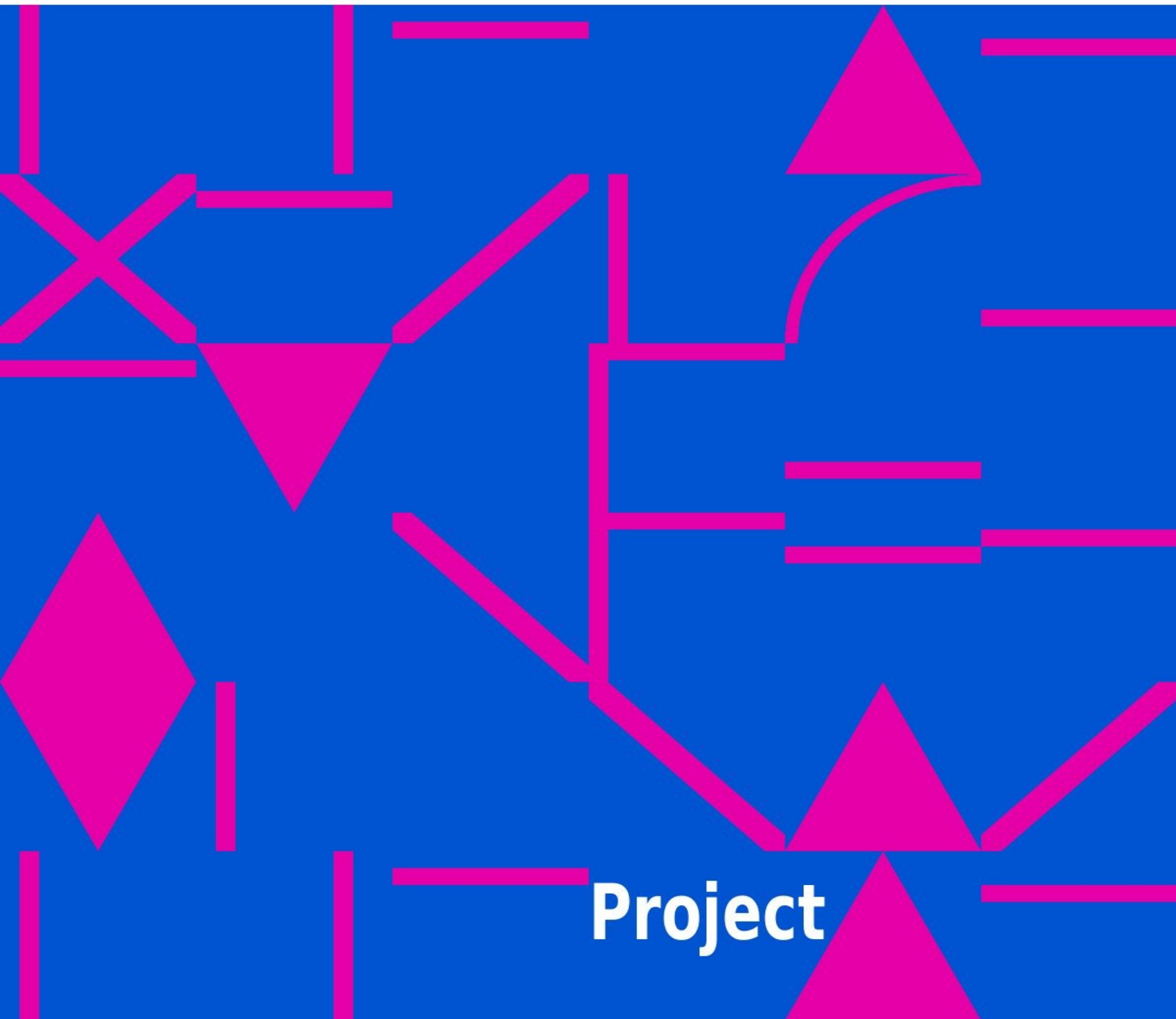


The Adventures of a Modest Man

Robert W. Chambers



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Title: The Adventures of a Modest Man

Author: Robert W. Chambers

Illustrator: Edmund Frederick

Release Date: September 12, 2013 [EBook #43702]

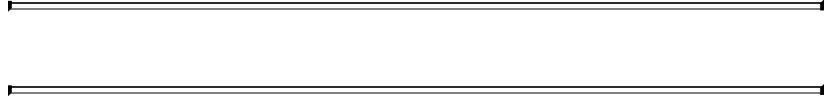
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The* ADVENTURES *of
A MODEST MAN



Works of Robert W. Chambers

The Adventures of a Modest Man

Ailsa Paige

The Danger Mark

Special Messenger

The Firing Line

The Younger Set

The Fighting Chance

Some Ladies in Haste

The Tree of Heaven

The Tracer of Lost Persons

A Young Man in a Hurry

Lorraine

Maids of Paradise

Ashes of Empire

The Red Republic

Outsiders

The Green Mouse

Iole

The Reckoning

The Maid-at-Arms

Cardigan

The Haunts of Men

The Mystery of Choice

The Cambric Mask

The Maker of Moons

The King in Yellow

In Search of the Unknown

The Conspirators
A King and a Few Dukes
In the Quarter

For Children

Garden-Land
Forest-Land
River-Land
Mountain-Land
Orchard-Land
Outdoorland
Hide and Seek in Forest-Land

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The ADVENTURES of

A MODEST MAN

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

ILLUSTRATED BY

EDMUND FREDERICK

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

NEW YORK AND LONDON: MCMXI

"I realised that I was going to kiss her if she didn't move.... And—she didn't."—[Page 276.]

TO

MR. AND MRS. C. WHEATON VAUGHAN

volume packed with bric-à-brac
offer you with my affection,—
story halts, the rhymes are slack—
stuff to add to your collection.
you possess from ages back:

This

I

The

Poor

Ger

It

is the modern junk you lack.

through marble halls,
dejection,
choir-stalls
recollection—
recalls
the walls!

perhaps, *my* bric-à-brac
pass the test of your inspection;
you will not send it back,
place it—if you've no objection—
some nick-nack laden rack
platters dangle on a tack.

from me
cupboards laden
filigree
maiden—
Dresden maid may see

We three once moused
Immersed in Art and deep
Mid golden thrones and
And gems beyond my
Yet soft!—my memory
Red labels pasted on

And so,
May
Perhaps
But
Unc
Wh

So if you'll take this book
And hide it in your
Beside some Dresden
And frivolously fetching
Who knows?—that
My book—and read it

through pardie!

deliratio appellari
omnium."

"Senilis stultitia quae
solet, senum levium est, non

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LIST OF

ILLUSTRATIONS

"I realised that I was going to kiss her if she didn't move.... And—she didn't"

"Give up my dead!' she whispered. 'Give up my dead!'"

"Christmas Eve she knelt, crying, before the pedestal"

"Only one person in the world can ever matter to me—now"

"Beyond, rocking wildly in a gilded boat, sat two people and a placid swan"

"I—I don't know,' she stammered; 'my shoe seems tied to yours'"

AN INADVERTENT POEM

urr

clothes-line

this lit-tul vine

rrd;

chickens' pan,

Man

weed,

quack,

*There is a little flow-urr
In our yard it does grow
Where many a happy hou-*

*I watch our rooster crow;
While clothes hang on the*

*And plowing has began
—And the name they call*

Is just "Old Man."

*Old Man, Old Man
A-growing in our yard,
Every spring a-coming up
While yet the ground is har-*

Pottering 'round the

*Creeping low and slow,
And why they call it Old*

*I never asked to know.
I never want to know.*

Crawling through the chick-

Dragging through the

*Pussly, tansy, tick-weed
Almost break his back.
Catnip, cockle, dock prevent
His travelling all they can,
But still he goes the ways*

he's went,

like

will sing

thee.

Poor Old Man!

*Old Man, Old Man,
What's the use of you?
No one wants to see you,*

*As if you hadn't grew.
You ain't no good to nothing
So far as I can see,
Unless some maiden fair*

These lines I've wrote to

And sing 'em soft to me.

*Some maiden fa-hair
With { ra-haven } hair
 { go-holden }
Will si-hing this so-hong
To me-hee-ee!*



CHAPTER I

CONCERNING TWO GENTLEMEN FROM LONG ISLAND, DESTINY, AND A POT OF BLACK PAINT

"Hello, old man!" he began.

"Gillian," I said, "don't call me 'Old Man.' At twenty, it flattered me; at thirty, it was all right; at forty, I suspected *double entendre*; and now I don't like it."

"Of course, if you feel that way," he protested, smiling.

"Well, I do, dammit!"—the last a German phrase. I am rather strong on languages.

Now another thing that is irritating— I've got ahead of my story, partly, perhaps, because I hesitate to come to the point.

For I have a certain delicacy in admitting that my second visit abroad, after twenty years, was due to a pig. So now that the secret is out—the pig also—I'll begin properly.



I purchased the porker at a Long Island cattle show; why, I don't know, except that my neighbor, Gillian Schuyler Van Dieman, put me up to it.

We are an inoffensive community maintaining a hunt club and the traditions of a by-gone generation. To the latter our children refuse to subscribe.

Our houses are what are popularly known as "fine old Colonial mansions." They were built recently. So was the pig. You see, I can never get away from that pig, although—but the paradox might injure the story. It has sufficiently injured me—the pig and the story, both.

The architecture of the pig was a kind of degenerate Chippendale, modified by Louis XVI and traces of Bavarian baroque. And his squeal resembled the atmospheric preliminaries for a Texas norther.

Van Dieman said I ought to buy him. I bought him. My men built him a chaste

bower to leeward of an edifice dedicated to cows.

Here I sometimes came to contemplate him while my horse was being saddled.

That particular morning, when Van Dieman saluted me so suspiciously at the country club, I had been gazing at the pig.

And now, as we settled down to our morning game of chess, I said:

"Van, that pig of mine seems to be in nowise remarkable. Why the devil do you suppose I bought him?"

"How do I know?"

"You ought to. You suggested that I buy him. Why did you?"

"To see whether you would."

I said rather warmly: "Did you think me weak-minded enough to do whatever you suggested?"

"The fact remains that you did," he said calmly, pushing the king's knight to queen's bishop six.

"Did what?" I snapped.

"What you didn't really want to do."

"Buy the pig?"

"Exactly."

I thought a moment, took a pawn with satisfaction, considered.

"Van," I said, "why do you suppose I bought that pig?"

"*Ennui*."

"A man doesn't buy pigs to escape from *ennui*!"

"You can't predict what a man will do to escape it," he said, smiling. "The trouble with you is that you're been here too long; you're in a rut; you're gone stale. Year in, year out, you do the same things in the same way, rise at the same time, retire at the same hour, see the same people, drive, motor, ride, potter about your lawns and gardens, come here to the club—and it's enough to petrify anybody's intellect."

"Do you mean to say that *mine*——"

"Partly. Don't get mad. No man who lives year after year in a Long Island

community could escape it. What you need is to go abroad. What you require is a good dose of Paris."

"For twenty odd years I have avoided Paris," I said, restlessly. "Why should I go back there?"

"Haven't you been there in twenty years?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing, to avoid meeting the entire United States."

"All right," said Van Dieman, "if you want to become an old uncle foozle, continue to take root in Long Island." He announced mine in two moves. After I had silently conceded it, he leaned back in his chair and lighted a cigarette.

"It's my opinion," he said, "that you've already gone too stale to take care of your own pig."

Even years of intimacy scarcely justified this.

"When the day comes," said I, "that I find myself no longer competent to look after my own affairs, I'll take your advice and get out of Long Island."

He looked up with a smile. "Suppose somebody stole that pig, for instance."

"They couldn't."

"Suppose they did, under your very nose."

"If anything happens to that pig," I said—"anything untoward, due to any negligence or stupidity of mine, I'll admit that I need waking up.... Now get that pig if you can!"

"Will you promise to go to Paris for a jolly little jaunt if anything does happen to your pig?" he asked.

"Why the devil do *you* want *me* to go to Paris?"

"Do you good, intellectually."

Then I got mad.

"Van," I said, "if anybody can get that pig away from me, I'll do anything you suggest for the next six months."

"*À nous deux, alors!*" he said. He speaks French too fast for me to translate. It's a

foolish way to talk a foreign language. But he has never yet been able to put it over me.

"*À la guerre comme à la guerre*," I replied carelessly. It's a phrase one can use in reply to any remark that was ever uttered in French. I use it constantly.



That afternoon I went and took a good look at my pig. Later, as I was walking on the main street of Oyster Bay, a man touched his hat and asked me for a job. Instantly it occurred to me to hire him as night watchman for the pig. He had excellent references, and his countenance expressed a capacity for honest and faithful service. That night before I went to bed, I walked around to the sty. My man was there on duty.

"That," thought I, "will hold Van Dieman for a while."

When my daughters had retired and all the servants were abed, I did a thing I have not done in years—not since I was a freshman at Harvard: I sat up with my pipe and an unexpurgated translation of Henry James until nearly eleven o'clock. However, by midnight I was asleep.

It was full starlight when I awoke and jumped softly out of bed. Somebody was tapping at the front door. I put on a dressing-gown and slippers and waited; but no servants were aroused by the persistent rapping.

After a moment I went to the window, raised it gently and looked out. A farmer with a lantern stood below.

"Say, squire," he said, when he beheld my head, "I guess I'll have to ask for help. I'm on my way to market and my pig broke loose and I can't ketch him nohow."

"Hush!" I whispered; "I'll come down."

Very cautiously I unbarred the front door and stepped out into the lovely April starlight. In the road beyond my hedge stood a farm-wagon containing an empty crate. Near it moved the farmer, and just beyond his outstretched hands sported a playful pig. He was a black pig. Mine was white. Besides I went around to the pen and saw, in the darkness, my Oyster Bay retainer still on guard. So, it being a genuine case, I returned to the road.

The farmer's dilemma touched me. What in the world was so utterly hopeless to pursue, unaided, as a coy pig at midnight.

"If you will just stand there, squire, and sorter spread out your skirts, I'll git him in a jiffy," said the panting farmer.

I did as I was bidden. The farmer approached; the pig pranced between his legs.

"By gum!" exclaimed the protected of Ceres.

But, after half an hour, the pig became over-confident, and the tiller of phosphites seized him and bore him, shrieking, to the wooden crate in the wagon, there depositing him, fastening the door, and climbing into his seat with warm thanks to me for my aid.

I told the Brother to the Ox that he was welcome. Then, with heart serenely warmed by brotherly love and a knowledge of my own condescension, I retired to sleep soundly until Higgins came to shave me at eight o'clock next morning.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Higgins, stirring his lather as I returned from the bath to submit my chin to his razor—"beg pardon, sir, but—but the pig, sir——"

"What pig?" I asked sharply. Had Higgins beheld me pursuing that midnight porker? And if he had, was he going to tell about it?

"What pig, sir? Why, THE pig, sir."

"I do not understand you, Higgins," I said coldly.

"Beg pardon, sir, but Miss Alida asked me to tell you, that the pig——"

"WHAT PIG?" I repeated exasperated.

"Why—why—OURS, sir."

I turned to stare at him. "MY pig?" I asked.

"Yes, sir—he's gone, sir——"

"Gone!" I thundered.

"Stolen, sir, out o' the pen last night."

Stunned, I could only stare at Higgins. Stolen? My pig? Last night?

"Some one," said Higgins, "went and opened that lovely fancy sty, sir; and the pig he bolted. It takes a handy thief to stop and steal a pig, sir. There must ha' been two on 'em to catch that pig!"

"Where's that miserable ruffian I hired to watch the sty?" I demanded hotly.

"He has gone back to work for Mr. Van Dieman, sir. His hands was all over

black paint, and I see him a-wipin' of 'em onto your white picket fence."

The calmness of despair came over me. I saw it, now. I had been called out of bed to help catch my own pig. For nearly half an hour I had dodged about there in front of my own house, too stupid to suspect, too stupid even to recognize my own pig in the disguised and capricious porker shying and caracolling about in the moonlight. Good heavens! Van Dieman was right. A man who helps to steal his own pig is fit for nothing but Paris or a sanitarium.

"Shave me speedily, Higgins," I said. "I am not very well, and it is difficult for me to preserve sufficient composure to sit still. And, Higgins, it is not at all necessary for you to refer to that pig hereafter. You understand? Very well. Go to the telephone and call up the Cunard office."

Presently I was in communication with Bowling Green.

That morning in the breakfast-room, when I had kissed my daughter Alida, aged eighteen, and my daughter Dulcima, aged nineteen, the younger said: "Papa, do you know that our pig has been stolen?"

"Alida," I replied, "I myself disposed of him"—which was the dreadful truth.

"You sold him?" asked Dulcima in surprise.

"N—not exactly. These grape-fruit are too sour!"

"You gave him away?" inquired Alida.

"Yes—after a fashion. Is this the same coffee we have been using? It has a peculiar——"

"Who did you give him to?" persisted my younger child.

"A—man."

"What man?"

"Nobody you know, child."

"But——"

"Stop!" said I firmly. "It is a subject too complicated to discuss."

"Oh, pooh!" said Dulcima; "everybody discusses everything in Oyster Bay. And besides I want to know——"

"About the pig!" broke in Alida.

"And that man to whom you gave the pig——"

"Alida," said I, with misleading mildness, "how would you like to go to Paris?"

"Oh! papa——"

"And you, Dulcima?"

"Darling papa!"

"When?" cried Alida.

"Wednesday," I replied with false urbanity.

"Oh! The darling!" they cried in rapture, and made toward me.

"Wait!" I said with a hideous smile. "We have not yet left Sandy Hook! And I solemnly promise you both that if either of you ever again ask me one question concerning that pig—nay, if you so much as look askance at me over the breakfast bacon—neither you nor I will ever leave Sandy Hook alive!"

They have kept their promises—or I should never have trodden the deck of the *S. S. Cambodia*, the pride of the great Cunard Line, with my daughter Dulcima on one side and my daughter Alida on the other side of me, and my old friend Van Dieman waving me adieu from a crowded pier, where hundreds of handkerchiefs flutter in the breeze.

"*Au revoir et bon voyage!*" he called up to me.

"*Toujours la politesse,*" I muttered, nodding sagely.

"That was a funny reply to make, papa," said Dulcima.

"Not at all," I replied, with animation; "to know a language is to know when to use its idioms." They both looked a little blank, but continued to wave their handkerchiefs.

"*À bien-tôt!*" called Alida softly, as the towering black sides of the steamer slipped along the wooden wharf.

Van Dieman raised his hat on the pier below, and answered: "*À bien-tôt? C'est la mort, jusqu'à bien-tôt! Donc, vive la vie, Mademoiselle!*"

"There is no necessity in chattering like a Frenchman when you talk French," I observed to Alida. "Could you make out what Van Dieman said to you?"

"Y—yes," she admitted, with a slight blush.

I glanced at Dulcima. There was a mischievous light in her blue eyes.

"Pooh!" I thought; "Van Dieman is forty if he's a day."

While the ship slid on past Castle William and poked her nose toward the forts at the Narrows, I watched the distant pier which we had left. It was still black with people, moving like ants. And, as I looked, I muttered ever: "Pooh! Van Dieman's forty. There's nothing in it, nothing in it, nothing whatever."

Off Fort Hamilton I noticed that Alida had a tear in one of her brown eyes. "There's nothing in it," I repeated obstinately.

Off Sandy Hook we ran into a sea-storm. In a few minutes many of the passengers went below; in a few more minutes the remainder of the passengers went below; and I was on the way below with my daughter Alida on one arm and my daughter Dulcima on the other.

"There is nothing in it," I reflected, as the ship shuddered, pitched, and we involuntarily began running down a toboggan slide, taking little timorous steps. Then the deck flew up and caught the soles of our shoes before we were ready to put our feet down. "Alida," I said, "do you feel bored?"

There was no mistaking the tears in her eyes now. "There's nothing in it. There's nothing in anything," I muttered faintly. And I was right as far as it concerned the passengers on the pitching *Cambodia*.

CHAPTER II

A CHAPTER DEPICTING A RATHER GARRULOUS REUNION

The second day we ran out of the storm. I remember on that day that I wore a rather doggy suit of gray—a trifle too doggy for a man of my years. In my button-hole reposed a white carnation, and as I strolled into the smoking-room I was humming under my breath an air from "Miss Helyet"—a thing I had not thought of in twenty years.

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed a man who looked up from his novel as I entered the doorway. "Gad! You haven't changed in twenty years!—except that your moustache is——"

"Sure! And my temples, Williams! Besides, I have two grown-up daughters aboard! How are you, anyway, you Latin Quarter come-back?"

We settled ourselves, hands still warmly clasped.

"You're not going back to Paris?" I asked.

"Why, man, I live there."

"By George, so you do! I forgot."

There was a silence—that smiling, retrospective silence which ends inevitably in a sigh not entirely painful.

"Are any of the old men left there?" I asked.

"Some."

"I—I suppose the city has changed a lot. Men who've been over since, say so."

"It hasn't changed, radically."

"Hasn't it, Williams?" I asked wistfully.

"No. The old café is exactly the same. The Luxembourg Quarter will seem familiar to you——"

"I'm not going there," I said hastily.

He smiled; I could see him doing it, askance. But my features remained dignified and my attitude detached.

"I wonder," I began carelessly, "whether——"

"She got married," he said casually; "I'm glad. She was a sweet little thing."

"She was exceedingly charming," I said, selecting a cigar. "And the other?"

"Which?"

"I forget her name."

"Oh, you mean Delancy's?"

"Yes."

"I don't know whatever became of her," he said.

"Whatever became of Delancy?"

"Oh, he did what we all usually do—he came back, married, and spent the better part of his life in trying to keep his daughter from marrying that young Harroll."

"Sir Peter's son?"

"Yes. I was a guest at the Delancy's at the time, and I nearly died. Harroll confided in me, Catharine Delancy confided in me, John Delancy told me his woes. It's an amusing story. Do you want to hear it?"

"Go ahead," I said. "My sympathies are already with Delancy. I've a pair of daughters myself, and I'm trying to shoo away every sort of man and keep 'em for myself a little longer."

Williams smiled:

"Well, you listen to what those two did to John Delancy. It was some."

I lit my cigar; he lit his; and I settled back, looking at him attentively as he began with a wave of his gloved hand, a story of peculiar interest to a man with two unusually attractive daughters:



Now, although Harroll had been refused a dozen times—not by Miss Delancy, but by her father—the young man's naturally optimistic spirits suffered only temporary depression; and a few evenings later he asked for her again, making it

a bakers' dozen—an uncanny record.

"No," said Mr. Delancy.

"Won't you let me have her when I become tenth vice-president of the Half-Moon Title Guarantee and Trust——"

"No, I won't."

"When will you let me try for her?"

There was no reply.

"Well, sir," said the young man cheerfully, "there must be some way, of course."

"Really, Jim, I don't see what way," said Mr. Delancy, without emotion. "I don't want you for a son-in-law, and I'm not going to have you. That's one of the reasons I allow you the run of the house. My daughter sees too much of you to care for you. It's a theory of my own, and a good one, too."

"Why don't you want me for a son-in-law?" asked the young man, for the hundredth time.

"Can you give me one single reason why I should want you?" asked Mr. Delancy wearily.

Harroll stood buried in meditation for a few moments. "No," he said, "I can't recall any important reasons at the moment."

"I can supply you with one—your sense of honor—but it doesn't count in this case, because you wouldn't be in my house if you didn't have any."

Harroll looked at the fire.

"I've told you a hundred times that when my little girl marries, she marries one of her own kind. I don't like Englishmen. And that is all there is to it, Jim."

"Don't you like me?"

"I'm not infatuated with you."

"Well," said Harroll, slowly pacing the rug in front of the fire, "it's curious, isn't it?—but, do you know, I think that I am going to marry Catharine one of these days?"

"Oh, I think not," replied Mr. Delancy amiably. "And perhaps this is a good opportunity to say good-by for a while. You know we go to Palm Beach tomorrow?"

"Catharine told me," said the young man, placidly. "So I've wired for quarters at The Breakers—for two weeks."

The two men smiled at one another.

"You take your vacation late," said Mr. Delancy.

"Not too late, I trust."

"You think you can afford Palm Beach, Jim?"

"No; but I'm going."

Mr. Delancy rose and stood thoughtfully twirling his monocle by the string. Then he threw away his cigar, concealed a yawn, and glanced gravely at the clock on the mantel.

"May I go in and say good-night to Catharine, sir?" asked young Harroll.

Mr. Delancy looked bored, but nodded civilly enough.

"And, Jim," he drawled, as the young man started toward the drawing-room, "I wouldn't go to Palm Beach if I were you."

"Yes, you would, sir—if you were I."

"Young man," said Mr. Delancy, mildly, "I'm damned if I have you for a son-in-law! Good-night."

They shook hands. Harroll walked into the drawing-room and found it empty. The music-room, however, was lighted, and Catharine Delancy sat tucked up in a deep window-seat, studying a map of southern Florida and feeding bonbons to an enormous white Persian cat.

"Jim," she said, raising her dark eyes as he sauntered up, "you and father have lately fallen into the disreputable habit of sitting behind closed doors and gossiping. You have done it thirteen times in three months. Don't be such pigs; scandal, like other pleasures, was meant to be shared."

At a gesture of invitation he seated himself beside her and lifted the Persian pussy to his lap.

"Well," she inquired, "are you really going with us?"

"I can't go when you do, but I'm going to The Breakers for a week or two—solely to keep an eye on your behavior."

"That is jolly!" she said, flushing with pleasure. "Was father pleased when you

told him?"

"He didn't say he was pleased."

"He is always reticent," she said, quickly. "But won't it be too jolly for words! We'll travel miles and miles together in bicycle-chairs, and we'll yacht and bathe and ride and golf, and catch amber-jack and sharks, and—you'll persuade father to let me gamble just once at the club—won't you?"

"Not much! Where did you hear that sort of talk, Catharine?"

"Don't tweak Omar's tail and I'll tell you—there! you've done it again, and I won't tell you."

He fell to stroking the cat's fur, gazing the while into space with an absent eye that piqued her curiosity. For a year now he had acquired that trick of suddenly detaching himself from earth and gazing speculatively toward heaven, lost in a reverie far from flattering to the ignored onlooker. And now he was doing it again under her very nose. What was he thinking about? He seemed, all at once, a thousand miles removed from her. Where were his thoughts?

Touched in her *amour propre*, she quietly resumed the map of southern Florida; but even the rustle of the paper did not disturb his self-centred and provoking meditation.

She looked at him, looked at the map, considered him again, and finally watched him.

Suddenly, for the first time in her life, she thought him dangerously attractive. Surprised and interested, she regarded him in this new light, impersonally for the moment. So far away had he apparently drifted in his meditation that it seemed to her as though she were observing a stranger—a most interesting and most unusual young man.

He turned and looked her straight in the eyes.

Twenty-two, and her first season half over, and to be caught blushing like a school-girl!

There was no constraint; her self-possession cooled her cheeks—and he was not looking at her, after all: he was looking through her, at something his fancy focused far, far beyond her.

Never had she thought any man half as attractive as this old friend in a new light—this handsome, well-built, careless young fellow absorbed in thoughts which

excluded her. No doubt he was so habituated to herself in all her moods that nothing except the friendliest indifference could ever——

To her consternation another tint of warm color slowly spread over neck and cheek. He rose at the same moment, dropped the cat back among the cushions, and smiling down at her, held out his hand. She took it, met his eyes with an effort; but what message she divined in them Heaven alone knows, for all at once her heart stood still and a strange thrill left her fingers nerveless in his hand.

He was saying slowly, "Then I shall see you at Palm Beach next week?"

"Yes.... You will come, won't you?"

"Yes, I will come."

"But if you—change your mind?"

"I never change. May I write you?"

"Good-night.... You may write me if you wish."

"I will write, every day—if you don't mind."

"No—I don't mind," she said thoughtfully.

She withdrew her hand and stood perfectly still as he left the room. She heard a servant open the door, she heard Harroll's quick step echo on the stoop, then the door closed.

A second later Mr. Delancy in the library was aroused from complacent meditation by the swish of a silken skirt, and glancing up, beheld a tall, prettily formed girl looking at him with a sober and rather colorless face.

"Father," she said, "I'm in love with Jim Harroll!"

Mr. Delancy groped for his monocle, screwed it into his left eye, and examined his daughter.

"It's true, and I thought I'd better tell you," she said.

"Yes," he agreed, "it's as well to let me know. Ah—er—when and how did it occur?"

"I don't know, father. I was feeding Omar bonbons and looking over the map of South Florida, and thinking about nothing in particular, when Jim came in. He said he was going to Palm Beach, and I said, 'How jolly!' and he sat down and picked up Omar, and—I don't know how it was, but I began to think him very

attractive, and the first thing I knew—it—happened!"

"Oh! So that's the way it happened?"

"I think it was, father."

"No doubt you'll outgrow it."

"Do you think so?"

"I haven't a doubt of it, little daughter."

"I have."

Mr. Delancy dropped his monocle and looked at the fire. The fire was all right.

"Do you—do you suppose that Jim is—does—thinks—knows——"

"I never speculate on what Jim is, does, thinks, or knows," said her father, thoughtfully, stirring the embers and spoiling a perfectly good fire. When he looked up again she had gone.

"One theory smashed!" observed Mr. Delancy. "I'll try another, with separation as the main ingredient."

He sat down before the fire and lighted a fresh cigar, which wasn't good for him.

"Must avoid making a martyr of Jim or there will be trouble," he mused. "There remains another way—make a martyr of myself."

He sat swinging his monocle around his forefinger, gazing vacantly at the pattern the shadows cast across the hearth.

"Avalon!" he said, abruptly. "Avalon! The 'back-to-nature' business, 'grass-cure' and all. It can't harm either Catharine or me, I fancy—or any other pair of donkeys!"

CHAPTER III

TROUBLE FOR TWO

A Note Found by Young Harroll on his Dresser the Evening of his Arrival at Palm Beach.

A.M.

"DEAR JIM—Everything is spoiled, after all! Father's failing health has suddenly become a serious matter, and we are going to try the 'nature cure,' or whatever they call it, at Avalon Island. I had no idea he was really ill. Evidently he is alarmed, for we have only been here six days, and in a few minutes we are to start for Avalon. Isn't it perfectly horrid? And to think that you are coming this evening and expecting to find us here!

"Father says you can't come to Avalon; that only invalids are received (I didn't know I was one, but it seems I'm to take the treatment, too!), and he says that nobody is received for less than a month's treatment, so I suppose that bars you even if you were self-sacrificing enough to endure a 'nature cure' for the pleasure of spending two weeks with [*me*, crossed out] us.

"I'm actually on the verge of tears when I think of all we had planned to do together! And there's my maid at the door, knocking. Good-by. You will write, won't you?

DELANCY."



Mr. James Harroll to Miss Catharine Delancy, Avalon, Balboa County, Florida.

CROSS LIGHT, FEBRUARY 15.

"DEAR CATHARINE—Your father was right: they refuse to take me at Avalon. As soon as I found your note I telegraphed to Avalon for accommodations. It seems

Avalon is an island, and they have to wait for the steamers to carry telegrams over from the mainland. So the reply has just reached me that they won't take me for less than a month; and my limit from business is two weeks or give up my position with your father.

"Yesterday I came out here to Holy Cross Spring to shoot ducks. I'd scarcely begun shooting, at dawn, when along came a couple of men through the fog, rowing like the mischief plump into my decoys, and I shouted out, 'What the deuce are you about?' and they begged my pardon, and said they had thought the point unoccupied, and that the fog was thicker than several things—which was true.

"So I invited them into the blind to—oh, the usual ceremony—and they came, and they turned out to be Jack Selden—the chap I told you about who was so decent to me in Paris—and his guide.

"So we had—ceremonies—several of them—and Selden stayed to shoot with me over my decoys, and our bag was fifty-three, all big duck except fifteen bluebills.

"Selden is a godsend to me. We're going to stay out here to-night at the lighthouse, and shoot all to-morrow if it doesn't blow too hard. It's blowing great guns now. I'm here in the lighthouse, writing in the glow of a lamp in the keeper's living-room, with his good little wife sewing by the fire and a half-dozen of his kids tumbling about on the floor. It's a pretty sight; I love children and firesides and that sort of thing. They've got hold of Selden now, and are making him tell stories of adventure. He's been all over the world, and is perfectly crazy to get married. Says he would prefer a widow with yellow hair and blue eyes. Do you know any? He's a nice chap."

"Catharine, I wish I were in Avalon. They could put me in a strait-jacket and I wouldn't care as long as [*you were*, crossed out] I could be with [*you*, crossed out] your father and you in Avalon.

"It's growing late, and Selden and I should be on the ducking-grounds to-morrow before dawn. The keeper's wife says it will blow too hard, but Selden only smiles. He's a cool one, and if he has the nerve to go out I'll go, too.

"With sincere regards to your father and every wish for his speedy recovery, I remain

faithfully,

HARROLL."

*Lines Scribbled on the Leaf of a Note-book and Found in a Bottle in the Pocket
of an old Shooting-coat a Year Later.*

OCEAN,

SOUTH OF HOLY CROSS LIGHT,

16.

"CATHARINE—I think this is the end. Selden and I have been blown out to sea in a rowboat, and it's leaking. I only want to say good-by. Telegraph Selden's mother, Lenox, Massachusetts. I have nobody to notify. Good-by.

HARROLL."

*Telegram to James Harroll, Received and Opened by the Keeper while Search-
boats Were still Out after Mr. Harroll and Mr. Selden, Two Days Missing.*

HARROLL, HOLY CROSS LIGHT, FLORIDA, EAST COAST:

"Don't run any risks. Be careful for our sakes. Terrible storm on the coast reported here. Wire me that you are safe.

DELANCY,

Florida."

*Telegrams Addressed to Young Harroll, and Opened by the Keeper of the
Lighthouse after the Search-boats Had Returned.*

No. 1.

"Why don't you telegraph us? Your silence and the reports of the storm alarm us.
Reply at once.

No. 2.

"Wire Catharine, Jim. You surely were not ass enough to go out in such a storm.

DELANCY."

No. 3.

"For pity's sake telegraph to me that you are safe. I cannot sleep.



Telegram to Miss Catharine Delancy, Avalon, Florida.

CROSS LIGHT.

"MISS CATHARINE DELANCY:

"Rowboat containing Mr. Harroll and Mr. Selden blown out to sea. Search-boats
returned without finding any trace of them.

Keeper."



Telegram from Mr. Delancy to Keeper of Holy Cross Light.

"CASWELL:

"Charter a fast ocean-going tug and as many launches as necessary. Don't give up the search. Spare no expense. Check mailed to you to-day.

"I will give ten thousand dollars to the man who rescues James Harroll. You may draw on me for any amount necessary. Keep me constantly informed of your progress by wire.

DELANCY."



In from the open sea drifted the castaways, the sun rising in tropic splendor behind them, before them a far strip of snowy surf edging green shores.

Selden sat in the bow, bailing; Harroll dug vigorously into the Atlantic with both oars; a heavy flood-tide was doing the rest. Presently Selden picked up the ducking-glass and examined the shore.

Harroll rested his oars, took a pull at the mineral water, and sighed deeply. "Except for the scare and the confounded leak it's been rather amusing, hasn't it?" he said.

"It's all right.... Hope you didn't set that farewell message afloat."

"What message?"

"Oh—I thought I saw you scribbling in your notebook and——"

"And what?"

"And stick the leaf into the bottle of gun-oil. If I was mistaken, kindly give me my bottle of gun-oil."

"Pooh!" said Harroll. "The storm was magnificent. Can't a man jot down impressions? Open a can of sardines, will you? And pass me the bread, you idiot!"

Selden constructed a sandwich and passed it aft. "When we near those ducks," he said, "we'd better give them a broadside—our larder's getting low. I'll load for us both."

He fished about among the cartridge-sacks for some dry shells, loaded the guns, and laid them ready.

"Bluebills," observed Harroll, as the boat drew near. "How tame they are! Look, Selden! It would be murder to shoot."

The boat, drifting rapidly, passed in among the raft of ducks; here and there a glistening silver-breasted bird paddled lazily out of the way, but the bulk of the flock floated serenely on either side, riding the swell, bright golden eyes fearlessly observing the intruders.

"Oh, a man can't shoot at things that act like that!" exclaimed Selden petulantly. "Shoo! Shoo—o!" he cried, waving his gun in hopes that a scurry and rise might justify assassination. But the birds only watched him in perfect confidence. The boat drove on; the young men sat staring across the waves, guns idly balanced across their knees. Presently Harroll finished his sandwich and resumed the oars.

"Better bail some more," he said. "What are you looking at?"—for Selden, using the ducking-glass, had begun to chuckle.

"Well, upon my word!" he said slowly—"of all luck! Where do you suppose we are?"

"Well, where the devil are we?"

"Off Avalon!"

"Avalon!" repeated Harroll, stupidly. "Why, man, it's a hundred miles south of Holy Cross!"

"Well, we've made it, I tell you. I can see one of their dinky little temples shining among the trees. Hark! There go the bells ringing for meditation!"

A mellow chime came across the water.

"It can't be Avalon," repeated Harroll, not daring to hope for such fortune. "What do you know about Avalon, anyway?"

"What I've heard."

"What's that?"

"Why, it's a resort for played-out people who've gone the pace. When a girl dances herself into the fidgets, or a Newport matron goes to pieces, or a Wall Street man begins to talk to himself, hither they toddle. It's the fashionable round-up for smashed nerves and wibbly-wobbly intellects—a sort of "back-to-

nature" enterprise run by a "doctor." He makes 'em all wear garments cut in the style of the humble bed-sheet, and then he turns 'em out to grass; and they may roll on it or frisk on it or eat it if they like. Incidentally, I believe, they're obliged to wallow in the ocean several times a day, run races afoot, chuck the classic discus, go barefooted and sandal-shod, wear wreaths of flowers instead of hats, meditate in silence when the temple bells ring, eat grain and fruit and drink milk, and pay enormous bills to the quack who runs the place. It must be a merry life, Harroll. No tobacco, no billiards, no bridge. And hit the downy at nine-thirty by the curfew!"

"Good Lord!" muttered Harroll.

"That's Avalon," repeated Selden. "And we're almost there. Look sharp! Stand by for a ducking! This surf means trouble ahead!"

It certainly did; the boat soared skyward on the crest of the swell; a smashing roller hurled it into the surf, smothering craft and crew in hissing foam. A second later two heads appeared, and two half-suffocated young men floundered up the beach and dropped, dripping and speechless, on the sand.

They lay inert for a while, salt water oozing at every pore. Harroll was the first to sit up.

"Right?" he inquired.

"All right. Where's the boat?"

"Ashore below us." He rose, dripping, and made off toward the battered boat, which lay in the shoals, heeled over. Selden followed; together they dragged the wreck up high and dry; then they sat down on the sand, eying one another.

"It's a fine day," said Selden, with a vacant grin. He rolled over on his back, clutching handfuls of hot sand. "Isn't this immense?" he said. "My! how nice and dry and solid everything is! Roll on your back, Harroll! You'll enjoy it more that way."

But Harroll got up and began dragging the guns and cartridge-sacks from the boat.

"I've some friends here," he said briefly. "Come on."

"Are your friends hospitably inclined to the shipwrecked? I'm about ready to be killed with hospitality," observed Selden, shouldering gun and sack and slopping along in his wet boots.

They entered a thicket of sweet-bay and palmetto, breast-high, and forced a path through toward a bit of vivid green lawn, which gave underfoot like velvet.

"There's a patient now—in his toga," said Selden, in a low voice. "Better hit him with a piteous tale of shipwreck, hadn't we?"

The patient was seated on a carved bench of marble under the shade of a live oak. His attitude suggested *ennui*; he yawned at intervals; at intervals he dug in the turf with idle bare toes.

"The back of that gentleman's head," said Harroll, "resembles the back of a head I know."

"Oh! One of those friends you mentioned?"

"Well—I never saw him in toga and sandals, wearing a wreath of flowers on his head. Let's take a front view."

The squeaky, sloppy sound of Selden's hip boots aroused the gentleman in the toga from his attitude of bored meditation.

"How do you do, sir?" said Harroll, blandly, "I thought I'd come to Avalon."

The old gentleman fumbled in his toga, found a monocle, screwed it firmly into his eye, and inspected Harroll from head to heel.

"You're rather wet, Jim," he said, steadying his voice.

Harroll admitted it. "This is my old friend, Jack Selden—the Lenox Seldens, you know, sir." And, to Selden, he reverently named Mr. Delancy.

"How do?" said Mr. Delancy. "You're wet, too."

There was a silence. Mr. Delancy executed a facial contortion which released the monocle. Then he touched his faded eyes with the hem of his handkerchief. The lashes and furrowed cheeks were moist.

"You're so devilish abrupt, Jim," he said. "Did you get any telegrams from us?"

"Telegrams? No, sir. When?"

"No matter," said Mr. Delancy.

Another silence, and Harroll said: "Fact is, sir, we were blown out to sea, and that's how we came here. I fancy Selden wouldn't mind an invitation to dinner and a chance to dry his clothes."

Selden smiled hopefully and modestly as Mr. Delancy surveyed him.

"Pray accept my hospitality, gentlemen," said Mr. Delancy, with a grim smile. "I've been ass enough to take a villa in this forsaken place. The food I have to offer you might be relished by squirrels, perhaps; the clothing resembles my own, and can be furnished you by the simple process of removing the sheets from your beds."

He rose, flung the flap of his toga over one shoulder, and passed his arm through Harroll's.

"Don't you like it here?" asked Harroll.

"*Like it!*" repeated Mr. Delancy.

"But—why did you come?"

"I came," said Mr. Delancy slowly, "because I desired to be rid of you."

Selden instinctively fell back out of earshot. Harroll reddened.

"I thought your theory was——"

"You smashed that theory—now you've shattered this—you and Catharine between you."

Harroll looked thoughtfully at Selden, who stood watching two pretty girls playing handball on the green.

"Young man," said Mr. Delancy, "do you realize what I've been through in one week? I have been obliged to wear this unspeakable garment, I've been obliged to endure every species of tomfoolery, I've been fed on bird seed, deprived of cigars, and sent to bed at half past nine. And I'm as sound in limb and body as you are. And all because I desired to be rid of you. I had two theories! both are smashed. I refuse to entertain any more theories concerning anything!"

Harroll laughed; then his attention became concentrated on the exquisite landscape, where amid green foliage white villas of Georgia marble glimmered, buried in blossoming thickets of oleander, wistaria, and Cherokee roses—where through the trees a placid lake lay reflecting the violet sky—where fallow-deer wandered, lipping young maple buds—where beneath a pergola heavily draped with golden jasmine a white-robed figure moved in the shade—a still, sunny world of green and gold and violet exhaling incense under a cloudless sky.

"I would like to see Catharine," he said, slowly, "with your permission—and in view of the fate of the theories."

"Jim," said Mr. Delancy, "you are doubtless unconscious of the trouble you have

created in my family."

"Trouble, sir?" repeated the young man, flushing up.

"Trouble for two. My daughter and I believed you drowned."

Harroll stood perfectly still. Mr. Delancy took a step or two forward, turned, and came back across the lawn. "She is sitting under that pergola yonder, looking out to sea, and I'm afraid she's crying her eyes out for something she wants. It's probably not good for her, either. But—such as it is—she may have it."

The two men looked at one another steadily.

"I'm rather glad you were not drowned," said Mr. Delancy, "but I'm not infatuated with you."

They shook hands solemnly, then Mr. Delancy walked over and joined Selden, who appeared to be fascinated by an attractive girl in Greek robes and sandals who was playing handball on the green.

"'Give up my dead!' she whispered. 'Give up my dead!'"

"Young man," said Mr. Delancy, "there's always trouble for two in this world. That young woman with yellow hair and violet eyes who is playing handball with her sister, and who appears to hypnotize you, is here to recuperate from the loss of an elderly husband."

"A widow with yellow hair and blue eyes!" murmured Selden, entranced.

"Precisely. Your train, however, leaves to-night—unless you mean to remain here on a diet of bird-seed."

Selden smiled absently. Bird-seed had no terror for him.

"Besides," he said, "I'm rather good at handball."

A moment later he looked around, presumably for Harroll. That young man was already half-way to the jasmine-covered arbor, where a young girl sat, dry-eyed, deathly pale, staring out to sea.

The sea was blue and smiling; the soft thunder of the surf came up to her. She heard the gulls mewing in the sky and the hum of bees in the wind-stirred blossoms; she saw a crested osprey plunge into the shallows and a great tarpon fling its mass of silver into the sun. Paroquets gleaming like living jewels rustled and preened in the china-trees; black and gold butterflies, covered with pollen, crawled over and over the massed orange bloom. Ah, the mask of youth that the

sly world wore to mock her! Ah, the living lie of the sky, and the false, smooth sea fawning at her feet!

Little persuasive breezes came whispering, plucking at the white hem of her robe to curry favor; the ingratiating surf purred, blinking with a million iridescent bubbles. The smug smile of nature appalled her; its hypocrisy sickened her; and she bent her dark eyes fiercely on the sea and clinched her little hands.

"Give up my dead!" she whispered. "Give up my dead!"

"Catharine!"

Dazed, she rose to her sandalled feet, the white folds of her robe falling straight and slim.

"Catharine!"

Her voiceless lips repeated his name; she swayed, steadying herself by the arm around her waist.

Then trouble for two began.



As Williams ended, I looked at him with indignation.

"As far as I can see," I said, "you are acting as attorney for the defense. That's a fine story to tell a father of two attractive daughters. You needn't repeat it to them."

"But it happened, old man——"

"Don't call me 'old man,' either. I'll explain to you why." And I did, peevishly.

After that I saw less of Williams, from choice. He has a literary way with him in telling a story—and I didn't wish Alida and Dulcima to sympathize with young Harroll and that little ninny, Catharine Delancy. So I kept clear of Williams until we arrived in Paris.



CHAPTER IV

WHEREIN A MODEST MAN IS BULLIED AND A LITERARY MAN PRACTICES STYLE

"What was your first impression of Paris, Mr. Van Twiller?" inquired the young man from East Boston, as I was lighting my cigar in the corridor of the Hôtel des Michetons after breakfast.

"The first thing I noticed," said I, "was the entire United States walking down the Boulevard des Italiens."

"And your second impression, sir?" he asked somewhat uncertainly.

"The entire United States walking back again." He lighted a cigarette and tried to appear cheerful. He knew I possessed two daughters. A man in possession of such knowledge will endure much.

Presently the stout young man from Chicago came up to request a light for his cigar. "See Paris and die, eh?" he observed with odious affability.

"I doubt that the city can be as unhealthy as that," I said coldly.

Defeated, he joined forces with the young man from East Boston, and they retired to the terrace to sit and hate me.

My daughter Alida, my daughter Dulcima, and I spent our first day in Paris "*ong voitoor*" as the denizen of East Boston informed me later.

"What is your first impression, Alida?" I asked, as our taxi rolled smoothly down the Avenue de l'Opera.

"Paris? An enormous blossom carved out of stone!—a huge architectural Renaissance rose with white stone petals!"

I looked at my pretty daughter with pride.

"That is what Mr. Van Dieman says," she added conscientiously.

My enthusiasm cooled at once.

"Van Dieman exaggerates," I said. "Dulcima, what do you find to characterize Paris?"

"The gowns!" she cried. "Oh, papa! did you see that girl driving past just now?"

I opened my guidebook in silence. I *had* seen her.

The sunshine flooded everything; the scent of flowers filled the soft air; the city was a garden, sweet with green leaves, embroidered with green grass—a garden, too, in architecture, carved out in silvery gray foliage of stone. The streets are as smooth and clean as a steamer's deck, with little clear rivulets running in gutters that seem as inviting as country brooks. It did not resemble Manhattan.

Paris!

Paris is a big city full of red-legged soldiers.

Paris is a forest of pink and white chestnut blossoms under which the inhabitants sit without their hats.

Paris is a collection of vistas; at the end of every vista is a misty masterpiece of architecture; on the summit of every *monument* is a masterpiece of sculpture.

Paris is a city of several millions of inhabitants, every inhabitant holding both hands out to you for a tip.

Paris is a park, smothered in foliage, under which asphalted streets lead to Paradise.

Paris is a sanitarium so skillfully conducted that nobody can tell the patients from the physicians; and all the inmates are firmly convinced that the outside world is mad.

I looked back at the gilded mass of the Opera—that great pile of stone set lightly there as the toe of a ballet-girl's satin slipper——

"What are you thinking, papa?" asked Alida.

"Nothing," I said hastily, amazed at my own frivolity. "Notice," said I, "the exquisite harmony of the sky-line. Here in Paris the Government regulates the height of buildings. Nothing inharmonious can be built; the selfishness and indifference of private ownership which in New York erects skyscrapers around our loveliest architectural remains, the City Hall, would not be tolerated here, where artistic *ensemble* is as necessary to people as the bread they eat."

"Dear me, where have I read that?" exclaimed Alida innocently.

I said nothing more.

We were now passing through that wing of the Louvre which faces the Carousal,

and we turned sharply to the right under the little arc, and straight past the Tuileries Gardens, all blooming with tulips and hyacinths, past the quaint weather-stained statues of an epoch as dead as its own sculptors, past the long arcades of the Rivoli, under which human spiders lurk for the tourist of Cook, and out into the Place de la Concorde—the finest square in the world.

The sun glittered on the brass inlaid base on which towered the monolith. The splashing of the great fountains filled the air with a fresh sweet sound. Round us, in a vast circle, sat the "Cities of France," with "Strasburg" smothered in crêpe and funeral wreaths, each still stone figure crowned with battlemented crowns and bearing the carved symbols of their ancient power on time-indented escutcheons, all of stone.

The fresh wet pavement blazed in the sunshine; men wheeled handcarts filled with violets or piled high with yellow jonquils and silvery hyacinths.

Violet, white, and yellow—these are the colors which Paris wears in springtime, twined in her chaplet of tender green.

I said this aloud to Dulcima, who replied that they were wearing blue in Paris this spring, and that she would like to know how soon we were going to the dressmakers.

Now at last we were rolling up the Champs Elysées, with the Arc de Triomphe, a bridge of pearl at the end of the finest vista in the world. Past us galloped gay cavalry officers, out for a morning canter in the Bois de Boulogne; past us whizzed automobiles of every hue, shape and species.

Past us, too, trotted shoals of people well diluted by our fellow countrymen, yet a truly Parisian crowd for all that. Hundreds of uniforms dotted the throngs; cuirassiers in short blue stable jackets, sabres hooked under their left elbows, little *piou-piou* lads, in baggy red trousers and shakos bound with yellow; hussars jingling along, wearing jackets of robin's-egg blue faced with white; chasseurs à Cheval, wearing turquoise blue braided with black; then came the priests in black, well groomed as jackdaws in April; policemen in sombre uniforms, wearing sword bayonets; gendarmes off duty—for the Republican Guard takes the place of the Gendarmerie within the walls of Paris; smart officers from the Fontainebleau artillery school, in cherry-red and black; Saint-Cyr soldiers in crude blues and reds, with the blue shako smothered under plumes; then Sisters, in their dark habits and white coifs, with sweet, serene faces looking out on the sinful world they spend their lives in praying for.

"Dulcima," I said, "what particular characteristic strikes you when you watch

these passing throngs of women?"

"Their necks; every Parisienne is a beauty from behind—such exquisite necks and hair."

"Their ankles," added Alida innocently; "they are the best-shod women in the world!"

I had noticed something of the sort; in fact, there is no escape for a man's eyes in Paris. Look where he will, he is bound to bring up against two neat little shoes trotting along demurely about their own frivolous business. One cannot help wondering what that business may be or where those little polished shoes are going so lightly, tap! tap! across the polished asphalt. And there are thousands on thousands of such shoes, passing, repassing, twinkling everywhere, exquisite, shapely, gay little shoes of Paris, pattering through boulevard and avenue, square, and street until the whole city takes the cadence, keeping time, day and night, to the little tripping feet of the Parisienne—bless her, heart and sole!

"Of what are you thinking, papa?" asked Alida.

"Nothing, child, nothing," I muttered.

We left our taxi and mounted to the top of the Arc de Triomphe. The world around us was bathed in a delicate haze; silver-gray and emerald the view stretched on every side from the great Basilica on Montmâtrre to the silent Fortress of Mont-Valerien; from the vast dome of the Pantheon, springing up like a silver bubble in the sky, to the dull golden dome of the Invalides, and the dome of the Val-de-Grâce.

Spite of the Sainte Chapel, with its gilded lace-work, spite of the bizarre Tour Saint-Jacques, spite of the lean monster raised by Monsieur Eiffel, straddling the vase Esplanade in the west, the solid twin towers of Nôtre-Dame dominated the spreading city by their sheer majesty—dominated Saint-Sulpice, dominated the Trocadero, dominated even the Pantheon.

"From those towers," said I, "Quasimodo looked down and saw the slim body of Esmeralda hanging on the gibbet."

"What became of her goat?" asked Alida, who was fond of pets.

"That reminds me," began Dulcima, "that now we are safely in Paris we might be allowed to ask papa about that——"

"There is a steamer which sails for New York to-morrow," I said calmly. "Any mention of that pig will ensure us staterooms in half an hour."

Considerably subdued, the girls meekly opened their Baedekers and patronized the view, while I lighted a cigar and mused.

It was my second cigar that morning. Certainly I was a changed man—but was it a change for the better? Within me I felt something stirring—I knew not what.

It was that long-buried germ of gayety, that latent uncultivated and embryotic germ which lies dormant in all Anglo-Saxons; and usually dies dormant or is drowned in solitary cocktails at a solemn club.

Certainly I was changing. Van Dieman was right. Doubtless any change could not be the worse for a man who has not sufficient intelligence to take care of his own pig.

"There is," said Dulcima, referring to her guidebook, "a café near here in the Bois de Boulogne, called the Café des Fleurs de Chine. I should so love to breakfast at a Chinese café."

"With chopsticks!" added Alida, soulfully clasping her gloved hands.

"Your Café Chinois is doubtless a rendezvous for Apaches," I said, "but we'll try it if you wish."

I am wondering, now, just what sort of a place that café is, set like a jewel among the green trees of the Bois. I know it is expensive, but not very expensive; I know, also, that the dainty young persons who sipped mint on the terrace appeared to disregard certain conventionalities which I had been led to believe were never disregarded in France.

The safest way was to pretend a grave abstraction when their bright eyes wandered toward one; and I did this, without exactly knowing why I did.

"I wish," said I to Dulcima, "that Van Dieman were here. He understands all this surface life one sees in the parks and streets."

"Do you really wish that Mr. Van Dieman were here?" asked Alida, softly coloring.

I looked at her gravely.

"Because," she said, "I believe he is coming about the middle of May."

"Oh, he is, is he?" I said, without enthusiasm. "Well, we shall doubtless be in the Rhine by the middle of May."

"My gowns couldn't be finished until June any way," said Dulcima, laying her

gloved fingers on Alida's chair.

So they were allies, then.

"I didn't know you had ordered any gowns," I said superciliously.

"I haven't—yet," she said coolly.

"Neither have I," began Alida; but I refused to hear any more.

"When you are at your modistes you may talk gowns until you faint away," said I; "but now let us try to take an intelligent interest in this famous and ancient capital of European civilization and liberty——"

"Did you notice that girl's gown?" motioned Alida to Dulcima.

I also looked. But it was not the beauty of the gown that I found so remarkable.

"I wonder," thought I—"but no matter. I wish that idiot Van Dieman were here."



That evening, after my daughters had retired, I determined to sit up later than I ought to. The reckless ideas which Paris inspired in me, alarmed me now and then. But I was game.

So I seated myself in the moonlit court of the hotel and lighted an unwise cigar and ordered what concerns nobody except the man who swallowed it, and, crossing my legs, looked amiably around.

Williams sat at the next table.

"Hello, old sport," he said affably.

"Williams," I said, "guess who I was thinking about a moment ago."

"A girl?"

"No, of course not. I was thinking of Jim Landon. What ever became of him?"

"Jim? Oh, he's all right."

"Successful?"

"Very. You ought to have heard of him over there; but I suppose you don't keep up with art news."

"No," I admitted, ashamed—"it's rather difficult to keep up with anything on

Long Island. Does Jim Landon live here?"

"In Normandy, with his wife."

"Oh, he got married. Was it that wealthy St. Louis girl who——"

"No; she married into the British Peerage. No, Landon didn't do anything of that sort. Quite the contrary."

"He—he didn't marry his model, did he?"

"Yes—in a way."

"In a way?"

Williams summoned a waiter who shifted his equipment to my table.

"It's rather an unusual story," he said. "Would you care to hear it?"

"Does it portray, with your well known literary skill, the confusion of a parent?" I inquired cautiously. "If it does, don't tell it."

"It doesn't."

"Oh. Nobody puts it all over the old man?"

"No, not in this particular instance. Shall I begin?"

"Shoot," I said.

He began with his usual graceful gesture:



Landon was dead broke.

As it had not been convenient for him to breakfast that morning, he was irritable. The mockery of handsome hangings and antique furniture in the outer studio increased his irritation as he walked through it into the rough, inner workshop, which was hung with dusty casts and dreary with clay and plaster.

Here Ellis found him, an hour later, smoking a cigarette to deceive his appetite, and sulkily wetting down the clay bust of a sheep-faced old lady—an order of the post-mortem variety which he was executing from a gruesome photograph.

"How," inquired Ellis, "is the coy Muse treating you these palmy, balmy days?"

Landon swore and squirted a spongeful of water over the old lady's side curls.

"My! my! As bad as that?" commented Ellis, raising his eyebrows. "I thought you expected to be paid for that tombstone."

"Man, I've been eating, drinking, and sleeping on that tombstone all winter. Last night I gnawed off the 'Hic Jacet' and washed it down with the date. There's nothing left."

"You've—ah—breakfasted, dear friend?"

"That's all right——"

"*Have* you?"

"No. But there's a man from Fourth Avenue coming to buy some of that superfluous magnificence in the show studio. Besides, I'll be paid for this old lady in a day or two— Where are you going?"

"Out," said Ellis, briefly.

Landon, left alone, threw a bit of wet clay at the doorknob, stood irresolutely, first on one foot, then on the other; then with a hearty scowl at the sheep-faced old lady washed her complacent face with a dripping sponge.

"Williams!" I interrupted violently, "how do you know all those details?"

"My Lord, man!" he retorted; "I write for a living. I've got to know them."

"Go on, then," I said.

He went on:

A few moments later Ellis came in with rolls, milk and fruit.

"That's very decent of you," said Landon, but the other cut him short, excitedly.

"Jim, who is the divinity I just met in your hallway? Yours?"

"What divinity?"

"Her hair," said Ellis, a little wildly, "is the color of Tuscan gold; her eyes, ultra marine; and the skin of her is just pure snow with a brushful of carmine across

the lips—and the Great Sculptor Himself must have moulded her body——"

Landon shrugged and buttered a roll. "You let her alone," he said.

"Reveal to me instantly her name, titles, and quality!" shouted Ellis, unsheathing a Japanese sword.

"Her name," said Landon, "is O'Connor; her quality is that of a shopgirl. She is motherless and alone, and inhabits a kennel across the hall. Don't make eyes at her. She'll probably believe whatever the first gentlemanly blackguard tells her."

Ellis said: "Why may I not—in a delicately detached and gayly impersonal, yet delightfully and evasively irrational manner, calculated to deceive nobody——"

"That would sound very funny in the Latin Quarter. This is New York." He rose, frowning. Presently he picked up the sponge. "Better let a lonely heart alone, unless you're in earnest," he said, and flung the sponge back into a bucket of water, dried his hands, and looked around.

"Have you sold any pictures yet?"

"Not one. I thought I had a Copper King nailed to the easel, but Fate separated us on a clinch and he got away and disappeared behind the bars of his safe deposit. How goes the market with you?"

"Dead. I can live on my furniture for a while."

"I thought you were going in on that competition for the Department of Peace at Washington."

"I am, if I have enough money left to hire a model."

Ellis rose, twirled his walking-stick meditatively, glanced at his carefully brushed hat, and placed it gravely on his head.

"Soon," he said cheerfully, "it will be time for straw hats. But where I'm going to get one I don't know. Poverty used to be considered funny in the Quarter; but it's no idle jest in this town. Well—I'll let your best girl alone, Jim, if you feel that way about it."

They laughed and shook hands.

In the corridor Ellis looked hard at the closed door opposite, and his volatile heart gave a tortured thump; he twirled his stick and sauntered out into Stuyvesant Square.

CHAPTER V

DREAMLAND

As winter faded into spring the first tracery of green fringed the branches in Stuyvesant Square. The municipal authorities decorated the grass with tulips and later with geraniums. Later still, cannas and foliage plants were planted, over which two fountains spurted aqua Crotonis.

But in spite of tasteless horticulture it is a quaint old square, a little sad and shabby, perhaps, yet mercifully green inside its two iron-railed parallelograms. Above the great sycamores and elms the truncated towers of St. George's brood heavily; along the short, leafy reach of Rutherford Place an old-time Quaker meeting-house keeps gentle vigil; northward, aged mansions peer at the square through time-dimmed windows; south, above the Sisters of The Assumption, a painted Virgin clasps her stone hands and looks down on the little children of the poor.

Along the east side of the square runs Livingston Place; behind it an elevated railroad roars; in front lies the square, shabby, unkempt, but lovely always, when night lends to it her mystery. For at night the trees loom gigantic; lights sparkle over lawn and fountain; the illuminated dial of St. George's hangs yellow as a harvest moon above the foliage; and the pleasant bell sounds from the towers, changing, for a moment, the streets' incessant monotone to a harmony.

Into this square went Landon; oftener, as the summer grew hotter and work grew scarcer.

Once, at the close of a scorching afternoon, his pretty neighbour from across the corridor came slowly into the square and rested for a few moments on the same bench he occupied.

So lovely and fresh and sweet she seemed in the early dusk that he, for an instant, was tempted from his parched loneliness to speak to her; but before he could bring himself to it she turned, recognized him, rose and went back to the house without a second glance.

"We've been neighbours for a year," he thought, "and she has never been civil enough to look at me yet—and I've been too civil to look at her. I was an ass."

He was wrong; she had looked at him often, when unafraid that his eyes might surprise her.

He was amusingly wrong. Waking, she remembered him; during the long day she thought of him; at night, when she returned from business, the radiance from his studio lamp streaming through the transom had for her all the thrilling fascination that a lighted shop window, at Christmas, has for a lonesome child passing in darkness.

From the dim monotony of her own life she had, at times, caught glimpses through his open door of splendours scarcely guessed. In her eyes an enchanted world lay just beyond his studio's threshold; a bright, warm, mellow wonderland, indistinct in the golden lamplight, where only a detail here and there half revealed a figured tapestry or carved foliation—perhaps some soft miracle of ancient Eastern weaving on the floor, perhaps a mysterious marble shape veiled in ruddy shadow—enough to set her youthful imagination on fire, enough to check her breath and start the pulses racing as she turned the key in her own door and reentered the white dusk of her own life once more.

The three most important events of her brief career had occurred within the twelvemonth—her mother's death, her coming here to live—and love. That also had happened. But she did not call it love; it did not occur to her to consider him in any possible, tangible relation to herself.

She never even expected to know him, to speak to him, or that he could possibly care to speak to her. As far as the east is from the west, so far apart were their two worlds. For them the gusty corridor was wider than interstellar voids; she had not even a thought that a miracle might bridge the infinite from her tiny world to his, which seemed to her so bright and splendid; she had never advanced farther than the happiness of lying still after the day's work, and thinking, innocently, of what she knew about him and what she timidly divined.

At such times, stretched across her bed, the backs of her hands resting on her closed lids, she pondered on that alluring wonderland, his studio—of the mystery that so fittingly surrounded his artist's life. She saw him always amid the tints and hues of ancient textiles, sometimes dreaming, sometimes achieving with fiery inspiration—but precisely how or what he achieved remained to her part of his mystery. She cherished only the confused vision of the youth of him, and its glorious energy and wisdom.

He could be very human, too, she thought; and often the smile curved her lips and cheeks at the recollection of the noisy gayety coming in gusts through his

transom on those nights when his friends were gathered there—laughter and song—the incense of tobacco drifting into her own white room from the corridor. She loved it; the odor seemed spicy with a delicate hint of sweet-brier, and she opened her transom wider to let it in.

Usually she fell asleep, the distant uproar of gayety lulling her into happier slumbers. And for days and nights afterward its recollection made life easier and pleasanter, as though she lived with amusing memories of events in which she herself had participated.

All day long, in a fashionable dry-goods shop, she sold cobweb finery and frail, intimate, lacy stuffs to very fine ladies, who usually drew a surprised breath at her beauty, and sometimes dealt with her as though they were dealing with one of their own caste.

At night, tired, she looked forward to her return, when, behind her own closed door, she could rest or read a little, or lie still and think of Landon. But even in the daring magic of waking dreams she had scarcely ventured any acquaintance with him; in dreamland they were as yet only just aware of one another. He had lately—oh, breathless and audacious imagination of hers!—smiled at her in the corridors of dreamland; and she had been a good many days trying to decide what she was going to do about it. In her phantom world matters were going well with her.

Meanwhile, except for the stupefying heat, the actual world was also going well with her. She had saved a little money, enough to give her ten days of luxury and fresh air when the time came. She needed it; the city had been hard on her. Yet the pleasure of going was not unmixed; for, as the day of her release drew nearer, she realized how, within the year, he had, in her dreams, insensibly become to her a part of her real life, and that she would miss him sorely. Which gave her courage to hasten their acquaintance in dreamland; and so it came about that he spoke to her one night as she lay dreaming, awake on her pillow; and she felt her cheeks burn in the dark as though it had all been real.

Yet he was very gentle with her in dreamland—quite wonderful—indeed, all that the most stilted vision of a young girl could desire.

Less unquiet, now that they knew each other, she looked forward to the real separation with comparative resignation.

Then came that unexpected episode when she seated herself on the same bench with him, unintentionally braving him in the flesh.

All that night she thought about it in consternation—piteously explaining it to him in dreamland. He understood—in dreamland—but did he understand in real life? Would he think she had meant to give him a chance to speak—horror of crimson dismay! Would he think her absurd to leave so abruptly when he caught her eye? And oh, she cared so much what he might think, so much more than she supposed she dared care!

All day long it made her miserable as she moved listlessly behind the counter; at night the heated pavements almost stunned her as she walked home to save the pennies.

She saw no light in his studio as she slipped through the corridor into her stifling room. Later, she bathed and dressed in a thinner gown, but it, also, was in black, in memory of her mother, and seemed to sear her body. The room grew hotter; she went out to the passage; no light threatened her from his transom, so she ventured to leave her door open.

But even this brought no relief; the heat became unendurable; and she rose at last, pinned on her big black hat of straw, and went out into the dusk.

Through the gates of the square she saw the poor surging into the park. The police had opened the scant bits of lawn to them. Men, women, children, lay half-naked on the grass, fighting for breath. And, after a little while, she crossed the street and went in among them.

The splash of the fountain was refreshing. She wandered at random, past the illuminated façade of the Lying-in Hospital, past the painted Virgin, then crossed Second Avenue, entered the gates again, and turned aimlessly by the second fountain. There seemed to be no resting-place for her on the crowded benches.

Beyond the fountain a shadowy sycamore stood in the centre of a strip of lawn. She went toward it, hesitated, glancing at the motionless, recumbent figures near by, then ventured to seat herself on the grass and lean back against the tree. Presently, she unpinned her hat, lifted a white face to the night, and closed her eyes.

How long she sat there she did not know when again she opened her tired lids.

A figure stood near her. For a moment she confused dream and reality and smiled at him; then sat up, rigid, breathless, as the figure stirred and came forward.

She remembered attempting to rise, remembered nothing else very distinctly—not even his first words, though his voice was gentle and pleasant, just as it was

in dreamland.

"Do you mind my speaking to you?" he was asking now.

"No," she said faintly.

He raised his head and looked out across the feverish city, passing one thin hand across his eyes. Then, with a slight movement of his shoulders, he seated himself on the ground at her feet.

"We have been neighbours so long," he said, "that I thought perhaps I might dare to speak to you to-night. My name is Landon—James Landon. I think I know your last name."

"O'Connor—Ellie O'Connor—Eleanor, I mean," she added, unafraid. A curious peace seemed to possess her at the sound of his voice. There was a stillness in it that reassured.

The silence between them was ringed with the distant roar of the city. He looked around him at the shadowy forms flung across bench and lawn; his absent glance swept the surrounding walls of masonry and iron, all a-glitter with tiny, lighted windows. Overhead a tarnished moon looked down into the vast trap where five million souls lay caught, gasping for air—he among the others—and this young girl beside him—trapped, helpless, foredoomed. The city had got them all! But he sat up the straighter, giving the same slightly-impatient shake to his shoulders.

"I came," he said, "to ask you one or two questions—if I may."

"Ask them," she answered, as in a dream.

"Then—you go to business, do you not?"

"Yes."

He nodded: "And now I'm going to venture another question which may sound impertinent, but I do not mean it so. May I?"

"Yes," she said in a low, hushed voice, as though a clearer tone might break some spell.

"It is about your salary. I do not suppose it is very large."

"My wages? Shall I tell you?" she asked, so innocently that he flushed up.

"No, no!—I merely wish to—to find out from you whether you might care to take a chance of increasing your salary."

"I don't think I know what you mean," she said, looking at him.

"I know you don't," he said, patiently; "let me begin a little farther back. I am a sculptor. You know, of course, what that is——"

"Yes. I am educated." She even found courage to smile at him.

His answering smile covered both confusion and surprise; then perplexity etched a crease between his brows.

"That makes it rather harder for me"—he hesitated—"or easier; I don't know which."

"What makes it harder?" she asked.

"Your being—I don't know—different—from what I imagined——"

"Educated?"

"Y-yes——"

She laughed deliciously in her new-born confidence.

"What is it you wish to ask?"

"I'll tell you," he said. "I need a model—and I'm too poor to pay for one. I've pledged everything in my studio. A chance has come to me. It's only a chance, however. But I can't take it because I cannot afford a model."

There was a silence; then she inquired what he meant by a model. And he told her—not everything, not clearly.

"You mean that you wish me to sit for my portrait in marble?"

"There are two figures to be executed for the new Department of Peace in Washington," he explained, "and they are to be called 'Soul' and 'Body.' Six sculptors have been invited to compete. I am one. We have a year before us."

She remained silent.

"It is perfectly apparent, of course, that you are exquis—admirably fitted"—he stammered under her direct gaze, then went on; "I scarcely dared dream of such a model even if I had the means to afford—" He could get no further.

"Are you really poor?" she asked in gentle wonder.

"At present—yes."

"I never dreamed it," she said. "I thought—otherwise."

"Oh, it is nothing; some day things will come out right. Only—I have a chance

now—if you—if you would help me.... I *could* win with you; I know it. And if I do win—with your aid—I will double your present salary. And that is what I've come here to say. Is that fair?"

He waited, watching her intently. She had dropped her eyes, sitting there very silent at the foot of the tree, cradling the big straw hat in her lap.

"Whatever you decide to be fair—" he began again, but she looked up wistfully.

"I was not thinking of that," she said; "I was only—sorry."

"Sorry?"

"That you are poor."

He misunderstood her. "I know; I wish I could offer you something beside a chance——"

"Oh-h," she whispered, but so low that he heard only a long, indrawn breath.

She sat motionless, eyes on the grass. When again she lifted them their pure beauty held him.

"What is it you wish?" she asked. "That I should be your model for the—this prize which you desire to strive for?"

"Yes; for that."

"How can I? I work all day."

"I could use you at night and on Saturday afternoons, and all day Sunday. And—have you had your yearly vacation?"

She drew a quietly tired breath. "No," she said.

"Then—I will give you two hundred dollars extra for those ten days," he went on eagerly—so eagerly that he forgot the contingency on which hung any payment at all. As for her, payment was not even in her thoughts.

Through the deep, sweet content which came to her with the chance of serving him, ran an undercurrent of confused pain that he could so blindly misunderstand her. If she thought at all of the amazing possibility of such a fortune as he offered, she knew that she would not accept it from him. But this, and the pain of his misunderstanding, scarcely stirred the current of a strange, new happiness that flowed through every vein.

"Do you think I could really help you?"

"If you will." His voice trembled.

"Are you sure—quite sure? If you are—I will do what you wish."

He sprang up buoyant, transfigured.

"If I win it will be *you*!" he said. "Could you come into the studio a moment? I'll show you the two sketches I have made for 'Soul' and 'Body'."

On the prospect of a chance—the chance that had come at last—he was completely forgetting that she must be prepared to comprehend what he required of her; he forgot that she could know nothing of a sculptor's ways and methods of production. On the way to the studio, however, he tardily remembered, and it rather scared him.

"Do you know any painters or sculptors?" he asked, keeping impatient pace beside her.

"I know a woman who makes casts of hands and arms," she said shyly. "She stopped me in the street once and asked permission to cast my hands. Would you call her a sculptor?"

"N—well, perhaps she may be. We sculptors often use casts of the human body." He plunged into it more frankly: "You know, of course, that to become a sculptor or a painter, one has to model and paint from living people."

"Yes," she said, undisturbed.

"And," he continued, "it would be impossible for a sculptor to produce the beautiful marbles you have seen—er—around—unless he could pose a living model to copy from."

An unquiet little pulse began to beat in her breast; she looked up at him, but he was smiling so amiably that she smiled, too.

Mortally afraid of frightening her, he could not exactly estimate how much she divined of what was to be required of her.

He continued patiently: "Unless a student dissects he can never become a surgeon. It is the same with us; our inspiration and originality must be founded on a solid study of the human body. That is why we must always have before us as perfect a living model as we can find."

"Do—do you think—" she stopped, pink and confused.

"I think," he said, quietly impersonal, "that, speaking as a sculptor, you are as

perfect and as beautiful a model as ever the old Greek masters saw, alive or in their dreams."

"I—did not—know it," she faltered, thrilling from head to foot.

They entered the corridor together. Her breath came faster as he unlocked his door and, turning up a lamp, invited her to enter.

At last in the magic world! And with *him*!

Figured tapestries hung from the golden mystery of the ceiling; ancient dyes glowed in the soft rugs under foot; the mellow light glimmered on dull foliations. She stood still, looking about her as in a trance.

"All this I will buy back again with your help," he said, laughingly; but his unsteady voice betrayed the tension to which he was keyed. A slow excitement was gaining on her, too.

"I will redeem all these things, never fear," he said, gayly.

"Oh—if you only can.... It is too cruel to take such things from you."

The emotion in her eyes and voice surprised him for one troubled moment. Then the selfishness of the artist ignored all else save the work and the opportunity.

"You *will* help me, won't you?" he asked. "It is a promise?"

"Yes—I will."

"Is it a *promise*?"

"Yes," she said, wondering.

"Then please sit here. I will bring the sketches. They merely represent my first idea; they are done without a living model." He was off, lighting a match as he hastened. A tapestry fell back into place; she lifted her blue eyes to the faded figures of saints and seraphim stirring when the fabric moved.

CHAPTER VI

SOUL AND BODY

As in a blessed vision, doubting the reality of it all, she sat looking upward until his step on some outer floor aroused her to the wondrous reality.

He came, holding two clay figures. The first was an exquisite winged shape, standing with delicate limbs parallel, arms extended, palms outward. The head was lifted a little, poised exquisitely on the perfect neck. Its loveliness thrilled her.

"Is it an angel?" she asked, innocently.

"No.... I thought you understood—this is only a sketch I made. And this is the other." And he placed on a table the second figure, a smooth, youthful, sensuous shape, looking aside and down at her own white fingers playing with her hair.

"Is it Eve?" she inquired, wondering.

"These," he said slowly, "are the first two sketches, done without a model, for my two figures 'Soul' and 'Body'."

She looked at him, not comprehending.

"I—I must have a *living* model—for these," he stammered. "Didn't you understand? I want *you* to work from."

From brow to throat the scarlet stain deepened and spread. She turned, laid one small hand on the back of the chair, faltered, sank onto it, covering her face.

"I thought you understood," he repeated stupidly. "Forgive me—I thought you understood what sort of help I needed." He dropped on one knee beside her. "I am so sorry. Try to reason a little. You—you must know I meant no offense—that I never could wish to offend you. Look at me, please; I am not that sort of a man. Can't you realize how desperate I was—how I dared hazard the chance that you might help me?"

She rose, her face still covered.

"*Can't* you comprehend?" he pleaded, "that I meant no offense?"

"Y-yes. Let me go."

"Can you forgive me?"

"I—yes."

"And you cannot—help me?"

"H-help you?... Oh, no, no, no!" She broke down, sobbing in the chair, her golden head buried in her arms.

Confused, miserable, he watched her. Already the old helpless feeling had come surging back, that there was to be no chance for him in the world, no hope of all he had dared to believe in, no future. Watching her he felt his own courage falling with her tears, his own will drooping as she drooped there—slender and white in her thin, black gown.

Again he spoke, for the moment forgetting himself.

"Don't cry, because there is nothing to cry about. You know I did not mean to hurt you; I know that you would help me if you could. Isn't it true?"

"Y-yes," she sobbed.

"It was only a sculptor who asked you, not a man at all. You understand what I mean?—only a poor devil of a sculptor, carried away by the glamour of a chance for better fortune that seemed to open before him for a moment. So you must not feel distressed or sensitive or ashamed——"

She sat up, wet eyed, cheeks aflame.

"I am thinking of *you*!" she cried, almost fiercely, "not of myself; and you don't understand! Do you think I would cry over myself? I—it is because I cannot help *you*!"

He found no words to answer as she rose and moved toward the door. She crossed the threshold, turned and looked at him. Then she entered her own doorway.



And the world went badly for her that night, and, after that, day and night, the world went badly.

Always the confusion of shame and dread returned to burn her; but that was the

least; for in the long hours, lying amid the fragments of her shattered dreams, the knowledge that he needed her and that she could not respond, overwhelmed her.

The house, the corridor, her room became unendurable; she desired to go—anywhere—and try to forget. But she could not; she could not leave, she could not forget, she could not go to him and offer the only aid he desired, she could not forgive herself.

In vain, in vain, white with the agony of courage, she strove to teach herself that she was nothing, her body nothing, that the cost was nothing, compared to the terrible importance of his necessity. She knew in her heart that she could have died for him; but—but—her courage could go no further.

In terrible silence she walked her room, thinking of him as one in peril, as one ruined for lack of the aid she withheld. Sometimes she passed hours on her knees, tearless, wordless; sometimes sheerest fear set her creeping to the door to peer out, dreading lest his closed door concealed a tragedy.

And always, burning like twin gray flames before her eyes, she saw the figures he had made, 'Soul' and 'Body.' Every detail remained clear; their terrible beauty haunted her. Night after night, rigid on her bed's edge, she stretched her bared, white arms, staring at them, then flung them hopelessly across her eyes, whispering, "I cannot—O God—I cannot—even for him."

And there came a day—a Saturday—when the silence of the house, of her room, the silence in her soul, became insupportable.

All day she walked in the icy, roaring streets, driving herself forward toward the phantom of forgetfulness which fled before her like her shadow. And at the edge of noon she found herself—where she knew she must come one day—seeking the woman who made plaster casts of hands and arms and shapely feet.

For a little while they talked together. The woman surprised, smiling sometimes, but always very gentle; the girl flushed, stammering, distressed in forming her naïve questions.

Yes, it could be done; it had been done. But it was a long process; it must be executed in sections, then set together limb by limb, for there were many difficulties—and it was not pleasant to endure, even sometimes painful.

"I do not mind the pain," said the girl. "Will it scar me?"

"No, not that.... But, another thing; it would be expensive."

"I have my vacation money, and a little more." She named the sum timidly.

Yes, it was enough. And when could she come for the first casts to be taken?

She was ready now.

A little later, turning a lovely, flushed face over her bare shoulder: "One figure stood like this," and, after a pause, "the other this way.... If you make them from me, can a sculptor work from life casts such as these?"

A sculptor could.

About dusk she crept home, trembling in every nerve. Her vacation had begun.

She had been promoted to a position as expert lace buyer, which permitted larger liberty. From choice she had taken no vacation during the summer. Now her vacation, which she requested for December, lasted ten days; and at the end of it her last penny had been spent, but in a manner so wonderful, so strange, that no maid ever dreamed such things might be.

"Christmas Eve she knelt, crying, before the pedestal."

And on the last evening of it, which was Christmas Eve, she knelt, crying, before two pedestals from which rose her body and soul as white as death.

An hour later the snowy twins stood in his empty studio, swathed in their corpse-white winding-sheets—unstained cerements, sealing beneath their folds her dead pride, dead hope—all that was delicate and intimate and subtle and sweet—slain and in cerements, for his sake.

And now she must go before he returned. Her small trunk was ready; her small account settled. With strangely weak and unsteady hands she stood before the glass knotting her veil.

Since that night together last summer she had not spoken to him, merely returning his low greeting in the corridor with a silent little inclination of her head. But, although she had had no speech with him, she had learned that he was teaching at the League now, and she knew his hours and his movements well enough to time her own by them.

He was not due for another hour; she looked out into the snowy darkness, drawing on her gloves and buttoning the scant fur collar close about her throat.

The old janitor came to say good-by.

"An' God be with you, miss, this Christmas Eve"—taking the coin irresolutely, but pocketing it for fear of hurting her.

His fingers, numbed and aged, fumbling in the pocket encountered another object.

"Musha, thin, I'm afther forgettin' phwat I'm here f'r to tell ye, miss," he rambled on. "Misther Landon wishes ye f'r to know that he do be lavin' the house"—the old man moistened his lips in an effort to remember with all the elegance required of him—"an' Misther Landon is wishful f'r to say a genteel good luck to ye, miss."

The girl shook her head.

"Tell Mr. Landon good-by for me, Patrick. Say—from me—God bless him.... Will you remember?... And a—a happy Christmas."

"I will, Miss."

She touched her eyes with her handkerchief hastily, and held out her hand to the old man.

"I think that is all," she whispered.

She was mistaken; the janitor was holding out a note to her.

"In case ye found it onconvaynient f'r to see Misther Landon, I was to projooce the letter, Miss."

She took it; a shiver passed over her.

When the old man had shambled off down the passage she reëntered her room, held the envelope a moment close under the lighted lamp, then nervously tore it wide.

"You will read this in case you refuse to say good-by to me. But I only wanted to offer you a little gift at Christmastide—not in reparation, for I meant no injury—but in deepest respect for you. And so I ask you once more to wait for me. Will you?"

Minute after minute she sat there, dumb, confused, nerves at the breaking point, her heart and soul crying out for him. Then the memory of what was awaiting him in his studio choked her with fright. She sprang to her feet, and at the same moment the outer gate clanged.

Terror froze her; then she remembered that it was too early for him; it must be the expressman for her trunk. And she went to the door and opened it.

"Oh-h!" she breathed, shrinking back; but Landon had seen his letter in her hand,

and he followed her into the room.

He was paler than she: his voice was failing him, too, as he laid his gift on the bare table—only a little book, prettily bound.

"Will you take it?" he asked in a colorless voice; but she could not answer, could not move.

"I wish you a happy Christmas," he whispered. "Good-by."

She strove to meet his eyes, strove to speak, lifted her slim hand to stay him. It fell, strength spent, in both of his.

Suddenly Time went all wrong, reeling off centuries in seconds. And through the endless interstellar space that stretched between her world and his she heard his voice bridging it: "I love you—I love you dearly.... Once more I am the beggar—a beggar at Christmastide, asking your mercy—asking more, your love. Dear, is it plain this time? Is all clear, dearest among women?"

She looked up into his eyes; his hands tightened over hers.

"Can you love me?" he said.

"Yes," answered her eyes and the fragrant mouth assented, quivering under his lips.

Then, without will or effort of her own, from very far away, her voice stole back to her faintly.

"Is all this true? I have dreamed so long—so long—of loving you——"

He drew her closer; she laid both hands against his coat and hid her face between them.

He whispered:

"It was your unselfishness, your sweetness, and—you—all of you—yes—your beauty—the loveliness of you, too! I could not put it from me; I knew that night that I loved you—and to-day they said you were going—so I came with my Christmas gift—the sorry, sorry gift—myself——"

"Ah!" she whispered, clinging closer. "And what of my gift—my twin gifts—there, in your studio! Oh, you don't know, you don't know——"

"Dearest!"

"No—you can never know how much easier it had been for me to die than to love—as I have loved a man this day."

"Confound you, Williams," I said, blinking.

But he did not hear me, sitting there in a literary reverie, mentally repolishing the carefully considered paragraphs with which he had just regaled me.

"Williams?"

"What?"

"So—they're living in Normandy."

"Who?"

"Jim Landon and that girl, dammit!" I said, crossly.

"Yes—oh, yes, of course. Children—bunches of 'em—and all that."

"Williams?"

"What?"

"*Was* she so pretty?"

"Certainly," he said, absently. "Don't bother me now; I've got an idea for another story."

CHAPTER VII

THE BITER, THE BITTEN, AND THE UN-BITTEN

"Mais tout le monde," began the chasseur of the Hôtel des Michetons—"mais, monsieur, tout le grand monde——"

"Exactly," said I, complacently. "Le grand monde means the great world; and," I added, "the world is a planet of no unusual magnitude, inhabited by bipeds whose entire existence is passed in attempting to get something for nothing."

The chasseur of the Hôtel des Michetons bowed, doubtfully.

"You request me," I continued, "not to forget you when I go away. Why should I not forget you? Are you historical, are you antique, are you rococo, are you a Rosacrucian?"

The chasseur, amiably perplexed, twirled his gold-banded cap between his fingers.

"Have you," I asked, "ever done one solitary thing for me besides touching your expensive cap?"

The chasseur touched his cap, smiled, and hopefully held out his large empty hand.

"Go to the devil," I said gently; "it is not for what you have done but for what you have not done that I give you this silver piece," and I paid the tribute which I despised myself for paying. Still, his gay smile and prompt salute are certainly worth something to see, but what their precise value may be you can only determine when, on returning to New York, you hear a gripman curse a woman for crossing the sacred tracks of the Metropolitan Street Railroad Company. So, with my daughter Dulcima and my daughter Alida, and with a wagon-load of baggage, I left the gorgeously gilded Hôtel des Michetons—for these three reasons:

Number one: it was full of Americans.

Number two: that entire section of Paris resembled a slice of the Waldorf-Astoria.

Number three: I wanted to be rid of the New York *Herald*. Surely somewhere in Paris there existed French newspapers, French people, and French speech. I meant to discover them or write and complain to the *Outlook*.

The new hotel I had selected was called the Hôtel de l'Univers. I had noticed it while wandering out of the Luxembourg Gardens. It appeared to be a well situated, modest, clean hotel, and not only thoroughly respectable—which the great gilded Hôtel des Michetons was not—but also typically and thoroughly French. So I took an apartment on the first floor and laid my plans to dine out every evening with my daughters.

They were naturally not favourably impressed with the Hôtel de l'Univers, but I insisted on trying it for a week, desiring that my daughters should have at least a brief experience in a typical French hotel.

On the third day of our stay my daughters asked me why the guests at the Hôtel de l'Univers all appeared to be afflicted in one way or another. I myself had noticed that many of the guests wore court-plaster on hands and faces, and some even had their hands bandaged in slings.

I thought, too, that the passers-by in the street eyed the modest hotel with an interest somewhat out of proportion to its importance. But I set that down to French alertness and inbred curiosity, and dismissed the subject from my mind. The hotel was pretty clean and highly respectable. Titled names were not wanting among the guests, and the perfect courtesy of the proprietor, his servants, and of the guests was most refreshing after the carelessness and bad manners of the crowds at the Hôtel des Michetons.

"Can it be possible?" said Alida, as we three strolled out of our hotel into the Boulevard St. Michel.

"What?" I asked.

"That we are in the Latin Quarter? Why this boulevard is beautiful, and I had always pictured the Latin Quarter as very dreadful."

"It's the inhabitants that are dreadful," said I with a shudder as a black-eyed young girl, in passing, gave me an amused and exceedingly saucy smile.

The "Quarter!" It is beautiful—one of the most beautiful portions of Paris. The Luxembourg Gardens are the centre and heart of the Latin Quarter—these ancient gardens, with their groves of swaying chestnuts all in bloom, quaint weather-beaten statues in a grim semicircle looking out over the flowering almonds on the terrace to the great blue basin of the fountain where toy yachts

battle with waves almost an inch high.

Here the big drab-colored pigeons strut and coo in the sunshine, here the carp splash in the mossy fountain of Marie de Medici, here come the nursemaids with their squalling charges, to sit on the marble benches and coquette with the red-trousered soldiers, who are the proper and natural prey of all nursemaids in all climes.

"What is that banging and squeaking?" asked Alida, as we entered the foliage of the southern terrace. "Not Punch and Judy—oh, I haven't seen Punch since I was centuries younger! Do let us go, papa!"

Around the painted puppet box children sat, open-mouthed. Back of them crowded parents and nurses and pretty girls and gay young officers, while, from the pulpit, Punch held forth amid screams of infantile delight, or banged his friends with his stick in the same old fashion that delighted us all—centuries since.

"Such a handsome officer," said Alida under her breath.

The officer in question, a dragoon, was looking at Dulcima in that slightly mischievous yet well-bred manner peculiar to European officers.

Dulcima did not appear to observe him.

"Why—why, that is Monsieur de Barsac, who came over on our ship!" said Alida, plucking me by the sleeve. "Don't you remember how nice he was when we were so—so sea—miserable? You really ought to bow to him, papa. If you don't, I will."

I looked at the dragoon and caught his eye—such a bright, intelligent, mischievous eye!—and I could not avoid bowing.

Up he came, sword clanking, white-gloved hand glued to the polished visor of his crimson cap, and—the girls were delighted.

Now what do you suppose that Frenchman did? He gave up his entire day to showing us the beauties of the Rive Gauche.

Under his generous guidance my daughters saw what few tourists see intelligently—the New Sorbonne, with its magnificent mural decorations by Puvis de Chavannes; we saw the great white-domed Observatory, piled up in the sky like an Eastern temple, and the beautiful old palace of the Luxembourg. Also, we beheld the Republican Guards, *à cheval*, marching out of their barracks on the Rue de Tournon; and a splendid glittering company of cavalry they were,

with their silver helmets, orange-red facings, white gauntlets, and high, polished boots—the picked men of all the French forces, as far as physique is concerned.

In the late afternoon haze the dome of the Pantheon, towering over the Latin Quarter, turned to purest cobalt in the sky. Under its majestic shadow the Boulevard St. Michel ran all green and gold with gas-jets already lighted in lamps and restaurants and the scores of students' cafés which line the main artery of the "Quartier Latin."

"I wish," said Alida, "that it were perfectly proper for us to walk along those terraces."

Captain de Barsac appeared extremely doubtful, but entirely at our disposal.

"You know what our students are, monsieur," he said, twisting his short blond moustache; "however—if monsieur wishes——?"

So, with my daughters in the centre, and Captain de Barsac and myself thrown out in strong flanking parties, we began our march.

The famous cafés of the Latin Quarter were all ablaze with electricity and gas and colored incandescent globes. On the terraces hundreds of tables and chairs stood, occupied by students in every imaginable civilian costume, although the straight-brimmed stovepipe and the *béret* appeared to be the favorite headgear. At least a third of the throng was made up of military students from the Polytechnic, from Fontainebleau, and from Saint-Cyr. Set in the crowded terraces like bunches of blossoms were chattering groups of girls—bright-eyed, vivacious, beribboned and befrilled young persons, sipping the petit-verre or Amer-Picon, gossiping, babbling, laughing like dainty exotic birds. To and fro sped the bald-headed, white-aproned waiters, balancing trays full of glasses brimming with red and blue and amber liquids.

Here was the Café d'Harcourt, all a-glitter, with music playing somewhere inside—the favorite resort of the medical students from the Sorbonne, according to Captain de Barsac. Here was the Café de la Source, with its cascade of falling water and its miniature mill-wheel turning under a crimson glow of light; here was the famous Café Vachette, celebrated as the centre of all Latin Quarter mischief; and, opposite to it, blazed the lights of the "CAFÉ DES BLEAUS," so called because haunted almost exclusively by artillery officers from the great school of Fontainebleau.

Up the boulevard and down the boulevard moved the big double-decked tram-cars, horns sounding incessantly; cabs dashed up to the cafés, deposited their

loads of students or pretty women, then darted away toward the river, their lamps shining like stars.

It was truly a fairy scene, with the electric lights playing on the foliage of the trees, turning the warm tender green of the chestnut leaves to a wonderful pale bluish tint, and etching the pavements underfoot with exquisite Chinese shadows.

"It is a shame that this lovely scene should not be entirely respectable," said Alida, resentfully.

"Vice," murmured de Barsac to me, "could not exist unless it were made attractive."

As far as the surface of the life before us was concerned, there was nothing visible to shock anybody; and, under escort, there is no earthly reason why decent women of any age should not enjoy the spectacle of the "BOUL' MICH." on a night in springtime.

An innocent woman, married or unmarried, ought not to detect anything unpleasant in the St. Michel district; but, alas! what is known as "Smart Society" is so preternaturally wise in these piping times o' wisdom, that the child is not only truly the father of the man, but also his instructor and interpreter—to that same man's astonishment and horror. It may always have been so—even before the days when our theatres were first licensed to instruct our children in object lessons of the seven deadly sins—but I cannot recollect the time when, as a youngster, I was tolerantly familiar with the scenes now nightly offered to our children through the courtesy of our New York theatre managers.

Slowly we turned to retrace our steps, strolling up the boulevard through the fragrant May evening, until we came to the gilded railing which encircles the Luxembourg Gardens from the School of Mines to the Palais-du-Sénat.

Here Captain De Barsac took leave of us with all the delightful and engaging courtesy of a well-bred Frenchman; and he seemed to be grateful for the privilege of showing us about over a district as tiresomely familiar to him as his own barracks.

I could do no less than ask him to call on us, though his devotion to Dulcima both on shipboard and here made me a trifle wary.

"We are stopping," said I, "at the Hôtel de l'Univers——"

He started and gazed at me so earnestly that I asked him why he did so.

"The—the Hôtel de l'Univers?" he repeated, looking from me to Dulcima and from Dulcima to Alida.

"Is it not respectable?" I demanded, somewhat alarmed.

"—But—but perfectly, monsieur. It is, of course, the very best hotel of *that* kind —"

"*What* kind?" I asked.

"Why—for the purpose. Ah, monsieur, I had no idea that you came to Paris for *that*. I am so sorry, so deeply grieved to hear it. But of course all will be well —"

He stopped and gazed earnestly at Dulcima.

"It is not—not *you*, mademoiselle, is it?"

My children and I stared at each other in consternation.

"What in heaven's name is the matter with that hotel?" I asked.

Captain de Barsac looked startled.

"Is there anything wrong with the guests there?" asked Dulcima, faintly.

"No—oh, no—only, of course, they are all under treatment——"

"Under treatment!" I cried nervously. "For what!!!"

"Is it possible," muttered the captain, "that you went to that hotel not knowing? Did you not notice anything peculiar about the guests there?"

"They all seem to wear court-plaster or carry their arms in slings," faltered Dulcima.

"And they come from all over the world—Russia, Belgium, Spain," murmured Alida nervously. "What do they want?"

"Thank heaven!" cried De Barsac, radiantly; "then you are not there for the treatment!"

"Treatment for what?" I groaned.

"Hydrophobia!"

I wound my arms around my shrinking children.

"It is the hotel where all the best people go who come to Paris for Pasteur's treatment," he said, trying to look grave; but Dulcima threw back her pretty head

and burst into an uncontrollable gale of laughter; and there we stood on the sidewalk, laughing and laughing while passing students grinned in sympathy and a cloaked policeman on the corner smiled discreetly and rubbed his chin.

That evening, after my progeny were safely asleep, casting a furtive glance around me I slunk off to my old café—the Café Jaune. I hadn't been there in over twenty years; I passed among crowded tables, skulked through the entrance, and slid into my old corner as though I had never missed an evening there.

They brought me a Bock. As I lifted the icy glass to my lips, over the foam I beheld Williams, smiling.

"Eh bien, mon vieux?" he said, pleasantly.

"By gad, Williams, this seems natural—especially with you sitting next."

"It sure does," he said.

I pointed toward a leather settee. "Archie used to sit over there with his best girl. Do you remember? And that was Dillon's seat—and Smithy and Palmyre—Oh, Lord!—And Seabury always had that other corner."... I paused, lost in happy reminiscences. "What has become of Jack Seabury?" I inquired.

"The usual."

"Married?"

"Oh, very much."

"Where does he live."

"In Philadelphia."

I mused for a while.

"So he's married, too," I said, thoughtfully. "Well—it's a funny life, isn't it, Williams."

"I've never seen a funnier. Seabury's marriage was funny too—I mean his courtship."

I looked up at Williams, suspiciously.

"Is this one of your professional literary stories?"

"It's a true one. What's the harm in my enveloping it in a professional glamour?"

"None," I said, resignedly; "go ahead."

"All right, mon vieux."

CHAPTER VIII

A MATTER OF PRONUNCIATION

This is a story of the Mystic Three—Fate, Chance, and Destiny; and what happens to people who trifle with them.

It begins with a young man running after a train. He had to run.

The connection at Westport Junction was normally a close one, but now, even before the incoming train had entirely stopped, the local on the other line began to move out, while the engineers of the two locomotives, leaning from their cab windows, exchanged sooty grins. It was none of their business—this squabble between the two roads which was making the term, "Junction," as applied to Westport, a snare and a derision.

So the roads squabbled, and young Seabury ran. Other passengers ran, too, amid the gibes of newsboys and the patronizing applause of station loafers.

He heard them; he also heard squeaks emitted by females whose highest speed was a dignified and scuttering waddle. Meanwhile he was running, and running hard through the falling snow; the ice under foot did not aid him; his overcoat and suit-case handicapped him; the passengers on the moving train smiled at him behind frosty windows.

One very thin man smoking a cigar rubbed his thumb on the pane in order to see better; he was laughing, and Seabury wished him evil.

There were only two cars, and the last one was already rolling by him. And at one of the windows of this car he saw a pretty girl in chinchilla furs watching him curiously. Then she also smiled.

It may have been the frank amusement of a pretty woman, and it may have been the sorrowful apathy of a red-nosed brakeman tying the loose end of the signal rope on the rear platform; doubtless one or the other spurred him to a desperate flying leap which landed him and his suit-case on the rear platform of the last car. And there he stuck, too mad to speak, until a whirlwind of snow and cinders drove him to shelter inside.

The choice of cars was limited to a combination baggage and smoker and a more

fragrant passenger coach. He selected a place in the latter across the aisle from the attractive girl in chinchilla furs who had smiled at his misfortunes—not very maliciously. Now, as he seated himself, she glanced up at him without the slightest visible interest, and returned to her study of the winter landscape.

The car was hot; he was hot. Burning thoughts concerning the insolence of railroads made him hotter; the knowledge that he had furnished amusement for the passengers of two trains did not cool him.

Meanwhile everybody in the car had become tired of staring at him; a little boy across the aisle giggled his last giggle; several men resumed their newspapers; a shopgirl remembered her gum and began chewing it again.

A large mottled man with a damp moustache, seated opposite him, said: "Vell, Mister, you runned pooty quvick alretty py dot Vestport train!"

"It seems to me," observed Seabury, touching his heated face with his handkerchief, "that the public ought to do something."

"Yaw; der bublic it runs," said the large man, resuming his eyeglasses and holding his newspaper nearer to the window in the fading light.

Seabury smiled to himself and ventured to glance across the aisle in time to see the dawning smile in the blue eyes of his neighbor die out instantly as he turned. It was the second smile he had extinguished since his appearance aboard the train.

The conductor, a fat, unbuttoned, untidy official, wearing spectacles and a walrus moustache, came straddling down the aisle. He looked over the tops of his spectacles at Seabury doubtfully.

"I managed to jump aboard," explained the young man, smiling.

"Tickuts!" returned the conductor without interest.

"I haven't a ticket; I'll pay——"

"Sure," said the conductor; "vere you ged ovid?"

"What?"

"Vere do you ged ovid?"

"Oh, where do I get *out*? I'm going to Beverly——"

"Peverly? Sefenty-vive cends."

"Not to Peverly, to Beverly——"

"Yaw, Peverly——"

"No, no; Beverly! not Peverly——"

"Aind I said Peverly alretty? Sefenty-vive——"

"Look here; there's a Beverly and a Peverly on this line, and I don't want to go to Peverly and I do want to go to Beverly——"

"You go py Peverly und you don'd go py Beverly alretty! Sure! Sefenty-vive ce——"

The young man cast an exasperated glance across the aisle in time to catch a glimpse of two deliciously blue eyes suffused with mirth. And instantly, as before, the mirth died out. As an extinguisher of smiles he was a success, anyway; and he turned again to the placid conductor who was in the act of punching a ticket.

"Wait! Hold on! Don't do that until I get this matter straight! Now, do you understand where I wish to go?"

"You go py Peverly——"

"No, Beverly! Beverly! *Beverly*," he repeated in patiently studied accents.

The large mottled man with the damp moustache looked up gravely over his newspaper: "Yaw, der gonductor he also says Peverly."

"But Peverly isn't Beverly——"

"Aind I said it blenty enough dimes?" demanded the conductor, becoming irritable.

"But you haven't said it right yet!" insisted Seabury.

The conductor was growing madder and madder. "Peverly! Peverly!! *Peverly!!!* In Gottes Himmel, don'd you English yet alretty understandt? Sefenty-vive cends! Und"—here he jammed a seat check into the rattling windows-sill—"Und ven I sez Peverly it iss Peverly, und ven I sez Beverly it iss Beverly, und ven I sez sefenty-vive cends so iss it sefenty-vi——"

Seabury thrust three silver quarters at him; it was impossible to pursue the subject; madness lay in that direction. And when the affronted conductor, mumbling muffled indignation, had straddled off down the aisle, the young man took a cautious glance at the check in the window-sill. But on it was printed only, "Please show this to the conductor," so he got no satisfaction there. He had

misaid his time-table, too, and the large mottled man opposite had none, and began an endless and patient explanation which naturally resulted in nothing, as his labials were similar to the conductor's; even more so.



CHAPTER IX

FATE

Turning to the man behind him Seabury attempted to extract a little information, and the man was very affable and anxious to be of help, but all he could do was to nod and utter Teutonic gutturals through a bushy beard with a deep, buzzing sound, and Seabury sank back, beaten and dejected.

"Good Lord!" he muttered to himself, "is the entire Fatherland travelling on this accursed car! I—I've half a mind——"

He stole a doubtful sidelong glance at his blue-eyed neighbor across the aisle, but she was looking out of her own window this time, her cheeks buried in the fur of her chinchilla muff.

"And after all," he reflected, "if I ask her, she might turn out to be of the same nationality." But it was not exactly that which prevented him.

The train was slowing down; sundry hoarse toots from the locomotive indicated a station somewhere in the vicinity.

"Plue Pirt Lake! Change heraus für Bleasant Falley!" shouted the conductor, opening the forward door. He lingered long enough to glare balefully at Seabury, then, as nobody apparently cared either to get out at Blue Bird Lake or change for Pleasant Valley, he slammed the door and jerked the signal rope; the locomotive emitted a scornful Teutonic grunt; the train moved forward into the deepening twilight of the December night.

The snow was now falling more heavily—it was light enough to see that—a fine gray powder sifting down out of obscurity, blowing past the windows in misty streamers.

The bulky man opposite breathed on the pane, rubbed it with a thumb like a pincushion, and peered out.

"Der next station iss Beverly," he said.

"The next is Peverly?"

"No, der next iss *Beverly*; und der nextest iss Peverly.

"Then, if I am going to Beverly, I get out at the next station, don't I?" stammered the perplexed young fellow, trying to be polite.

The man became peevish. "Nun, wass ist es?" he growled. "I dell you Peverly und you say Beverly. Don'd I know vat it iss I say alretty?"

"Yes—but *I* don't——"

"Also, you ged owid vere you tam blease!" retorted the incensed passenger, and resumed his newspaper, hunching himself around to present nothing to Seabury except a vast expanse of neck and shoulder.

Seabury, painfully embarrassed, let it go at that. Probably the poor man *had* managed to enunciate the name of the station properly; no doubt the next stop was Beverly, after all. He was due there at 6.17. He looked at his watch. It was a quarter past six already. The next stop *must* be Beverly—supposing the train to be on time.

And already the guttural warning of the locomotive sounded from the darkness ahead; already he sensed the gritting resistance of the brakes.

Permitting himself a farewell and perfectly inoffensive glance across the aisle, he perceived her of the blue eyes and chinchilla furs preparing for departure; and, what he had not before noticed, her maid in the seat behind her, gathering a dainty satchel, umbrella, and suit-case marked C. G.

So she was going to Beverly, too! He hoped she might be bound for the Christmas Eve frolic at the Austins'. It was perfectly possible—in fact, probable.

He was a young man whose optimism colored his personal wishes so vividly that sometimes what he desired became presently, in his imagination, a charming and delightful probability. And already his misgivings concerning the proper name of the next station had vanished. He *wanted* Beverly to be the next station, and already it was, for him. Also, he had quite made up his mind that she of the chinchillas was bound for the Austins'.

A cynical blast from the locomotive; a jerking pull of brakes, and, from the forward smoker, entered the fat conductor.

"Beverly! Beverly!" he shouted.

So he, too, had managed to master his *P*'s and *B*'s, concluded the young man, smiling to himself as he rose, invested himself with his heavy coat, and picked up his suit-case.

The young lady of the chinchillas had already left the car, followed by her maid, before he stepped into the aisle ready for departure.

A shadow of misgiving fell upon him when, glancing politely at his fellow-passenger, he encountered only a huge sneer, and concluded that the nod of courtesy was superfluous.

Also he hesitated as he passed the fat conductor, who was glaring at him, mouth agape—hesitated a moment only, then, realizing the dreadful possibilities of reopening the subject, swallowed his question in silence.

"It's *got* to be Beverly, now," he thought, making his way to the snowy platform and looking about him for some sign of a conveyance which might be destined for him. There were several sleighs and depot-wagons there—a number of footmen bustling about in furs.

"I'll just glance at the name of the station to be sure," he thought to himself, peering up through the thickly descending snow where the name of the station ought to be. And, as he stepped out to get a good view, he backed into a fur-robed footman, who touched his hat in hasty apology.

"Oh, Bailey! Is that you?" said Seabury, relieved to encounter one of Mrs. Austin's men.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Seabury, sir! Were you expected——?"

"Certainly," nodded the young man gayly, abandoning his suit-case to the footman and following him to a big depot-sleigh.

And there, sure enough, was his lady of the chinchillas, nestling under the robes to her pretty chin, and her maid on the box with the coachman—a strangely fat coachman—no doubt a new one to replace old Martin.

When Seabury came up the young lady turned and looked at him, and he took off his hat politely, and she acknowledged his presence very gravely and he seated himself decorously, and the footman swung to the rumble.

Then the chiming silver sleigh-bells rang out through the snow, the magnificent pair of plumed horses swung around the circle under the bleared lights of the station and away they speeded into snowy darkness.

A decent interval of silence elapsed before he considered himself at liberty to use a traveller's privilege. Then he said something sufficiently commonplace to permit her the choice of conversing or remaining silent. She hesitated; she had never been particularly wedded to silence. Besides, she was scarcely twenty—

much too young to be wedded to anything. So she said something, with perfect composure, which left the choice to him. And his choice was obvious.

"I have no idea how far it is; have you?" he asked.

"Yes," she said coolly.

"This is a jolly sleigh," he continued with unimpaired cheerfulness.

She thought it comfortable. And for a while the conversation clung so closely around the sleigh that it might have been run over had not he dragged it into another path.

"Isn't it amazing how indifferent railroads are to the convenience of their passengers?"

She turned her blue eyes on him; there was the faintest glimmer in their depths.

"I know you saw me running after that train," he said, laughingly attempting to break the ice.

"I?"

"Certainly. And it amused you, I think."

She raised her eyebrows a trifle. "What is there amusing about that?"

"But you *did* smile—at least I thought so."

Evidently she had no comment to offer. She was hard to talk to. But he tried again.

"The fact is, I never expected to catch your—that train. It was only when I saw—saw"—he floundered on the verge of saying "you," but veered off hastily—"when I saw that brakeman's expression of tired contempt, I simply sailed through the air like a—a—like a—one of those—er you know——"

"Do you mean kangaroos?" she ventured so listlessly that the quick flush of chagrin on his face died out again; because it was quite impossible that such infantine coldness and candour could be secretly trifling with his dignity.

"It was a long jump," he concluded gayly, "but I did some jumping at Harvard and I made it and managed to hold on."

"You were very fortunate," she said, smiling for the first time.

And, looking at her, he thought he was; and he admitted it so blandly that he overdid the part. But he didn't know that.

"I fancy," he continued, "that everybody on that train except you and I were Germans. Such a type as sat opposite me——"

"Which car were you in?" she asked simply.

"Why—in your car——"

"In *my* car?"

"Why—er—yes," he explained; "you were sitting across the aisle, you know."

"Was I?" she asked with pleasant surprise; "across the aisle from you?"

He grew red; he had certainly supposed that she had noticed him enough to identify him again. Evidently she had not. Mistakes like that are annoying. Every man instinctively supposes himself enough of an entity to be noticed by a pretty woman.

"I had no end of trouble of finding out where Beverly was," he said after a minute.

"Oh! And how did you find out?"

"I didn't until I backed into Bailey, yonder.... Do you know that I had a curious sort of presentiment that I should find you in this sleigh?"

"That is strange," she said. "When did you have it?"

"In the car—long before you got off."

She thought it most remarkable—rather listlessly.

"Those things happen, you know," he went on; "like thinking of a person you don't expect to see, and looking up and suddenly seeing that very person walking along."

"How does that resemble your case?" she asked.

It didn't. He realised it even before he began to try to explain the similarity. It really didn't matter one way or the other; it was nothing to turn red about, but he was turning. Somehow or other she managed to say things that never permitted that easy, graceful flow of language which characterised him in his normal state. Somehow or other, he felt that he was not doing himself justice. He could converse well enough with people as a rule. Something in that topsy-turvy and maddeningly foolish colloquy with those Germans must have twisted his tongue or unbalanced his logic.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "there's no similarity between the two cases except

the basic idea of premonition."

She had been watching him disentangle himself with bright eyes in which something was sparkling—perhaps sympathy and perhaps not. It may have been the glimmer of malice. Perhaps she thought him just a trifle too ornamental—for he certainly was a very good-looking youth—perhaps something in the entire episode appealed to her sense of mischief. Probably even she herself could not explain just why she had thought it funny to see him running for his train, and later entangling himself in a futile word-fest with the conductor and the large mottled man.

"So," she said thoughtfully, "you were obsessed by a premonition."

"Not—er—exactly obsessed," he said suspiciously. Then his face cleared. How could anybody be suspicious of such sweetly inquiring frankness? "You see," he admitted, "that I—well, I rather hoped you would be going to the Austins'."

"The *Austins*!" she repeated.

"Yes. I—I couldn't help speculating——"

"About me?" she asked. "Why should you?"

"I—there was no reason, of course, only I k-kept seeing you without trying to ——"

"Me?"

"Certainly. I couldn't help seeing you, could I?"

"Not if you were looking at me," she murmured, pressing her muff to her face. Perhaps she was cold.

Again it occurred to him that there was something foolish in her reply. Certainly she was a little difficult to talk to. But then she was young—very young and—close enough to being a beauty to excuse herself from any over strenuous claim to intellectuality.

"Yes," he said kindly and patiently, "I did see you, and I did hope that you were going to the Austins'. And then I bumped into somebody and there you were. I don't mean," as she raised her pretty eyebrows—"mean that you were Bailey. Good Lord, *what* is the matter with my tongue!" he said, flushing with annoyance. "I don't talk this way usually."

"Don't you?" she managed to whisper behind her muff.

"No, I don't. That conductor's jargon seems to have inoculated me. You will probably not believe it, but I *can* talk the English tongue sometimes——"

She was laughing now—a clear, delicious, irrepressible little peal that rang sweetly in the frosty air, harmonising with the chiming sleigh-bells. And he laughed, too, still uncomfortably flushed.

"Do you think it would help if we began all over again?" she asked, looking wickedly at him over her muff. "Let me see—you had an obsession which turned into a premonition that bumped Bailey and you found it wasn't Bailey at all, but a stranger in chinchillas who was going to—*where* did you say she was going? Oh, to the Austins'! *That* is clear, isn't it?"

"About as clear as anything that's happened to me to-night," he said.

"A snowy night does make a difference," she reflected.

"A—a difference?"

"Yes—doesn't it?" she asked innocently.

"I—in *what*?"

"In clearness. Things are clearer by daylight?"

"I don't see—I—exactly how—as a matter of fact I don't follow you at all," he said desperately. "You say things—and they sound all right—but somehow my answers seem queer. *Do* you suppose that German conversation has mentally twisted me?"

Her eyes above the fluffy fur of her muff were bright as stars, but she did not laugh.

"Suppose," she said, demurely, "that *you* choose a subject of conversation and try to make sense of it. If you *are* mentally twisted it will be good practice."

"And you will—you won't say things—I mean things not germane to the subject?"

"Did you say German?"

"No, germane."

"Oh! Have *I* been irrelevant, too?"

"Well, you mixed up mental clarity with snowy nights. Of course it was a little joke—I saw that soon enough; I'd have seen it at once, only I *am* rather upset and nervous after that German experience."

CHAPTER X

CHANCE

She considered him with guileless eyes. He was *too* good-looking, too attractive, too young, and far too much pleased with himself. That was the impression he gave her. And, as he was, in addition, plainly one of her own sort, a man she was likely to meet anywhere—a well-bred, well-mannered and agreeable young fellow, probably a recent undergraduate, which might account for his really inoffensive breeziness—she felt perfectly at ease with him and safe enough to continue imprudently her mischief.

"If you are going to begin at the beginning," she said, "perhaps it might steady your nerves to repeat your own name very slowly and distinctly. Physicians recommend it sometimes," she added seriously.

"My name is John Seabury," he said, laughing. "Am I lucid?"

"Lucid so far," she said gravely. "I knew a Lily Seabury——"

"My sister. She's in Paris."

"Yes, I knew that, too," mused the girl, looking at him in a different light—different in this way that his credentials were now unquestionable, and she could be as mischievous as she pleased with the minimum of imprudence.

"Do you ever take the advice of physicians," he asked naïvely, "about repeating names?"

"Seldom," she said. "I don't require the treatment."

"I was only wondering——"

"You were wondering what C. G. stood for on my satchel? I will be very glad to tell you, Mr. Seabury. C stands for Cecil, and G for Gay; Cecil Gay. Is that lucid?"

"Cecil!" he said; "that's a man's name."

"How rude! It is *my* name. Now, do you think your mental calibre requires any more re-boring?"

"Oh, you know about calibres and things. Do you shoot? I *can* talk about dogs and guns. Listen to me, Miss Gay." The subject shifted from shooting to fishing, and from hunting to driving four-in-hand, and eventually came back to the horses and the quaint depot-sleigh which was whirling them so swiftly toward their destination.

"Jack Austin and I were in Paris," he observed.

"Oh—recently?"

"Last year."

"I thought so."

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh, I suppose it was one of those obsessed premonitions——"

"You are laughing at me, Miss Gay."

"Am I? Why?"

"Why? How on earth is a man to know why? *I* don't know why you do it, but you do—all the time."

"Not *all* the time, Mr. Seabury, because I don't know you well enough."

"But you know my sister!"

"Yes. She is a dear."

"Won't that introduce me? And, besides, you know Jack Austin——"

"No, I don't."

"Isn't that odd?" he said. "You don't know Jack Austin and I don't know Mrs. Austin. It was nice of her to ask me. They say she is one of the best ever."

"It was certainly nice of her to ask you," said the girl, eyes brightening over her muff.

"I was in Europe when they were married," he said. "I suppose you were there."

"No, I wasn't. That sounds rather strange, doesn't it?"

"Why, yes, rather!" he replied, looking up at her in his boyish, perplexed way. And for a moment her heart failed her; he *was* nice, but also he was a living temptation. Never before in all her brief life had she been tempted to do to anybody what she was doing to him. She had often been imprudent in a

circumspect way—conventionally unconventional at times—even a little daring. At sheer audacity she had drawn the line, and now the impulse to cross that line had been too much for her. But even she did not know exactly why temptation had overcome her.

There was something that she ought to tell him—and tell him at once. Yet, after all, it was really already too late to tell him—had been too late from the first. Fate, Chance and Destiny, the Mystic Three, disguised, as usual, one as a German conductor; one as a large mottled man; the other as a furry footman had been bumped by Seabury and jeered at by a girl wearing dark blue eyes and chinchillas. And now the affronted Three were taking exclusive charge of John Seabury and Cecil Gay. She was partly aware of this; she did not feel inclined to interfere where interference could do no good. And that being the case, why not extract amusement from matters as they stood? Alas, it is not well to laugh at the Mystic Three! But Cecil Gay didn't know that. You see, even *she* didn't know everything.



"You will like Jack Austin," he asserted.

"Really?"

"I'm willing to bet——"

"Oh, wait till we know one another officially before we begin to make wagers.... Still, I might, perhaps safely wager that I shall not find your friend Jack Austin very agreeable to-night."

So they settled the terms of the wager; cigarettes versus the inevitable bonbons.

"Everybody likes Jack Austin on sight," he said triumphantly, "so you may as well send the cigarettes when you are ready;" and he mentioned the brand.

"You will never smoke those cigarettes," she mused aloud, looking dreamily at him, her muff pressed alongside of her pretty cheek. "Tell me, Mr. Seabury, are you vindictive?"

"Not very."

"Revengeful?"

"Well—no, I don't think so," he replied. "Why?"

"I'm much relieved," she said, simply.

"Why?"

"Because I've done a dreadful thing—perfectly dreadful."

"To me?"

She nodded.

Perplexed and curious, he attempted to learn what she meant, but she parried everything smiling. And now, the faster the horses sped, the faster her pulses beat, and the more uncertain and repentant she became until her uncertainty increased to a miniature panic, and, thoroughly scared, she relapsed into a silence from which he found it beyond his powers to lure her.

For already a bright light was streaming out toward them from somewhere ahead. In its rays the falling snow turned golden, every separate flake distinct as they passed a great gate with the lodge beside it and went spinning away along a splendid wooded avenue and then straight up toward a great house, every window ablaze with light.

John Seabury jumped out and offered his aid to Cecil Gay as several servants appeared under the porte-cochère.

"I had no idea that Jack Austin lived so splendidly," he whispered to Miss Gay, as they entered the big hall.

But she was past speech now—a thoroughly scared girl; and she lost no time in following a maid into the elevator, whither Seabury presently followed her in tow of a man-servant.

"Luxury! Great Scott," thought Seabury. "This dubbing a palace a cottage is the worse sort of affectation, and I'll tell Jack Austin so, too."

The elevator stopped; the doors clicked open; Seabury turned smilingly to Cecil Gay, but she hurried past him, crimson-cheeked, head bent, and he followed his pilot to his room.

"Dinner is hannounced at 'awf awfter height, sir," announced the man with dignity.

"Thank you," said Seabury, watching a valet do sleight-of-hand tricks with the contents of his suit-case. And when he was alone he hopped nimbly out of his apparel and into a bath and out again in a high state of excitement, talking to himself all the while he was dressing.

"Good old Jack! The Mrs. must have had the means to do this sort of thing so well. I'm delighted!—de—lighted!... If ever a man deserved affluence, it's Jack Austin! It suits him. It will do him good. It becomes him.... Plucky fellow to go on grinding at the law!... Only thing to do, of course—decent thing to do—self-respect and all that.... But, by jingo!"—he looked about him as he stood buttoning his collar. "Hah!" stepping to the wall and examining a picture—"Great Jenkins!—why, here's a real Fortuny—in a *bedroom*!"

He cared for good pictures, and he stood before the exquisite aquarelle as long as he dared. Then, glancing at his watch, he completed his toilet, opened his door, and, scorning the lift, fled blithely down the great staircase on pleasing bent—and on being pleased.

A big drawing-room, charmingly lighted, and gay already with the chatter and laughter of a very jolly throng—this is what confronted him as a servant offered him a tray containing cards.

"I don't see my name here," he said, examining the slim envelopes.

"Beg pardon, sir—what name, sir?"

"Mr. Seabury."

The servant looked and Seabury looked in vain.

"An oversight," commented the young fellow, coolly. "I'll ask Mrs. Austin about it." And he walked in, and, singling out the hostess, advanced with smiling confidence, thinking to himself: "She is pretty; Jack's right. But—but, by George!—she looks like Cecil Gay!"

His hostess received him very charmingly, saying that it was so good of him to come; and he said it was so good of her to have asked him, and then they said several similar things. He spoke of Jack—mentioning him and continuing to another subject; and she smiled a trifle uncertainly. Her smile was still more vague and uncertain when he laughingly mentioned the dinner-cards; and she said it was a vexing oversight and would be immediately arranged—glancing rather sharply at an amiable gentleman standing near her. And this amiable gentleman came up to Seabury and shook hands very cordially, and said several agreeable things to which Seabury responded, until new arrivals separated him from his hostess and the amiable gentleman, and he fell back and glanced about him. And, after a little while an odd expression came into his eyes; he stood very still; a slight flush slowly spread over his face which had grown firmer. In a few moments the color went as it had come, slowly; the faint glitter died out in his

eyes.

There were several people he knew among the guests; he nodded quietly to young Van Guilder, to Brimwell and others, then crossed to speak to Catherine Hyland and Dorothy Minster. He was very agreeable, but a little distraught. He seemed to have something on his mind.

Meanwhile his hostess was saying to her husband: "Who is that, Jim?" And her husband said: "You can search me. Didn't you ask him?" And his wife responded: "He's talking to nearly everybody. It's curious, isn't it?" Here she was interrupted by the flushed entrance of her unmarried sister, Cecil Gay.

Meanwhile, Seabury was saying coolly: "I haven't seen Jack yet."

"Jack?" repeated Dorothy Minster. "Which Jack?"

"Jack Austin."

"Oh," said Miss Minster, who did not know him; "is he to be here?"

But Seabury only smiled vaguely. His mind, his eyes, his attention were fixed upon a vision of loveliness in the foreground—a charmingly flushed young girl who knew everybody and was evidently a tremendous favorite, judging from the gay greetings, the little volleys of laughter, and the animated stirring of groups among which she passed.

Watching her, quite oblivious to his surroundings, the servant at his elbow was obliged to cough discreetly half a dozen times and repeat "Beg pardon, sir," before he turned to notice the silver salver extended.

"Oh—thank you," he said, picking up an envelope directed, "Mr. Seabury," and opening it. Then a trifle surprised but smiling, he turned to find the girl whose name was written on the card. She was speaking to the hostess and the amiable man who had first greeted him. And this is what he didn't hear as he watched her, waiting grimly for a chance at her:

"Cecil! *Who* is that very young man?"

"Betty, how should *I* know——"

"Look here, Cis," from the amiable gentleman; "this is some of your deviltry ____"

"Oh, *thank* you, Jim!"

"Yes, it is. Who is he and where did you rope him?"

"Jim!"

"Cecil! What nonsense is this?" demanded her hostess and elder sister. "How did he get here and who is he?"

"I did *not* bring him, Betty. He simply came?"

"How?"

"In the depot-sleigh, of course——"

"With *you*?"

"Certainly. He wanted to come. He *would* come! I couldn't turn him out, could I —after he climbed in?"

Host and hostess glared at their flushed and defiant relative, who tried to look saucy, but only looked scared. "*He* doesn't know he's made a mistake," she faltered; "and there's no need to tell him yet—is there?... I put my name down on his card; he'll take me in.... Jim, don't, for Heaven's sake, say anything if he calls Betty Mrs. Austin. Oh, Jim, be decent, please! I *was* a fool to do it; I don't know what possessed me! Wait until to-morrow before you say anything! Besides, he may be furious! Please wait until I'm out of the house. He'll breakfast late, I hope; and I promise you I'll be up early and off by the seven o'clock train——"

"In Heaven's name, who *is* he?" broke in the amiable man so fiercely that Cecil jumped.

"He's only Lily Seabury's brother," she said, meekly, "and he thinks he's at the Austins'—and he might as well be, because he knows half the people here, and I've simply *got* to keep him out of their way so that nobody can tell him where he is. Oh, Betty—I've spoiled my own Christmas fun, and his, too! *Is* there any way to get him to the Austins' now?"

"The Jack Austins' of Beverly!" exclaimed her sister, incredulously. "Of course not!"

"And you *let* him think he was on his way there?" demanded her brother-in-law. "Well—you—are—the—limit!"

"So is *he*," murmured the abashed maid, slinking back to give place to a new and last arrival. Then she turned her guilty face in a sort of panic of premonition. She was a true prophetess; Seabury had seen his chance and was coming. And *that's* what comes of mocking the Mystic Three and cutting capers before High Heaven.

CHAPTER XI

DESTINY

He had taken her in and was apparently climbing rapidly through the seven Heavens of rapture—having arrived as far as the third unchecked and without mishap. It is not probable that she kept pace with him: she had other things to think of.

Dinner was served at small tables; and it required all her will, all her limited experience, every atom of her intelligence, to keep him from talking about things that meant exposure for her. Never apparently had he been so flattered by any individual girl's attention; she was gay, witty, audacious, charming, leading and carrying every theme to a scintillating conclusion.

The other four people at their table he had not before met—she had seen to that—and it proved to be a very jolly group, and there was a steady, gay tumult of voices around it, swept by little gusts of laughter; and he knew perfectly well that he had never had such a good time as he was having—had never been so clever, so interesting, so quick with his wit, so amusing. He had never seen such a girl as had been allotted to him—never! Besides, something else had nerved him to do his best. And he was doing it.

"It's a curious thing," he said, with that odd new smile of his, "what a resemblance there is between you and Mrs. Austin."

"What Mrs. Austin?" began the girl opposite; but got no further, for Cecil Gay was appealing to him to act as arbiter in a disputed Bridge question; and he did so with nice discrimination and a logical explanation which tided matters over that time. But it was a close call; and the color had not all returned to Cecil's cheeks when he finished, with great credit to his own reputation as a Bridge expert.

But the very deuce seemed to possess him to talk on subjects from which she strove to lead him.

These are the other breaks he made, and as far as he got with each break—stopped neatly every time in time:

"Curious I haven't seen Jack Aus——"

"Mrs. Austin *does* resemble——"

"This is the first time I have ever been in Bev——"

And each time she managed to repair the break unnoticed. But it was telling on her; she couldn't last another round—she knew that. Only the figurative bell could save her now. And she could almost *hear* it as her sister rose.

Saved! But—but—*what* might some of these men say to him if he lingered here for coffee and cigarettes?

"You won't, will you?" she said desperately, as all rose.

"Won't—what?" he asked.

"Stay—*long*."

He rapidly made his way from the third into the fourth Heaven. She watched him.

"No, indeed," he said under his breath.

She lingered, fascinated by her own peril. *Could* she get him away at once?

"I—I wonder, Mr. Seabury, what you would think if I—if I suggested that you smoke—smoke—on the stairs—now—with me?"

He hastily scrambled out of the fourth Heaven into the fifth. She saw him do it.

"I'd rather smoke there than anywhere in the world——"

"Quick, then! Saunter over to the door—stroll about a little first—no, don't do even that!—I—I mean—you'd better hurry. *Please!*" She cast a rapid look about her; she could not linger another moment. Then, concentrating all the sweetness and audacity in her, and turning to him, she gave him one last look. It was sufficient to send him in one wild, flying leap from the fifth Heaven plump into the sixth. The sixth Heaven was on the stairs; and his legs carried him thither at a slow and indifferent saunter, though it required every scrap of his self-control to prevent his legs from breaking into a triumphant trot. Yet all the while that odd smile flickered, went out, and flickered in his eyes.

She was there, very fluffy, very brilliant, and flustered and adorable, the light from the sconces playing over her bare arms and shoulders and spinning all sorts of aureoles around her bright hair. Hah! She had him alone now. She was safe; she could breathe again. And he might harp on the Austins all he chose. Let him!

"No, *I* can't have cigarettes," she explained, "because it isn't good for my voice.

I'm supposed to possess a voice, you know."

"It's about the sweetest voice I ever heard," he said so sincerely that the bright tint in her cheeks deepened.

"That is nicer than a compliment," she said, looking at him with a little laugh of pleasure. He nodded, watching the smoke rings drifting through the hall.

"Do you know something?" he said.

"Not very much. What?"

"If I were a great matrimonial prize——"

"You are, aren't you?"

"If I was," he continued, ignoring her, "like a king or a grand duke——"

"Exactly."

"I'd invite a grand competition for my hand and heart——"

"We'd all go, Mr. Seabury——"

"——And then I'd stroll about among them all——"

"Certainly—among the competing millions."

"Among the millions—blindfolded——"

"Blinfo——"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"——Blindfolded!" he repeated with emphasis. "I would choose a *voice!*—before everything else in the world."

"Oh," she said, rather faintly.

"A voice," he mused, looking hard at the end of his cigarette which had gone out: and the odd smile began to flicker in his eyes again.

Mischief prompting, she began: "I wonder what chance I should have in your competition? First prize I couldn't aspire to, but—there would be a sort of booby prize—wouldn't there, Mr. Seabury?"

"There would be only one prize——"

"Oh!"

"And that would be the booby prize; the prize booby." And he smiled his odd smile and laid his hand rather gracefully over his heart. "You have won him, Miss Gay."

She looked at him prepared to laugh, but, curiously enough, there was less of the booby about him as she saw him there than she had expected—a tall, clean-cut, attractive young fellow, with a well-shaped head and nice ears—a man, not a boy, after all—pleasant, amiably self-possessed, and of her own sort, as far as breeding showed.

Gone was the indescribably indefinite suggestion of *too* good looks, of latent self-sufficiency. He no longer struck her as being pleased with himself, of being a shade—just a shade—too sure of himself. A change, certainly; and to his advantage. Kindness, sympathy, recognition make wonderful changes in some people.

"I'll tell you what I'd do if I were queen, and"—she glanced at him—"a matrimonial prize.... Shall I?"

"Why be both?" he asked.

"That rings hollow, Mr. Seabury, after your tribute to my voice!... Suppose I were queen. *I'd* hold a caucus, too. Please say you'd come."

"Oh, I am already there!"

"*That* won't help you; it isn't first come, first served at *my* caucus!... So, suppose millions of suitors were all sitting around twisting their fingers in abashed hopeful silence."

"Exactly."

"*What* do you think I'd do, Mr. Seabury?"

"Run. *I* should."

"No; I should make them a speech—a long one—oh, dreadfully long and wearisome. I should talk and talk and talk, and repeat myself, and pile platitude on platitude, and maunder on and on and on. And about luncheon-time I should have a delicious repast served me, and I'd continue my speech as I ate. And after that I'd ramble on and on until dinner-time. And I should dine magnificently up there on the dais, and, between courses, I'd continue my speech——"

"You'd choose the last man to go to sleep," he said simply.

"*How* did you guess it!" she exclaimed, vexed. "I—it's too bad for you to know

everything, Mr. Seabury."

"I thought you were convinced that I didn't know *anything*?" he said, looking up at her. His voice was quiet—too quiet; his face grave, unsmiling, firm.

"I? Mr. Seabury, I don't understand you."

He folded his hands and rested his chin on the knuckles. "But I understand you, Miss Gay. Tell me"—the odd smile flickered and went out—"Tell me, in whose house am I?"

Sheer shame paralyzed her; wave on wave of it crimsoned her to the hair. She sat there in deathly silence; he coolly lighted another cigarette, dropped one elbow on his knee, propping his chin in his open palm.

"I'm curious to know—if you don't mind," he added pleasantly.

"Oh—h!" she breathed, covering her eyes suddenly with both hands. She pressed the lids for a moment steadily, then her hands fell to her lap, and she faced him, cheeks aflame.

"I—I have no excuse," she stammered—"nothing to say for myself ... except I did not understand what a—a common—dreadful—insulting thing I was doing ____"

He waited; then: "I am not angry, Miss Gay."

"N-not angry? You are! You must be! It was too mean—too contemptible——"

"Please don't. Besides, I took possession of your sleigh. Bailey did the business for me. I didn't know he had left the Austins, of course."

She looked up quickly; there was a dimness in her eyes, partly from earnestness; "I did not know you had made a mistake until you spoke of the Austins," she said. "And then something whispered to me not to tell you—to let you go on—something possessed me to commit this folly——"

"Oh, no; *I* committed it. Besides, we were more than half-way here, were we not?"

"Ye-yes."

"And there's only one more train for Beverly, and I couldn't possibly have made that, even if we had turned back!"

"Y-yes. Mr. Seabury, *are* you trying to defend me?"

"You need no defense. You were involved through no fault of your own in a

rather ridiculous situation. And you simply, and like a philosopher, extracted what amusement there was in it."

"Mr. Seabury! You shall not be so—so generous. I have cut a wretchedly undignified figure——"

"You couldn't!"

"I could—I have—I'm doing it!"

"You are doing something else, Miss Gay."

"W-what?"

"Making it very, very hard for me to go."

"But you can't go! You mustn't! Do you think I'd let you go—*now*? Not if the Austins lived next door! I mean it, Mr. Seabury. I—I simply must make amends—all I can——"

"Amends? You have."

"I? How?"

"By being here with me."

"Th-that is—is very sweet of you, Mr. Seabury, but I—but they—but you—Oh! I don't know what I'm trying to say, except that I like you—*they* will like you—and everybody knows Lily Seabury. Please, please forgive——"

"I'm going to telephone to Beverly.... Will you wait—*here*?"

"Ye-yes. Wh-what are you going to telephone? You can't go, you know. Please don't try—will you?"

"No," he said, looking down at her.

Things were happening swiftly—everything was happening in an instant—life, youth, time, all were whirling and spinning around her in bewildering rapidity; and her pulses, too, leaping responsive, drummed cadence to her throbbing brain.

She saw him mount the stairs and disappear—no doubt to his room, for there was a telephone there. Then, before she realized the lapse of time, he was back again, seating himself quietly beside her on the broad stair.

"Shall I tell you what I am going to do?" he said after a silence through which the confused sense of rushing unreality had held her mute.

"Wh-what are you going to do?"

"Walk to Beverly."

"Mr. Seabury! You promised——"

"Did I?"

"You did! It is snowing terribly.... It is miles and miles and the snow is already too deep. Besides, do you think I—we would let you *walk*! But you shall not go—and there are horses enough, too! No, no, no! I—I wish you would let me try to make up *something* to you—if I—all that I can possibly make up."

"At the end of the hall above there's a window," he said slowly. "Prove to me that the snow is too deep."

"Prove it?" She sprang up, gathering her silken skirts and was on the landing above before he could rise.

""Only one person in the world can ever matter to me—now.'"

He found her, smiling, triumphant, beside the big casement at the end of the hallway.

"Now are you convinced?" she said. "Just look at the snowdrifts. Are you satisfied?"

"No," he said, quietly—too quietly by far. She looked up at him, a quick protest framed on her red lips. Something—perhaps the odd glimmer in his eyes—committed her to silence. From silence the stillness grew into tension; and again the rushing sense of unreality surged over them both, leaving their senses swimming.

"There is only one thing in the world I care for now," he said.

"Ye-yes."

"And that is to have you think well of me."

"I—I do."

"—And each day—think better of me."

"I—will—probably——"

"And in the end——"

She neither stirred nor turned her eyes.

"—In the end—*Listen* to me."

"I am wi-willing to."

"Because it will be then as it is now; as it was when even I didn't know it—as it must be always, for me. Only one person in the world can ever matter to me—now.... There's no escape from it for me."

"Do—do you wish to—escape?"

"Cecil!" he said under his breath.



"They're dancing, below," she said leaning over the gallery, one soft white hand on the polished rail, the other abandoned to him—carelessly—as though she

were quite unconscious where it lay.

"They are dancing," she repeated, turning toward him—which brought them face to face, both her hands resting listlessly in his.

A silence, then:

"Do you know," she said, "that this is a very serious matter?"

"I know."

"And that it's probably one of those dreadful, terrible and sudden strokes of Fate?"

"I know."

"And that—that it serves me right?"

He was smiling; and she smiled back at him, the starry beauty of her eyes dimming a trifle.

"You say that you have chosen a 'Voice,'" she said; "and—do you think that you would be the last man to go to sleep?"

"The very last."

"Then—I suppose I must make my choice.... I will ... some day.... And, are you going to dance with me?"

He raised her hands, joining them together between his; and she watched him gravely, a tremor touching her lips. In silence their hands fell apart; he stepped nearer; she lifted her head a little—a very little—closing her lids; he bent and kissed her lips, very lightly.

That was all; they opened their eyes upon one another, somewhat dazed. A bell, very far off, was sounding faintly through the falling snow—faintly, persistently, the first bell for Christmas morning.

Then she took the edges of her silken gown between thumb and forefinger, and slowly, very slowly, sank low with flushed cheeks, sweeping him an old-time curtsy.

"I—I wish you a Merry Christmas," she said.... "And thank you for *your* wish.... And you may take me down, now"—rising to her slim and lovely height—"and I think we had better dance as hard as we can and try to forget what our families are likely to think of what we've done.... Don't you?"

"Yes," he said seriously, "I do."

"And *that's* what comes of running after trains, and talking to fat conductors, and wearing chinchilla furs, and flouting the Mystic Three!" added Williams throwing away his cigar.

CHAPTER XII

IN WHICH A MODEST MAN MAUNDERS

"In my opinion," said I, "a man who comes to see Paris in three months is a fool, and kin to that celebrated ass who circum-perambulated the globe in eighty days. See all, see nothing. A man might camp a lifetime in the Louvre and learn little about it before he left for Père Lachaise. Yet here comes the United States in a gigantic "*mônome*" to see the city in three weeks, when three years is too short a time in which to appreciate the Carnavalet Museum alone! I'm going home."

"Oh, papa!" said Alida.

"Yes, I am," I snapped. "I'd rather be tried and convicted in Oyster Bay on the charge of stealing my own pig than confess I had 'seen Paris' in three months."

We had driven out to the Trocadero that day, and were now comfortably seated in the tower of that somewhat shabby "palace," for the purpose of obtaining a bird's eye view of the "Rive Droite" or right bank of the Seine.

Elegant, modern, spotless, the Rive Droite spread out at our feet, silver-gray squares of Renaissance architecture inlaid with the delicate green of parks, circles, squares, and those endless double and quadruple lines of trees which make Paris slums more attractive than Fifth Avenue. Far as the eye could see stretched the exquisite monotony of the Rive Droite, discreetly and artistically broken by domes and spires of uncatalogued "monuments," in virgin territory, unknown and unsuspected to those spiritual vandals whose hordes raged through the boulevards, waving ten thousand blood-red Baedekers at the paralyzed Parisians.

"Well," said I, "now that we have 'seen' the Rive Droite, let's cast a bird's-eye glance over Europe and Asia and go back to the hotel for luncheon."

My sarcasm was lost on my daughters because they had moved out of earshot. Alida was looking through a telescope held for her by a friend of Captain de Barsac, an officer of artillery named Captain Vicômte Torchon de Cluny. He was all over scarlet and black and gold; when he walked his sabre made noises, and his ringing spurs reminded me of the sound of sleigh-bells in Oyster Bay.

My daughter Dulcima was observing the fortress of Mont-Valerien through a

tiny pair of jewelled opera-glasses, held for her by Captain de Barsac. It was astonishing to see how tirelessly De Barsac held those opera-glasses, which must have weighed at least an ounce. But French officers are inured to hardships and fatigue.

"Is *that* a fortress?" asked Dulcima ironically. "I see nothing but some low stone houses."

"Next to Gibraltar," said De Barsac, "it is the most powerful fortress in the world, mademoiselle. It garrisons thousands of men; its stores are enormous; it dominates not only Paris, but all France."

"But where are the cannon?" asked Dulcima.

"Ah—exactly—where? That is what other nations pay millions to find out—and cannot. Will you take my word for it that there are one or two cannon there—and permit me to avoid particulars?"

"You might tell me where just one little unimportant cannon is?" said my daughter, with the naïve curiosity which amuses the opposite and still more curious sex.

"And endanger France?" asked De Barsac, with owl-like solemnity.

"Thank you," pouted Dulcima, perfectly aware that he was laughing.

Their voices became low, and relapsed into that buzzing murmur which always defeats its own ends by arousing parental vigilance.

"Let us visit the aquarium," said I in a distinct and disagreeable voice. Doubtless the "voice from the wilderness" was gratuitously unwelcome to Messieurs De Barsac and Torchon de Cluny, but they appeared to welcome the idea with a conciliatory alacrity noticeable in young men when intruded upon by the parent of pretty daughters. Dear me, how fond they appeared to be of me; what delightful information they volunteered concerning the Trocadero, the Alexander Bridge, the Champ de Mars.



The aquarium of the Trocadero is underground. To reach it you simply walk down a hole in France and find yourself under the earth, listening to the silvery prattle of a little brook which runs over its bed of pebbles *above your head*, pouring down little waterfalls into endless basins of glass which line the damp

arcades as far as you can see. The arcades themselves are dim, the tanks, set in the solid rock, are illuminated from above by holes in the ground, through which pours the yellow sunshine of France.

Looking upward through the glass faces of the tanks you can see the surface of the water with bubbles afloat, you can see the waterfall tumbling in; you can catch glimpses of green grass and bushes, and a bit of blue sky.

Into the tanks fall insects from the world above, and the fish sail up to the surface and lazily suck in the hapless fly or spider that tumbles onto the surface of the water.

It is a fresh-water aquarium. All the fresh-water fish of France are represented here by fine specimens—pike, barbels, tench, dace, perch, gudgeons, sea-trout, salmon, brown-trout, and that lovely delicate trout-like fish called *l'Ombre de Chevallier*. What it is I do not know, but it resembles our beautiful American brook-trout in shape and marking; and is probably a hybrid, cultivated by these clever French specialists in fish-propagation.

Coming to a long crystal-clear tank, I touched the glass with my finger-tip, and a slender, delicate fish, colored like mother-of-pearl, slowly turned to stare at me.

"This," said I, "is that aristocrat of the waters called the 'Grayling.' Notice its huge dorsal fin, its tender and diminutive mouth. It takes a fly like a trout, but the angler who would bring it to net must work gently and patiently, else the tender mouth tears and the fish is lost. Is it not the most beautiful of all fishes?"

trout;
—'

""Here and there a lusty
Here and there a Grayling

"Ah, Tennyson knew. And that reminds me, Alida," I continued, preparing to recount a personal adventure with a grayling in Austria—"that reminds me——"

I turned around to find I had been addressing the empty and somewhat humid atmosphere. My daughter Alida stood some distance away, gazing absently at a tank full of small fry; and Captain Vicômte Torchon de Cluny stood beside her, talking. Perhaps he was explaining the habits of the fish in the tank.

My daughter Dulcima and Captain de Barsac I beheld far down the arcades, strolling along without the faintest pretence of looking at anything but each other.

"Very well," thought I to myself, "this aquarium is exactly the place I expect to avoid in future—" And I cheerfully joined my daughters as though they and their escorts had long missed me.

Now, of course, they all expressed an enthusiastic desire to visit every tank and hear me explain the nature of their contents; but it was too late.

"No," said I, "it is damp enough here to float all the fishes in the Seine. And besides, as we are to 'see' the Rive Droite, we should hasten, so that we may have at least half an hour to devote to the remainder of France."

From the bowels of the earth we emerged into the sunshine, to partake of an exceedingly modest luncheon in the Trocadero restaurant, under the great waterfall.

Across the river a regiment of red-legged infantry marched, drums and bugles sounding.

"All that territory over there," said De Barsac, "is given up to barracks. It is an entire quarter of the city, occupied almost exclusively by the military. There the streets run between miles of monotonous barracks, through miles of arid parade grounds, where all day long the *piou-pious* drill in the dust; where the cavalry exercise; where the field-artillery go clanking along the dreary streets toward their own exercise ground beyond the Usine de Gaz. All day long that quarter of the city echoes with drums beating and trumpets sounding, and the trample of passing cavalry, and the clank and rattle of cannon. Truly, in the midst of peace we prepare for—something else—we French."

"It is strange," said I, "that you have time to be the greatest sculptors, architects, and painters in the world."

"In France, monsieur, we never lack time. It is only in America that you corner time and dispense it at a profit."

"Time," said I, "is at once our most valuable and valueless commodity. Our millionaires seldom have sufficient time to avoid indigestion. Yet, although time is apparently so precious, there are among us men who spend it in reading the New York *Herald* editorials. I myself am often short of time, yet I take a Long Island newspaper and sometimes even read it."

We had been walking through the gardens, while speaking, toward a large crowd of people which had collected along the river. In the centre of the crowd stood a taxicab, on the box of which danced the cabby, gesticulating.

When we arrived at the scene of disturbance the first person I saw distinctly was our acquaintance, the young man from East Boston, hatless, dishevelled, all over dust, in the grasp of two agents de police.

"He has been run over by a taxi," observed De Barsac. "They are going to arrest him."

"Well, why don't they do it?" I said, indignantly, supposing that De Barsac meant the chauffeur was to be arrested.

"They have done so."

"No, they haven't! They are holding the man who has been run over!"

"Exactly. He has been run over and they are arresting him."

"Who?" I demanded, bewildered.

"Why, the man who has been run over!"

"But why, in Heaven's name!"

"Why? Because he allowed himself to be run over!"

"What!" I cried. "They arrest the man who has been run over, and not the man who ran over him?"

"It is the law," said De Barsac, coolly.

"Do you mean to tell me that the *runner* is left free, while the *runnee* is arrested?" I asked in deadly calmness, reducing my question to legal and laconic language impossible to misinterpret.

"Exactly. The person who permits a vehicle to run over him in defiance of the French law, which says that nobody ought to let himself be run over, is liable to arrest, imprisonment, and fine—unless, of course, so badly injured that recovery is impossible."

Now at last I understood the Dreyfus Affaire. Now I began to comprehend the laws of the Bandarlog. Now I could follow the subtle logic of the philosophy embodied in "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking-Glass!"

This was the country for me! Why, certainly; these people here could understand a man who was guilty of stealing his own pig.

"I think I should like to live in Paris again," I said to my daughters; then I approached the young man from East Boston and bade him cheer up.

He was not hurt; he was only rumpled and dusty and hopping mad.

"I shall pay their darned fine," he said. "Then I'm going to hire a cab and drive it myself, and hunt up that cabman who ran over me, by Judas!"

That night I met Williams at the Café Jaune by previous and crafty agreement; and it certainly was nice to be together after all these years in the same old seats in the same café, and discuss the days that we never could live again—and wouldn't want to if we could—alas!

The talk fell on Ellis and Jones, and immediately I perceived that Williams had skillfully steered the conversation toward those two young men—and I knew devilish well he had a story to tell me about them.

So I cut short his side-stepping and circling, and told him to be about it as I wanted to devote one or two hours that night to a matter which I had recently neglected—Sleep.

"That Jones," he said, "was a funny fellow. He and Ellis didn't meet over here; Ellis was before his time. But they became excellent friends under rather unusual circumstances.

"Ellis, you know, was always getting some trout fishing when he was over here. He was a good deal of a general sportsman. As for Jones—well, you remember that he had no use for anything more strenuous than a motor tour."

"I remember," I said.

CHAPTER XIII

A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE

Well, then, the way that Ellis and Jones met each other—and several other things—was this. It chanced to be in the northern forests, I believe—both were fishing, neither knew the other nor was even aware of their mutual proximity.

Then the wind changed abruptly, blowing now from the south; and with the change of wind Ellis fancied that he smelled green wood burning. A few minutes later he was sure of it; he stood knee-deep in the stream sniffing uneasily, then he lifted his trout-rod, reeled in his line, and waded silently shoreward, his keen nose twitching.

Ah! There it was—that misty bluish bloom belting a clump of hemlocks. And the acrid odor grew, impregnating the filtered forest air. He listened, restless eyes searching. The noise of the stream filled his ears; he tightened the straps of his pack, shortened his trout rod, leaving line and cast on, and crawled up the ravine, shoulder-deep in fragrant undergrowth, until the dull clash of flashing spray and the tumult of the falls were almost lost in the leafy depths behind.

Ranker, stronger, came the pungent odor of smoke; halting to listen he heard the hissing whisper of green wood afire; then, crawling up over an enormous boulder, he saw, just beyond and below, a man in tweeds, squatting on his haunches, and attempting to toss a flapjack over a badly constructed camp-fire.

The two young men caught sight of one another at the same instant; alert, mistrustful, each stared at the other in questioning silence while the first instinct of unpleasant surprise lasted.

"How are you?" said the man, cautiously.

"Good-morning," replied Ellis. "When the wind turned I scented your fire down the stream. Thought I'd see what was burning."

"Are you up here fishing?" inquired he of the tweeds.

"Yes; came here by canoe to the forks below. I am out for a week by myself. The Caranay water is my old-time trail.... Looks like a storm, doesn't it?"

"Anything doing with the trout?"

"Not much; two in the falls pool that come an ounce short of the pound. I should be glad to divide—if you are shy on trout."

Again they regarded one another carefully.

"My name," said the man by the fire, "is Jones—but that can't be helped now. So if you'll overlook such matters I'll be glad of a trout if you can spare one."

"My name is Ellis; help yourself."

The man by the fire glanced at the burnt flapjack, scraped it free from the pan, tossed it into the bushes, and straightened to his full height.

"Come into camp, Mr. Ellis," he said, politely. The freemasonry of caste operates very quickly in the wilderness; Ellis slid down the boulder on the re-enforced seat of his knickerbockers, landing, with hob-nailed shoes foremost, almost at the edge of the fire. Then he laid his rod aside, slipped the pack to the ground, unslung his creel, and, fishing out a handkerchief, mopped his sunburnt countenance.

"Anything else you're short of, Mr. Jones?" he asked, pleasantly. "I'm just in from the settlements, and I can let you have a pinch of almost anything."

"Have you plenty of salt?" inquired Jones, wistfully.

"Plenty; isn't there anything else? Bacon? Sugar?"

"Matches?"

Ellis looked at him keenly; good woodsmen don't run short of matches; good woodsmen don't build such fires.

"Certainly," he said. "Did you have an accident?"

"No—that is, several boxes got wet, and I've been obliged to sit around this confounded fire for fear it might go out—didn't dare fish very far from it."

He looked gloomily around, rubbed his forehead as though trying to recollect something, and finally sat down on a log.

"Fact is," he said, "I don't know very much about the woods. Do you? Everything's gone wrong; I tore my canoe in the Ledge Rapids yesterday. I'm in a fix."

Ellis laughed; and his laugh was so pleasant, so entirely without offence, that young Jones laughed, too, for a while, then checked himself to adjust his eyeglasses, which his mirth had displaced.

"Can you cook?" he asked, so seriously that Ellis only nodded, still laughing.

"Then, for Heaven's love, would you, when you cook your own breakfast over that fire, cook enough for two?"

"Why, man, I believe you're hungry," said Ellis, sharply.

"Hungry? Well, I don't know whether you would call it exactly hunger, because I have eaten several things which I cooked. I ought not to be hungry; I tried to toss a flapjack, but it got stuck to the pan. Fact is, I'm a rotten cook, and I guess it's simply that I'm half starved for a decent meal."

"Why, see here," said Ellis, rising to his feet, "I can fix up something pretty quick if you like."

"I *do* like. Yonder is my cornmeal, coffee, some damp sugar, flour, and what's left of the pork. You see I left it in a corner of the lean-to, and while I was asleep a porcupine got busy with it; then I hung it on a tree, and some more porcupines invited their relatives, and they all climbed up and nearly finished it. Did you suppose that a porcupine could climb a tree?"

"I've heard so," said Ellis, gravely, busy with the stores which he was unrolling from his own blanket. The guilelessness of this stray brother appalled him. Here was a babe in the woods. A new sort of babe, too, for, in the experience of Ellis, the incompetent woodsman is ever the loudest-mouthed, the tyro, the most conceited. But this forest-squatting innocent not only knew nothing of the elements of woodcraft, but had called a stranger's attention to his ignorance with a simplicity that silenced mirth, forestalled contempt, and aroused a curious respect for the unfortunate.

"He is no liar, anyway," thought Ellis, placing a back-log, mending the fire, emptying the coffee pot, and settling the kettle to boil. And while he went about culinary matters with a method born of habit, Jones watched him, aided when he saw a chance; and they chatted on most animatedly together as the preparations for breakfast advanced.

"The very first day I arrived in the woods," said Jones, "I fell into the stream and got most of my matches wet. I've had a devil of a time since."

"It's a good idea to keep reserve matches in a water-tight glass bottle," observed Ellis, carelessly, and without appearing to instruct anybody about anything.

"I'll remember that. What is a good way to keep pork from porcupines?"

Ellis mentioned several popular methods, stirred the batter, shoved a hot plate

nearer the ashes, and presently began the manufacture of flapjacks.

"Don't you toss 'em?" inquired Jones, watching the process intently.

"Oh, they can be tossed—like this! But it is easier for me to turn them with a knife—like this. I have an idea that they toss flapjacks less often in the woods than they do in fiction."

"I gathered my idea from a book," said Jones, bitterly; "it told how to build a fire without matches. Some day I shall destroy the author."

Presently Jones remarked in a low, intense voice: "Oh, the fragrance of that coffee and bacon!" which was all he said, but its significance was pathetically unmistakable.

"Pitch in, man," urged Ellis, looking back over his shoulder. "I'll be with you in a second." But when his tower of browned and smoking flapjacks was ready, and he came over to the log, he found that his host, being his host, had waited. That settled his convictions concerning Jones; and that was doubtless why, inside of half an hour, he found himself calling him Jones and not Mr. Jones, and Jones calling him Ellis. They were a pair of well knit, clean-limbed young men, throat and face burnt deeply by wind and sun. Jones did not have much hair; Ellis's was thick and short, and wavy at the temples. They were agreeable to look at.

"Have another batch of flapjacks?" inquired Ellis, persuasively.

Jones groaned with satisfaction at the prospect, and applied himself to a crisp trout garnished with bacon.

"I've tried and tried," he said, "but I cannot catch any trout. When I found that I could not I was horrified, Ellis, because, you see, I had supposed that the forest and stream were going to furnish me with subsistence. Nature hasn't done a thing to me since I've tried to shake hands with her."

"I wonder," said Ellis, "why you came into the woods alone?"

Jones coyly pounced upon another flapjack, folded it neatly and inserted one end of it into his mouth. This he chewed reflectively; and when it had vanished according to Fletcher, he said:

"If I tell you why I came here I'll begin to get angry. This breakfast is too heavenly to spoil. Pass the bacon and help yourself."

Ellis, however, had already satisfied his hunger. He set the kettle on the coals again, dumped into it cup and plate and fork, wiped his sheath-knife carefully,

and, curling up at the foot of a hemlock, lighted his pipe, returning the flaming branch to the back-log.

Jones munched on; smile after smile spread placidly over his youthful face, dislodging his eyeglasses every time. He resumed them, and ate flapjacks.

"The first time my canoe upset," he said, "I lost my book of artificial flies. I brought a box of angle-worms with me, too, but they fell into the stream the second time I upset. So I have been trying to snare one of those big trout under the ledge below——"

Ellis's horrified glance cut him short; he shrugged his shoulders.

"My friend, I know it's dead low-down, but it was a matter of pure hunger with me. At all events, it's just as well that I caught nothing; I couldn't have cooked it if I had."

He sighed at the last flapjack, decided he did not require it, and settling down with his back against the log blissfully lighted his pipe.

For ten minutes they smoked without speaking, dreamily gazing at the blue sky through the trees. Friendly little forest birds came around, dropping from twig to branch; two chipmunks crept into the case of eggs to fill their pouched chops with the oats that the eggs were packed in. The young men watched them lazily.

"The simpler life is the true existence," commented Ellis, drawing a long, deep breath.

"What the devil is the simpler life?" demanded Jones, with so much energy that the chipmunks raced away in mad abandon, and the flock of black-capped birds scattered to neighbouring branches, remarking in unison, "*Chick-a-dee-dee-dee*."

"Why, you're leading the simpler life now," said Ellis, laughing, "are you not?"

"Am I? No, I'm not. I'm not leading a simple life; I'm leading a pace-killing, nerve-racking, complex one. I tell you, Ellis, that it has taken just one week in the woods to reveal to me the complexity of simplicity!"

"Oh, you don't like the life?"

"I like it all right, but it's too complex. Listen to me. You asked me why anybody ever let me escape into the woods. I'll tell you.... You're a New Yorker, are you not?"

Ellis nodded.

"All right. First look on this picture: I live in the Sixties, near enough to the Park to see it. It's green, and I like it. Besides, there are geraniums and other posies in my back yard, and I can see them when the laundress isn't too busy with the clothes-line. So much for the *mise en scène*; me in a twenty-by-one-hundred house, perfectly contented; Park a stone's toss west, back yard a few feet north. My habits? Simple enough to draw tears from a lambkin! I breakfast at nine—an egg, fruit, coffee and—I hate to admit it—the *Sun*. At eleven I go down-town to see if there's anything doing. There never is, so I smoke one cigar with my partner and then we lunch together. I then walk uptown—*walk*, mind you. At the club I look at the ticker, or out of the window. Later I play cowboy or billiards for an hour. I take one cocktail—one, if you please. I converse." He waved his pipe; Ellis nodded solemnly.

"Then," continued Jones, "what do I do?"

"I don't know," replied Ellis.

"I'll tell you. I call a cab—one taxi, or one hansom, as the state of the weather may suggest—I drive through the Park, pleasantly aware of the verdure, the squirrels, and the babies; I arrive at my home; I mount to the library and there I select from my limited collection some accursed book I've always heard of but have never read—not fiction, but something stupefying and worth while. This I read for exactly one hour. I then need a drink. I then dress; and if I'm dining out, out I go—if not, I dine at home. Twice a week I attend the theatre, but I neutralise that by doing penance at the opera every Monday during the season.... There, Ellis, is the story of a simple life! Look on *that* picture. Now look on *this*: Me in the backwoods, fly-bitten, smoke-choked, a half-charred flapjack in my fist, a porcupine-gnawed rind of pork on a stick, attempting to broil the same at a fire, the smoke of which blinds me. Me, again, belly down, peering hungrily over the bank of a stream, attempting to snatch a trout with a bare hook, my glasses slipping off repeatedly, the spectre of starvation scourging on me. Me, once more, frantic with indigestion and mosquitoes, lurking under a blanket, the root of a tree bruising my backbone; me in the morning, done up, shaving in icy water and cutting my chin; me, half shaved, searching for a scrap of nourishment, gauntly prowling among cold and greasy fry-pans! Ellis! *Which* is the simpler life, in Heaven's name?"

Ellis's laughter was the laughter of a woodsman, full, infectious, but almost noiseless. The birds came back and teetered on adjacent twigs, cheeping in friendly unison; a chipmunk, chops distended, popped up from the case of eggs like a striped jack-in-a-box, not at all afraid of a man who laughed that way.

"How did you ever come into the woods?" he asked at length.

"Lunatic friends and fool books persuaded me I was missing something. I read all about how to tell a woodcock from a peacock; how to dig holes in the ground and raise little pea vines, and how to make two blades of grass grow where the laundress had set a devastating shoe. Then I tired of it. But friends urged me on, and one idiot said that I looked like the victim of a rare disease and gave me a shotgun—whether to shoot myself or the dicky birds I'm not perfectly certain yet. Besides, as I have a perfect hatred of taking life, I had no temptation to shoot guides in Maine or niggers in South Carolina, where the quail come from. Still, I was awake to the new idea. I read more books on bats and woodchucks; I smelled every flower I saw; I tried to keep up," he said, earnestly; "by Heaven, I did my best! And now, look at me! Nature hands me the frozen mitt!"

Ellis could only laugh, cradling his knees in his clasped and sun-tanned hands.

"I am fond of Nature; I admire the geraniums in my backyard," continued Jones, excitedly. "I like a simple life, too; but I don't wish to pursue a live thing and eat it for my dinner. The idea is perfectly obnoxious to me. I like flowers on a table or in the Park, but I don't want to know their names, or the names of the creatures that buzz and crawl over them, or the names of the birds that feed on the buzzy things! I don't; I know I don't, and I won't! Nature has strung me; I shall knock Nature hereafter. This is all for mine. I'll lock up and leave the key of the fields to the next Come-on lured into the good green goods by that most accomplished steerer, Mrs. Nature. I've got my gilt brick, Ellis—I'm going home to buy a card to hang over my desk; and on it will be the wisest words ever written:

""Who's Loony Now?""

"But, my dear fellow——"

"No, you don't. You're an accomplice of this Nature dame; I can tell by the way you cook and catch trout and keep your matches in bottles. One large and brilliant brick is enough for one New York man. The asphalt for mine—and a Turkish bath."

After a grinning silence, Ellis arose, stretched, tapped his pipe against a tree trunk, and sauntered over to where his rod lay. "Come on; I'll guarantee you a trout in the first reach," he said, affably, slipping ferrule into socket, disentangling the cast and setting the line free.

So they strolled off toward the long amber reach which lay a few yards below

the camp, Jones explaining that he didn't wish to take life from anything except a mosquito.

"We've got to eat; we'd better stock up while we can, because it's going to rain," observed Ellis.

"Going to rain? How do you know?"

"I smell it. Besides, look there—yonder above the mountains. Do you see the sky behind the Golden Dome?"



CHAPTER XIV

A STATE OF MIND

Up the narrow valley, over the unbroken sweep of treetops, arose tumbled peaks; and above the Golden Dome, pushing straight upward into the flawless blue of heaven, towered a cloud, its inky convolutions edged with silver.

Jones inspected the thunderhead with disapproval; Ellis offered his rod, and, being refused, began some clever casting, the artistic beauty of which was lost upon Jones.

One trout only investigated the red-and-white fly; and, that fish safely creeled, Ellis turned to his companion:

"Three years ago, when I last came here, this reach was more prolific. But there's a pool above that I'll warrant. Shall we move?"

As they passed on upstream Jones said: "There's no pool above, only a rapid."

"You're in error," said Ellis, confidently. "I've known every pool on the Caranay for years."

"But there is no pool above—unless you mean to trespass."

"Trespass!" repeated Ellis, aghast. "*Trespass* in the free Caranay forests! You—you don't mean to say that any preserve has been established on the Caranay! I haven't been here for three years.... *Do* you?"

"Look there," said Jones, pointing to a high fence of netted wire which rose above the undergrowth and cut the banks of the stream in two with a barrier eight feet high; "that's what stopped me. There's their home-designed trespass notice hanging to the fence. Read it; it's worth perusal."

Speechless, but still incredulous, Ellis strode to the barrier and looked up. And this is what he read printed in mincing "Art Nouveau" type upon a swinging zinc sign fashioned to imitate something or other which was no doubt very precious:

OYEZ!

Ye simple livers of ye simpler life have raised thys barrier against ye World, ye Flesh and ye Devyl. Turn back in Peace and leave us to our Nunnery.

YE MAIDS AND DAMES OF VASSAR.

"What the devil is that nonsense?" demanded Ellis hoarsely.

"Explained on our next tree," remarked Jones, wiping his eyeglasses indifferently.

An ordinary trespass notice printed on white linen was nailed to the flank of a great pine; and, below this, a special warning, done in red on a white board:

NOTICE!

This property belongs to the Vassar College Summer School. Fishing, shooting, trapping, the felling of trees, the picking of wild flowers, and every form of trespass, being strictly forbidden, all violators of this ordinance under the law will be prosecuted. One hundred dollars reward is offered for evidence leading to the detection and conviction of any trespasser upon this property.

THE DIRECTORS OF THE VASSAR SUMMER SCHOOL.

"Well?" inquired Jones, as Ellis stood motionless, staring at the sign. The latter slowly turned an enraged visage toward his companion.

"What are you going to do?" repeated Jones, curiously.

"Do? I'm going to fish the Caranay. Come on."

"Trespass on Vassar?" asked Jones.

"I'm going to fish the Caranay, my old and favorite and beloved stream," retorted Ellis, doggedly. "Do you suppose a dinky zinc sign in this forest can stop me? Come on, Jones. I'll show you a trout worth tossing this Caranay Belle to." And he looped on a silver-and-salmon-tinted fly and waded out into the rapids.

Jones lighted his pipe and followed him, giving his views of several matters in a voice pitched above the whispering rush of the ripples:

"That's all very well, Ellis, but suppose we are pinched and fined? A nice place, these forests, for a simple liver to lead a simple life in! Simple life! What? And some of these writers define the 'simple life' as merely a 'state of mind.' That's right, too; I was in a state of mind until I met you, let me tell you! They're perfectly correct; it is a state of mind."

He muttered to himself, casting an anxious eye on the thundercloud which stretched almost to the zenith over the Golden Dome and shadowed Lynx Peak like a pall.

"Rain, too," he commented, wading in Ellis's wake. "There's a most devilish look about that cloud. I wish I were a woodchuck—or a shiner, or an earnest young thing from Vassar. What are we to do if pinched with the goods on us, Ellis?"

The other laughed a disagreeable laugh and splashed forward.

"Because," continued Jones, wiping the spray from his glasses, "the woods yonder may be teeming with these same young things from Vassar. Old 'uns, too—there's a faculty for that Summer School. You can never tell what a member of a ladies' Summer School faculty would do to you. I dare say they might run after you and frisk you for a kiss—out here in the backwoods."

"Do you know anything about this absurd Summer School?" asked Ellis, halting to wait for his companion.

"Only what the newspapers print."

"And what's that? I've not noticed anything about it."

"Why, they all tell about the scope of the Vassar Summer School. It's founded"—and he grinned maliciously—"on the simple life."

"How?" snapped Ellis, clambering up out of the water to the flat, sandy shore of an exquisite pool some forty rods in length.

"Why, this way: The Vassar undergraduates, who formerly, after commencement, scattered into all the complexities of a silly, unprofitable, good old summer time, now have a chance to acquire simplicity and a taste for the rudimentary pleasures and pursuits they have overlooked in their twentieth-century gallop after the complex."

Ellis sullenly freed his line and glanced up at the clouds. It was already raining on the Golden Dome.

"So," continued Jones, "the Summer School took to the woods along with the rest of the simple-minded. I hear they have a library; doubtless it contains the *Outlook* and the Rollo books. They have courses in the earlier and simpler languages—the dead 'uns—Sanskrit, Greek, Latin; English, too, before it grew pin-feathers. They have a grand-stand built of logs out yonder where the mosquito hummeth; and some trees and a pond which they call a theatre devoted to the portrayal of the great primitive and simple passions and emotions. They have also dammed up the stream to make a real lake when they give tank-dramas like Lohengrin and the Rheingold; and the papers say they have a pair of live swans hitched to a boat—that is, a yellow reporter swears they have, but he was

discovered taking snapshots at some Rhine-wine daughters, and hustled out of the woods——"

He paused to watch Ellis hook and play and presently land a splendid trout weighing close to two pounds.

"It's an outrage, an infernal outrage, for such people to dam the Caranay and invade this God-given forest with their unspeakable tin signs!" said Ellis, casting again.

"But they're only looking for a simpler life—just like you."

Ellis said something.

"That," replied Jones, "is a simple and ancient word expressing tersely one of the simplest and most primitive passions. You know, the simple life is merely a "state of mind"; you're acquiring it; I recognize the symptoms."

Ellis made another observation, more or less mandatory.

"Yes, that is a locality purely mythical, according to our later exponents of theology; therefore I cannot accept the suggestion to go there——"

"Confound it!" exclaimed Ellis, laughing, as he landed a trout, "let up on your joking. I'm mad all through, and it's beginning to rain. When that thunder comes nearer it will end the fishing, too. Look at Lynx Peak! Did you see that play of lightning? There's a corker of a storm brewing. I hope," he added, savagely, "it will carry away their confounded dam and their ridiculous lake. The nerve of women to dam a trout stream like the Caranay.... What was that you said?"

"I said," hissed Jones in a weird whisper, "that there are two girls standing behind us and taking our pictures with a kodak! Don't look around, man! They'll snap-shoot us for evidence!"

But the caution was too late; Ellis had turned. There came a click of a kodak shutter; Jones turned in spite of himself; another click sounded.

"Stang!" breathed Jones as two young girls stepped from the shelter of a juniper brush and calmly confronted the astonished trespassers.

"I am very sorry to trouble you," said the taller one severely, "but this is private property."

Ellis took off his cap; Jones did the same.

"I saw your signs," said Ellis, pleasantly. Jones whispered to him: "The taller one

is a corker!" and Ellis replied under his breath: "The other is attractive, too."

"You admit that you deliberately trespassed?" inquired the shorter girl very gravely.

"Not upon you—only upon what you call your property," said Ellis, gaily. "You see, we really need the trout in our business—which is to keep soul and body on friendly terms."

No answering smile touched the pretty grey eyes fixed on his. She said gravely: "I am very sorry that this has happened."

"We're sorry, too," smiled Jones, "although we can scarcely regret the charming accident which permits us——"

But it wouldn't do; the taller girl stared at him coldly from a pair of ornamental brown eyes.

Presently she said: "We students are supposed to report cases like this. If you have deliberately chosen to test the law governing the protection of private property no doubt our Summer School authorities will be willing to gratify you before a proper tribunal.... May I ask your names?" She drew a notebook from the pocket of her kilted skirt, standing gracefully with pencil poised, dark eyes focused upon Jones. And, as she waited, the thunder boomed behind the Golden Dome.

"It's going to rain cats and dogs," said Jones, anxiously "and you haven't an umbrella——"

The dark-eyed girl gazed at him scornfully. "Do you refuse your name?"

"No—oh, not at all!" said Jones hastily; "my name is Jones——"

The scorn deepened. "And—is this Mr. Smith?" she inquired, looking at Ellis.

"My name *is* Jones," said Jones so earnestly that his glasses fell off. "And what's worse, it's John Jones."

Something in his eye engaged her attention—perhaps the unwinking innocence of it. She wrote "John Jones" on her pad, noted his town address, and turned to Ellis, who was looking fixedly, but not offensively, at the girl with the expressive grey eyes.

"If you have a pad I'll surrender to you," he said, amiably. "There is glory enough for all here, as our admiral once remarked."

The grey eyes glimmered; a quiver touched the scarlet mouth. But a crash of nearer thunder whitened the smile on her lips.

"Helen, I'm going!" she said hastily to her of the brown eyes.

"That storm," said Ellis calmly, "has a long way to travel before it strikes the Caranay valley." He pointed with his rod, tracing in the sky the route of the crowding clouds. "Every storm that hatches behind the Golden Dome swings south along the Black Water first, then curves and comes around by the west and sweeps the Caranay. You have plenty of time to take my name."

"But—but the play? I was thinking of the play," she said, looking anxiously at the brown eyes, which were raised to the sky in silent misgiving.

"If you don't mind my saying so," said Ellis, "there is ample time for your outdoor theatricals—if you mean that. You need not look for that storm on the upper Caranay before late this afternoon. Even then it may break behind the mountains and you may see no rain—only a flood in the river."

"Do you really think so?" she asked.

"I do; I can almost answer for it. You see, the Caranay has been my haunt for many years, and I know almost to a certainty what is likely to happen here."

"That is jolly!" she exclaimed, greatly relieved. "Helen, I really think we should be starting——"

But Helen, pencil poised, gazed obdurately at Ellis out of brown eyes which were scarcely fashioned for such impartial and inexorable work.

"If your name is not Smith I should be very glad to note it," she said.

So he laughed and told her who he was and where he lived; and she wrote it down, somewhat shakily.

"Of course," she said, "you cannot be the *artist*—James Lowell Ellis, *the* artist—the great——"

She hesitated; brown eyes and grey eyes, very wide now, were concentrated on him. Jones, too, stared, and Ellis laughed.

"*Are you?*" blurted out Jones. "Great Heaven! I never supposed——"

Ellis joined in a quartet of silence, then laughed again, a short, embarrassed laugh.

"You *don't* look like anything famous, you know," said Jones reproachfully.

"Why didn't you tell me who you are? Why, man, I own two of your pictures!"

To brown-eyes, known so far as "Helen," Ellis said: "We painters are a bad lot, you see—but don't let that prejudice you against Mr. Jones; he really doesn't know me very well. Besides, I dragged him into this villainy; didn't I, Jones? You didn't want to trespass, you know."

"Oh, come!" said Jones; "I own two of your pictures—the Amourette and the Corrida. That ought to convict me of almost anything."

Grey-eyes said: "We—my father—has the Espagnolita, Mr. Ellis." She blushed when she finished.

"Why, then, you must be Miss Sandys!" said Ellis quickly. "Mr. Kenneth Sandys owns that picture."

The brown eyes, which had widened, then sparkled, then softened as matters developed, now became uncompromisingly beautiful.

"I am dreadfully sorry," she said, looking at her notebook. "I trust that the school authorities may not press matters." Then she raised her eyes to see what Jones's expression might resemble. It resembled absolutely nothing.

After a silence Miss Sandys said: "Do you think Helen, that we are—that we ought to report this——"

"Yes, Molly, I do."

"I'm only an architect; fine me, but spare my friend, Ellis," said Jones far too playfully to placate the brown-eyed Helen. She returned his glance with a scrutiny devoid of expression. The thunder boomed along the flanks of Lynx Peak.

"We—we are very sorry," whispered Miss Sandys.

"I am, too," replied Ellis—not meaning anything concerning his legal predicament.

Brown-eyes looked at Jones; there was a little inclination of her pretty head as she passed them. A moment later the two young men stood alone, caps in hand, gazing fixedly into the gathering dimness of Caranay forest.

CHAPTER XV

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM

"Ellis," said Jones, earnestly, as they climbed to the camp and stood gazing at the whitening ashes of their fire, "the simple life is a state of mind. I'm in it, now. And—do you know, Ellis, that—I—I could learn to like it?"

Ellis prodded the back-log, and tossed on some dry sticks.

"Great Heaven!" breathed Jones, "did you ever see such eyes, Ellis?"

"The grey ones? They're very noticeable——"

"I meant—well, let it go at that. Here be two of us have lost a thousand shillings to-day."

"And the ladies were not in buckram," rejoined Ellis, starting a blaze. "Jones, can you prepare trout for the pan with the aid of a knife? Here, rub salt in 'em—and leave all but two in that big tin—dry, mind, then cover it and sink it in the spring, or something furry will come nosing and clawing at it. I'll have things ready by the time you're back."

"About our canoes," began Jones. "I've daubed mine with white lead, but I cut it up badly. Hadn't we better attend to them before the storm breaks?"

"Get yours into camp. I'll fetch mine; it's cached just below the forks. This storm may tear things."

A quarter of an hour later two vigorous young men swung into camp, lowered the canoes from their heads and shoulders, carried the strapped kits, poles and paddles into the lean-to, and turned the light crafts bottom up as flanking shelters to headquarters.

"No use fishing; that thunder is spoiling the Caranay," muttered Ellis, moving about and setting the camp in order. "This is a fine lean-to," he added; "it's big enough for a regiment."

"I told you I was an architect," said Jones, surveying the open-faced shanty with pride. "I had nothing else to do, so I spent the time in making this. I'm a corker on the classic. Shall I take an axe and cut some wood in the Ionic or Doric

style?"

Ellis, squatting among the provisions, busily bringing order out of chaos, told him what sort of wood to cut; and an hour later, when the echoing thwacks of the axe ceased and Jones came in loaded with firewood, the camp was in order; hambones, stale bedding, tin cans, the heads and spinal processes of trout had been removed, dishes polished, towels washed and drying, and a pleasant aroma of balsam tips mingled with the spicy scent of the fire.

"Whew!" said Jones, sniffing; "it smells pleasant now."

"Your camp," observed Ellis, "had all the fragrance of a dog-fox in March. How heavy the air is. Listen to that thunder! There's the deuce to pay on the upper waters of the Caranay by this time."

"Do you think we'll get it?"

"Not the rain and wind; the electrical storms usually swing off, following the Big Oswaya. But we may have a flood." He arose and picked up his rod. "The thunder has probably blanked me, but if you'll tend camp I'll try to pick up some fish in a binnikill I know of where the trout are habituated to the roar of the fork falls. We may need every fish we can get if the flood proves a bad one."

Jones said it would suit him perfectly to sit still. He curled up close enough to the fire for comfort as well as æsthetic pleasure, removed his eyeglasses, fished out a flask of aromatic mosquito ointment, and solemnly began a facial toilet, in the manner of a comfortable house cat anointing her countenance with one paw.

"Ellis," he said, blinking up at that young man very amiably, "it would be agreeable to see a little more of—of Miss Sandys; wouldn't it? And the other ____"

"We could easily do that."

"Eh? How?"

"By engaging an attorney to defend ourselves in court," said Ellis grimly.

"Pooh! You don't suppose that brown-eyed girl——"

"Yes, I do! *She* means mischief. If it had rested with the other——"

"You're mistaken," said Jones, warmly. "I am perfectly persuaded that if I had had half an hour's playful conversation with the brown-eyed one——"

"You tried playfulness and fell down," observed Ellis, coldly. "If I could have

spoken to Miss Sandys——"

"What! A girl with steel-grey eyes like two poniards? A lot of mercy she would show us! My dear fellow, trust in the brown eye every time! The warm, humane, brown eye—the emotional, the melting, the tender brown——"

"Don't trust it! Didn't she kodak twice? You and I are now in her Rogues' Gallery. Besides, didn't she take notes on her pad? I never observed anything humane in brown eyes."

Jones polished his nose with the mosquito salve.

"How do you know what she wanted my picture for?" he asked, annoyed. "Perhaps she means to keep it for herself—if that grey-eyed one lets her alone ——"

"Let the grey-eyed one alone yourself," retorted Ellis, warmly.

"You'd better, too. Any expert in human character can tell you which of those girls means mischief."

"If you think you're an expert——" began Ellis, irritated, then stopped short. Jones followed his eyes.

"Look at that stream," said Ellis, dropping his rod against the lean-to. "There's been a cloudburst in the mountains. There's no rain here, but *look* at that stream! Yellow and bank-full! Hark! Hear the falls. I have an idea the woods will be awash below us in an hour."

They descended to the ledge which an hour ago had overhung the stream. Now the water was level with it, lapping over it, rising perceptibly in the few seconds they stood there. Alders and willows along the banks, almost covered, staggered in the discolored water; drift of all sorts came tumbling past, rotten branches, piles of brush afloat, ferns and shrubs uprooted; the torrent was thick with flakes of bark and forest mould and green-leaved twigs torn from the stream-side.

From the lower reaches a deer came galloping toward the ridges; a fox stole furtively into the open, hesitated, and slunk off up the valley.

And now the shallow gorge began to roar under the rising flood; tumbling castles of piled-up foam whirled into view; the amber waves washed through the fringing beech growth, slopping into hollows, setting the dead leaves afloat. A sucking sound filled the woods; millions of tiny bubbles purred in the shallow overflow; here and there dead branches stirred, swung and floated.

"Our camp is going to be an island pretty soon," observed Ellis; "just look at _____"

But Jones caught him by the arm. "*What* is that?" he demanded shakily. "Are there things like that in these woods?"

At the same instant Ellis caught sight of something in midstream bearing down on them in a smother of foam—an enormous lizard-like creature floundering throat-deep in the flood.

"What is it, Ellis? Look! It's got a tail ten feet long! Great Heaven, look at it!"

"I see it," said Ellis, hoarsely. "I never saw such a thing——"

"It's opening its jaws!" gasped Jones.

Ellis, a trifle white around the cheekbones, stared in frozen silence at the fearsome creature as it swept down on them. A crested wave rolled it over; four fearsome claws waved in the air; then the creature righted itself and swung in toward the bank.

"Upon my word!" stammered Ellis; "it's part of their theatrical property. Lord! how real it looked out yonder. I knew it couldn't be alive, but—Jones, see how my hands are shaking. Would you believe a man could be rattled like that?"

"Believe it? I should say I could! Look at the thing wabbling there in the shallows as though it were trying to move its flippers! *Look* at it, Ellis; see how it seems to wriggle and paddle——"

The words froze on his lips; the immense creature was moving; the scaled claws churned the shallows; a spasm shook the head; the jaws gaped.

"Help!" said a very sweet and frightened voice.

Ellis got hold of one claw, Jones the other, almost before they comprehended—certainly before, deep in the scaly creature's maw, they discovered the frightened but lovely features of the grey-eyed girl who had snap-shot them.

"Please pull," she said; "I can't swim in *this*!"

Almost hysterically they soothed her as they tugged and steered the thing into the flooded forest.

"Mr. Ellis—please—*please* don't pull quite so hard," she called out.

"Oh, did I hurt you?" he cried so tenderly that, even in the shock of emotions, Jones was ashamed of him.

"No, you don't hurt me, Mr. Ellis; I'm all right inside here, but I—I—you must not pull this papier-mâché dragon to pieces——"

"What do I care for the dragon if you are in danger?" cried Ellis, excitedly.

But it was a frightened and vexed voice that answered almost tearfully: "If you pull too hard on the pasteboard legs something dreadful may happen. I—this dragon is—is about the only clothing I have on!"

Ellis dropped the flipper, seized it again, and gazed into the scared eyes of Jones.

"For Heaven's sake, go easy," he hissed, "or the thing will come apart!"

Jones, in a cold perspiration, stood knee-deep in the flood, not daring to touch the flipper again.

"You help here," he whispered, hoarsely. "If she stands up, now, you can support her to camp, can't you?"

Ellis bent over and looked into the gaping jaws of Fafnir the Dragon.

"Miss Sandys," he said seriously, "do you think you could get on your hind—on your feet?"

The legs of the monster splashed, groping for the bottom; Ellis passed his arm around the scaly body; Fafnir arose, rather wobbly, and took one dripping step forward.

"Beyond, rocking wildly in a gilded boat, sat two people and a placid swan."

"I fancy we can manage it now, Jones," said Ellis, cheerfully, turning around; but Jones did not answer; he was running away, dashing and splashing down the flooded forest. Beyond, rocking wildly in a gilded boat, sat two people and a placid swan.

"Good Lord!" faltered Ellis, as the dragon turned with a little shriek. "Is the whole Summer School being washed away?"

"No," she said excitedly, "but the dam broke. Helen and Professor Rawson tried to save the swan-boat—we were giving tableaux from "Lohengrin" and "The Rheingold"—and—oh! oh! oh! such a torrent came! Helen—there she is in armour—Helen tried to paddle the boat, but the swans pulled the other way, and they flapped so wildly that Helen called for help. Then one of the Rhine-maidens—Professor Rawson—waded in and got aboard, but the paddle broke and they

were adrift. Then one of those horrid swans got loose, and everybody screamed, and the water rose higher and higher, and nobody helped anybody, so, so—as I swim well, I jumped in without waiting to undress—you see I had been acting the dragon, Fafnir, and I went in just as I was; but the papier-mâché dragon kept turning turtle with me, and first I knew I was being spun around like a top."

There was a silence; they stood watching Jones scrambling after the swan-boat, which had come to grief in shallow water. Professor Rawson, the Rhine-maiden, gave one raucous and perfunctory shriek as Jones floundered alongside—for the garb of the normal Rhine-daughter is scanty, and Professor Rawson's costume, as well as her maidenly physique, was almost anything except redundant.

As for Helen, sometime known as brown-eyes, she rose to her slim height, all glittering in tin armour, and gave Jones a smile of heavenly gratitude that shot him through and through his Norfolk jacket.

"Don't look!" said Professor Rawson, in a voice which, between the emotions of recent terror and present bashfulness, had dwindled to a squeak. "Don't look; I'm going to jump." And jump she did, taking to the water with a trifle less grace than the ordinary Rhine-maiden.

There was a spattering splash, a smothered squawk which may have been emitted by the swan, and the next moment Professor Rawson was churning toward dry land, her wreath of artificial seaweed over one eye, her spectacles glittering amid her dank tresses.

Jones looked up at brown-eyes balancing in the bow of the painted boat.

"I can get you ashore quite dry—if you don't mind," he said.

She considered the water; she considered Jones; she looked carefully at the wallowing Rhine-daughter.

"Are you sure you can?" she asked.

"Perfectly certain," breathed Jones.

"I am rather heavy——"

The infatuated man laughed.

"Well, then, I'll carry the swan," she said calmly; and, seizing that dignified and astonished bird, she walked demurely off the prow of the gaudy boat into the arms of Jones.

To Ellis and the grey-eyed dragon, and to Professor Rawson, who had crawled to

a dry spot on the ridge, there was a dreadful fascination in watching that swaying pyramid of Jones, Lohengrin, and swan tottering landward, knee-deep through the flood. The pyramid swayed dangerously at times; but the girl in the tin armour clasped Jones around the neck and clung to the off leg of the swan, and Jones staggered on, half-strangled by the arm and buffeted by the flapping bird, until his oozing shoes struck dry land.

"Hurrah!" cried Ellis, his enthusiasm breaking out after an agonizing moment of suspense; and Miss

[Pg 191]
[Pg 192] Sandys, forgetting her plight, waved her lizard claws and hailed rescuer and rescued with a clear-voiced cheer as they came up excited and breathless, hustling before them the outraged swan, who waddled furiously forward, craning its neck and snapping.

"*What is that?*" muttered Jones aside to Ellis as the dragon and Lohengrin embraced hysterically. He glanced toward the Rhine-maiden, who was hiding behind a tree.

"Rhine wine with the cork pulled," replied Ellis, gravely. "Go up to camp and get her your poncho. I'll do what I can to make things comfortable in camp."

The girl in armour was saying, "You poor, brave dear! How perfectly splendid it was of you to plunge into the flood with all that pasteboard dragon-skin tied to you—like Horatius at the bridge. Molly, I'm simply overcome at your bravery!"

And all the while she was saying this, Molly Sandys was saying: "Helen, how did you ever dare to try to save the boat, with those horrid swans flapping and nipping at you every second! It was the most courageous thing I ever heard of, and I simply revere you, Helen Gay!"

Jones, returning from camp with his poncho, said: "There's a jolly fire in camp and plenty of provisions;" and sidled toward the tree behind which Professor Rawson was attempting to prevent several yards of cheese cloth from adhering too closely to her outline.

"Go away!" said that spinster, severely, peering out at him with a visage terminating in a length of swan-like neck which might have been attractive if feathered.

"I'm only bringing you a poncho," said Jones, blushing.

Ellis heard a smothered giggle behind him, but when he turned Molly Sandys had shrunk into her dragon-skin, and Helen Gay had lowered the vizor of her helmet.

"I think we had better go to the camp-fire," he said gravely. "It's only a step."

"We think so, too," they said. "Thank you for asking us, Mr. Ellis."

So Ellis led the way; after him slopped the dragon, its scaled tail dragging sticks and dead leaves in its wake; next waddled the swan, perforce, prodded forward by the brown-eyed maid in her tin armor. Professor Rawson, mercifully disguised in a rubber poncho, under which her thin shins twinkled, came in the rear, gallantly conducted by Jones in oozing shoes.



CHAPTER XVI

THE SIMPLEST SOLUTION OF AN ANCIENT PROBLEM

In the silence befitting such an extraordinary occasion the company formed a circle about the camp-fire.

Presently Professor Rawson looked sharply at the damp dragon. "Child!" she exclaimed, "you ought to take that off this instant!"

"But—but I haven't very much on," protested Molly Sandys with a shiver. "I'm only dressed as a—a page."

"It can't be helped," retorted the professor with decision; "that dragon is nothing but soaking pulp except where the tail is on fire!"

Ellis hastily set his foot on the sparks, just as Molly Sandys jumped. There was a tearing, ripping sound, a stifled scream, and three-quarters of a page in blue satin and lisle thread, wearing the head and shoulders of a dragon, shrank down behind Professor Rawson's poncho-draped figure.

"Here's my poncho," cried Ellis, hastily; "I am awfully sorry I ripped your gown—I mean your pasteboard tail—but you switched it into the fire and it was burning."

"Have you something for me?" inquired Miss Gay, coloring, but calm; "I'm not very comfortable, either."

Jones's enraptured eyes lingered on the slim shape in mail; he hated to do it, but he brought a Navajo blanket and draped in it the most distractingly pretty figure his rather nearsighted eyes had ever encountered.

"There," explained Ellis, courteously, "is the shanty. I've hung a blanket over it. Jones and I will sleep here by the fire."

"Sleep!" faltered Molly Sandys. "I think we ought to be starting——"

"The forests are flooded; we can't get you back to the Summer School to-night," said Ellis.

Professor Rawson shuddered. "Do you mean that we are cut off from civilization entirely?" she asked.

"Look!" replied Ellis.

The ridge on which the camp lay had become an island; below it roared a spreading flood under a column of mist and spray; all about them the water soused and washed through the forest; below them from the forks came the pounding thunder of the falls.

"There's nothing to be alarmed at, of course," he said, looking at Molly Sandys.

The grey eyes looked back into his. "Isn't there, really?" she asked.

"Isn't there?" questioned Miss Gray's brown eyes of Jones's pleasant, nearsighted ones.

"No," signalled the orbs of Jones through his mud-spattered eyeglasses.

"I'm hungry," observed Professor Rawson in a patient but plaintive voice, like the note of a widowed guinea-hen.

So they all sat down on the soft pine-needles, while Ellis began his culinary sleight-of-hand; and in due time trout were frying merrily, bacon sputtered, ash-cakes and coffee exhaled agreeable odors, and mounds of diaphanous flapjacks tottered in hot and steaming fragrance on either flank.

There were but two plates; Jones constructed bark platters for Professor Rawson, Ellis and himself; Helen Gay shared knife and fork with Jones; Molly Sandys condescended to do the same for Ellis; Professor Rawson had a set of those articles to herself.

And there, in the pleasant glow of the fire, Molly Sandys, cross-legged beside Ellis, drank out of his tin cup and ate his flapjacks; and Helen Gay said shyly that never had she tasted such a banquet as this forest fare washed down with bumpers of icy, aromatic spring water. As for Professor Rawson, she lifted the hem of her poncho and discreetly dried that portion of the Rhine-maiden's clothing which needed it; and while she sizzled contentedly, she ate flapjack on flapjack, and trout after trout, until merriment grew within her and she laughed when the younger people laughed, and felt a delightful thrill of recklessness tingling the soles of her stockings. And why not?

"It's a very simple matter, after all," declared Jones; "it's nothing but a state of mind. I thought I was leading a simple life before I came here, but I wasn't. Why? Merely because I was *not* in a state of mind. But"—and here he looked full at Helen Gay—"but no sooner had I begun to appreciate the charm of the forest"—she blushed vividly "no sooner had I realised what these awful solitudes

might contain, than, instantly, I found myself in a state of mind. Then, and then only, I understood what heavenly perfection might be included in that frayed and frazzled phrase, "The Simple Life."

"I understood it long ago," said Ellis, dreamily.

"Did you?" asked Molly Sandys.

"Yes—long ago—about six hours ago"—he lowered his voice, for Molly Sandys had turned her head away from the firelight toward the cooler shadow of the forest.

"What happened," she asked, carelessly, "six hours ago?"

"I first saw you."

"No," she said calmly; "I first saw you and took your picture!" She spoke coolly enough, but her color was bright.

"Ah, but before that shutter clicked, convicting me of a misdemeanor, your picture had found a place——"

"Mr. Ellis!"

"Please let me——"

"No!"

"Please——"

A silence.

"Then you must speak lower," she said, "and pretend to be watching the stream."

Professor Rawson gleefully scraped her plate and snuggled up in her poncho. She was very happy. When she could eat no more she asked Jones what his theory might be concerning Wagner's influence on Richard Strauss, and Jones said he liked waltzes, but didn't know that the man who wrote *The Simple Life* had anything to do with that sort of thing. And Professor Rawson laughed and laughed, and quoted a Greek proverb; and presently arose and went into the shanty, dropping the blanket behind her.

"Don't sit up late!" she called sleepily.

"Oh, *no*!" came the breathless duet.

"And don't forget to feed the swan!"

"Oh, *no*!"

A few minutes later a gentle, mellow, muffled monotone vibrated in the evening air. It was the swan-song of Professor Rawson.

Ellis laid fresh logs on the blaze, lighted a cigarette, and returned to his seat beside Molly Sandys, who sat, swathed in her poncho, leaning back against the base of a huge pine.

"Jones *is* right," he said; "the simple life—the older and simpler emotions, the primal desire—*is* a state of mind."

Molly Sandys was silent.

"And a state of—heart."

Miss Sandys raised her eyebrows.

"Why be insincere?" persisted Ellis.

"I'm not!"

"No—no—I didn't mean you. I meant everybody——"

"I'm somebody——"

"Indeed you *are*!"—much too warmly; and Molly Sandys looked up at the evening star.

"The simple life," said Ellis, "is an existence replete with sincerity. Impulse may play a pretty part in it; the capacity for the enjoyment of simple things grows out of impulse; and impulse is a child's reasoning. Therefore, impulse, being unsullied, unaffected in its source, is to be respected, cherished, guided into a higher development, so that it may become a sweet reasonableness, an unerring philosophy. Am I right, Miss Sandys?"

"I think you are."

"Well, then, following out my theorem logically, what is a man to do when, without an instant's warning, he finds himself——"

There was a pause, a long one.

"Finds himself where?" asked Molly Sandys.

"In love."

"I—I don't know," she said, faintly. "Doesn't the simple life teach him what is— is proper—on such brief acquaintance——"

"I didn't say the acquaintance was brief. I only said the love was sudden."

"Oh—then I—I don't know——"

"M-Mo-Mi-M-M——"

He wanted to say "Molly," and he didn't want to say "Miss Sandys," and he couldn't keep his mouth shut, so that was the phonetic result—a muttering monotone which embarrassed them both and maddened him till he stammered out: "The moment I saw you I—I can't help it; it's the simplest thing to do, anyhow—to tell you——"

"Me!"

"You, M-M-Mo-Mi-M——" He couldn't say it.

"Try," she whispered, stifling with laughter.

"Molly!" Like a cork from a popgun came the adored yet dreaded name.

Molly turned scarlet as Miss Gay and Jones looked up in pure amazement from the farther side of the camp-fire.

"*Don't* you know how to make love?" she whispered in a fierce little voice; "*don't* you? If you don't I am going off to bed."

"Molly!" That was better—in fact, it was so low that she could scarcely hear him. But she said: "Doesn't Helen Gay look charming in her tin armour? She is the dearest, sweetest girl, Mr. Ellis. She's my cousin. Do you think her pretty?"

"Do you know," whispered Ellis, "that I am in dead earnest?"

"Why, I—I hope so."

"Then tell me what chance I stand. I am in love; it came awfully quickly, as quickly as you snapped that kodak—but it has come to stay——"

"But I am not in—love.

"That is why I speak. I can't endure it to let you go—Heaven knows where——"

"Only to New York," she said, demurely, and, in a low voice, she named the street and the number. "In an interval of sanity you shall have an opportunity to reflect on what you have said to me, Mr. Ellis. Being a—a painter—and a rather famous one—for so young a man—you are, no doubt, impulsive—in love with love—*not* with a girl you met six hours ago."

"But if I *am* in love with her?"

"We will argue that question another time."

"In New York?"

She looked at him, a gay smile curving her lips. Suddenly the clear, grey eyes filled; a soft, impulsive hand touched his for an instant, then dropped.

"Be careful," she said, unsteadily; "so far, I also have only been in love with love."

Stunned by the rush of emotion he rose to his feet as she rose, eye meeting eye in audacious silence.

Then she was gone, leaving him there—gone like a flash into the camp-hut; he saw the blanket twitching where she had passed behind it; he heard the muffled swan-song of her blanket-mate; he turned his enchanted eyes upon Jones. Jones, his elbows on the ground, chin on his palms, was looking up into the rapt face of Helen Gay, who sat by the fire, her mailed knees gathered up in her slim hands, the reflection of the blaze playing scarlet over her glittering tin armour.

"Why may I not call you Helen?" he was saying.

"Why should you, Mr. Jones?"

The infatuated pair were oblivious of him. *Should* he sneeze? No; his own case was too recent; their attitude fascinated him; he sat down softly to see how it was done.

"If—some day—I might be fortunate enough to call you more than Helen——"

"Mr. Jones!"

"I can't help it; I love you so—so undauntedly that I have got to tell you *something* about it! You don't mind, do you?"

"But I *do* mind."

"Very much?"

Ellis thought: "Is *that* the way a man looks when he says things like that?" He shuddered, then a tremor of happiness seized him. Molly Sandys had emerged from the hut.

Passing the fire, she came straight to Ellis. "It's horrid in there. Don't you hear her? It's muffled, I know, because she's taken the swan to bed with her, and it's asleep, too, and acting as though Professor Rawson's head were a nest-egg. I am not sleepy; I—I believe I shall sit up by this delightful fire all night. Make me a nest of blankets."

Jones and Helen were looking across the fire at them in silence; Ellis unrolled some blankets, made a nest at the foot of the pine full in the fire-glow. Swathed to her smooth white throat, Molly sank into them.

"Now," she said, innocently, "we can talk. Helen! Ask Mr. Jones to make some coffee. Oh, *thank* you, Mr. Jones! Isn't this perfectly delicious! So simple, so primitive, so sincere"—she looked at Ellis—"so jolly. If the simple life is only a state of mind I can understand how easy it is to follow it to sheerest happiness." And in a low voice, to Ellis: "Can *you* find happiness in it, too?"

Across the fire Helen called softly to them: "Do you want some toasted cheese, too? Mr. Jones knows how to make it."

A little later, Jones, toasting bread and cheese, heard a sweet voice softly begin the Swan-Song. It was Helen. Molly's lovely, velvet voice joined in; Ellis cautiously tried his barytone; Jones wisely remained mute, and the cheese sizzled a discreet tremolo. It was indeed the swan-song of the heart-whole and fancy-free—the swan-song of the unawakened. For the old order of things was passing away—had passed. And with the moon mounting in silvered splendor over the forest, the newer order of life—the simpler, the sweeter—became so plain to them that they secretly wondered, as they ate their toast and cheese, how they could have lived so long, endured so long, the old and dull complexity of a life through the eventless days of which their hearts had never quickened to the oldest, the most primitive, the simplest of appeals.

And so, there, under the burnished moon, soberly sharing their toasted cheese, the muffled swan-song of the incubating maiden thrilling their enraptured ears, began for them that state of mind in the inviolate mystery of which the passion for the simpler life is hatched.

"If we only had a banjo!" sighed Helen.

"I have a jew's-harp," ventured Jones. "I am not very musical, but every creature likes to emit some sort of melody."

Ellis laughed.

"Why not?" asked Helen Gay, quickly; "after all, what simpler instrument can you wish for?" And she laughed at Jones in a way that left him light-headed.

So there, in the moonlight and the shadows of the primeval pines, Jones—simplest of men with simplest of names—produced the simplest of all musical instruments, and, looking once into the beautiful eyes of Helen, quietly began the simplest of all melodies—the Spanish Fandango.

And for these four the simple life began.

I waited for a few moments, but Williams seemed to consider that there was nothing more to add. So I said:

"Did they marry those two girls?"

He glanced at me in a preoccupied manner without apparently understanding.

"Did they marry 'em?" I repeated, impatiently.

"What? Oh, yes, of course."

"Then why didn't you say so?"

"I didn't have to say so. Didn't you notice the form in which I ended?"

"What's that got to do with it? You're not telling me a short story, you're telling me what really happened. And what really happens never ends artistically."

"It does when I tell it," he said, with a self-satisfied smile. "Let Fate do its worst; let old man Destiny get in his work; let Chance fix up things to suit herself. I wait until that trio finishes, then *I* step in and tell the truth in my own way. And, by gad! when I get through, Fate, Chance, and Destiny set up a yell of impotent fury and Truth looks at herself in the mirror in delighted astonishment, amazed to discover in herself attractions which she never suspected."

"In other words," said I, "Fate no longer has the final say-so."

"Not while the short-story writer exists," he grinned. "It's up to him. Fate slaps your face midway in a pretty romance. All right. But when I make a record of the matter I pick, choose, sort, re-assort my box of words, and when things are going too rapidly I wink at Fate with my tongue in my cheek and round up everybody so amiably that nobody knows exactly what did happen—and nobody even stops to think because everybody has already finished the matter in their own minds to their own satisfaction."

CHAPTER XVII

SHOWING HOW IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ANY MAN TO MAKE OF HIMSELF A CHUMP

After a while I repeated: "They *did* marry, didn't they?"

"What do *you* think?"

"I'm perfectly certain they did."

"Well, then, what more do you want?" he laughed.

"Another of your reminiscences disguised as fiction," I said, tinkling my spoon on the edge of my tumbler to attract the waiter.

"Two more," I said, lighting a caporal cigarette, the penetrating aroma of which drifted lazily through forgotten years, drawing memory with it in its fragrant back-draught.

"Do you remember Seabury's brother?" he asked.

"Beaux Arts? Certainly. Architect, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but he came into a lot of money and started for home to hit a siding."

"Little chump," I said; "I remember him. There was a promising architect spoiled."

"Oh, I don't know. He is doing a lot to his money."

"Good?"

"Of course. Otherwise I should have said that his money is doing a lot to him."

"Cut out these fine shades and go back to galley-proof," I said, sullenly. "What about him, anyway?"

Williams said, slowly: "A thing happened to that man which had no right to happen anywhere except in a musical comedy. But," he shrugged his shoulders, "everybody's lives are really full of equally grotesque episodes. The trouble is that the world is too serious to discover any absurdity in itself. We writers have to do that for it. For example, there was Seabury's brother. Trouble began the

moment he saw her."

"Saw who?" I interrupted.

"Saw her! Shut up!"

I did so. He continued:



They encountered one another under the electric lights in the wooden labyrinth which forms the ferry terminal of the Sixth Avenue Elevated Railroad, she hastening one way, he hurrying the opposite. There was ample room for them to pass each other; it may have been because she was unusually pretty, it may have been his absent-mindedness, but he made one of those mistakes which everybody makes once in a lifetime: he turned to the left, realised what he was doing, wheeled hastily to the right—as she, too, turned—only to meet her face to face, politely dodge, meet again, lose his head and begin a heart-breaking contra-dance, until, vexed and bewildered, she stood perfectly still, and he, redder than she, took the opportunity to slink past her and escape.

"Hey!" said a sarcastic voice, as, blinded with chagrin, he found himself attempting to force a locked wooden gate. "You want to go the other way, unless you're hunting for the third rail."

"No, I don't," he said, wrathfully; "I want to go uptown."

"That's what I said; you want to go the other way, even if you don't know where you want to go," yawned the gateman disdainfully.

Seabury collected his scattered wits and gazed about him. Being a New Yorker, and acquainted with the terminal labyrinth, he very quickly discovered his error, and, gripping suit-case and golf-bag more firmly, he turned and retraced his steps at the natural speed of a good New Yorker, which is a sort of a meaningless lope.

Jammed into the familiar ticket line, he peered ahead through the yellow glare of light and saw the charming girl with whom he had danced his foolish contra-dance just receiving her ticket from the boxed automaton. Also, to his satisfaction, he observed her disappear through the turnstile into the crush surging forward alongside of the cars, and, when he presently deposited his own ticket in the chopper's box, he had no more expectation of ever again seeing her than he had of doing something again to annoy and embarrass her.

But even in Manhattan Destiny works overtime, and Fate gets busy in a manner that no man knoweth; and so, personally though invisibly conducted, Seabury lugged his suit-case and golf-bag aboard a train, threaded his way into a stuffy car and took the only empty seat remaining; and a few seconds later, glancing casually at his right-hand neighbour, he blushed to find himself squeezed into a seat beside his unusually attractive partner in the recent contra-dance.

That she had already seen him, the calm indifference in her blue eyes, the poise of her flushed face, were evidence conclusive.

He shrank back, giving her all the room he could, set his bag of golf-clubs between his knees, and looked innocent. First, as all New Yorkers do, he read the line of advertisements opposite with the usual personal sense of resentment; then he carelessly scanned the people across the aisle. As usual, they resembled everybody he had never particularly noticed; he fished out the evening paper, remembered that he had read it on the ferryboat, stuck it into his golf-bag, and contemplated the battered ends of his golf-clubs.

Station after station flashed yellow lamps along the line of car windows; passengers went and passengers took their places; in one of the streets below he caught a glimpse of a fire engine vomiting sparks and black smoke; in another an ambulance with a squalid assemblage crowded around a policeman who was emerging from a drug store.

He had pretty nearly succeeded in forgetting the girl and his mortification; he cast a calmly casual glance over his well-fitting trousers and shoes. The edge of a shoe-lace lay exposed, and he leisurely remedied this untidy accident, leaning over and tying the lace securely with a double knot.

Fourteenth, Eighteenth, Twenty-third, ran the stations. He gathered his golf-bag instinctively and sat alert, prepared to rise and leave the car with dignity.

"Twenty-eighth!" It was his station. Just as he rose the attractive girl beside him sprang up, and at the same instant his right leg was jerked from under him and he sat down in his seat with violence. Before he comprehended what had happened, the girl, with a startled exclamation, fell back into her seat, and he felt a spasmodic wrench at his foot again.

Astonished, he struggled to rise once more, but something held him—his foot seemed to be caught; and as he turned he encountered her bewildered face and felt another desperate tug which brought him abruptly into his seat again.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked.

"'I—I don't know,' she stammered; 'my shoe seems tied to yours.'"

"I—I don't know," she stammered; "my shoe seems to be tied to yours."

"Tied!" he cried, bending down in a panic, "wasn't that *my* shoe-lace?" His golf-bag fell, he seized it and set it against the seat between them. "Hold it a moment," he groaned. "I tied your shoe-lace to mine!"

"*You* tied it!" she repeated, furiously.

"I saw a shoe-lace—I thought it was mine—I tied it fast—in a d-d-double knot——"

"Untie it at once!" she said, crimson to the roots of her hair.

"Great Heavens, madam! I didn't mean to do it! I'll fix it in a moment——"

"Don't," she whispered, fiercely; "the people opposite are looking at us! Do you wish to hold us both up to ridicule?" He straightened up, thoroughly flurried.

"But—this is my station—" he began.

"It is mine, too. I'd rather sit here all night than have those people see you untie your shoe from mine! How—how *could* you——"

"I've explained that I didn't mean to do it," he returned, dropping into the breathless undertone in which she spoke. "Happening to glance down, I saw a shoe-lace end and thought my shoe was untied——"

She looked at him scornfully.

"And I tied it tight, that's all. I'm horribly mortified; this is the second time I've appeared to disadvantage——"

"People in New York usually turn to the right; even horses——"

"I doubt," he said, "that you can make me feel much worse than I feel now, but it's a sort of a horrible relief to know what a fool you think me."

She said nothing, sitting there, cooling her hot face in the breeze from the forward door; he, numb with chagrin, stole an apprehensive glance at the passengers opposite. Nobody appeared to have observed their plight, and he ventured to say so in a low voice.

"Are you certain?" she asked, her own voice not quite steady.

"Perfectly. Look! Nobody is eying our feet."

Her own small feet were well tucked up under her gown; she instinctively drew them further in; he felt a little tug; they both coloured furiously.

"This is simply unspeakable," she said, looking straight ahead of her through two bright tears of mortification.

"Suppose," he whispered, "you edge your foot a trifle this way—I think I can cut the knot with my penknife—" He glanced about him stealthily. "Shall I try?"

"Not now. Wait until those people go."

"But some of them may live in Harlem."

"I—I can't help it. Do you suppose I'm going to let you lean over before all those people and try to untie our shoes?"

"Do you mean to sit here until they're all gone?" he asked, appalled.

"I do. Terrible as the situation is, we've got to conceal it."

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"Even if some of them go to the end of the line?"

"I don't care!" She turned on him with a hint of that pretty fierceness again. "Do you know what you've done? You've affronted and mortified me and humiliated me beyond endurance. I have a guest to dine with me: I shall not arrive before midnight!"

"Do you suppose," he said miserably, "that anything you say can add to my degradation? Can't you imagine how a man must feel who first of all makes a four-footed fool of himself before the most attractive girl he——"

"Don't say that!" she cried, hotly.

"Yes, I will! You are! And I dodged and tumbled about like a headless chicken and ran into the wrong gate. I wish I'd climbed out on the third rail! And then, when I hoped I'd never see you again, I found myself beside you, and—Good Heavens! I lost no time in beginning my capers again and doing the most abandoned deed a man ever accomplished on earth!"

She appeared to be absorbed in contemplation of a breakfast-food advertisement; her color was still high; at times she worried her under lip with her white teeth, but her breath rose and fell under the fluffy bosom of her gown with more regularity, and the two bright tears in her eyes had dried unshed. Wrath may have dried them.

"I wish it were possible," he said very humbly, "for you to see the humour——"

"Humour!" she repeated, menacingly.

"No—I didn't mean that, I meant the—the——"

"You did! You meant the humour of the situation. I will answer you. I do *not* see the humour of it!"

"You are quite right," he admitted, looking furtively at the edge of her gown which concealed his right foot. "It is, as you say, simply ghastly to be tied together by the feet. Don't you suppose I could—without awakening suspicion—cut the—the laces with a penknife?"

"I beg you will attempt nothing whatever until this car is empty."

"Certainly," he said. "I will do anything in the world I can to spare you."

She did not reply, and he sat there nervously balanced on the edge of his seat, watching the lights of Harlem flash into view below. He had been hungry; he was no longer. Appetite had been succeeded by a gnawing anxiety. Again and again warm waves of shame overwhelmed him, alternating with a sort of wild-eyed pity for the young girl who sat so rigidly beside him, face averted. Once a mad desire to laugh seized him; he wondered whether it might be a premonition of hysteria, and shuddered. It did not seem as though he could possibly endure it another second to be tied by the foot to this silently suffering and lovely companion.

"Do you think," he said, hoarsely, "at the next station that if we rose together—and kept step——"

She shook her head.

"A—a sort of lock-step," he explained, timidly.

"I would if I thought it possible," she replied under her breath; "but I dare not. Suppose you should miss step! You are likely to do anything if it's only sufficiently foolish."

"You could take my arm and pretend you are my lame sister," he ventured.

"Suppose the train started. Suppose, by any one of a thousand possible accidents, you should become panic-stricken. What sort of a spectacle would we furnish the passengers of this car? No! No! No! The worst of it is almost over. My guest is there—astounded at my absence. Before I am even half-way back to Twenty-eighth Street she will have become sufficiently affronted to leave the house. I

might as well go on to the end of the road." She turned toward him hastily: "Where is the end of this road?"

"Somewhere in the Bronx, I believe," he said, vaguely.

"That is hours from Twenty-eighth Street, isn't it?"

"I believe so."

The train whirled on; stations were far between, now. He sat so silent, so utterly broken and downcast, that after a long while she turned to him with a hint of softness in her stern reserve.

"Of course," she said, "I do not suppose you deliberately intended to tie our feet together. I am not absurd. But the astonishment, the horror of finding what you had done exasperated me for a moment. I'm cool enough now; besides, it is perfectly plain that you are the sort of man one is—is accustomed to know."

"I hope not!" he said, devoutly.

"Oh, I mean—" She hesitated, and the glimmer of a smile touched her eyes, instantly extinguished, however.

"I understand," he said. "You mean that it's lucky your shoe-laces are tied to the shoe-lace of a man of your own sort. I hope to Heaven you may find a little comfort in that."

"I do," she said, with the uncertain violet light in her eyes again. "It's bad enough, goodness knows, but I—I am very sure you did not mean——"

"You are perfectly right; I mean well, as they say of all chumps. And the worst of it is," he added, wildly, "I never before knew that I was a chump! I never before saw any symptoms. Would you believe me, I never in all my life have been such an idiot as I was in those first few minutes that I crossed your path. How on earth to account for it; how to explain, to ask pardon, to—to ever forget it! As long as I live I shall wake at night with the dreadful chagrin burning my ears off. Isn't it the limit? And I—I shouldn't have felt so crushed if it had been anybody excepting you——"

"I do not understand," she said gravely.

"I do," he muttered.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MASTER KNOT OF HUMAN FATE

The conversation dropped there: she gazed thoughtfully out upon the Teutonic magnificence of One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street by gaslight; he, arms folded, relapsed into bitter contemplation of the breakfast-food. So immersed he became in the picture of an unctuous little boy stuffing himself to repletion under the admiring smirk of a benevolent parent that he forgot his manacles, and attempting to stretch his cramped leg, returned to his senses in a hurry.

"I think," she suggested, quietly, "that, if you care to stretch, I wouldn't mind it, either. Can you do it discreetly?"

"I'll try," he said in a whisper. "Shall I count three?"

She nodded.

"One, two, three," he counted, and they cautiously stretched their legs.

"I now know how the Siamese twins felt," he said, sullenly. "No wonder they died young."

She laughed—a curious, little laugh which was one of the most agreeable sounds he had ever heard.

"I take it for granted," he said, "that you will always cherish for me a wholesome and natural hatred."

"I shall never see you again," she replied, simply.

That silenced him for a while; he fished about in his intellect to find mitigating circumstances. There was none that he knew of.

"Suppose—under pleasanter auspices, we should some day meet?" he suggested.

"We never shall."

"How do you know?"

"It is scarcely worth while speculating upon such an improbability," she said, coldly.

"But—suppose——"

She turned toward him. "You desire to know what my attitude would be toward you?"

"Yes, I do."

"It would be one of absolutely amiable indifference—if you really wish to know," she said so sweetly that he was quite sure his entire body shrank at least an inch.

"By the way," she added, "the last passenger has left this car."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, sitting bolt upright. "Now's our time. Would you mind _____"

"With the very greatest pleasure," she said, quickly; "please count one, two, three."

He counted; there came a discreet movement, and from under the hem of her gown there appeared a dainty shoe, accompanied by a larger masculine companion. He bent down, his fingers seemed to be all thumbs, and he grew redder and redder.

"Perhaps I can do it," she said, stripping off her gloves and bending over. A stray tendril of bright hair brushed his cheek as their heads almost came together.

"Goodness, what a dreadful knot!" she breathed, her smooth fingers busy. The perfume of her hair, her gloves, her gown thrilled him; he looked at her face, now flushed with effort; his eyes fell on her delicate hands, her distractingly pretty foot, in its small, polished shoe.

"Patience," she said, calmly; "this knot must give way——"

"If it doesn't——"

"Madness lies that way," she breathed. "Wait! Don't dare to move your foot!"

"We are approaching a station; shall I cut it?" he asked.

"No—wait! I think I have solved it. There!" she cried with a breathless laugh. "We are free!"

There was not an instant to lose, for the train had already stopped; they arose with one accord and hurried out into the silvery Harlem moonlight—which does not, perhaps, differ from normal moonlight, although it seemed to him to do astonishing tricks with her hair and figure there on the deserted platform, turning her into the loveliest and most unreal creature he had ever seen in all his life.

"There ought to be a train pretty soon," he said cheerfully.

She did not answer.

"Do you mind my speaking to you now that we are——"

"Untethered?" she said with a sudden little flurry of laughter. "Oh, no; why should I care what happens to me now, after taking a railroad journey tied to the shoe-strings of an absent-minded stranger?"

"Please don't speak so—so heartlessly——"

"Heartlessly? What have hearts to do with this evening's lunacy?" she asked, coolly.

He had an idea, an instinctive premonition, but it was no explanation to offer her.

Far away up the track the starlike headlight of a train glittered: he called her attention to it, and she nodded. Neither spoke for a long while; the headlight grew larger and yellower; the vicious little train came whizzing in, slowed, halted with a jolt. He put her aboard and followed into a car absolutely empty save for themselves. When they had gravely seated themselves side by side she looked around at him and said without particular severity: "I can see no reason for our going back together; can you?"

"Yes," he answered with such inoffensive and guileless conviction that she was silent.

He went on presently: "Monstrous as my stupidity is, monumental ass as I must appear to you, I am, as a matter of fact, rather a decent fellow—the sort of man a girl need not flay alive to punish."

"I do not desire to punish you. I do not expect to know you——"

"Do you mean 'expect,' or 'desire'?"

"I mean both, if you insist." There was a sudden glimmer in her clear eyes that warned him; but he went on:

"I beg you to give me a chance to prove myself not such a clown as you think me."

"But I don't think about you at all!" she explained.

"Won't you give me a chance?"

"How?"

"Somebody you—we both know—I mean to say——"

"You mean, will I sit here and compare notes with you to find out whether we both know Tom, Dick, and Harry? No, I will not."

"I mean—so that—if you don't mind—somebody can vouch for me——"

"No," she said, decisively.

"I mean—I would be so grateful—and I admire you tremendously——"

"Please do not say that."

"No—I won't, of course; I don't admire anybody very much, and I didn't dream of being offensive—only—I—now that I've known you——"

"You don't know me," she observed, icily.

"No, of course, I don't know you at all; I'm only talking to you——"

"A nice comment upon us both," she observed; "could anything be more pitifully common?"

"But being tied together, how could we avoid talking about it?" he pleaded.

"When you're tied up like that to a person, it's per—permitted to speak, you know——"

"We talked entirely too much," she said with decision. "Now we are not tied at all, and I do not see what decent excuse we can have for conversing about anything.... Do you?"

"Yes, I do."

"What excuse?" she asked.

"Well, for one thing, a sense of humour. A nice spectacle we should be, you in one otherwise empty car, I in another, bored to death——"

"Do you think," she said, impatiently, "that I require anybody's society to save myself from *ennui*?"

"No—but I require——"

"That is impertinent!"

"I didn't mean to be; you must know that!" he said.

She looked out of the window.

"I wonder," he began in a cheerful and speculative tone, taking courage from her

silence—"I wonder whether you know——"

"I will not discuss people I know with you," she said.

"Then let us discuss people I know," he rejoined, amiably.

"Please don't."

"Please let me——"

"No."

"Are you never going to forgive me?" he asked.

"I shall forget," she said, meaningly.

"Me?"

"Certainly."

"Please don't——"

"You are always lingering dangerously close to the border of impertinence," she said. "I do not wish to be rude or ungracious. I have been unpardonably annoyed, and—when I consider my present false situation—I am annoyed still more. Let me be unmistakably clear and concise; I do not feel any—anger—toward you; I have no feeling whatever toward you; and I do not ever expect to see you again. Let it rest so. I will drop you my best curtsey when you lift your hat to me at Twenty-ninth Street. Can a guilty man ask more?"

"Your punishment is severe," he said, flushing.

"My punishment? Who am I punishing, if you please?"

"Me."

"What folly! I entertain no human emotions toward you; I have no desire to punish you. How could I punish you—if I wished to?"

"By doing what you are doing."

"And what is that?" she asked rather softly.

"Denying me any hope of ever knowing you."

"You are unfair," she said, biting her lip. "I do not deny you that 'hope,' as you choose to call it. Consider a moment. Had you merely seen me on the train you could not have either hoped or even desired ever to know me. Suppose for a moment——" she flushed, but her voice was cool and composed "suppose you

were attracted to me—thought me agreeable to look at? You surely would never have dreamed of speaking to me and asking such a thing. Why, then, should you take unfair advantage of an accident and ask it now? You have no right to—nor have I to accord you what you say you desire."

She spoke very sweetly, meeting his eyes without hesitation.

"May I reply to you?" he asked soberly.

"Yes—if you wish."

"You will not take it as an affront?"

"Not—not if—" She looked at him. "No," she said.

"Then this is my reply: Wherever I might have seen you I should instantly have desired to know you. That desire would have caused you no inquietude; I should have remained near you without offense, perfectly certain in my own mind that somehow and somewhere I must manage to know you; and to that end—always without offense, and without your knowledge—I should have left the train when you did, satisfied myself where you lived, and then I should have scoured the city, and moved heaven and earth to find the proper person who might properly ask your permission to receive me. That is what I should have done if I had remained thirty seconds in the same car with you.... Are you offended?"

"No," she said.

They journeyed on for some time, saying nothing; she, young face bent, sensitive lips adroop, perhaps considering what he said; he, cradling his golf-sticks, trying to keep his eyes off her and succeeding very badly.

"I wonder what your name is?" she said, looking up at him.

"James Seabury," he replied so quickly that it was almost pathetic.

She mused, frowning a little: "Where have I heard your name?" she asked with an absent-minded glance at him.

"Oh—er—around, I suppose," he suggested, vaguely.

"But I have heard it. Are you famous?"

"Oh, no," he said quickly. "I'm an architect, or ought to be. Fact is, I'm so confoundedly busy golfing and sailing and fishing and shooting and hunting that I have very little time for business."

"What a confession!" she exclaimed, laughing outright; and the beauty that

transfigured her took his breath away. But her laughter was brief, her eyes grew more serious than ever: "So you are not in business?"

"No."

"I am employed," she said calmly, looking at him.

"Are you?" he said, astonished.

"So, you see," she added gaily, "I should have very little time to see anybody _____"

"You mean me?"

"Yes, you, for example."

"You don't work all the while, do you?" he asked.

"Usually."

"All the time?"

"I dine—at intervals."

"That's the very thing!" he said with enthusiasm.

She looked at him gravely.

"Don't you see," he went on, "as soon as you'll let me know you my sister will call, and then you'll call, and then my sister will invite——"

She was suddenly laughing again—a curious laugh, quite free and unguarded.

"Of course, you'll tell your sister how we met," she suggested; "she'll be so anxious to know me when she hears all about it."

"Do you suppose," he said coolly, "that I don't know one of my own sort whenever or however I happen to meet her?"

"Men cannot always tell; I grant you women seldom fail in placing one another at first glance; but men rarely possess that instinct.... Besides, I tell you I am employed."

"What of it? Even if you wore the exceedingly ornamental uniform of a parlor-maid it could not worry me."

"Do you think your sister would hasten to call on a saleswoman at Blumenshine's?" she asked carelessly.

"Nobody wants her to," he retorted, amused.

"Or on a parlor-maid—for example?"

"Let her see you first; you can't shock her after that.... Are you?" he inquired gently—so gently, so pleasantly, that she gave him a swift look that set his heart galloping.

"Do you really desire to know me?" she asked. But before he could answer she sprang up, saying: "Good gracious! This is Twenty-eighth Street! It seems impossible!"

He could not believe it, either, but he fled after her, suit-case and golf-bag swinging; the gates slammed, they descended the stairs and emerged on Twenty-eighth Street. "I live on Twenty-ninth Street," she said; "shall we say good-bye here?"

"I should think not!" he replied with a scornful decision that amazed her, but, curiously enough, did not offend her. They walked up Twenty-eighth Street to Fifth Avenue, crossed, turned north under the white flare of electricity, then entered Twenty-ninth Street slowly, side by side, saying nothing.



CHAPTER XIX

THE TIME AND THE PLACE

She halted at the portal of an old-fashioned house which had been turned into an apartment hotel—a great brownstone mansion set back from the street. A severely respectable porter in livery appeared and bowed to her, but when his apoplectic eyes encountered Seabury's his shaven jaw dropped and a curious spasm appeared to affect his knees.

She did not notice it; she turned to Seabury and, looking him straight in the face, held out her hand.

"Good-night," she said. "Be chivalrous enough to find out who I am—without sacrificing me.... You—you have not displeased me."

He took her hand, held it a moment, then released it.

"I live here," he said calmly.

A trifle disconcerted, she searched his face. "That is curious," she said uneasily.

"Oh, not very. I have bachelor apartments here; I've been away from town for three months. Here is my pass-key," he added, laughing, and to the strangely paralyzed porter he tossed his luggage with a nod and a pleasant: "You didn't expect me for another month, William, did you?"

"That explains it," she said smiling, a tint of excitement in her pretty cheeks. "I've been here only for a day or two."

They were entering now, side by side; he followed her into the elevator. The little red-haired boy, all over freckles and gilt buttons, who presided within the cage, gaped in a sort of stupor when he saw Seabury.

"Well, Tommy," inquired that young gentleman, "what's the matter?"

"What floor?" stammered Tommy, gazing wildly from one to the other.

"The usual one, in my case," said Seabury, surprised.

"The usual one, in my case," said the girl, looking curiously at the agitated lad. The cage shot up to the third floor; they both rose, and he handed her out. Before

either could turn the elevator hurriedly dropped, leaving them standing there together. Then, to the consternation of Seabury, the girl quietly rang at one of the only two apartments on the floor, and the next instant a rather smart-looking English maid opened the door.

Seabury stared; he turned and examined the corridor; he saw the number on the door of the elevator shaft; he saw the number over the door.

"There seems to be," he began slowly, "something alarming the matter with me to-night. I suppose—I suppose it's approaching dementia, but do you know that I have a delusion that this apartment is mine?"

"Yours!" faltered the girl, turning pale.

"Well—it was once—before I left town. Either that or incipient lunacy explains my hallucination."

The maid stood at the door gazing at him in undisguised astonishment. Her pretty mistress looked at her, looked at Seabury, turned and cast an agitated glance along the corridor—just in time to catch a glimpse of the curly black whiskers and the white and ghastly face of the proprietor peering at them around the corner. Whiskers and pallor instantly vanished. She looked at Seabury.

"Please come in a moment, Mr. Seabury," she said calmly. He followed her into the familiar room decorated with his own furniture, and lined with his own books, hung with his own pictures. At a gesture from her he seated himself in his own armchair; she sat limply in a chair facing him.

"Are these your rooms?" she asked unsteadily.

"I thought so, once. Probably there's something the matter with me."

"You did not desire to rent them furnished during your absence?"

"Not that I know of."

"And you have returned a month before they expected you, and I—oh, this is infamous!" she cried, clenching her white hands. "How dared that wretched man rent this place to me? How dared he!"

A long and stunning silence fell upon them—participated in by the British maid.

Then Seabury began to laugh. He looked at the maid, he looked at her angry and very lovely young mistress, looked at the tables littered with typewriters and stationery, he caught sight of his own dining-room with the little table laid for two. His gayety disconcerted her—he rose, paced the room and returned.

"It seems my landlord has tried to turn a thrifty penny by leasing you my rooms!" he said, soberly. "Is that it?"

She was close to tears, controlling her voice and keeping her self-possession with a visible effort. "I—I am treasurer and secretary for the new wing to—to St. Berold's Hospital," she managed to say. "We—the women interested, needed an office—we employ several typewriters, and—oh, goodness! What on earth will your sister think!"

"My sister? Why, she's at Seal Harbor——"

"Your sister was there visiting my mother. I came on to town to see our architects; I wired her to come. She—she was to dine with me here to-night! Sherry was notified!"

"My sister?"

"Certainly. What on earth did she think when she found me installed in your rooms? And that's bad enough, but I invited her to dine and go over the hospital matters—she's one of the vice presidents—and then—then you tied our feet together and it's—what time is it?" she demanded of her maid.

"It is midnight, mem," replied the maid in sepulchral tones.

"Is that man from Sherry's still there?"

"He is, mem."

Her mistress laid her charming head in her hands and covered her agreeable features with a handkerchief of delicate and rather valuable lace.

The silence at last was broken by Seabury addressing the maid: "Is that dinner spoiled?"

"Quite, sir."

Her mistress looked up hastily: "Mr. Seabury, you are not going to——"

"Yes, I am; this is the time and the place!" And he rose with decision and walked straight to the kitchen, where a stony-faced individual sat amid the culinary ruins, a statue of despair.

"What I want you to do," said Seabury, "is to fix up a salad and some of the cold duck, and attend to the champagne. Meanwhile I think I'll go downstairs; I have an engagement to kill a man."

However, a moment later he thought better of it; *she* was standing by the mirror

—his own mirror—touching her eyes with her lace handkerchief and patting her hair with the prettiest, whitest hands.

"Kill him? Never: I'll canonize him!" muttered Seabury, enchanted. Behind him he heard the clink of glass and china, the pleasant sound of ice. She heard it, too, and turned.

"Of all the audacity!" she said in a low voice, looking at him under her level brows. But there was something in her eyes that gave him courage—and in his that gave her courage.... Besides, they were dreadfully hungry.

"You refuse to tell me?"

"I do," she said. "If you have not wit enough to find out my name without betraying me to your sister you do not deserve to know my name—or me."

It was nearly two o'clock, they had risen, and the gay little flowery table remained between them; the salad and duck were all gone. But the froth purred in their frail glasses, breaking musically in the candle-lit silence.

"Will you tell me your name before I go?"

"I will not." Her bright eyes and fair young face defied him.

"Very well; as soon as I learn it I shall be more generous—for I have something to tell you; and I'll do it, too!"

"Are you sure you will?" she asked, flushing up.

"Yes, I am sure."

"I may not care to hear what you have to say, Mr. Seabury."

They regarded one another intently, curiously. Presently her slender hand fell as by accident on the stem of her wine-glass; he lifted his glass: very, very slowly. She raised hers, looking at him over it.

"To—what I shall tell you—when I learn your name!" he said, deliberately.

Faint fire burned in her cheeks; her eyes fell, then were slowly raised to his; in silence, still looking at one another, they drank the toast.

"Dammit!" I said, impatiently, "is that all?"

"Yes," he said, "that will be about all. I'm going home to bed."



CHAPTER XX

DOWN THE SEINE

My daughter Alida and my daughter Dulcima had gone to drive with the United States Ambassador and his daughter that morning, leaving me at the Hôtel with instructions as to my behaviour in their absence, and injunctions not to let myself be run over by any cab, omnibus, automobile, or bicycle whatever.

Considerably impressed by their solicitude, I retired to the smoking-room, believing myself safe there from any form of vehicular peril. But the young man from Chicago sauntered in and took a seat close beside me, with benevolent intentions toward relieving my isolation.

I preferred any species of juggernaut to his rough riding over the English language, so I left him murkily enveloped in the fumes of his own cigar and sauntered out into the street.

The sky was cloudless; the air was purest balm. Through fresh clean streets I wandered under the cool shadows of flowering chestnuts, and presently found myself on the quay near the Pont des Arts, leaning over and looking at the river slipping past between its walls of granite.

In a solemn row below me sat some two dozen fishermen dozing over their sport. Their long white bamboo poles sagged, their red and white quill-floats bobbed serenely on the tide. Truly here was a company of those fabled Lotus-eaters, steeped in slumber; a dreamy, passionless band of brothers drowsing in the sunshine.

Looking east along the grey stone quays I could see hundreds and hundreds of others, slumbering over their fishpoles; looking west, the scenery was similar.

"The fishing must be good here," I observed to an aged man, leaning on the quay-wall beside me.

"*Comme ça*," he said.

I leaned there lazily, waiting to see the first fish caught. I am an angler myself, and understand patience; but when I had waited an hour by my watch I looked suspiciously at the aged man beside me. He was asleep, so I touched him.

He roused himself without resentment. "Have you," said I, sarcastically, "ever seen better fishing than this, in the Seine?"

"Yes," he said; "I once saw a fish caught."

"And when was that?" I asked.

"That," said the aged man, "was in 1853."

I strolled down to the lower quay, smoking. As I passed the row of anglers I looked at them closely. They all were asleep.

Just above was anchored one of those floating *lavoirs* in which the washerwomen of Paris congregate to beat your linen into rags with flat wooden paddles, and soap the rags snow-white at the cost of a few pennies.

The soapsuds from the washing floated off among the lines of the slumbering fishermen. Perhaps that was one reason why the fish were absent from the scenery. On the other hand, however, I was given to understand that a large sewer emptied into the river near the Pont des Arts, and that the fishing was best in such choice spots. Still something certainly was wrong somewhere, for either the sewer and the soapsuds had killed the fish, or they had all migrated up the sewer on an inland and subterranean picnic to meet the elite among the rats of Paris, and spend the balance of the day.

The river was alive with little white saucy steamboats, rushing up and down the Seine with the speed of torpedo craft. There was a boat-landing within a few paces of where I stood, so, when a boat came along and stopped to discharge a few passengers, I stepped aboard, bound for almost anywhere, and not over-anxious to get there too quickly. Neither did I care to learn my own destination, and when the ticket agent in naval uniform came along to inquire where I might be going, I told him to sell me a pink ticket because it looked pretty. As all Frenchmen believe that all Americans are a little mad, my request, far from surprising the ticket agent, simply confirmed his national theory; and he gave me my ticket very kindly, with an air of protection such as one involuntarily assumes toward children and invalids.

"You are going to Saint Cloud," he said. "I'll tell you when to get off the boat."

"Thank you," said I.

"You ought to be going the other way," he added.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because Charenton lies the other way," he replied, politely, and passed on to sell his tickets.

Now I had forgotten much concerning Paris in my twenty years of absence.

There was a pretty girl sitting on the bench beside me, with elbows resting on the railing behind. I glanced at her. She was smiling.

"Pardon, madame," said I, knowing enough to flatter her, though she had "mademoiselle" written all over her complexion of peaches and cream—"pardon, madame, but may I, a stranger, venture to address you for a word of information?"

"You may, monsieur," she said, with a smile which showed an edge of white teeth under her scarlet lips.

"Then, if you please, where is Charenton?"

"Up the river," she replied, smiling still.

"And what," said I, "is the principal feature of the town of Charenton?"

"The Lunatic Asylum, monsieur."

I thanked her and looked the other way.

Our boat was now flying past the Louvre. Above in the streets I could see cabs and carriages passing, and the heads and shoulders of people walking on the endless stone terraces. Below, along the river bank, our boat passed between an almost unbroken double line of dozing fishermen.

Now we shot out from the ranks of *lavoirs* and bathhouses, and darted on past the Champ de Mars; past the ugly sprawling Eiffel Tower, past the twin towers of the Trocadero, and out under the huge stone viaduct of the Point du Jour.

Here the banks of the river were green and inviting. Cafés, pretty suburban dance-houses, restaurants, and tiny hotels lined the shores. I read on the signs such names as "The Angler's Retreat," "At the Great Gudgeon," "The Fisherman's Paradise," and I saw sign-boards advertising fishing, and boats to let.

"I should think," said I, turning to my pretty neighbor, "that it would pay to remove these fisherman's signs to Charenton."

"Why?" she asked.

"Because," said I, "nobody except a Charentonian would ever believe that any

fish inhabit this river."

"Saint Cloud! Saint Cloud!" called out the ticket-agent as the boat swung in to a little wooden floating pier on the left bank of the river.

The ticket-agent carefully assisted me over the bridge to the landing-dock, and I whispered to him that I was the Duke of Flatbush and would be glad to receive him any day in Prospect Park.

Then, made merry at my own wit, I strolled off up the steps that led to the bank above.

There, perched high above the river, I found a most delightful little rustic restaurant where I at once ordered luncheon served for me on the terrace, in the open air.

The bald waiter sped softly away to deliver my order, and I sipped an Amer-Picon, and bared my head to the warm breeze which swept up the river from distant meadows deep in clover.

There appeared to be few people on the terrace. One young girl, however, whom I had seen on the boat, I noticed particularly because she seemed to be noticing me. Then, fearing that my stare might be misunderstood, I turned away and soon forgot her when the bald waiter returned with an omelet, bread and butter, radishes and a flask of white wine.

Such an omelet! such wine! such butter! and the breeze from the west blowing sweet as perfume from a nectarine, and the green trees waving and whispering, and the blessed yellow sunshine over all——

"Pardon, monsieur."

I turned. It was my pretty little Parisienne of the steamboat, seated at the next small table, demurely chipping an egg.

"I beg *your* pardon," said I, hastily, for the leg of my chair was pinning her gown to the ground.

"It is nothing," she said brightly, with a mischievous glance under her eyes.

"My child," said I, "it was very stupid of me, and I am certainly old enough to know better."

"Doubtless, monsieur; and yet you do not appear to be very, very old."

"I am very aged," said I—"almost forty-five." And I smiled a retrospective

smile, watching the bubbles breaking in my wine-glass.

Memory began to work, deftly, among the debris of past years. I saw myself a student of eighteen, gayly promenading Paris with my tutor, living a monotonous colourless life in a city of which I knew nothing and saw nothing save through the windows of my English pension or in the featureless streets of the American quarter, under escort of my tutor and my asthmatic aunt, Miss Janet Van Twiller.

That year spent in Paris, to "acquire the language" in a house where nothing but English was spoken, had still a vague, tender charm for me, because in that year I was young. I grew older when I shook the tutor, side-stepped my aunt, and moved across the river.

Once, only once, had the placid serenity of that year been broken. It was one day—a day like this in spring—when, for some reason, even now utterly unknown to me, I deliberately walked out of the house alone in defiance of my tutor and my aunt, and wandered all day long through unknown squares and parks and streets intoxicated with my own freedom. And I remember, that day—which was the twin of this—sitting on the terrace of a tiny café in the Latin Quarter, I drifted into idle conversation with a demure little maid who was sipping a red syrup out of a tall thin glass.

Twenty-seven years ago! And here I was again, in the scented spring sunshine, with the same west wind whispering of youth and freedom, and my heart not a day older.

"My child," said I to the little maid, "twenty-seven years ago you drank pink strawberry syrup in a tall iced glass."

"I do not understand you, monsieur," she faltered.

"You cannot, mademoiselle. I am drinking to the memory of my dead youth."

And I touched my lips to the glass.

"I wonder," she said, under her breath, "what I am to do with the rest of the day?"

"I could have told you," said I—"twenty-seven years ago."

"Perhaps you could tell me better now?" she said, innocently.

I looked out into the east where the gold dome of the Tomb rose glimmering through a pale-blue haze. "Under that dome lies an Emperor in his crypt of porphyry," said I. "Deeper than his dust, bedded in its stiff shroud of gold, lies

my dead youth, sleeping forever in the heart of this fair young world of spring."

I touched my glass idly, then lifted it.

"Yet," said I, "the pale sunshine of winter lies not unkindly on snow and ice, sometimes. I drink to your youth and beauty, my child."

"Is that all?" she asked, wonder-eyed.

I thought a moment: "No, not all. Williams isn't the only autocratic interpreter of Fate, Chance, and Destiny."

"Williams!" she repeated, perplexed.

"You don't know him. He writes stories for a living. But he'll never write the story I might very easily tell you in the sunshine here."

After a pause she said: "Are you going to?"

"I think I will," I said. And my eyes fixed smiling upon the sunny horizon, I began:



Now, part of this story is to be vague as a mirrored face at dusk; and part is to be as precise as the reflection of green trees in the glass of the stream; and all is to be as capricious as the flight of that wonderful butterfly of the South which is called Ajax by the reverent, and The White Devil by the profane. Incidentally, it is the story of Jones and the Dryad.

The profession of Jones was derided by the world at large. He collected butterflies; and it may be imagined what the American public thought of him when they did not think he was demented. But a large, over-nourished and blasé millionaire, wearied of collecting pigeon-blood rubies, first editions and Rembrandts, through sheer *ennui* one day commissioned Jones to gather for him the most magnificent and complete collection of American butterflies that could possibly be secured—not only single perfect specimens of the two sexes in each species, but series on series of every kind, showing local varieties, seasonal variations in size and colour, strange examples of albinism and polymorphic phenomena—in fact, this large, benevolent and intellectual capitalist wanted something which nobody else had, so he selected Jones and damned the expense. Nobody else had Jones: that pleased him; Jones was to secure specimens that nobody else had: and that would be doubly gratifying. Therefore he provided

Jones with a five-year contract, an agreeable salary, turned him loose on a suspicious nation, and went back to hunt up safe investments for an income the size of which had begun to annoy him.

"This part of the story is clear enough, is it not, my child?"

"Are *you* Jones?"

"Don't ask questions," I said, seriously.

"The few delirious capers cut by Jones subsequent to the signing of the contract consisted of a debauch at the Astor Library, a mad evening with seven aged gentlemen at the Entomological Society, and the purchase of a ticket to Florida. This last spasm was his undoing; he went for butterflies, and the first thing he did was to trip over the maliciously extended foot of Fate and fall plump into the open arms of Destiny. And in a week he was playing golf. This part is sufficiently vague, I hope. Is it?"

She said it was; so I continued:

The Dryad, with her sleeves rolled up above her pretty elbows, was preparing to assault a golf ball; Jones regarded the proceedings with that inscrutable expression which, no doubt, is bestowed upon certain creatures as a weapon for self-protection.

"Don't talk to me while I'm driving," said the Dryad.

"No," said Jones.

"Don't even say 'no!'" insisted the Dryad.

A sharp thwack shattered the silence; the golf ball sailed away toward the fifth green, landing in a gully. "Oh, bother!" exclaimed the Dryad, petulantly, as the small black caddie pattered forward, irons rattling in his quiver. "Now, Mr. Jones, it is up to you"—doubtless a classically mythological form of admonition common to Dryads but now obsolete.

The Dryad, receiving no reply, looked around and beheld Jones, net poised,

advancing on tiptoe across the green.

"What is it—a snake?" inquired the Dryad in an unsteady voice.

"It is The White Devil!" whispered Jones.

The Dryad's skirts were short enough as it was, but she hastily picked them up. She had a right to. "Does it bite?" she whispered, looking carefully around in the grass. But all she could see was a strangely beautiful butterfly settled on a blue wild blossom which swayed gently in the wind on the edge of the jungle. So she dropped her skirts. She had a right to.

Now, within a few moments of the hour when Jones had first laid eyes on her, and she on Jones, he had confided to her his family history, his ambitions, his ethical convictions, and his theories concerning the four known forms of the exquisite Ajax butterfly of Florida. She had been young enough to listen without yawning—which places her age somewhere close to eighteen. Besides, she had remembered almost everything that Jones had said, which confirms a diagnosis of her disease. There could be no doubt about it; the Dryad was afflicted with extreme Youth, for she now recognized the butterfly from the eulogy of Jones, and her innocent heart began a steady tattoo upon her ribs as Jones, on tiptoe, crept nearer and nearer, net outstretched.

The moment was solemn; breathless, hatless, bare-armed, the Dryad advanced, skirts spread as though to shoo chickens.

"Don't," whispered Jones.

But the damage had been accomplished; Ajax jerked his pearl and ashen banded wings, shot with the fiery crimson bar, flashed into the air, and was gone like the last glimmer of a fading sun-spot.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" cried the Dryad, clasping her highly ornamental hands; "what on earth will you think of my stupidity?"

"Nothing," said Jones, resolutely, swallowing hard and gazing at the tangled jungle.

"It was too stupid," insisted the Dryad; and, as the silence of Jones assented, she added, "but it is not very nice of you to say so."

"Why, I didn't," cried Jones.

"You did," said the Dryad, tears of vexation in her blue eyes. "And to pay for your discourtesy you shall make me a silk net and I shall give up golf and spend

my entire time in hunting for White Devils, to make amends."

The suggested penance appeared to attract Jones.

"Give up golf—which I am perfectly mad about," repeated the Dryad, "just because you were horrid when I tried to help you."

"That will be delightful," said Jones, naïvely. "We will hunt Ajax together—all day, every day——"

"Oh, I shall catch—something—the first time I try," observed the Dryad, airily. She teed up a practice ball, hit it a vicious whack, followed its flight with narrowing blue eyes, and, turning placidly upon Jones, smiled a dangerous smile.

"If I don't catch an Ajax before you do I'll forfeit anything you please," she said.

"I'll take it," said Jones.

"But," cried the Dryad, "what do you offer against it?"

"Whatever I ask from you," he said, deliberately.

"You are somewhat vague, Mr. Jones."

"I won't be when I win."

"Tell me what you want—if you win!"

"What? With this caddie hanging around and listening?" The Dryad, wide-eyed and flushed, regarded him in amazement.

Jones picked up a pinch of wet sand from the box, moulded it with great care into a tiny truncated cone, set it on the tee, set his ball on top of it, whipped the air persuasively with his driver once or twice, and, settling himself into the attitude popularly attributed to the Colossus of Rhodes, hit the ball for the longest, cleanest drive he had ever perpetrated.

"Dryad," he said, politely, "it is now up to you."



Of all the exquisite creatures that float through the winter sunshine of the semi-tropics this is the most exquisite and spirituelle. Long, slender, swallow-tailed wings, tinted with pearl and primrose, crossed with ashy stripes and double-barred with glowing crimson—this is the shy, forest-haunting creature that the

Dryad sought to snare, and sought in vain.

Sometimes, standing on the long, white shell roads, where myriads of glittering dragon-flies sailed, far away a pale flash would catch the sun for an instant; and "Ready! Look out!" would cry the Dryad. Vanity! Swifter than a swallow the Ajax passed, a pearly blurr against the glare of the white road; swish! swish! the silken nets swung in vain.

"Oh, bother," sighed the Dryad.

Again, in the dim corridors of the forest, where tall palms clustered and green live oaks spread transparent shadows across palmetto thickets, far in some sunlit glade a tiny wing-flash would bring the Dryad's forest cry: "Quick! Oh, quick!" But the woodland ghost was gone.

"Oh, bother, bother!" sighed the Dryad. "There are flowers—the sparkleberry is in blossom—there is bloom on the China tree, but this phantom never stops! Can nothing stop it?"

Day after day, guarding the long, white road, the Dryad saw the phantom pass—always flying north; day after day in the dim forest, the hurrying, pale-winged, tireless creatures fled away, darting always along some fixed yet invisible aerial path. Nothing lured them, neither the perfumed clusters of the China-berry, nor the white forest flowers; nothing checked them, neither the woven curtain of creepers across the forest barrier, nor the jungle walled with palms.

To the net of the Dryad and of Jones had fallen half a thousand jewelled victims; the exquisite bronzed Berenice, the velvet and yellow Palamedes, the great orange-winged creatures brilliant as lighted lanterns. But in the gemmed symmetry of the casket the opalescent heart was missing; and the Dryad, uncomforted, haunted the woodlands, roaming in defiance of the turquoise-tinted lizards and the possible serpent whose mouth is lined with snow-white membranes—prowling in contempt of that coiled horror that lies waiting, S shaped, a mass of matted grey and velvet diamond pattern from which two lidless eyes glitter unwinking.

"How on earth did anybody ever catch an Ajax?" inquired the Dryad at the close of one fruitless, bootless day's pursuit.

"I suppose," said Jones, "that every year or so the Ajax alights." That was irony.

"On what?" insisted the Dryad.

"Oh, on—something," said Jones, vaguely. "Butterflies are, no doubt, like the

human species; flowers tempt some butterflies, mud-puddles attract others. One or the other will attract our Ajax some day."

That night Jones, with book open upon his knees, sat in the lamplight of the great veranda and read tales of Ajax to the Dryad; how that, in the tropics, Ajax assumes four forms, masquerading as *Floridensis* in winter and as *Telamonides* in summer, and how he wears the exquisite livery of Marcellus, too, and even assumes, according to a gentleman named Walsh, a fourth form. Beautiful pictures of Ajax illumined the page where were also engraved the signs of Mars and of Venus. The Dryad looked at these; Jones looked at her; the rest of the hotel looked at them. Jones read on.

Sleepy-eyed the Dryad listened; outside in the burnished moonlight the whippoorwill's spirit call challenged the star-set silence; and far away in the blue night she heard the deep breathing of the sea. Presently the Dryad slept in her rocking-chair, curved wrist propping her head; Jones was chagrined. He need not have been, for the Dryad was dreaming of him.



There came a day late in April when, knee deep in palmetto scrub, the Dryad and Jones stood leaning upon their nets and scanning the wilderness for the swift-winged forest phantom they had sought so long. Ajax was on the wing; glimpse after glimpse they had of him, a pale shadow in the sun, a misty spot in the shadow, then nothing but miles of palmetto scrub and the pink stems of tall pines.

Suddenly an Ajax darted into the sunny glade where they stood, and a ragged, faded brother Ajax fluttered up from the ground and, Ajax-like, defied the living lightning.

Wing beating wing they closed in battle, whirling round and round one another above the palmetto thicket. The ragged and battered butterfly won, the other darted away with the speed of a panic-stricken jacksnipe, and his shabby opponent quietly settled down on a sun-warmed twig.

Then it was that inspiration seized the Dryad: "Mr. Jones, you trick wild ducks into gunshot range by setting painted wooden ducks afloat close to the shore where you lie hidden. Catch that ragged Ajax, place him upon a leaf, and who knows?"

Decoy a butterfly? Decoy the forest phantom drunk with the exhilaration of his own mad flight! It was the invention of a new sport.

Scarcely appearing to move at all, so cautious was his progress, Jones slowly drew near the basking and battle-tattered creature that had once been Ajax. There was a swift drop of the silken net, a flutter, and all was over. In the palm of Jones's hand, dead, lay the faded and torn insect with scarce a vestige of former beauty on the motionless wings.

Doubting, yet stirred to hope, he placed the dead butterfly on a palmetto frond, wings expanded to catch the sun; and then, standing within easy net-stroke, the excited Dryad and Jones strained their eyes to catch the first far glimpse of Ajax in the wilderness.

What was that distant flash of light? A dragon-fly sailing? There it is again! And there again! Nearer, nearer, following the same invisible aerial path.

"Quick!" whispered the Dryad. A magnificent Ajax flashed across the glade, turned an acute angle in mid-air, and in an instant hung hovering over the lifeless insect on the palm leaf.

Swish-h! A wild fluttering in the net, a soft cry of excitement from the Dryad, and there, dead, in the palm of the hand of Jones, lay the first perfect specimen, exquisite, flawless, beautiful beyond words.

Before the Dryad could place the lovely creature in safety another Ajax darted into the glade, sheered straight for the decoy, and the next instant was fluttering, a netted captive.

Then the excitement grew; again and again Ajax appeared in the vicinity; and the tension only increased as the forest phantom, unseeing or unheeding the decoy, darted on in a mad ecstasy of flight.

No hunter, crouched in the reeds, could find keener excitement watching near his decoys than the Dryad found that April day, motionless, almost breathless, scanning the forest depths for the misty-winged phantom of the tropic wilderness. One in six turned to the decoy; there were long, silent intervals of waiting and of strained expectancy; there were false alarms as a distant drifting dragon-fly glimmered in the sun; but one by one the swift-winged victims dashed at the decoy and were taken in their strength and pride and all their unsullied beauty. And when the sport of that April morning was over, and when Denis, the Ethiopian, turned the horses' heads homeward, Ajax Floridensis, Ajax Marcellus and Ajax Telamonides were no longer mysteries to the Dryad and to

Jones.

But there was a deeper mystery to solve before returning to the vast caravansary across the river; and while they hesitated to attack it, I, mademoiselle, having met and defeated Ajax in fair and open trial of cunning and of wit, think fit to throw a ray of modern light upon this archaic tale.

It is true that Ajax, of the family of Papilio, rivals the wind in flight, and seldom, in spring and summer, deigns to alight. Yet I have seen Ajax Telamonides alight in the middle of the roadway, and, netting him, have found him fresh from the chrysalis, and therefore weak and inexperienced. Ajax Floridensis I have taken with a net as he feasted on the bunches of white sparkleberry on the edge of the jungle.

Rarely have I seen Ajax seduced by the wild phlox blossoms, but I have sometimes caught him sipping there.

As for the decoy, I have used it and taken with it scores and scores of Ajax butterflies which otherwise I could not have hoped to capture. This is not all; the great Tiger Swallowtail of the orange groves can be decoyed by a dead comrade of either sex; so, too, can the royal, velvet-robed Palamedes butterfly; and when the imperial Turnus sails high among the magnolias' topmost branches, a pebble cast into the air near him will sometimes bring him fluttering down, following the stone as it falls to the ground. These three butterflies, however, are generally easily decoyed, and all love flowers. Yet, in experimenting with decoys, I have never seen an Ajax decoy to any dead butterfly except an Ajax; and the dead butterfly may be of either sex, and as battered as you please.

It is supposed by some that butterflies can distinguish colour and form at no greater distance than five feet; and experiments in decoying appear to bear out this theory. Butterflies decoy to their own species, even to faded and imperfect ones.

Of half a dozen specimens set out on leaves and twigs, among which were Papilio Palamedes, Cresphontes, and Turnus, Ajax decoyed only to an imperfect and faded Ajax, and finally, when among that brilliant array of specimens a single upper wing of a dead Ajax was placed on a broad leaf, Ajax came to it, ignoring the other perfect specimens.

Yet Ajax will fight in single combat with any live butterfly, and so will Palamedes, Turnus, and Cresphontes.

If a female Luna moth is placed in a cage of mosquito netting and hung out of

the window at night she is almost certain to attract all the male Luna moths in the neighbourhood before morning. In this case, as it is in the case of the other moths of the same group, it is the odor that attracts.

But in the case of a dead Ajax butterfly it appears to be colour even more than form; and it can scarcely be odor, because the Ajax butterflies of both sexes decoy to a dead and dried butterfly of either sex. With this abstruse observation, mademoiselle, I, personally, retire into the jungle to peep out at a passing vehicle driven by an Ethiopian known as Denis, and containing two young people of sexes diametrically opposed. And I am pleasantly conscious that I can no longer conceal their identity from you, mademoiselle.

"No," she said, "I know who they are. Please continue about them."

So I smiled and continued:

"And after all these weeks, during which I have so faithfully accompanied you, are you actually going to insist that I lost my bet?" asked the Dryad in a low voice.

"But you didn't, did you?" said the pitiless Jones.

"I let you catch the first Ajax. I might have prevented you; I might have even caught it myself!"

"But you didn't, did you?" said the pitiless Jones.

"Because," continued the Dryad, flushing, "I was generous enough to think only of capturing the butterflies, while all the time it appears *you* were thinking of something else. How sordid!" she added, scornfully.

"You admit I won the bet?" persisted that meanest of men.

"I admit nothing, Mr. Jones."

"Didn't I win the bet?"

Silence.

"Didn't I——"

"Goodness, yes!" cried the Dryad. "Now what are you going to do about it?"

"You said," observed Jones, "that you would forfeit anything I desired. Didn't you?"

The Dryad looked at him, then looked away.

"Didn't you?"

Silence.

"Di——"

"Yes, I did."

"Then I am to ask what I desire?"

No answer.

"So," continued Jones in a low voice, "I do ask it."

Still no answer.

"Will you——"

"Mr. Jones," she said, turning a face toward him on which was written utter consternation.

"Will you," continued Jones, "permit me to name the first new butterfly that I capture, after you?"

Her eyes widened.

"Is—is *that* all you desire?" she faltered. Suddenly her eyes filled.

"Absolutely all," said Jones simply—"to name a new species of butterfly after my wife——"

However, that was the simplest part of the whole matter; the trouble was all ahead, waiting for them on the veranda—two hundred pounds of wealthy trouble sitting in a rocking-chair, tatting, and keeping tabs upon the great clock and upon the trolley cars as they arrived in decorous procession from the golf links.



There was a long, long silence.

"Is—is that all?" inquired my little neighbour.

"Can't you guess the rest?"

But she only sighed, looking down at the lace handkerchief which she had been absently twisting in her lap.

"You know," said I, "what keys unlock the meaning of all stories?"

She nodded.

"The keys of The Past," I said.

She sighed, looking down into her smooth little empty hands:

"I threw them away, long ago," she said. "For me there remains only one more door. And that unlocks of itself."

And we sat there, thinking, through the still summer afternoon.

CHAPTER XXI

IN A BELGIAN GARDEN

That evening I found Williams curled up in his corner at the Café Jaune.

"You are sun-burned," he said, inspecting me.

"A little. I've been in Florida."

"What?"

"With the ghosts of years ago. But it seemed very realistic to me as I sat in the sun and recalled it. Possibly it was even real enough to sun-burn me a little."

He eyed me with considerable chagrin. Perhaps he thought that he had the monopoly of poetic fancies. It was most agreeable to me to touch him up. They're a jealous bunch, those whittlers of fact into fiction.

However, he brightened as he drew a letter from his pocket:

"You remember Kingsbury, of course?" he asked.

"Perfectly."

"And his friend Smith?"

"Certainly."

"I've a letter here from Kingsbury. He expects to be in Paris this autumn."

"I'd like to see him," said I, "but I'm going home before Autumn."

"Haven't you seen him in all these years?"

"Not once."

"And you never heard——"

"Oh, go on, Williams, and tell your story. I'm perfectly willing to listen. Cut out all that coy business and tear off a few page-proofs. Besides," I added, maliciously, "I know how it's done, now."

"*How* do you know?"

"Because I did a little in that line myself this afternoon. Let me tell you

something; there isn't a profession in all the world which can be so easily and quickly acquired as yours. Therefore pin no more orders and ribbons and stars and medals on yourself. The only difference between you and your public is that they have no time to practice your profession in addition to their own."

Which took him down a peg or two, until we both took down another peg or two. But when I called the waiter and ordered a third, he became more cheerful.

"You're a jollier," he said, "aren't you?"

"I did a little this afternoon. Go on about Kingsbury and Smithy. After all, Williams, you really do it much better than I."

Which mollified him amazingly, and he began with a brisk confidence in his powers of narration:



When Kingsbury had finished his course at the University of Paris, there appeared to be little or nothing further in the way of human knowledge for him to acquire. However, on the chance of disinterring a fragment or two of amorphous information which he might find use for in his projected book, *The Economy of Marriage*, he allowed himself another year of travel, taking the precaution to invite Smith—the flippancy of Smith being calculated to neutralise any over-intellectual activity in himself.

He needed a rest; he had had the world on his hands too long—ever since his twentieth year. Smith was the man to give him mental repose. There was no use attempting to discuss social economy with Smith, or of interesting that trivial and inert mind in race suicide. Smith was flippant. Often and often Kingsbury thought: "How can he have passed through The University of Paris and remained flippant?" But neither Sorbonne nor Pantheon produced marked effect upon Smith, and although it is true that Paris horridly appealed to him, in the remainder of Europe he found nothing better to do than to unpack his trout-rod and make for the nearest puddle wherever they found themselves, whether in the Alps, the Tyrol, the Vosges, or the forests of Belgium, where they at present occupied a stucco-covered villa with servants, stables, hot-houses, and a likely trout stream for Smith to dabble in, at a sum per month so ridiculously reasonable that I shall not mention it for fear of depopulating my native land.

Besides, they had the youthful and widowed Countess of Semois for their

neighbour.

And so it came about that, in this leafy, sunny land of cream and honey, one very lovely morning, young Kingsbury, booted and spurred and still flushed from his early gallop through the soft wood-roads of the forest, found Smith at breakfast under the grape-arbour, immersed in a popular novel and a bowl of strawberries.

"Hello," said Smith, politely, pushing the fruit across the table. "The berries are fine; I took a corking trout an hour ago; we'll have it directly."

"I saw the Countess," said Kingsbury, carelessly unbuttoning his gloves as he stood there.

"Oh, you did? Well, which one is the Countess, the girl with the dark hair, or that stunning red-haired beauty?"

"How could I tell? I couldn't ride up and ask, could I? They were driving, as usual. The King was out, too; I wish he'd wear a decent hat."

"With the moral welfare of two hemispheres on your hands, you ought not to feel responsible for the King's derby," observed Smith.

Any exaggeration of fact always perplexed Kingsbury. He flattened out his gloves, stuck his riding-crop into his left boot, and looked at Smith through his monocle.

"For all the talk about the King," he said, "the peasantry salute him as reverently as though he were their father."

To which Smith, in his flippancy, replied:

monarch pray,	"The children for their
laddie;	Each buxom lass and
have they	A thousand reasons good
daddy."	To call the King their

Kingsbury retired to make his toilet; returned presently smelling less of the stables, seated himself, drowned a dozen luscious strawberries in cream, tasted one, and cast a patronising eye upon the trout, which had been prepared à la Meunière.

"Corker, isn't he?" observed Smith, contemplating the fish with pardonable pride. "He's poached, I regret to inform you."

"Poached?"

"Oh, not like an egg; I mean that I took him in private waters. It was a disgusting case of poaching."

"What on earth did you do that for?"

"Now, I'll explain that in a minute. You know where our stream flows under the arch in the wall which separates our grounds from the park next door? Well, I was casting away on our side, never thinking of mischief, when, flip! flop! spatter! splash! and, if you please, right under the water-arch in the wall this scandalous trout jumped. Of course, I put it to him good and plenty, but the criminal creature, on purpose to tempt me, backed off down stream and clean through the arch into our neighbour's water.

"'Is it poaching if I go over after him?' thought I. And, Kingsbury, do you know I had no time to debate that moral question, because, before I could reply to myself, I found myself hoisting a ladder to the top of the wall and lowering it on the other side—there are no steps on the other side. And what do you think? Before I could rouse myself with the cry of 'Trespasser! Help!' I found myself climbing down into the park and casting a fly with sinful accuracy.

"'Is it right?' I asked myself in an agony of doubt. But, alas, Kingsbury, before I had a ghost of a chance to answer myself in the negative I had hooked that trout fast; and there was the deuce to pay, for I'd forgotten my landing-net!"

He shook his head, helped Kingsbury to a portion of the trout, and refilled his own cup. "Isn't it awful," he said.

"It's on a par with most of your performances," observed the other, coldly. "I suppose you continued your foolish conduct with that girl, too."

"What girl?"

"And I suppose you kissed her again! Did you?"

"Kiss a girl?" stammered Smith. "Where have you been prowling?"

"Along the boundary wall on my side, if you want to know. A week ago I chanced to be out by moonlight, and I saw you kiss her, Smith, across the top of the park wall. It is your proper rôle, of course, to deny it, but let me tell you that I think it's a pretty undignified business of yours, kissing the Countess of

Semois's servants——"

"What the deuce——"

"Well, *who* was it you kissed over the top of the wall, then?"

"I don't know," said Smith, sullenly.

"You don't know! It wasn't the Countess, was it?"

"Of course it wasn't the Countess. I tell you I don't know who it was."

"Nonsense!"

"No, it isn't. What happened was this: I climbed up the niches to sit on the wall by moonlight and watch the trout jump; and just as my head cleared the wall the head of a girl came up on the other side—right against the moon, so it was just a shadow—a sort of silhouette. It was an agreeable silhouette; I couldn't really see her features."

"That was no reason for kissing them, was it?"

"No—oh, not at all. The way *that* came about was most extraordinary. You see, we were both amazed to find our two noses so close together, and I said—something foolish—and she laughed—the prettiest, disconcerted little laugh, and that moon was there, and suddenly, to my astonishment, I realised that I was going to kiss her if she didn't move.... And—she didn't."

"You mean to say——"

"Yes, I do; I haven't the faintest notion who it was I kissed. It couldn't have been the Countess, because I've neither fought any duels nor have I been arrested. I refuse to believe it could have been the cook, because there was something about that kiss indescribably aromatic—and, Kingsbury, she didn't say a word—she scarcely breathed. Now a cook would have screamed, you know——"

"I *don't* know," interrupted Kingsbury.

"No, no, of course—neither do I."

"Idiot!" said Kingsbury wrathfully. "Suppose it *had* been the Countess! Think of the consequences! Keep away from that wall and don't attempt to ape the depravity of a morally sick continent. You shocked me in Paris; you're mortifying me here. If you think I'm going to be identified with your ragged morals you are mistaken."

"That's right; don't stand for 'em. I've been reading novels, and I need a jar from

an intelligence absolutely devoid of imagination."

"You'll get it if you don't behave yourself," said Kingsbury complacently. "The Countess of Semois probably knows who we are, and ten to one we'll meet her at that charity bazar at Semois-les-Bains this afternoon."

"I'm not going," said Smith, breaking an egg.

"Not going? You said you would go. Our Ambassador will be there, and we can meet the Countess if we want to."

"I don't want to. Suppose, after all, I had kissed *her*! No, I'm not going, I tell you."

"Very well; that's your own affair," observed the other, serenely occupied with the trout. "Perhaps you're right, too; perhaps the happy scullion whom you honoured may have complained about you to her mistress."

Smith sullenly tinkled the bell for more toast; a doll-faced maid in cap and apron brought it.

"Probably," said Kingsbury in English, "*that* is the species you fondled——"

Smith opened his novel and pretended to read; Kingsbury picked up the morning paper, propped it against a carafe, sipped his coffee, and inspected the headlines through his single eyeglass. For a few minutes peace and order hovered over the American breakfast; the men were young and in excellent appetite; the fragrance of the flowers was not too intrusive; discreet breezes stirred the leaves; and well-behaved little birds sang judiciously in several surrounding bushes.

As Kingsbury's eyes wandered over the paper, gradually focussing up a small paragraph, a frown began to gather on his youthful features.

"Here's a nice business!" he said, disgusted.

Smith looked up indifferently. "Well, what is it?" he asked, and then, seeing the expression on his friend's face, added: "Oh, I'll bet I know!"

"This," said Kingsbury, paying him no attention, "is simply sickening."

"A young life bartered for a coronet?" inquired Smith, blandly.

"Yes. Isn't it shameful? What on earth are our women thinking of? Are you aware, Smith, that over ninety-seven and three tenths per cent of such marriages are unhappy? Are you? Why, I could sit here and give you statistics——"

"Don't, all the same."

"Statistics that would shock even you. And I say solemnly, that I, as an American, as a humanitarian, as a student of social economics——"

"Help! Help!" complained Smith, addressing the butter.

"Social economics," repeated the other, firmly, "as a patriot, a man, and a future father, I am astounded at the women of my native land! Race suicide is not alone what menaces us; it is the exportation of our finest and most vigorous stock to upbuild a bloodless and alien aristocracy at our expense."

Smith reached for the toast-rack.

"And if there's one thing that irritates me," continued Kingsbury, "it's the spectacle of wholesome American girls marrying titles. Every time they do it I get madder, too. Short-sighted people like you shrug their shoulders, but I tell you, Smith, it's a terrible menace to our country. Beauty, virtue, wealth, all are being drawn away from America into the aristocratic purlieus of England and the Continent."

"Then I think you ought to see about it at once," said Smith, presenting himself with another slice of toast.

Kingsbury applied marmalade to a muffin and flattened out the newspaper.

"I tell you what," he said, "some American ought to give them a dose of their own medicine."

"How?"

"By coming over here and marrying a few of their titled women."

Smith sipped his coffee, keeping his novel open with the other hand: "We do that sort of thing very frequently in literature, I notice. There's an American doing it now in this novel. I've read lots of novels like it, too." He laid his head on one side, musing. "As far as I can calculate from the romantic literature I have absorbed, I should say that we Americans have already carried off practically all of the available titled beauties of Europe."

"My friend," said Kingsbury, coldly, "do you realise that I am serious?"

"About what?"

"About this scandalous chase after titles. In the book on which I am now engaged I am embodying the following economic propositions: For every good, sweet, wholesome American girl taken from America to bolster up a degenerate title, we men of America ought to see to it that a physically sound and titled

young woman be imported and married to one of us."

"Why a titled one?"

"So that Europe shall feel it the more keenly," replied Kingsbury sternly. "I've often pondered the matter. If only one American could be found sufficiently self-sacrificing to step forward and set the example by doing it, I am convinced, Smith, that the tardy wheels of justice would begin to revolve and rouse a nation too long imposed upon."

"Why don't you do something in that way yourself? There's a fine physical specimen of the Belgian nobility in the villa next door."

"I don't know her," said Kingsbury, turning a delicate shell pink.

"You will when you go to the bazar. Stop fiddling with that newspaper and answer me like a man."

But Kingsbury only reopened the newspaper and blandly scanned the columns. Presently he began muttering aloud as he skimmed paragraph after paragraph; but his mutterings were ignored by Smith, who, coffee-cup in hand, was again buried in his novel.

"I've a mind to try it," repeated Kingsbury in a higher key. "It is the duty of every decent American to improve his own race. If we want physical perfection in anything don't we select the best type obtainable? Why don't we do it in marrying? I tell you, Smith, this is the time for individual courage, honesty and decency. Our duty is clear; we must meet the impoverishment, which these titled marriages threaten, with a restless counter-raid into the enemy's country. When a European takes from us one of our best, let us take from Europe her best, health for health, wealth for wealth, title for title! By Heaven, Smith, I'm going to write a volume on this."

"Oh, you're going to *write* about it."

"I am."

"And then what?" asked Smith taking the newspaper from Kingsbury and opening it.

"What then? Why—why, some of us ought to give our country an example. I'm willing to do it—when I have time——"

"Here's your chance, then," urged Smith, studying the society column. "Here's all about the charity bazar at Semois-les-Bains this afternoon. The Countess sells

dolls there. Our Ambassador will be on hand, and you can meet her easily enough. The rest," he added, politely, "will, of course, be easy."

Kingsbury lighted a cigar, leaned back in his chair, and flung one booted leg over the other.

"If I were not here in Belgium for a rest—" he began.

"You are—but not alone for bodily and mental repose. Think how it would rest your conscience to offset that marriage which has irritated you by marrying the Countess of Semois—by presenting to your surprised and admiring country a superb and titled wife for patriotic purposes."

"I don't know which she is," retorted Kingsbury, intensely annoyed. "If she's the tall girl with dark hair and lots colour I could manage to fall in love easily enough. I may add, Smith, that you have an extraordinary way of messing up the English language."

He arose, walking out toward the gate, where the smiling little postman came trotting up to meet him, fishing out a dozen letters and papers.

"Letters from home, Smith," he observed, strolling back to the harbour. "Here's one for you"—he laid it beside Smith's plate—"and here's one from my sister—I'll just glance at it if you'll excuse me." He opened it and read placidly for a few moments. Then, of a sudden a terrible change came into his face; he hastily clapped his monocle to his eye, glared at the written page, set his teeth, and crumpled it furiously in his hand.

"Smith," he said, hoarsely, "my sister writes that she's engaged to marry an—an Englishman!"

"What of it?" inquired Smith.

"What of it? I tell you my sister—my *sister*—my sister—is going to marry a British title!"

"She's probably in love, isn't she? What's the harm——"

"Harm?"

For a full minute Kingsbury stood petrified, glaring at space, then he cast his cigar violently among the roses.

"I have a mind," he said, "to get into a top hat and frock coat and drive to Semois-les-Bains.... You say she sells dolls?"

"She's due to sell 'em, according to the morning paper."

For a few moments more Kingsbury paced the lawn; colour, due to wrath or rising excitement, touched his smooth, handsome face, deepening the mask of tan. He was good to look upon, and one of the most earnest young men the gods had ever slighted.

"You think I'm all theory, don't you?" he said, nervously. "You shrug those flippant shoulders of yours when I tell you what course an American who honors his country should pursue. Now I'll prove to you whether or not I'm sincere. I am deliberately going to marry the Countess of Semois; and this afternoon I shall take the necessary measures to fall in love with her. That," he added, excitedly, "can be accomplished if she is the dark-haired girl we've seen driving."

"Now, I don't suppose you really intend to do such a——"

"Yes, I do! It sounds preposterous, but it's logical. I'm going to practice what I expect to spend my life in preaching; that's all. Not that I want to marry just now—I don't; it's inconvenient. I don't want to fall in love, I don't want to marry, I don't want to have a dozen children," he said, irritably; "but I'm going to, Smith! I'm going to, for the sake of my country. Pro patria et gloria!"

"Right away?"

"What rot you talk, sometimes! But I'm ready to make my words mean something; I'm ready to marry the Countess of Semois. There is no possible room for doubt; any man can marry any woman he wants to; that is my absolute conviction. Anyhow, I shall ask her."

"As soon as you meet her?"

"Certainly not. I expect to take several days about it——"

"Why employ several days in sweet dissembling?"

"Confound it, I'm not going to dissemble! I'm going to let her know that I admire her the moment I meet her. I'm going to tell her about my theory of scientific marriages. If she is sensible—if she is the woman America requires—if she is the dark-haired girl—she'll understand." He turned squarely on Smith: "As for you, if you were the sort of American that you ought to be you would pick out some ornamental and wholesome young Belgian aristocrat and marry her in the shortest time that decency permits! That's what you'd do if you had a scintilla of patriotism in your lazy make-up!"

"No, I wouldn't——"

"You would! Look at yourself—a great, hulking, wealthy, idle young man, who stands around in puddles catching fish while Europe runs off our loveliest women under your bovine nose. Shame on you! Have you no desire to be up and doing?"

"Oh, of course," said Smith, unruffled; "if several passion-smitten duchesses should climb over the big wall yonder and chase me into the garden——"

Kingsbury swung on his spurred heels and strode into the house.



CHAPTER XXII

A YOUTHFUL PATRIOT

Smith sauntered out to the terrace, looked at the sky, sniffed the roses, and sat down in the shadow of a cherry tree, cocking his feet up and resting his novel on his knees. Several hours later, aroused by the mellow clash of harness and noise of wheels, he looked out over the terrace wall just in time to catch a glimpse of the victoria of his neighbour, gold and green livery, strawberry roans, flashing wheels and all; and quite alone under her brilliant sunshade, the dark-haired girl whom Kingsbury had decided to marry as soon as he could arrange to fall in love with her.

"I fancy she's the Countess, all right," mused Smith; "but, to me, the girl with red hair is vastly—more—more alluring——"

The sound of wheels again broke the thread of his sleepy meditation; their dog-cart was at the gate; and presently he perceived Kingsbury, hatted and gloved to perfection, get in, take the reins from the coachman, loop his whip, assume the posture popularly attributed to pupils of Howlett, and go whirling away through the lazy sunshine of a perfect Belgian afternoon.

"The beast has lunched without me," muttered Smith, yawning and looking at his watch. Then he got up, stretched, tinkled the bell, and when the doll-faced maid arrived, requested an omelet à la Semois and a bottle of claret.

He got it in due time, absorbed it lazily, casting a weatherwise eye on the sky at intervals with a view to afternoon fishing; but the sun was too bright; besides, his book had become interesting in a somewhat maudlin fashion, inasmuch as the lovers must come to a clinch in the next chapter or not at all.

"You can't tell in modern novels," he muttered; "a girl has a way of side-stepping just as the bell rings: but the main guy ought to make good within the next page or two. If he doesn't he's a dub!"

With which comment he sought his hammock for an hour's needed repose; but he had slumbered longer than that when he found himself sitting bolt upright, the telephone bell ringing in his ears.

Comfortably awake now, he slid from the hammock, and, entering the house,

stepped into the smoking-room.

"Hello!" he said, unhooking the receiver.

Kingsbury's voice replied: "I'm here in Semois-les-Bains, at the charity bazar. Can you distinguish what I say?"

"Perfectly, my Romeo! Proceed."

"I'm in a fix. Our Ambassador didn't come, and I don't know anybody to take me over and present me."

"Buy a doll, idiot!"

"Confound it, I've already bought ten! That doesn't give me the privilege of doing anything but buying ten more. She's busy; about five million people are crowding around her."

"Buy every doll she has! Put her out of business, man! Then if you can't fix it somehow you're a cuckoo. Is the Countess the dark-haired girl?"

"Certainly."

"How do you know?"

"Isn't she here selling dolls? Didn't the paper say she was going to?"

"Yes—but hadn't you better find out for certain before you——"

"I am certain; anyway, I don't care. Smith, she is the most radiantly——"

"All right; ring off——"

"Wait! I wanted to tell you that she has the prettiest way of smiling every time I buy a doll. And then, while she wraps up the infernal thing in ribbons and tissue we chat a little. I'd like to murder our Ambassador! Do you think that if I bought her entire stock——"

"Yes, I do!"

"What do you think?"

"What you do."

"But I don't think anything at all. I am asking you——"

"Try it, anyhow."

"All right. Hold the wire, Smith. I'll report progress——"

"What! Stand here and wait——"

"Don't be selfish. I'll return in a moment."

The "moment" stretched into a buzzing, crackling half hour, punctuated by impatient inquiries from Central. Suddenly an excited: "Hello, Smith!"

"Hello, you infernal——"

"I've done it! I've bought every doll! She's the sweetest thing; I told her I had a plan for endowing a ward in any old hospital she might name, and she thinks we ought to talk it over, so I'm going to sit out on the terrace with her—Smith!"

"What?"

"Oh, I thought you'd gone! I only wanted to say that she is far, far lovelier than I had supposed. I can't wait here talking with you any longer. Good-by!"

"Is she the Countess?" shouted Smith incredulously. But Kingsbury had rung off.



CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE WALL

Smith retired to his room to bathe, clothed himself in snowy linen and fresh tennis flannels, and descended again, book under his arm, to saunter forth through heavy tangles of cinnamon-tinted Flemish roses and great sweet-scented peonies, musing on love and fate.

"Kingsbury and his theories! The Countess of Semois will think him crazy. She'll think us both crazy! And I am not sure that we're not; youth is madness; half the world is lunatic! Take me, for example; I never did a more unexpected thing than kissing that shadow across the wall. I don't know why, I don't know how, but I did it; and I am out of jail yet. Certainly it must have been the cook. Oh, Heavens! If cooks kiss that way, what, *what* must the indiscretion of a Countess resemble?... She *did* kiss back.... At least there was a soft, tremulous, perfumed flutter—a hint of delicate counter-pressure——"

But he had arrived at the wall by that time.

"How like a woodland paradise!" he murmured sentimentally, youthful face upraised to the trees. "How sweet the zephyr! How softly sing the dicky-birds! I wonder—I wonder—" But what it was that perplexed him he did not say; he stood eying the top of the wall as the furtive turkey eyed its selected roost before coyly hopping thither.

"What's the use? If I see her I'll only take fright and skulk homeward. Why do I return again and again to the scene of guilt? Is it Countess or cook that draws me, or some one less exalted in the culinary confine? Why, why should love get busy with me? Is this the price I pay for that guileless kiss? Am I to be forever 'it' in love's gay game of tag?"

He ascended the steplike niche in the wall, peeped fearfully over into his neighbour's chase. Tree and tangle slept in the golden light of afternoon; a cock-pheasant strutted out of a thicket, surveyed the solitude with brilliant eyes, and strutted back again; a baby rabbit frisked across the carrefour into the ferny warren beyond; and "Bubble, bubble, flowed the stream, like an old song through a dream."

Sprawling there flat on top of the sun-warmed stucco wall, white sunlight barring the pages of his book, he lifted his head to listen. There was a leafy stirring somewhere, perhaps the pheasant rustling in the underbrush. The sing-song of the stream threaded the silence; and as he listened it seemed to grow louder, filling the woods with low, harmonious sounds. In the shallows he heard laughter; in the pouring waterfalls, echoes like wind-blown voices calling. Small grey and saffron tinted birds, passing from twig to twig, peered at him fearlessly; a heavy green lizard vanished between the stones with an iridescent wriggle. Suddenly a branch snapped and the underbrush crackled.

"Probably a deer," thought Smith, turning to look. Close inspection of the thicket revealed nothing; he dropped his chin on his hands, crossed his legs, and opened his book.

The book was about one of those Americans who trouble the peace of mind of Princesses; and this was the place to read it, here in the enchanted stillness of the ancient Belgian forest, here where the sunshine spread its net on fretted waters, where lost pools glimmered with azure when the breeze stirred overhead—here where his neighbor was a Countess and some one in her household wore a mass of gold-red hair Greek fashion—and Aphrodite was not whiter of neck nor bluer eyed than she.

The romance that he read was designed to be thickly satisfying to American readers, for it described a typical American so accurately that Smith did not recognize the type. Until he had been enlightened by fiction he never imagined Americans were so attractive to exotic nobility. So he read on, gratified, cloyed, wondering how the Princess, although she happened to be encumbered with a husband, could stand for anything but ultimate surrender to the Stars and Stripes; and trustfully leaving it to another to see that it was done morally.

Hypnotized by the approaching crisis, he had begun already to finger the next page, when a slight crash in the bushes close by and the swish of parting foliage startled him from romance to reality.

But he had looked up too late; to slink away was impossible; to move was to reveal himself. It was *she*! And she was not ten feet distant.

One thing was certain: whether or not she was the shadowy partner of his kiss, she could not be the Countess, because she was fishing, unattended, hatless, the sleeves of her shirtwaist rolled up above her white elbows, a book and a short landing-net tucked under her left arm. Countesses don't go fishing unattended; gillies carry things. Besides, the Countess of Semois was in Semois-les-Bains

selling dolls to Kingsbury.

The sun glowed on her splendid red hair; she switched the slender rod about rather awkwardly, and every time the cast of flies became entangled in a nodding willow she set her red lips tight and with an impatient "*Mais, c'est trop bête! Mais, c'est vraiment trop*——"

It was evident that she had not seen him where he lay on the wall; the chances were she would pass on—indeed her back was already toward him—when the unexpected happened: a trout leaped for a gnat and fell back into the pool with a resounding splash, sending ring on ring of sunny wavelets toward the shore.

"Ah! *Te voilà!*" she said aloud, swinging her line free for a cast.

Smith saw what was coming and tried to dodge, but the silk line whistled on the back-cast, and the next moment his cap was snatched from his head and deposited some twenty feet out in the centre of the pool.

The amazement of the fair angler was equal to his own as she looked hastily back over her shoulder and discovered him on the wall.

There is usually something undignified about a man whose hat has been knocked off; to laugh is as fatal as to show irritation; and Smith did neither, but quietly dropped over to her side of the wall, saying, "I'm awfully sorry I spoiled your cast. Don't mind the cap; that trout was a big one, and he may rise again."

He had spoken in English, and she answered in very pretty English: "I am so sorry—could I help you to recover your hat?"

"Thank you; if you would let me take your rod a moment."

"Willingly, monsieur."

She handed him the rod; he loosened the line, measured the distance with practiced eye, turned to look behind him, and, seeing there was scant room for a long back-cast, began sending loop after loop of silken line forward across the water, using the Spey method, of which none except an expert is master.

The first cast struck half-way, but in line; the next, still in line, slipped over the cap, but failed to hook. Then, as he recovered, there was a boiling rush in the water, a flash of pink and silver, and the rod staggered.

"I—I beg your pardon!" he exclaimed aghast; "I have hooked your trout!"

"Play him," she said quickly. The elfin shriek of the reel answered; he gave the fish every ounce the quivering rod could spare, the great trout surged deeply,

swerved, circled and bored slowly upstream.

"This fish is magnificent," said Smith, guiltily. "You really must take the rod _____"

"I shall not, indeed."

"But this is not fair!"

"It is perfectly fair, monsieur—and a wonderful lesson in angling to me. Oh, I beg you to be careful! There is a sunken tree limb beyond!"

Her cheeks were the colour of wild roses, her blue eyes burned like stars.

"He's down; I can't stir him," said Smith. "He's down like a salmon!"

She linked her hands behind her back. "What is to be done?" she asked calmly.

"If you would gather a handful of those pebbles and throw one at a time into the pool where he is lying——"

Before he finished speaking she had knelt, filled her palms with golden gravel, and stood ready at the water's edge.

"Now?" she nodded, inquiringly.

"Yes, one at a time; try to hit him."

The first pebble produced no effect; neither did the second, nor yet the third.

"Throw a handful at him," he suggested, and braced himself for the result. A spray of gravel fell; the great fish sulked motionless.

"There's a way——" began Smith, feeling in his pockets for his key-ring. It was not there.

"Could I be of any use?" she asked, looking up at Smith very guilelessly.

"Why, if I had something—a key-ring or anything that I could hang over the taut line—something that would slide down and jog him gently——"

"A hairpin?" she asked.

"I'm afraid it's too light."

She reflected a moment; her bent forefinger brushed her velvet lips. Then she began to unfasten a long gold pin at her throat.

"Oh, not that!" exclaimed Smith, anxiously. "It might slip off."

"It can't; there's a safety clasp. Anyway, we must have that trout!"

"But I could not permit——"

"It is I who permit myself, monsieur."

"No, no, it is too generous of you——"

"Please!" She held the pin toward him; he shook his head; she hesitated, then with a quick movement she snapped the clasp over the taut line and sent it spinning toward the invisible fish.

He saw the gold glimmer become a spark under water, die out in dusky depths; then came a rushing upheaval of spray, a flash, the rod quivered to the reel-plate, and the fight began in fury. The rod was so slim, so light—scarce three ounces—that he could but stand on the defensive at first. Little by little the struggle became give and take, then imperceptibly he forced the issue, steadily, delicately, for the tackle was gossamer, and he fought for the safety of the golden clasp as well as for his honour as an angler.

"Do you know how to net a trout?" he asked presently. She came and stood at his shoulder, net poised, blue eyes intent upon the circling fish.

"I place it behind him, do I not?" she asked coolly.

"Yes—when I give the word——"

One more swerve, a half circle sheering homeward, nearer, nearer——

A moment later the huge trout lay on the moss; iridescent tints played over its broad surface, shimmering hues deepened, waxing, warning; the spots glowed like rubies set in bronze.

Kneeling there, left hand resting on the rod, Smith looked up at her over his shoulder; but all she said was: "Ah, the poor, brave thing! The gallant fish! This is wrong—all wrong. I wish we had not taken a life we cannot give again."

"Shall I put the trout back madame?"

She looked at him surprised.

"Would you?" she asked incredulously.

"If you desire it."

"But it is your fish."

"It is yours, madame."

"Will it live? Oh, try to make it live!"

He lifted the beautiful fish in both hands, and, walking to the water's edge, laid it in the stream. For a while it floated there, gold and silver belly turned to the sky, gills slowly inflating and collapsing. Presently a fin stirred; the spasmodic movement of the gill-covers ceased, and the breathing grew quiet and steady. Smith touched the pectoral fins; the fish strove to turn over; he steadied the dorsal fin, then the caudal, righting the fish. Slowly, very slowly, the great trout moved off, farther, farther, sinking into cool, refreshing depths; there was a dull glitter under the water, a shadow gliding, then nothing except the green obscurity of the pool criss-crossed with surface sunshine.

When Smith turned around the girl was pensively regarding the water. His cap had stranded on a shoal almost at his feet; he recovered it, wrung the drops from it, and stood twirling it thoughtfully in the sunlight.

"I've ruined it, haven't I?" she asked.

"Oh, no; it's a shooting-cap. Like Tartarin, I shall probably ventilate it later in true Midi fashion."

She laughed; then, with the flushed composure of uneasiness: "Thank you for a lesson in angling. I have learned a great deal—enough at least to know that I shall not care to destroy life, even in a fish."

"That is as it should be," he replied coolly. "Men find little charm in women who kill."

"That is scarcely in accord with the English novels I read—and I read many," she said laughing.

"It is true, nevertheless. Saint Hubert save us from the woman who can watch the spark of life fade out in the eye of any living thing."

"Are you not a little eccentric, monsieur?"

"If you say so. Eccentricity is the full-blown blossom of mediocrity."

CHAPTER XXIV

A JOURNEY TO THE MOON

There was a silence so politely indifferent on her part that he felt it to be the signal for his dismissal. And he took his leave with a formality so attractive, and a good humour so informal, that before she meant to she had spoken again—a phrase politely meaningless in itself, yet—if he chose to take it so—acting as a stay of execution.

"I was wondering," he said, amiably, "how I was going to climb back over the wall."

A sudden caprice tinged with malice dawned in the most guileless of smiles as she raised her eyes to his:

"You forgot your ladder this time, didn't you?"

Would he ever stop getting redder? His ears were afire, and felt enormous.

"I am afraid you misunderstood me," she said, and her smile became pitilessly sweet. "I am quite sure a distinguished foreign angler could scarcely condescend to notice trespass signs in a half-ruined old park——"

His crimson distress softened her, perhaps, for she hesitated, then added impulsively: "I did not mean it, monsieur; I have gone too far——"

"No, you have not gone too far," he said. "I've disgraced myself and deserve no mercy."

"You are mistaken; the trout may have come from your side of the wall——"

"It did, but that is a miserable excuse. Nothing can palliate my conduct. It's a curious thing," he added, bitterly, "that a fellow who is decent enough at home immediately begins to do things in Europe."

"What things, monsieur?"

"Ill-bred things; I might as well say it. Theoretically, poaching is romantic; practically, it's a misdemeanor—the old conflict between realism and romance, madame—as typified by a book I am at present reading—a copy of the same book which I notice you are now carrying under your arm."

She glanced at him, curious, irresolute, waiting for him to continue. And as he did not, but stood moodily twirling his cap like a sulky schoolboy, she leaned back against a tree, saying: "You are very severe on romance, monsieur."

"You are very lenient with reality, madame."

"How do you know? I may be far more angry with you than you suspect. Indeed, every time I have seen you on the wall—" she hesitated, paling a trifle. She had made a mistake, unless he was more stupid than she dared hope.

"But until this morning I had done nothing to anger you?" he said, looking up sharply. Her features wore the indifference of perfect repose; his latent alarm subsided. She had made no mistake in his stupidity.

And now, perfectly conscious of the irregularity of the proceedings, perhaps a trifle exhilarated by it, she permitted curiosity to stir behind the curtain, ready for the proper cue.

"Of course," he said, colouring, "I know you perfectly well by sight——"

"And I you, monsieur—perfectly well. One notices strangers, particularly when reading so frequently about them in romance. This book"—she opened it leisurely and examined an illustration—"appears to describe the American quite perfectly. So, having read so much about Americans, I was a trifle curious to see one."

He did not know what to say; her youthful face was so innocent that suspicion subsided.

"That American you are reading about is merely a phantom of romance," he said honestly. "His type, if he ever did exist, would become such a public nuisance in Europe that the police would take charge of him—after a few kings and dukes had finished thrashing him."

"I do not believe you," she said, with a hint of surprise and defiance. "Besides, if it were true, what sense is there in destroying the pleasure of illusion? Romance is at least amusing; reality alone is a sorry scarecrow clothed in the faded rags of dreams. Do you think you do well to destroy the tinted film of romance through which every woman ever born gazes at man—and pardons him because the rainbow dims her vision?"

She leaned back against the silver birch once more and laid her white hand flat on the open pages of the book:

"Monsieur, if life were truly like this, fewer tears would fall from women's eyes

—eyes which man, in his wisdom, takes pains to clear—to his own destruction!"

She struck the book a light blow, smiling up at him:

"Here in these pages are spring and youth eternal—blue skies and roses, love and love and love unending, and once more love, and the world's young heart afire! Close the book and what remains?" She closed the covers very gently. "What remains?" she asked, raising her blue eyes to him.

"You remain, madame."

She flushed with displeasure.

"And yet," he said, smiling, "if the hero of that book replied as I have you would have smiled. That is the false light the moon of romance sheds in competition with the living sun." He shrugged his broad shoulders, laughing: "The contrast between the heroine of that romance and you proves which is the lovelier, reality or romance——"

She bit her lips and looked at him narrowly, the high colour pulsating and dying in her cheeks. Under cover of the very shield that should have protected her he was using weapons which she herself had sanctioned—the impalpable weapons of romance.

Dusk, too, had already laid its bloom on hill and forest and had spun a haze along the stream—dusk, the accomplice of all the dim, jewelled forms that people the tinted shadows of romance. Why—if he had displeased her—did she not dismiss him? It is not with a question that a woman gives a man his congé.

"Why do you speak as you do?" she asked, gravely. "Why, merely because you are clever, do you twist words into compliments. We are scarcely on such a footing, monsieur."

"What I said I meant," he replied, slowly.

"Have I accorded you permission to say or mean?"

"No; that is the fashion of romance—a pretty one. But in life, sometimes, a man's heart beats out the words his lips deliver untricked with verbal tinsel."

Again she coloured, but met his eyes steadily enough.

"This is all wrong," she said; "you know it; I know it. If, in the woman standing here alone with you, I scarcely recognise myself, you, monsieur, will fail to remember her—if chance wills it that we meet again."

"My memory," he said in a low voice, "is controlled by your mind. What you forget I cannot recall."

She said, impulsively, "A gallant man speaks as you speak—in agreeable books of fiction as in reality. Oh, monsieur"—and she laughed a pretty, troubled laugh—"how can you expect me now to disbelieve in my Americans of romance?"

She had scarcely meant to say just that; she did not realise exactly what she had said until she read it in his face—read it, saw that he did not mean to misunderstand her, and, in the nervous flood of relief, stretched out her hand to him. He took it, laid his lips to the fragrant fingers, and relinquished it. Meanwhile his heart was choking him like the clutch of justice.

"Good-by," she said, her outstretched hand suspended as he had released it, then slowly falling. A moment's silence; the glow faded from the sky, and from her face, too; then suddenly the blue eyes glimmered with purest malice:

"Having neglected to bring your ladder this time, monsieur, pray accept the use of mine." And she pointed to a rustic ladder lying half-buried in the weedy tangle behind him.

He gave himself a moment to steady his voice: "I supposed there was a ladder here—somewhere," he said, quietly.

"Oh! And why did you suppose—" She spoke too hurriedly, and she began again, pleasantly indifferent: "The foresters use a ladder for pruning, not for climbing walls."

He strolled over to the thicket, lifted the light ladder, and set it against the wall. When he had done this he stepped back, examining the effect attentively; then, as though not satisfied, shifted it a trifle, surveyed the result, moved it again, dissatisfied.

"Let me see," he mused aloud, "I want to place it exactly where it was that night—" He looked back at her interrogatively. "Was it about where I have placed it?"

Her face was inscrutable.

"Or," he continued, thoughtfully, "was it an inch or two this way? I could tell exactly if the moon were up. Still"—he considered the ladder attentively—"I might be able to fix it with some accuracy if you would help me. Will you?"

"I do not understand," she said.

"Oh, it is nothing—still, if you wouldn't mind aiding me to settle a matter that

interests me—would you?"

"With pleasure, monsieur," she said, indifferently. "What shall I do?"

So he mounted the ladder, crossed the wall, and stood on a stone niche on his side, looking down at the ladder. "Now," he said, "if you would be so amiable, madame, as to stand on the ladder for one moment you could aid me immensely."

"Mount that ladder, monsieur?"

She caught his eyes fixed on her; for just an instant she hesitated, then met them steadily enough; indeed, a growing and innocent curiosity widened her gaze, and she smiled and lifted her pretty shoulders—just a trifle, and her skirts a trifle, too; and, with a grace that made him tremble, she mounted the ladder, step by step, until her head and shoulders were on a level with his own across the wall.

"And now?" she asked, raising her eyebrows.

"The moon," he said, unsteadily, "ought to be about—there!"

"Where?" She turned her eyes inquiringly skyward.

But his heart had him by the throat again, and he was past all speech.

"Well, monsieur?" She waited in sweetest patience. Presently: "Have you finished your astronomical calculations? And may I descend?" He tried to speak, but was so long about it that she said very kindly: "You are trying to locate the moon, are you not?"

"No, madame—only a shadow."

"A shadow, monsieur?"—laughing.

"A shadow—a silhouette."

"Of what?"

"Of a—a woman's head against the moon."

"Monsieur, for a realist you are astonishingly romantic. Oh, you see I was right! You do belong in a book."

"You, also," he said, scarcely recognising his own voice. "Men—in books—do well to risk all for one word, one glance from you; men—in books—do well to die for you, who reign without a peer in all romance——"

"Monsieur," she faltered.

But he had found his voice—or one something like it—and he said: "You are right to rebuke me; romance is the shadow, life the substance; and *you* live; and as long as you live, living men must love you; as I love you, Countess of Semois."

"Oh," she breathed, tremulously, "oh,—you think *that*? You think *I* am the Countess of Semois? And *that* is why——"

For a moment her wide eyes hardened, then flashed brilliant with tears.

"Is that your romance, monsieur?—the romance of a Countess! Is your declaration for mistress or servant?—for the Countess or for her secretary—who sometimes makes her gowns, too? Ah, the sorry romance! Your declaration deserved an audience more fitting——"

"My declaration was made a week ago! The moon and you were audience enough. I love you."

"Monsieur, I—I beg you to release my hand——"

"No; you must listen—for the veil of romance is rent and we are face to face in the living world! Do you think a real man cares what title you wear, if you but wear his name? Countess that you are *not*—if you say you are not—but woman that you *are*, is there anything in Heaven or earth that can make love *more* than love? Veil your beautiful true eyes with romance, and answer me; look with clear, untroubled eyes upon throbbing, pulsating life; and answer me! Love is no more, no less, than love. I ask for yours; I gave you mine a week ago—in our first kiss."

Her face was white as a flower; the level beauty of her eyes set him trembling.

"Give me one chance," he breathed. "I am not mad enough to hope that the lightning struck us both at a single flash. Give me, in your charity, a chance—a little aid where I stand stunned, blinded, alone—you who can still see clearly!"

She did not stir or speak or cease to watch him from unwavering eyes; he leaned forward, drawing her inert hands together between his own; but she freed them, shivering.

"Will you not say one word to me?" he faltered.

"Three, monsieur." Her eyes closed, she covered them with her slender hands: "I—love—you."



Before the moon appeared she had taken leave of him, her hot, young face pressed to his, striving to say something for which she found no words. In tremulous silence she turned in his arms, unclasping his hands and yielding her own in fragrant adieu.

"Do you not know, oh, most wonderful of lovers—do you not know?" her eyes were saying, but her lips were motionless; she waited, reluctant, trembling. No, he could not understand—he did not care, and the knowledge of it suffused her very soul with a radiance that transfigured her.

So she left him, the promise of the moon silvering the trees. And he stood there on the wall, watching the lights break out in the windows of her house—stood there while his soul drifted above the world of moonlit shadow floating at his feet.

"Smith!"

Half aroused, he turned and looked down. The moonlight glimmered on Kingsbury's single eyeglass. After a moment his senses returned; he descended to the ground and peered at Kingsbury, rubbing his eyes.

With one accord they started toward the house, moving slowly, shoulder to shoulder.

"Not that I personally care," began Kingsbury. "I am sorry only on account of my country. I was, perhaps, precipitate; but I purchased one hundred and seven dolls of Mademoiselle Plessis—her private secretary——"

"What!"

"With whom," continued Kingsbury, thoughtfully, "I am agreeably in love. Such matters, Smith, cannot be wholly controlled by a sense of duty to one's country. Beauty and rank seldom coincide except in fiction. It appears"—he removed his single eyeglass, polished it with his handkerchief, replaced it, and examined the moon—"it appears," he continued blandly, "that it is the Countess of Semois who is—ah—so to speak, afflicted with red hair... The moon—ahem—is preternaturally bright this evening, Smith."

After a moment Smith halted and turned, raising his steady eyes to that pale mirror of living fire above the forest.

"Well," began Kingsbury, irritably, "can't you say something?"

"Nothing more than I have said to her already—though she were Empress of the World!" murmured Smith, staring fixedly at the moon.

"Empress of *what*? I do not follow you."

"No," said Smith, dreamily, "you must not try to. It is a long journey to the summer moon—a long, long journey. I started when I was a child; I reached it a week ago; I returned to-night. And do you know what I discovered there? Why, man, I discovered the veil of Isis, and I looked behind it. And what do you suppose I found? A child, Kingsbury, a winged child, who laughingly handed me the keys of Eden! What do you think of that?"

But Smith had taken too many liberties with the English language, and Kingsbury was far too mad to speak.



CHAPTER XXV

THE ARMY OF PARIS

I was smoking peacefully in the conservatory of the hotel, when a bellboy brought me the card of Captain le Vicôte de Cluny.

In due time Monsieur the Viscount himself appeared, elegant, graceful, smart; black and scarlet uniform glittering with triple-gold arabesques on sleeve and Képi, spurs chiming with every step.

We chatted amiably for a few moments; then the Captain, standing very erect and stiff, made me a beautiful bow and delivered the following remarkable question:

"Monsieur Van Twillaire, I am come to-day according to the American custom, to beg your permission to pay my addresses to mademoiselle, your daughter."

I inhaled the smoke of my cigarette in my astonishment. That was bad for me. After a silence I asked:

"Which daughter?"

"Mademoiselle Dulcima, monsieur."

After another silence I said:

"I will give you an answer to-morrow at this hour."

We bowed to each other, solemnly shook hands, and parted.

I was smoking restlessly in the conservatory of the hotel when a bellboy brought me the card of Captain le Vicôte de Barsac.

In due time the Vicôte himself appeared, elegant, graceful, smart; black, scarlet, and white uniform glittering with triple-gold arabesques on sleeve and Képi, spurs chiming with every step.

We chatted amiably for a few moments; then the Captain, standing very erect and stiff, made me a beautiful bow and delivered the following remarkable question:

"Monsieur Van Twillaire, I am come to-day according to the American custom,

to beg your permission to pay my addresses to mademoiselle, your daughter."

I dropped my cigarette into the empty fireplace.

"Which daughter?" I asked, coldly.

"Mademoiselle Dulcima, monsieur."

After a silence I said:

"I will give you an answer to-morrow at this hour."

We bowed to each other, solemnly shook hands, and parted.

I was smoking violently in the conservatory of the hotel, when a bellboy brought me a card of my old friend, Gillian Van Dieman.

In due time Van Dieman appeared, radiant, smiling, faultlessly groomed.

"Well," said I, "it's about time you came over from Long Island, isn't it? My daughters expected you last week."

"I know," he said, smiling; "I couldn't get away, Peter. Didn't Alida explain?"

"Explain what?" I asked.

"About our engagement."

In my amazement I swallowed some smoke that was not wholesome for me.

"Didn't she tell you she is engaged to marry me?" he asked, laughing.

After a long silence, in which I thought of many things, including the formal offers of Captains de Barsac and Torchon de Cluny, I said I had not heard of it, and added sarcastically that I hoped both he and Alida would pardon my ignorance on any matters which concerned myself.

"Didn't you know that Alida came over here to buy her trousseau?" he inquired coolly.

I did not, and I said so.

"Didn't you know about the little plot that she and I laid to get you to bring her to Paris?" he persisted, much amused.

I glared at him.

"Why, Peter," he said, "when you declared to me in the clubhouse that nothing could get you to Paris unless, through your own stupidity, something happened to your pig——"

I turned on him as red as a beet.

"I know you stole that pig, Van!"

"Yes," he muttered guiltily.

"Then," said I earnestly, "for God's sake let it rest where it is, and marry Alida whenever you like!"

"With your blessing, Peter?" asked Van Dieman, solemnly.

"With my blessing—dammit!"

We shook hands in silence.

"Where is Alida?" he asked presently.

"In her room, surrounded by thousands of dressmakers, hatmakers, mantua-makers, furriers, experts in shoes, lingerie, jewelry, and other inexpensive trifles," said I with satisfaction.

But the infatuated man never winced.

"You will attend to that sort of thing in the future," I remarked.

The reckless man grinned in unfeigned delight.

"Come," said I, wearily, "Alida is in for all day with her trousseau. I've a cab at the door; come on! I was going out to watch the parade at Longchamps. Now you've got to go with me and tell me something about this temperamental French army that seems more numerous in Paris than the civilians."

"What do you want to see soldiers for?" he objected.

"Because," said I, "I had some slight experience with the army this morning just before you arrived; and I want to take a bird's-eye view of the whole affair."

"But I——"

"Oh, we'll return for dinner and then you can see Alida," I added. "But only in my company. You see we are in France, Van, and she is the *jeune fille* of romance."

"Fudge!" he muttered, following me out to the cab.

"We will drive by the Pont Neuf," he suggested. "You know the proverb?"

"No," said I; "what proverb?"

"The bridegroom who passes by the Pont Neuf will always meet a priest, a

soldier, and a white horse. The priest will bless his marriage, the soldier will defend it, the white horse will bear his burdens through life."

As a matter of fact, passing the Pont Neuf, we did see a priest, a soldier, and a white horse. But it is a rare thing not to meet this combination on the largest, longest, oldest, and busiest bridge in Paris. All three mascots are as common in Paris as are English sparrows in the Bois de Boulogne.

I bought a book on the quay, then re-entered the taxi and directed the driver to take us to the race-course at Longchamps.

Our way led up the Champs Elysées, and, while we whirled along, Van Dieman very kindly told me as much about the French army as I now write, and for the accuracy of which I refer to my future son-in-law.

There are, in permanent garrison in Paris, about thirty thousand troops stationed. This does not include the famous Republican Guard corps, which is in reality a sort of municipal gendarmerie, composed of several battalions of infantry, several squadrons of gorgeous cavalry, and a world-famous band, which corresponds in functions to our own Marine Band at Washington.

The barracks of the regular troops are scattered about the city, and occupy strategic positions as the armouries of our National Guard are supposed to do. All palaces, museums of importance, and government buildings are guarded day and night by infantry. The cavalry guard only their own barracks; the marines, engineers, and artillery the same.

At night the infantry and cavalry of the Republican Guard post sentinels at all theatres, balls, and public functions. In front of the Opera only are the cavalry mounted on their horses, except when public functions occur at the Elysées or the Hôtel de Ville.

In the dozen great fortresses that surround the walls of Paris, thousands of fortress artillery are stationed. In the suburbs and outlying villages artillery and regiments of heavy and light cavalry have their permanent barracks—dragoons, cuirassiers, chasseurs-à-cheval, field batteries, and mounted batteries. At Saint Cloud are dragoons and remount troopers; at Versailles the engineers and cuirassiers rule the region; and the entire Department of the Seine is patrolled by gendarmes, mounted and on foot.

When we reached the beautiful meadow of Longchamps, with its grand-stand covered with waving flags and the sunshine glowing on thousands of brilliant parasols, we left the taxi, and found a place on what a New Yorker would call

"the bleachers." The bleachers were covered with pretty women, so we were not in bad company. As for the great central stand, where the President of the Republic sat surrounded by shoals of brilliant officers, it was a mass of colour from flagstaff to pelouse.

The band of the Republican Guards was thundering out one of Sousa's marches; the vast green plain glittered with masses of troops. Suddenly three cannon-shots followed one another in quick order; the band ended its march with a long double roll of drums; the Minister of War had arrived.

"They're coming," said Van Dieman. "Look! Here come the Saint-Cyrians. They lead the march one year, and the Polytechnic leads it the next. But I wish they could see West Point—just once."

The cadets from Saint-Cyr came marching past, solid ranks of scarlet, blue, and silver. They marched pretty well; they ride better, I am told. After them came the Polytechnic, in black and red and gold, the queer cocked hats of the cadets forming a quaint contrast to the toy soldier headgear of the Saint-Cyr soldiers. Following came battalion after battalion of engineers in sombre uniforms of red and dark blue, then a bizarre battalion of Turcos or Algerian Riflemen in turbans and pale blue Turkish uniforms, then a company of Zouaves in scarlet and white and blue, then some special corps which was not very remarkable for anything except the bad fit of its clothing.

After them marched solid columns of line infantry, great endless masses of dull red and blue, passing steadily until the eye wearied of the monotony.

Trumpets were sounding now; and suddenly, the superb French artillery passed at a trot, battery after battery, the six guns and six caissons of each in mathematically perfect alignment, all the gunners mounted, and not a man sitting on limber or caisson.

In my excitement I rose and joined the roar of cheers which greeted the artillerymen as battery after battery passed, six guns abreast.

"Sit down," said Van Dieman, laughing. "Look! Here come the cavalry!"

In two long double ranks, ten thousand horsemen were galloping diagonally across the plain—Hussars in pale robin's-egg blue and black and scarlet, Chasseurs-à-cheval in light blue and silver tunics, Dragoons armed with long lances from which fluttered a forest of red-and-white pennons, Cuirassiers cased in steel helmets and corselets—all coming at a gallop, sweeping on with the earth shaking under the thunder of forty thousand horses' hoofs, faster, faster,

while in the excitement the vast throng of spectators leaped up on the benches to see.

There was a rumble, a rolling shock, a blast from a hundred trumpets. "Halt!"

Then, with the sound of the rushing of an ocean, ten thousand swords swept from their steel scabbards, and a thundering cheer shook the very sky: "VIVE LA RÉPUBLIQUE!"



That evening we dined together at the Hôtel—Alida, Dulcima, Van Dieman, and I.

Alida wore a new ring set with a brilliant that matched her shining, happy eyes. I hoped Van Dieman might appear foolish and ill at ease, but he did not.

"There is," said he, "a certain rare brand of champagne in the secret cellars of this famous café. It is pink as a rose in colour, and drier than a British cigar. It is the only wine, except the Czar's Tokay, fit to drink to the happiness of the only perfect woman in the world."

"And her equally perfect sister, father and fiancé," said I. "So pray order this wonderful wine, Van, and let me note the brand; for I very much fear that we shall need another bottle at no distant date."

"Why?" asked Dulcima, colouring to her hair.

"Because," said I, "the French army is expected to encamp to-morrow before this hotel."

"Cavalry or artillery?" she asked faintly.

"Both," said I; "so let us thank Heaven that we escape the infantry, at least. Alida, my dear, your health, happiness, and long, long life!"

We drank the toast standing.

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