

Kent Knowles: Quahaug

Joseph C. Lincoln

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KENT KNOWLES: QUAHAUG

By Joseph C. Lincoln

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KENT KNOWLES: QUAHAUG

CHAPTER I

Which is Not a Chapter at All

It was Asaph Tidditt who told me how to begin this history. Perhaps I should be very much obliged to Asaph; perhaps I shouldn't. He has gotten me out of a difficulty--or into one; I am far from certain which.

Ordinarily--I am speaking now of the writing of swashbuckling romances, which is, or was, my trade--I swear I never have called it a profession--the beginning of a story is the least of the troubles connected with its manufacture. Given a character or two and a situation, the beginning of one of those romances is, or was, pretty likely to be something like this:

"It was a black night. Heavy clouds had obscured the setting sun and now, as the clock in the great stone tower boomed twelve, the darkness was pitchy."

That is a good safe beginning. Midnight, a stone tower, a booming clock, and darkness make an appeal to the imagination. On a night like that almost anything may happen. A reader of one of my romances--and readers there must be, for the things did, and still do, sell to some extent--might be fairly certain that something WOULD happen before the end of the second page. After that the somethings continued to happen as fast as I could invent them.

But this story was different. The weather or the time had nothing to do with its beginning. There were no solitary horsemen or strange wayfarers on lonely roads, no unexpected knocks at the doors of taverns, no cloaked personages landing from boats rowed by black-browed seamen with red handkerchiefs knotted about their heads and knives in their belts. The hero was not addressed as "My Lord"; he was not "Sir Somebody-or-other" in disguise. He was not young and handsome; there was not even "a certain something in his manner and bearing which hinted of an eventful past." Indeed there was not. For, if this particular yarn or history or chronicle which I had made up my mind to write, and which I am writing now, had or has a hero, I am he. And I am Hosea Kent Knowles, of Bayport, Massachusetts, the latter the village in which I was born and in which I have lived most of the time since I was twenty-seven years old. Nobody calls me "My Lord." Hephzy has always called me "Hosy"--a name which I despise--and the others, most of them, "Kent" to my face and "The Quahaug" behind my back, a quahaug being a very common form of clam which is supposed to lead a solitary existence and to keep its shell tightly shut. If anything in my manner had hinted at a mysterious past no one in Bayport would have taken the hint. Bayporters know my past and that of my ancestors only too well.

As for being young and handsome--well, I was thirty-eight years old last March. Which is quite enough on THAT subject.

But I had determined to write the story, so I sat down to begin it. And immediately I got into difficulties. How should I begin? I might begin at any one of a dozen places--with Hephzy's receiving the Raymond and Whitcomb circular; with our arrival in London; with Jim Campbell's visit to me here in Bayport; with the curious way in which the letter reached us, after crossing the ocean twice. Any one of these might serve as a beginning--but which? I made I don't know how many attempts, but not one was satisfactory. I, who had begun I am ashamed to tell you how many stories--yes, and had finished them and seen them in print as well--was stumped at the very beginning of this one. Like Sim Phinney I had worked at my job "a long spell" and "cal'lated" I knew it, but here was something I didn't know. As Sim said, when he faced his problem, "I couldn't seem to get steerage way on her."

Simeon, you see--He is Angeline Phinney's second cousin and lives in the third house beyond the Holiness Bethel on the right-hand side of the road--Simeon has "done carpentering" here in Bayport all his life. He built practically every henhouse now gracing or disgracing the backyards of our village. He is our "henhouse specialist," so to speak. He has even been known to boast of his skill. "Henhouses!" snorted Sim; "land of love! I can build a henhouse with my eyes shut. Nowadays when another one of them foolheads that's been readin' 'How to Make a Million Poultry

Raisin" in the Farm Gazette comes to me and says 'Henhouse,' I say, 'Yes sir. Fifteen dollars if you pay me cash now and a hundred and fifteen if you want to wait and pay me out of your egg profits. That's all there is to it.'

And yet, when Captain Darius Nickerson, who made the most of his money selling fifty-foot lots of sand, beachgrass and ticks to summer people for bungalow sites--when Captain Darius, grown purse-proud and vainglorious, expressed a desire for a henhouse with a mansard roof and a cupola, the latter embellishments to match those surmounting his own dwelling, Simeon was set aback with his canvas flapping. At the end of a week he had not driven a nail. "Godfrey's mighty!" he is reported to have exclaimed. "I don't know whether to build the average cupola and trust to a hen's fittin' it, or take an average hen and build a cupola round her. Maybe I'll be all right after I get started, but it's where to start that beats me."

Where to start beat me, also, and it might be beating me yet, if I hadn't dropped in at the post-office and heard Asaph Tidditt telling a story to the group around the stove. After he had finished, and, the mail being sorted, we were walking homeward together, I asked a question.

"Asaph," said I, "when you start to spin a yarn how do you begin?"

"Hey?" he exclaimed. "How do I begin? Why, I just heave to and go to work and begin, that's all."

"Yes, I know, but where do you begin?"

"At the beginnin', naturally. If you was cal'latin' to sail a boat race you wouldn't commence at t'other end of the course, would you?"

"_I_ might; practical people wouldn't, I suppose. But--what IS the beginning? Suppose there were a lot of beginnings and you didn't know which to choose."

"Oh, we-ll, in that case I'd just sort of--of edge around till I found one that--that was a beginnin' of SOMETHIN' and I'd start there. You understand, don't you? Take that yarn I was spinnin' just now--that one about Josiah Dimick's great uncle's pig on his mother's side. I mean his uncle on his mother's side, not the pig, of course. Now I hadn't no intention of tellin' about that hog; hadn't thought of it for a thousand year, as you might say. I just commenced to tell about Angie Phinney, about how fast she could talk, and that reminded me of a parrot that belonged to Sylvanus Cahoon's sister--Violet, the sister's name was--loony name, too, if you ask ME, 'cause she was a plaguey sight nigher bein' a sunflower than she was a violet--weighed two hundred and ten and had a face on her as red as--"

"Just a minute, Ase. About that pig?"

"Oh, yes! Well, the pig reminded me of Violet's parrot and the parrot reminded me of a Plymouth Rock rooster I had that used to roost in the pigpen nights--wouldn't use the henhouse no more'n you nor I would--and that, naturally, made me think of pigs, and pigs fetched Josiah's uncle's pig to mind and there I was all ready to start on the yarn. It pretty often works out that way. When you want to start a yarn and you can't start--you've forgot it, or somethin'--just begin somewhere, get

goin' somehow. Edge around and keep edgin' around and pretty soon you'll fetch up at the right place TO start. See, don't you, Kent?"

I saw--that is, I saw enough. I came home and this morning I began the "edging around" process. I don't seem to have "fetched up" anywhere in particular, but I shall keep on with the edging until I do. As Asaph says, I must begin somewhere, so I shall begin with the Saturday morning of last April when Jim Campbell, my publisher and my friend--which is by no means such an unusual combination as many people think--sat on the veranda of my boathouse overlooking Cape Cod Bay and discussed my past, present and, more particularly, my future.

CHAPTER II

Which Repeats, for the Most Part, What Jim Campbell Said to Me and What I Said to Him

"Jim," said I, "what is the matter with me?"

Jim, who was seated in the ancient and dilapidated arm-chair which was the finest piece of furniture in the boathouse and which I always offered to visitors, looked at me over the collar of my sweater. I used the sweater as I did the arm-chair when I did not have visitors. He was using it then because, like an idiot, he had come to Cape Cod in April with nothing warmer than a very natty suit and a light overcoat. Of course one may go clamming and fishing in a light overcoat, but--one doesn't.

Jim looked at me over the collar of my sweater. Then he crossed his oilskinned and rubber-booted legs--they were my oilskins and my boots--and answered promptly.

"Indigestion," he said. "You ate nine of those biscuits this morning; I saw you."

"I did not," I retorted, "because you saw them first. MY interior is in its normal condition. As for yours--"

"Mine," he interrupted, filling his pipe from my tobacco pouch, "being accustomed to a breakfast, not a gorge, is abnormal but satisfactory, thank you--quite satisfactory."

"That," said I, "we will discuss later, when I have you out back of the bar in my catboat. Judging from present indications there will be some sea-running. The 'Hephzy' is a good, capable craft, but a bit cranky, like the lady she is named for. I imagine she will roll."

He didn't like that. You see, I had sailed with him before and I remembered.

"Ho-se-a," he drawled, "you have a vivid imagination. It is a pity you don't use more of it in those stories of yours."

"Humph! I am obliged to use the most of it on the royalty statements you send me. If you call me 'Hosea' again I will take the 'Hephzy' across the Point Rip. The waves there are fifteen feet high at low tide. See

here, I asked you a serious question and I should like a serious answer. Jim, what IS the matter with me? Have I written out or what is the trouble?"

He looked at me again.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked.

"I am, very much in earnest."

"And you really want to talk shop after a breakfast like that and on a morning like this?"

"I do."

"Was that why you asked me to come to Bayport and spend the week-end?"

"No-o. No, of course not."

"You're another; it was. When you met me at the railroad station yesterday I could see there was something wrong with you. All this morning you've had something on your chest. I thought it was the biscuits, of course; but it wasn't, eh?"

"It was not."

"Then what was it? Aren't we paying you a large enough royalty?"

"You are paying me a good deal larger one than I deserve. I don't see why you do it."

"Oh," with a wave of the hand, "that's all right. The publishing of books is a pure philanthropy. We are in business for our health, and--"

"Shut up. You know as well as I do that the last two yarns of mine which your house published have not done as well as the others."

I had caught him now. Anything remotely approaching a reflection upon the business house of which he was the head was sufficient to stir up Jim Campbell. That business, its methods and its success, were his idols.

"I don't know any such thing," he protested, hotly. "We sold--"

"Hang the sale! You sold quite enough. It is an everlasting miracle to me that you are able to sell a single copy. Why a self-respecting person, possessed of any intelligence whatever, should wish to read the stuff I write, to say nothing of paying money for the privilege, I can't understand."

"You don't have to understand. No one expects an author to understand anything. All you are expected to do is to write; we'll attend to the rest of it. And as for sales--why, 'The Black Brig'--that was the last one, wasn't it?--beat the 'Omelet' by eight thousand or more."

"The Omelet" was our pet name for "The Queen's Amulet," my first offence in the literary line. It was a highly seasoned concoction of revolution and adventure in a mythical kingdom where life was not dull, to say the least. The humblest character in it was a viscount. Living in Bayport

had, naturally, made me familiar with the doings of viscounts.

"Eight thousand more than the last isn't so bad, is it?" demanded Jim Campbell combatively.

"It isn't. It is astonishingly good. It is the books themselves that are bad. The 'Omelet' was bad enough, but I wrote it more as a joke than anything else. I didn't take it seriously at all. Every time I called a duke by his Christian name I grinned. But nowadays I don't grin--I swear. I hate the things, Jim. They're no good. And the reviewers are beginning to tumble to the fact that they're no good, too. You saw the press notices yourself. 'Another Thriller by the Indefatigable Knowles' 'Barnacles, Buccaneers and Blood, not to Mention Beauty and the Bourbons.' That's the way two writers headed their articles about 'The Black Brig.' And a third said that I must be getting tired; I wrote as if I was. THAT fellow was right. I am tired, Jim. I'm tired and sick of writing slush. I can't write any more of it. And yet I can't write anything else."

Jim's pipe had gone out. Now he relit it and tossed the match over the veranda rail.

"How do you know you can't?" he demanded.

"Can't what?"

"Can't write anything but slush?"

"Ah ha! Then it is slush. You admit it."

"I don't admit anything of the kind. You may not be a William Shakespeare or even a George Meredith, but you have written some mighty interesting stories. Why, I know a chap who sits up till morning to finish a book of yours. Can't sleep until he has finished it."

"What's the matter with him; insomnia?"

"No; he's a night watchman. Does that satisfy you, you crossgrained old shellfish? Come on, let's dig clams--some of your own blood relations--and forget it."

"I don't want to forget it and there is plenty of time for clamming. The tide won't cover the flats for two hours yet. I tell you I'm serious, Jim. I can't write any more. I know it. The stuff I've been writing makes me sick. I hate it, I tell you. What the devil I'm going to do for a living I can't see--but I can't write another story."

Jim put his pipe in his pocket. I think at last he was convinced that I meant what I said, which I certainly did. The last year had been a year of torment to me. I had finished the 'Brig,' as a matter of duty, but if that piratical craft had sunk with all hands, including its creator, I should not have cared. I drove myself to my desk each day, as a horse might be driven to a treadmill, but the animal could have taken no less interest in his work than I had taken in mine. It was bad--bad--bad; worthless and hateful. There wasn't a new idea in it and I hadn't one in my head. I, who had taken up writing as a last resort, a gamble which might, on a hundred-to-one chance, win where everything else had failed, had now reached the point where that had failed, too. Campbell's surmise was correct; with the pretence of asking him to the Cape for a

week-end of fishing and sailing I had lured him there to tell him of my discouragement and my determination to quit.

He took his feet from the rail and hitched his chair about until he faced me.

"So you're not going to write any more," he said.

"I'm not. I can't."

"What are you going to do; live on back royalties and clams?"

"I may have to live on the clams; my back royalties won't keep me very long."

"Humph! I should think they might keep you a good while down here. You must have something in the stocking. You can't have wasted very much in riotous living on this sand-heap. What have you done with your money, for the last ten years; been leading a double life?"

"I've found leading a single one hard enough. I have saved something, of course. It isn't the money that worries me, Jim; I told you that. It's myself; I'm no good. Every author, sometime or other, reaches the point where he knows perfectly well he has done all the real work he can ever do, that he has written himself out. That's what's the matter with me--I'm written out."

Jim snorted. "For Heaven's sake, Kent Knowles," he demanded, "how old are you?"

"I'm thirty-eight, according to the almanac, but--"

"Thirty-eight! Why, Thackeray wrote--"

"Drop it! I know when Thackeray wrote 'Vanity Fair' as well as you do. I'm no Thackeray to begin with, and, besides, I am older at thirty-eight than he was when he died--yes, older than he would have been if he had lived twice as long. So far as feeling and all the rest of it go, I'm a second Methusaleh."

"My soul! hear the man! And I'm forty-two myself. Well, Grandpa, what do you expect me to do; get you admitted to the Old Man's Home?"

"I expect--" I began, "I expect--" and I concluded with the lame admission that I didn't expect him to do anything. It was up to me to do whatever must be done, I imagined.

He smiled grimly.

"Glad your senility has not affected that remnant of your common-sense," he declared. "You're dead right, my boy; it IS up to you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am, but that doesn't help me a whole lot."

"Nothing will help you as long as you think and speak as you have this morning. See here, Kent! answer me a question or two, will you? They may be personal questions, but will you answer them?"

"I guess so. There has been what a disinterested listener might call a slightly personal flavor to your remarks so far. Do your worst. Fire away."

"All right. You've lived in Bayport ten years or so, I know that. What have you done in all that time--besides write?"

"Well, I've continued to live."

"Doubted. You've continued to exist; but how? I've been here before. This isn't my first visit, by a good deal. Each time I have been here your daily routine--leaving out the exciting clam hunts and the excursions in quest of the ferocious flounder, like the one we're supposed--mind, I say supposed--to be on at the present moment--you have put in the day about like this: Get up, bathe, eat, walk to the post-office, walk home, sit about, talk a little, read some, walk some more, eat again, smoke, talk, read, eat for the third time, smoke, talk, read and go to bed. That's the program, isn't it?"

"Not exactly. I play tennis in summer--when there is anyone to play with me--and golf, after a fashion. I used to play both a good deal, when I was younger. I swim, and I shoot a little, and--and--"

"How about society? Have any, do you?"

"In the summer, when the city people are here, there is a good deal going on, if you care for it--picnics and clam bakes and teas and lawn parties and such."

"Heavens! what reckless dissipation! Do you indulge?"

"Why, no--not very much. Hang it all, Jim! you know I'm no society man. I used to do the usual round of fool stunts when I was younger, but--"

"But now you're too antique, I suppose. Wonder that someone hasn't collected you as a genuine Chippendale or something. So you don't 'tea' much?"

"Not much. I'm not often invited, to tell you the truth. The summer crowd doesn't take kindly to me, I'm afraid."

"Astonishing! You're such a chatty, entertaining, communicative cuss on first acquaintance, too. So captivatingly loquacious to strangers. I can imagine how you'd shine at a 'tea.' Every summer girl that tried to talk to you would be frost-bitten. Do you accept invitations when they do come?"

"Not often nowadays. You see, I know they don't really want me."

"How do you know it?"

"Why--well, why should they? Everybody else calls me--"

"They call you a clam and so you try to live up to your reputation. I know you, Kent. You think yourself a tough old bivalve, but the most serious complaint you suffer from is ingrowing sensitiveness. They do want you. They'd invite you if you gave them half a chance. Oh, I know you won't, of course; but if I had my way I'd have you dragged by main strength to every picnic and tea and feminine talk-fest within twenty

miles. You might meet some persevering female who would propose marriage. YOU never would, but SHE might."

I rose to my feet in disgust.

"We'll go clamming," said I.

He did not move.

"We will--later on," he answered. "We haven't got to the last page of the catechism yet. I mentioned matrimony because a good, capable, managing wife would be my first prescription in your case. I have one or two more up my sleeve. Tell me this: How often do you get away from Bayport? How often do you get to--well, to Boston, we'll say? How many times have you been there in the last year?"

"I don't know. A dozen, perhaps."

"What did you do when you went?"

"Various things. Shopped some, went to the theater occasionally, if there happened to be anything on that I cared to see. Bought a good many books. Saw the new Sargent pictures at the library. And--and--"

"And shook hands with your brother fossils at the museum, I suppose. Wild life you lead, Kent. Did you visit anybody? Meet any friends or acquaintances--any live ones?"

"Not many. I haven't many friends, Jim; you know that. As for the wild life--well, I made two visits to New York this year."

"Yes," drily; "and we saw Sothern and Marlowe and had dinner at the Holland. The rest of the time we talked shop. That was the first visit. The second was more exciting still; we talked shop ALL the time and you took the six o'clock train home again."

"You're wrong there. I saw the new loan collections at the Metropolitan and heard Ysaye play at Carnegie Hall. I didn't start for home until the next day."

"Is that so. That's news to me. You said you were going that afternoon. That was to put the kibosh on my intention of taking you home to my wife and her bridge party, I suppose. Was it?"

"Well--well, you see, Jim, I--I don't play bridge and I AM such a stick in a crowd like that. I wanted to stay and you were mighty kind, but--but--"

"All right. All right, my boy. Next time it will be Bustanoby's, the Winter Garden and a three A. M. cabaret for yours. My time is coming. Now--Well, now we'll go clamming."

He swung out of the arm-chair and walked to the top of the steps leading down to the beach. I was surprised, of course; I have known Jim Campbell a long time, but he can surprise me even yet.

"Here! hold on!" I protested. "How about the rest of that catechism?"

"You've had it."

"Were those all the questions you wanted to ask?"

"Yes."

"Humph! And that is all the advice and encouragement I'm to get from you! How about those prescriptions you had up your sleeve?"

"You'll get those by and by. Before I leave this gay and festive scene to-morrow I'm going to talk to you, Ho-se-a. And you're going to listen. You'll listen to old Doctor Campbell; HE'LL prescribe for you, don't you worry. And now," beginning to descend the steps, "now for clams and flounders."

"And the Point Rip," I added, maliciously, for his frivolous treatment of what was to me a very serious matter, was disappointing and provoking. "Don't forget the Point Rip."

We dug the clams--they were for bait--we boarded the "Hephzy," sailed out to the fishing grounds, and caught flounders. I caught the most of them; Jim was not interested in fishing during the greater part of the time. Then we sailed home again and walked up to the house. Hephzibah, for whom my boat is named, met us at the back door. As usual her greeting was not to the point and practical.

"Leave your rubber boots right outside on the porch," she said. "Here, give me those flatfish; I'll take care of 'em. Hosity, you'll find dry things ready in your room. Here's your shoes; I've been warmin' 'em. Mr. Campbell I've put a suit of Hosity's and some flannels on your bed. They may not fit you, but they'll be lots better than the damp ones you've got on. You needn't hurry; dinner won't be ready till you are."

I did not say anything; I knew Hephzy--had known her all my life. Jim, who, naturally enough, didn't know her as well, protested.

"We're not wet, Miss Cahoon," he declared. "At least, I'm not, and I don't see how Kent can be. We both wore oilskins."

"That doesn't make any difference. You ought to change your clothes anyhow. Been out in that boat, haven't you?"

"Yes, but--"

"Well, then! Don't say another word. I'll have a fire in the sittin'-room and somethin' hot ready when you come down. Hosity, be sure and put on BOTH the socks I darned for you. Don't get thinkin' of somethin' else and come down with one whole and one holey, same as you did last time. You must excuse me, Mr. Campbell. I've got saleratus biscuits in the oven."

She hastened into the kitchen. When Jim and I, having obeyed orders to the extent of leaving our boots on the porch, passed through that kitchen she was busy with the tea-kettle. I led the way through the dining-room and up the front stairs. My visitor did not speak until we reached the second story. Then he expressed his feelings.

"Say, Kent" he demanded, "are you going to change your clothes?"

"Yes."

"Why? You're no wetter than I am, are you?"

"Not a bit, but I'm going to change, just the same. It's the easier way."

"It is, is it! What's the other way?"

"The other way is to keep on those you're wearing and take the consequences."

"What consequences?"

"Jamaica ginger, hot water bottles and an afternoon's roast in front of the sitting-room fire. Hephzibah went out sailing with me last October and caught cold. That was enough; no one else shall have the experience if she can help it."

"But--but good heavens! Kent, do you mean to say you always have to change when you come in from sailing?"

"Except in summer, yes."

"But why?"

"Because Hephzy tells me to."

"Do you always do what she tells you?"

"Generally. It's the easiest way, as I said before."

"Good--heavens! And she darns your socks and tells you what--er lingerie to wear and--does she wash your face and wipe your nose and scrub behind your ears?"

"Not exactly, but she probably would if I didn't do it."

"Well, I'll be hanged! And she extends the same treatment to all your guests?"

"I don't have any guests but you. No doubt she would if I did. She mothers every stray cat and sick chicken in the neighborhood. There, Jim, you trot along and do as you're told like a nice little boy. I'll join you in the sitting-room."

"Humph! perhaps I'd better. I may be spanked and put to bed if I don't. Well, well! and you are the author of 'The Black Brig!' 'Buccaneers and Blood!' 'Bibs and Butterscotch' it should be! Don't stand out here in the cold hall, Hopsy darling; you may get the croup if you do."

I was waiting in the sitting-room when he came down. There was a roaring fire in the big, old-fashioned fireplace. That fireplace had been bricked up in the days when people used those abominations, stoves. As a boy I was well acquainted with the old "gas burner" with the iron urn on top and the nicked ornaments and handles which Mother polished so assiduously. But the gas burner had long since gone to the junk dealer. Among the improvements which my first royalty checks made possible were steam heat and the restoration of the fireplace.

Jim found me sitting before the fire in one of the two big "wing" chairs which I had purchased when Darius Barclay's household effects were sold at auction. I should not have acquired them as cheaply if Captain Cyrus Whittaker had been at home when the auction took place. Captain Cy loves old-fashioned things as much as I do and, as he has often told me since, he meant to land those chairs some day if he had to run his bank account high and dry in consequence. But the Captain and his wife--who used to be Phoebe Dawes, our school-teacher here in Bayport--were away visiting their adopted daughter, Emily, who is married and living in Boston, and I got the chairs.

At the Barclay auction I bought also the oil painting of the bark "Freedom"--a command of Captain Elkanah Barclay, uncle of the late Darius--and the set--two volumes missing--of *The Spectator*, bound in sheepskin. The "Freedom" is depicted "Entering the Port of Genoa, July 10th, 1848," and if the port is somewhat wavy and uncertain, the bark's canvas and rigging are definite and rigid enough to make up. The *Spectator* set is chiefly remarkable for its marginal notes; Captain Elkanah bought the books in London and read and annotated at spare intervals during subsequent voyages. His opinions were decided and his notes nautical and emphatic. Hephzibah read a few pages of the notes when the books first came into the house and then went to prayer-meeting. As she had announced her intention of remaining at home that evening I was surprised--until I read them myself.

Jim came downstairs, arrayed in the suit which Hephzy had laid out for him. I made no comment upon his appearance. To do so would have been superfluous; he looked all the comments necessary.

I waved my hand towards the unoccupied wing chair and he sat down. Two glasses, one empty and the other half full of a steaming mixture, were on the little table beside us.

"Help yourself, Jim," I said, indicating the glasses. He took up the one containing the mixture and regarded it hopefully.

"What?" he asked.

"A Cahoon toddy," said I. "Warranted to keep off chills, rheumatism, lumbago and kindred miseries. Good for what ails you. Don't wait; I've had mine."

He took a sniff and then a very small sip. His face expressed genuine emotion.

"Whew!" he gasped, choking. "What in blazes--?"

"Jamaica ginger, sugar and hot water," I explained blandly. "It won't hurt you--longer than five minutes. It is Hephzy's invariable prescription."

"Good Lord! Did you drink yours?"

"No--I never do, unless she watches me."

"But your glass is empty. What did you do with it?"

"Emptied it behind the back log. Of course, if you prefer to drink it--"

"Drink it!" His "toddy" splashed the back log, causing a tremendous sizzle.

Before he could relieve his mind further, Hephzy appeared to announce that dinner was ready if we were. We were, most emphatically, so we went into the dining-room.

Hephzy and Jim did most of the talking during the meal. I had talked more that forenoon than I had for a week--I am not a chatty person, ordinarily, which, in part, explains my nickname--and I was very willing to eat and listen. Hephzy, who was garbed in her best gown--best weekday gown, that is; she kept her black silk for Sundays--talked a good deal, mostly about dreams and presentiments. Susanna Wixon, Tobias Wixon's oldest daughter, waited on table, when she happened to think of it, and listened when she did not. Susanna had been hired to do the waiting and the dish-washing during Campbell's brief visit. It was I who hired her. If I had had my way she would have been a permanent fixture in the household, but Hephzy scoffed at the idea. "Pity if I can't do housework for two folks," she declared. "I don't care if you can afford it. Keepin' hired help in a family no bigger than this, is a sinful extravagance." As Susanna's services had been already engaged for the weekend she could not discharge her, but she insisted on doing all the cooking herself.

Her conversation, as I said, dealt mainly with dreams and presentiments. Hephzibah is not what I should call a superstitious person. She doesn't believe in "signs," although she might feel uncomfortable if she broke a looking-glass or saw the new moon over her left shoulder. She has a most amazing fund of common-sense and is "down" on Spiritualism to a degree. It is one of Bayport's pet yarns, that at the Harniss Spiritualist camp-meeting when the "test medium" announced from the platform that he had a message for a lady named Hephzibah C--he "seemed to get the name Hephzibah C"--Hephzy got up and walked out. "Any dead relations I've got," she declared, "who send messages through a longhaired idiot like that one up there"--meaning the medium,--"can't have much to say that's worth listenin' to. They can talk to themselves if they want to, but they shan't waste MY time."

In but one particular was Hephzy superstitious. Whenever she dreamed of "Little Frank" she was certain something was going to happen. She had dreamed of "Little Frank" the night before and, if she had not been headed off, she would have talked of nothing else.

"I saw him just as plain as I see you this minute, Hosy," she said to me. "I was somewhere, in a strange place--a foreign place, I should say 'twas--and there I saw him. He didn't know me; at least I don't think he did."

"Considering that he never saw you that isn't so surprising," I interrupted. "I think Mr. Campbell would have another cup of coffee if you urged him. Susanna, take Mr. Campbell's cup."

Jim declined the coffee; said he hadn't finished his first cup yet. I knew that, of course, but I was trying to head off Hephzy. She refused to be headed, just then.

"But I knew HIM," she went on. "He looked just the same as he has when I've seen him before--in the other dreams, you know. The very image of his mother. Isn't it wonderful, Hosy!"

"Yes; but don't resurrect the family skeletons, Hephzy. Mr. Campbell isn't interested in anatomy."

"Skeletons! I don't know what you're talkin' about. He wasn't a skeleton. I saw him just as plain! And I said to myself, 'It's little Frank!' Now what do you suppose he came to me for? What do you suppose it means? It means somethin', I know that."

"Means that you weren't sleeping well, probably," I answered. "Jim, here, will dream of cross-seas and the Point Rip to-night, I have no doubt."

Jim promptly declared that if he thought that likely he shouldn't mind so much. What he feared most was a nightmare session with an author.

Hephzibah was interested at once. "Oh, do you dream about authors, Mr. Campbell?" she demanded. "I presume likely you do, they're so mixed up with your business. Do your dreams ever come true?"

"Not often," was the solemn reply. "Most of my dream-authors are rational and almost human."

Hephzy, of course, did not understand this, but it did have the effect for which I had been striving, that of driving "Little Frank" from her mind for the time.

"I don't care," she declared, "I s'pose it's awful foolish and silly of me, but it does seem sometimes as if there was somethin' in dreams, some kind of dreams. Hossy laughs at me and maybe I ought to laugh at myself, but some dreams come true, or awfully near to true; now don't they. Angeline Phinney was in here the other day and she was tellin' about her second cousin that was--he's dead now--Abednego Small. He was constable here in Bayport for years; everybody called him 'Uncle Bedny.' Uncle Bedny had been keepin' company with a woman named Dimick--Josiah Dimick's niece--lots younger than he, she was. He'd been thinkin' of marryin' her, so Angie said, but his folks had been talkin' to him, tellin' him he was too old to take such a young woman for his third wife, so he had made up his mind to throw her over, to write a letter sayin' it was all off between 'em. Well, he'd begun the letter but he never finished it, for three nights runnin' he dreamed that awful trouble was hangin' over him. That dream made such an impression on him that he tore the letter up and married the Dimick woman after all. And then--I didn't know this until Angie told me--it turned out that she had heard he was goin' to give her the go-by and had made all her arrangements to sue him for breach of promise if he did. That was the awful trouble, you see, and the dream saved him from it."

I smiled. "The fault there was in the interpretation of the dream," I said. "The 'awful trouble' of the breach of promise suit wouldn't have been a circumstance to the trouble poor Uncle Bedny got into by marrying Ann Dimick. THAT trouble lasted till he died."

Hephzibah laughed and said she guessed that was so, she hadn't thought of it in that way.

"Probably dreams are all nonsense," she admitted. "Usually, I don't pay much attention to 'em. But when I dream of poor 'Little Frank,' away off there, I--"

"Come into the sitting-room, Jim," I put in hastily. "I have a cigar or two there. I don't buy them in Bayport, either."

"And who," asked Jim, as we sat smoking by the fire, "is Little Frank?"

"He is a mythical relative of ours," I explained, shortly. "He was born twenty years ago or so--at least we heard that he was; and we haven't heard anything of him since, except by the dream route, which is not entirely convincing. He is Hephzy's pet obsession. Kindly forget him, to oblige me."

He looked puzzled, but he did not mention "Little Frank" again, for which I was thankful.

That afternoon we walked up to the village, stopping in at Simmons's store, which is also the post-office, for the mail. Captain Cyrus Whittaker happened to be there, also Asaph Tidditt and Bailey Bangs and Sylvanus Cahoon and several others. I introduced Campbell to the crowd and he seemed to be enjoying himself. When we came out and were walking home again, he observed:

"That Whittaker is an interesting chap, isn't he?"

"Yes," I said. "He is all right. Been everywhere and seen everything."

"And that," with an odd significance in his tone, "may possibly help to make him interesting, don't you think?"

"I suppose so. He lives here in Bayport now, though."

"So I gathered. Popular, is he?"

"Very."

"Satisfied with life?"

"Seems to be."

"Hum! No one calls HIM a--what is it--quahaug?"

"No, I'm the only human clam in this neighborhood."

He did not say any more, nor did I. My fit of the blues was on again and his silence on the subject in which I was interested, my work and my future, troubled me and made me more despondent. I began to lose faith in the "prescription" which he had promised so emphatically. How could he, or anyone else, help me? No one could write my stories but myself, and I knew, only too well, that I could not write them.

The only mail matter in our box was a letter addressed to Hephzibah. I forgot it until after supper and then I gave it to her. Jim retired early; the salt air made him sleepy, so he said, and he went upstairs shortly after nine. He had not mentioned our talk of the morning, nor did he until I left him at the door of his room. Then he said:

"Kent, I've got one of the answers to your conundrum. I've diagnosed one of your troubles. You're blind."

"Blind?"

"Yes, blind. Or, if not blind altogether you're suffering from the worse case of far-sightedness I ever saw. All your literary--we'll call it that for compliment's sake--all your literary life you've spent writing about people and things so far off you don't know anything about them. You and your dukes and your earls and your titled ladies! What do you know of that crowd? You never saw a lord in your life. Why don't you write of something near by, something or somebody you are acquainted with?"

"Acquainted with! You're crazy, man. What am I acquainted with, except this house, and myself and my books and--and Bayport?"

"That's enough. Why, there is material in that gang at the post-office to make a dozen books. Write about them."

"Tut! tut! tut! You ARE crazy. What shall I write; the life of Ase Tidditt in four volumes, beginning with 'I swan to man' and ending with 'By godfrey'?"

"You might do worse. If the book were as funny as its hero I'd undertake to sell a few copies."

"Funny! _I_ couldn't write a funny book."

"Not an intentionally funny one, you mean. But there! There's no use to talk to you."

"There is not, if you talk like an imbecile. Is this your brilliant 'prescription'?"

"No. It might be; it would be, if you would take it, but you won't--not now. You need something else first and I'll give it to you. But I'll tell you this, and I mean it: Downstairs, in that dining-room of yours, there's one mighty good story, at least."

"The dining-room? A story in the dining-room?"

"Yes. Or it was there when we passed the door just now."

I looked at him. He seemed to be serious, but I knew he was not. I hate riddles.

"Oh, go to blazes!" I retorted, and turned away.

I looked into the dining-room as I went by. There was no story in sight there, so far as I could see. Hephzy was seated by the table, mending something, something of mine, of course. She looked up.

"Oh, Hosity," she said, "that letter you brought was a travel book from the Raymond and Whitcomb folks. I sent a stamp for it. It's awfully interesting! All about tours through England and France and Switzerland and everywhere. So cheap they are! I'm pickin' out the ones I'm goin' on some day. The pictures are lovely. Don't you want to see 'em?"

"Not now," I replied. Another obsession of Hephzy's was travel. She, who had never been further from Bayport than Hartford, Connecticut, was forever dreaming of globe-trotting. It was not a new disease with her,

by any means; she had been dreaming the same things ever since I had known her, and that is since I knew anything. Some day, SOME day she was going to this, that and the other place. She knew all about these places, because she had read about them over and over again. Her knowledge, derived as it was from so many sources, was curiously mixed, but it was comprehensive, of its kind. She was continually sending for Cook's circulars and booklets advertising personally conducted excursions. And, with the arrival of each new circular or booklet, she picked out, as she had just done, the particular tours she would go on when her "some day" came. It was funny, this queer habit of hers, but not half as funny as the thought of her really going would have been. I would have as soon thought of our front door leaving home and starting on its travels as of Hephzy's doing it. The door was no more a part and fixture of that home than she was.

I went into my study, which adjoins the sitting-room, and sat down at my desk. Not with the intention of writing anything, or even of considering something to write about. That I made up my mind to forget for this night, at least. My desk chair was my usual seat in that room and I took that seat as a matter of habit.

As a matter of habit also I looked about for a book. I did not have to look far. Books were my extravagance--almost my only one. They filled the shelves to the ceiling on three sides of the study and overflowed in untidy heaps on the floor. They were Hephzy's bugbear, for I refused to permit their being "straightened out" or arranged.

I looked about for a book and selected several, but, although they were old favorites, I could not interest myself in any of them. I tried and tried, but even Mr. Pepys, that dependable solace of a lonely hour, failed to interest me with his chatter. Perhaps Campbell's pointed remarks concerning lords and ladies had its effect here. Old Samuel loved to write of such people, having a wide acquaintance with them, and perhaps that very acquaintance made me jealous. At any rate I threw the volume back upon its pile and began to think of myself, and of my work, the very thing I had expressly determined not to do when I came into the room.

Jim's foolish and impossible advice to write of places and people I knew haunted and irritated me. I did know Bayport--yes, and it might be true that the group at the post-office contained possible material for many books; but, if so, it was material for the other man, not for me. "Write of what you know," said Jim. And I knew so little. There was at least one good yarn in the dining-room at that moment, he had declared. He must have meant Hephzibah, but, if he did, what was there in Hephzibah's dull, gray life-story to interest an outside reader? Her story and mine were interwoven and neither contained anything worth writing about. His fancy had been caught, probably, by her odd combination of the romantic and the practical, and in her dream of "Little Frank" he had scented a mystery. There was no mystery there, nothing but the most commonplace record of misplaced trust and ingratitude. Similar things happen in so many families.

However, I began to think of Hephzy and, as I said, of myself, and to review my life since Ardelia Cahoon and Strickland Morley changed its course so completely. And now it seems to me that, in the course of my "edging around" for the beginning of this present chronicle--so different from anything I have ever written before or ever expected to write--the time has come when the reader--provided, of course, the

said chronicle is ever finished or ever reaches a reader--should know something of that life; should know a little of the family history of the Knowles and the Cahoons and the Morleys.

CHAPTER III

Which, Although It Is Largely Family History, Should Not Be Skipped by the Reader

Let us take the Knowleses first. My name is Hosea Kent Knowles--I said that before--and my father was Captain Philander Kent Knowles. He was lost in the wreck of the steamer "Monarch of the Sea," off Hatteras. The steamer caught fire in the middle of the night, a howling gale blowing and the thermometer a few degrees above zero. The passengers and crew took to the boats and were saved. My father stuck by his ship and went down with her, as did also her first mate, another Cape-Codder. I was a baby at the time, and was at Bayport with my mother, Emily Knowles, formerly Emily Cahoon, Captain Barnabas Cahoon's niece. Mother had a little money of her own and Father's life was insured for a moderate sum. Her small fortune was invested for her by her uncle, Captain Barnabas, who was the Bayport magnate and man of affairs in those days. Mother and I continued to live in the old house in Bayport and I went to school in the village until I was fourteen, when I went away to a preparatory school near Boston. Mother died a year later. I was an only child, but Hephzibah, who had always seemed like an older sister to me, now began to "mother" me, the process which she has kept up ever since.

Hephzibah was the daughter of Captain Barnabas by his first wife. Hephzy was born in 1859, so she is well over fifty now, although no one would guess it. Her mother died when she was a little girl and ten years later Captain Barnabas married again. His second wife was Susan Hammond, of Ostable, and by her he had one daughter, Ardelia. Hephzy has always declared "Ardelia" to be a pretty name. I have my own opinion on that subject, but I keep it to myself.

At any rate, Ardelia herself was pretty enough. She was pretty when a baby and prettier still as a schoolgirl. Her mother--while she lived, which was not long--spoiled her, and her half-sister, Hephzy, assisted in the petting and spoiling. Ardelia grew up with the idea that most things in this world were hers for the asking. Whatever took her fancy she asked for and, if Captain Barnabas did not give it to her, she considered herself ill-used. She was the young lady of the family and Hephzibah was the housekeeper and drudge, an uncomplaining one, be it understood. For her, as for the Captain, the business of life was keeping Ardelia contented and happy, and they gloried in the task. Hephzy might have married well at least twice, but she wouldn't think of such a thing. "Pa and Ardelia need me," she said; that was reason sufficient.

In 1888 Captain Barnabas went to Philadelphia on business. He had retired from active sea-going years before, but he retained an interest in a certain line of coasting schooners. The Captain, as I said, went to Philadelphia on business connected with these schooners and Ardelia went with him. Hephzibah stayed at home, of course; she always stayed at home, never expected to do anything else, although even then her favorite reading were books of travel, and pictures of the Alps, and of

St. Peter's at Rome, and the Tower of London were tacked up about her room. She, too, might have gone to Philadelphia, doubtless, if she had asked, but she did not ask. Her father did not think of inviting her. He loved his oldest daughter, although he did not worship her as he did Ardelia, but it never occurred to him that she, too, might enjoy the trip. Hephzy was always at home, she WAS home; so at home she remained.

In Philadelphia Ardelia met Strickland Morley.

I give that statement a line all by itself, for it is by far the most important I have set down so far. The whole story of the Cahoons and the Knowleses--that is, all of their story which is the foundation of this history of mine--hinges on just that. If those two had not met I should not be writing this to-day, I might not be writing at all; instead of having become a Bayport "quahaug" I might have been the Lord knows what.

However, they did meet, at the home of a wealthy shipping merchant named Osgood who was a lifelong friend of Captain Barnabas. This shipping merchant had a daughter and that daughter was giving a party at her father's home. Barnabas and Ardelia were invited. Strickland Morley was invited also.

Morley, at that time--I saw a good deal of him afterward, when he was at Bayport and when I was at the Cahoon house on holidays and vacations--was a handsome, aristocratic young Englishman. He was twenty-eight, but he looked younger. He was the second son in a Leicestershire family which had once been wealthy and influential but which had, in its later generations, gone to seed. He was educated, in a general sort of way, was a good dancer, played the violin fairly well, sang fairly well, had an attractive presence, and was one of the most plausible and fascinating talkers I ever listened to. He had studied medicine--studied it after a fashion, that is; he never applied himself to anything--and was then, in '88, "ship's doctor" aboard a British steamer, which ran between Philadelphia and Glasgow. Miss Osgood had met him at the home of a friend of hers who had traveled on that steamer.

Hephzy and I do not agree as to whether or not he actually fell in love with Ardelia Cahoon. Hephzy, of course, to whom Ardelia was the most wonderfully beautiful creature on earth, is certain that he did--he could not help it, she says. I am not so sure. It is very hard for me to believe that Strickland Morley was ever in love with anyone but himself. Captain Barnabas was well-to-do and had the reputation of being much richer than he really was. And Ardelia WAS beautiful, there is no doubt of that. At all events, Ardelia fell in love, with him, violently, desperately, head over heels in love, the very moment the two were introduced. They danced practically every dance together that evening, met surreptitiously the next day and for five days thereafter, and on the sixth day Captain Barnabas received a letter from his daughter announcing that she and Morley were married and had gone to New York together. "We will meet you there, Pa," wrote Ardelia. "I know you will forgive me for marrying Strickland. He is the most wonderful man in the wide world. You will love him, Pa, as I do."

There was very little love expressed by the Captain when he read the note. According to Mr. Osgood's account, Barnabas's language was a throwback from the days when he was first mate on a Liverpool packet. That his idolized daughter had married without asking his consent was bad enough; that she had married an Englishman was worse. Captain Barnabas hated all Englishmen. A ship of his had been captured and

burned, in the war time, by the "Alabama," a British built privateer, and the very mildest of the terms he applied to a "John Bull" will not bear repetition in respectable society. He would not forgive Ardelia. She and her "Cockney husband" might sail together to the most tropical of tropics, or words to that effect.

But he did forgive her, of course. Likewise he forgave his son-in-law. When the Captain returned to Bayport he brought the newly wedded pair with him. I was not present at that homecoming. I was away at prep school, digging at my examinations, trying hard to forget that I was an orphan, but with the dull ache caused by my mother's death always grinding at my heart. Many years ago she died, but the ache comes back now, as I think of her. There is more self-reproach in it than there used to be, more vain regrets for impatient words and wasted opportunities. Ah, if some of us--boys grown older--might have our mothers back again, would we be as impatient and selfish now? Would we neglect the opportunities? I think not; I hope not.

Hephzibah, after she got over the shock of the surprise and the pain of sharing her beloved sister with another, welcomed that other for Ardelia's sake. She determined to like him very much indeed. This wasn't so hard, at first. Everyone liked and trusted Strickland Morley at first sight. Afterward, when they came to know him better, they were not--if they were as wise and discerning as Hephzy--so sure of the trust. The wise and discerning were not, I say; Captain Barnabas, though wise and shrewd enough in other things, trusted him to the end.

Morley made it a point to win the affection and goodwill of his father-in-law. For the first month or two after the return to Bayport the new member of the family was always speaking of his plans for the future, of his profession and how he intended soon, very soon, to look up a good location and settle down to practice. Whenever he spoke thus, Captain Barnabas and Ardelia begged him not to do it yet, to wait awhile. "I am so happy with you and Pa and Hephzy," declared Ardelia. "I can't bear to go away yet, Strickland. And Pa doesn't want us to; do you, Pa?"

Of course Captain Barnabas agreed with her, he always did, and so the Morleys remained at Bayport in the old house. Then came the first of the paralytic shocks--a very slight one--which rendered Captain Barnabas, the hitherto hale, active old seaman, unfit for exertion or the cares of business. He was not bedridden by any means; he could still take short walks, attend town meetings and those of the parish committee, but he must not, so Dr. Parker said, be allowed to worry about anything.

And Morley took it upon himself to prevent that worry. He spoke no more of leaving Bayport and settling down to practice his profession. Instead he settled down in Bayport and took the Captain's business cares upon his own shoulders. Little by little he increased his influence over the old man. He attended to the latter's investments, took charge of his bank account, collected his dividends, became, so to speak, his financial guardian. Captain Barnabas, at first rebellious--"I've always bossed my own ship," he declared, "and I ain't so darned feeble-headed that I can't do it yet"--gradually grew reconciled and then contented. He, too, began to worship his daughter's husband as the daughter herself did.

"He's a wonder," said the Captain. "I never saw such a fellow for money matters. He's handled my stocks and things a whole lot better'n I ever

did. I used to call it if I got six per cent. interest I was doin' well. He ain't satisfied with anything short of eight, and he gets it, too. Whatever that boy wants and I own he can have. Sometimes I think this consarned palsy of mine is a judgment on me for bein' so sot against him in the beginnin'. Why, just look at how he runs this house, to say nothing of the rest of it! He's a skipper here; the rest of us ain't anything but fo'most hands."

Which was not the exact truth. Morley was skipper of the Cahoon house, Ardelia first mate, her father a passenger, and the foremast hand was Hephzy. And yet, so far as "running" that house was concerned the foremast hand ran it, as she always had done. The Captain and Ardelia were Morley's willing slaves; Hephzy was, and continued to be, a free woman. She worked from morning until night, but she obeyed only such orders as she saw fit.

She alone did not take the new skipper at his face value.

"I don't know what there was about him that made me uneasy," she has told me since. "Maybe there wasn't anything; perhaps that was just the reason. When a person is SO good and SO smart and SO polite--maybe the average sinful common mortal like me gets jealous; I don't know. But I do know that, to save my life, I couldn't swallow him whole the way Ardelia and Father did. I wanted to look him over first; and the more I looked him over, and the smoother and smoother he looked, the more sure I felt he'd give us all dyspepsy before he got through. Unreasonable, wasn't it?"

For Ardelia's sake she concealed her distrust and did her best to get on with the new head of the family. Only one thing she did, and that against Motley's and her father's protest. She withdrew her own little fortune, left her by her mother, from Captain Barnabas's care and deposited it in the Ostable savings bank and in equally secure places. Of course she told the Captain of her determination to do this before she did it and the telling was the cause of the only disagreement, almost a quarrel, which she and her father ever had. The Captain was very angry and demanded reasons. Hephzibah declared she didn't know that she had any reasons, but she was going to do it, nevertheless. And she did do it. For months thereafter relations between the two were strained; Barnabas scarcely spoke to his older daughter and Hephzy shed tears in the solitude of her bedroom. They were hard months for her.

At the end of them came the crash. Morley had developed a habit of running up to Boston on business trips connected with his father-in-law's investments. Of late these little trips had become more frequent. Also, so it seemed to Hephzy, he was losing something of his genial sweetness and suavity, and becoming more moody and less entertaining. Telegrams and letters came frequently and these he read and destroyed at once. He seldom played the violin now unless Captain Barnabas--who was fond of music of the simpler sort--requested him to do so and he seemed uneasy and, for him, surprisingly disinclined to talk.

Hephzy was not the only one who noticed the change in him. Ardelia noticed it also and, as she always did when troubled or perplexed, sought her sister's advice.

"I sha'n't ever forget that night when she came to me for the last time," Hephzy has told me over and over again. "She came up to my room, poor thing, and set down on the side of my bed and told me how worried

she was about her husband. Father had turned in and HE was out, gone to the post-office or somewheres. I had Ardelia all to myself, for a wonder, and we sat and talked just the same as we used to before she was married. I'm glad it happened so. I shall always have that to remember, anyhow.

"Of course, all her worry was about Strickland. She was afraid he was makin' himself sick. He worked so hard; didn't I think so? Well, so far as that was concerned, I had come to believe that almost any kind of work was liable to make HIM sick, but of course I didn't say that to her. That somethin' was troublin' him was plain, though I was far enough from guessin' what that somethin' was.

"We set and talked, about Strickland and about Father and about ourselves. Mainly Ardelia's talk was a praise service with her husband for the subject of worship; she was so happy with him and idolized him so that she couldn't spare time for much else. But she did speak a little about herself and, before she went away, she whispered somethin' in my ear which was a dead secret. Even Father didn't know it yet, she said. Of course I was as pleased as she was, almost--and a little frightened too, although I didn't say so to her. She was always a frail little thing, delicate as she was pretty; not a strapping, rugged, homely body like me. We wasn't a bit alike.

"So we talked and when she went away to bed she gave me an extra hug and kiss; came back to give 'em to me, just as she used to when she was a little girl. I wondered since if she had any inklin' of what was goin' to happen. I'm sure she didn't; I'm sure of it as I am that it did happen. She couldn't have kept it from me if she had known--not that night. She went away to bed and I went to bed, too. I was a long while gettin' to sleep and after I did I dreamed my first dream about 'Little Frank.' I didn't call him 'Little Frank' then, though. I don't seem to remember what I did call him or just how he looked except that he looked like Ardelia. And the next afternoon she and Strickland went away--to Boston, he told us."

From that trip they never returned. Morley's influence over his wife must have been greater even than any of us thought to induce her to desert her father and Hephzy without even a written word of explanation or farewell. It is possible that she did write and that her husband destroyed the letter. I am as sure as Hephzy is that Ardelia did not know what Morley had done. But, at all events, they never came back to Bayport and within the week the truth became known. Morley had speculated, had lost and lost again and again. All of Captain Barnabas's own money and all intrusted to his care, including my little nest-egg, had gone as margins to the brokers who had bought for Morley his worthless eight per cent. wildcats. Hephzy's few thousands in the savings bank and elsewhere were all that was left.

I shall condense the rest of the miserable business as much as I can. Captain Barnabas traced his daughter and her husband as far as the steamer which sailed for England. Farther he would not trace them, although he might easily have cabled and caused his son-in-law's arrest. For a month he went about in a sort of daze, speaking to almost no one and sitting for hours alone in his room. The doctor feared for his sanity, but when the breakdown came it was in the form of a second paralytic stroke which left him a helpless, crippled dependent, weak and shattered in body and mind.

He lived nine years longer. Meanwhile various things happened. I managed to finish my preparatory school term and, then, instead of entering college as Mother and I had planned, I went into business--save the mark--taking the exalted position of entry clerk in a wholesale drygoods house in Boston. As entry clerk I did not shine, but I continued to keep the place until the firm failed--whether or not because of my connection with it I am not sure, though I doubt if my services were sufficiently important to contribute toward even this result. A month later I obtained another position and, after that, another. I was never discharged; I declare that with a sort of negative pride; but when I announced to my second employer my intention of resigning he bore the shock with--to say the least--philosophic fortitude.

"We shall miss you, Knowles," he observed.

"Thank you, sir," said I.

"I doubt if we ever have another bookkeeper just like you."

I thanked him again, fighting down my blushes with heroic modesty.

"Oh, I guess you can find one if you try," I said, lightly, wishing to comfort him.

He shook his head. "I sha'n't try," he declared. "I am not as young and as strong as I was and--well, there is always the chance that we might succeed."

It was a mean thing to say--to a boy, for I was scarcely more than that. And yet, looking back at it now, I am much more disposed to smile and forgive than I was then. My bookkeeping must have been a trial to his orderly, pigeon-holed soul. Why in the world he and his partner put up with it so long is a miracle. When, after my first novel appeared, he wrote me to say that the consciousness of having had a part, small though it might be, in training my young mind upward toward the success it had achieved would always be a great gratification to him, I did not send the letter I wrote in answer. Instead I tore up my letter and his and grinned. I WAS a bad bookkeeper; I was, and still am, a bad business man. Now I don't care so much; that is the difference.

Then I cared a great deal, but I kept on at my hated task. What else was there for me to do? My salary was so small that, as Charlie Burns, one of my fellow-clerks, said of his, I was afraid to count it over a bare floor for fear that it might drop in a crack and be lost. It was my only revenue, however, and I continued to live upon it somehow. I had a small room in a boarding-house on Shawmut Avenue and I spent most of my evenings there or in the reading-room at the public library. I was not popular at the boarding-house. Most of the young fellows there went out a good deal, to call upon young ladies or to dance or to go to the theater. I had learned to dance when I was at school and I was fond of the theater, but I did not dance well and on the rare occasions when I did accompany the other fellows to the play and they laughed and applauded and tried to flirt with the chorus girls, I fidgeted in my seat and was uncomfortable. Not that I disapproved of their conduct; I rather envied them, in fact. But if I laughed too heartily I was sure that everyone was looking at me, and though I should have liked to flirt, I didn't know how.

The few attempts I made were not encouraging. One evening--I was

nineteen then, or thereabouts--Charlie Burns, the clerk whom I have mentioned, suggested that we get dinner downtown at a restaurant and "go somewhere" afterward. I agreed--it happened to be Saturday night and I had my pay in my pocket--so we feasted on oyster stew and ice cream and then started for what my companion called a "variety show." Burns, who cherished the fond hope that he was a true sport, ordered beer with his oyster stew and insisted that I should do the same. My acquaintance with beer was limited and I never did like the stuff, but I drank it with reckless abandon, following each sip with a mouthful of something else to get rid of the taste. On the way to the "show" we met two young women of Burns' acquaintance and stopped to converse with them. Charlie offered his arm to one, the best looking; I offered mine to the discard, and we proceeded to stroll two by two along the Tremont Street mall of the Common. We had strolled for perhaps ten minutes, most of which time I had spent trying to think of something to say, when Burns' charmer--she was a waitress in one of Mr. Wyman's celebrated "sandwich depots," I believe--turned and, looking back at my fair one and myself, observed with some sarcasm: "What's the matter with your silent partner, Mame? Got the lock-jaw, has he?"

I left them soon after that. There was no "variety show" for me that night. Humiliated and disgusted with myself I returned to my room at the boarding-house, realizing in bitterness of spirit that the gentlemanly dissipations of a true sport were never to be mine.

As I grew older I kept more and more to myself. My work at the office must have been a little better done, I fancy, for my salary was raised twice in four years, but I detested the work and the office and all connected with it. I read more and more at the public library and began to spend the few dollars I could spare for luxuries on books. Among my acquaintances at the boarding-house and elsewhere I had the reputation of being "queer."

My only periods of real pleasure were my annual vacations in summer. These glorious fortnights were spent at Bayport. There, at our old home, for Hephzibah had sold the big Cahoon house and she and her father were living in mine, for which they paid a very small rent, I was happy. I spent the two weeks in sailing and fishing, and tramping along the waved-washed beaches and over the pine-sprinkled hills. Even in Bayport I had few associates of my own age. Even then they began to call me "The Quahaug." Hephzy hugged me when I came and wept over me when I went away and mended my clothes and cooked my favorite dishes in the interval. Captain Barnabas sat in the big arm-chair by the sitting-room window, looking out or sleeping. He took little interest in me or anyone else and spoke but seldom. Occasionally I spent the Fourth of July or Christmas at Bayport; not often, but as often as I could.

One morning--I was twenty-five at the time, and the day was Sunday--I read a story in one of the low-priced magazines. It was not much of a story, and, as I read it, I kept thinking that I could write as good a one. I had had such ideas before, but nothing had come of them. This time, however, I determined to try. In half an hour I had evolved a plot, such as it was, and at a quarter to twelve that night the story was finished. A highwayman was its hero and its scene the great North Road in England. My conceptions of highwaymen and the North Road--of England, too, for that matter--were derived from something I had read at some time or other, I suppose; they must have been. At any rate, I finished that story, addressed the envelope to the editor of the magazine and dropped the envelope and its inclosure in the corner

mail-box before I went to bed. Next morning I went to the office as usual. I had not the faintest hope that the story would be accepted. The writing of it had been fun and the sending it to the magazine a joke.

But the story was accepted and the check which I received--forty dollars--was far from a joke to a man whose weekly wage was half that amount. The encouraging letter which accompanied the check was best of all. Before the week ended I had written another thriller and this, too, was accepted.

Thereafter, for a year or more, my Sundays and the most of my evenings were riots of ink and blood. The ink was real enough and the blood purely imaginary. My heroes spilled the latter and I the former. Sometimes my yarns were refused, but the most of them were accepted and paid for. Editors of other periodicals began to write to me requesting contributions. My price rose. For one particularly harrowing and romantic tale I was paid seventy-five dollars. I dressed in my best that evening, dined at the Adams House, gave the waiter a quarter, and saw Joseph Jefferson from an orchestra seat.

Then came the letter from Jim Campbell requesting me to come to New York and see him concerning a possible book, a romance, to be written by me and published by the firm of which he was the head. I saw my employer, obtained a Saturday off, and spent that Saturday and Sunday in New York, my first visit.

As a result of that visit began my friendship with Campbell and my first long story, "The Queen's Amulet." The "Amulet," or the "Omelet," just as you like, was a financial success. It sold a good many thousand copies. Six months later I broke to my employers the distressing news that their business must henceforth worry on as best it could without my aid; I was going to devote my valuable time and effort to literature.

My fellow-clerks were surprised. Charlie Burns, head bookkeeper now, and a married man and a father, was much concerned.

"But, great Scott, Kent!" he protested, "you're going to do something besides write books, ain't you? You ain't going to make your whole living that way?"

"I am going to try," I said.

"Great Scott! Why, you'll starve! All those fellows live in garrets and starve to death, don't they?"

"Not all," I told him. "Only real geniuses do that."

He shook his head and his good-by was anything but cheerful.

My plans were made and I put them into execution at once. I shipped my goods and chattels, the latter for the most part books, to Bayport and went there to live and write in the old house where I was born. Hephzy was engaged as my housekeeper. She was alone now; Captain Barnabas had died nearly two years before.

Among the Captain's papers and discovered by his daughter after his death was a letter from Strickland Morley. It was written from a town in France and was dated six years after Morley's flight and the disclosure of his crookedness. Captain Barnabas had never, apparently, answered the

letter; certainly he had never told anyone of its receipt by him. The old man never mentioned Morley's name and only spoke of Ardelia during his last hours, when his mind was wandering. Then he spoke of and asked for her continually, driving poor Hephzibah to distraction, for her love for her lost sister was as great as his.

The letter was the complaining whine of a thoroughly selfish man. I can scarcely refer to it without losing patience, even now when I understand more completely the circumstances under which it was written. It was not too plainly written or coherent and seemed to imply that other letters had preceded it. Morley begged for money. He was in "pitiful straits," he declared, compelled to live as no gentleman of birth and breeding should live. As a matter of fact, the remnant of his resources, the little cash left from the Captain's fortune which he had taken with him had gone and he was earning a precarious living by playing the violin in a second-rate orchestra. "For poor dead Ardelia's sake," he wrote, "and for the sake of little Francis, your grandchild, I ask you to extend the financial help which I, as your heir-in-law, might demand. You may consider that I have wronged you, but, as you should know and must know, the wrong was unintentional and due solely to the sudden collapse of the worthless American investments which the scoundrelly Yankee brokers inveigled me into making."

If the money was sent at once, he added, it might reach him in time to prevent his yielding to despondency and committing suicide.

"Suicide! HE commit suicide!" sniffed Hephzy when she read me the letter. "He thinks too much of his miserable self ever to hurt it. But, oh dear! I wish Pa had told me of this letter instead of hidin' it away. I might have sent somethin', not to him, but to poor, motherless Little Frank."

She had tried; that is, she had written to the French address, but her letter had been returned. Morley and the child of whom this letter furnished the only information were no longer in that locality. Hephzy had talked of "Little Frank" and dreamed about him at intervals ever since. He had come to be a reality to her, and she even cut a child's picture from a magazine and fastened it to the wall of her room beneath the engraving of Westminster Abbey, because there was something about the child in the picture which reminded her of "Little Frank" as he looked in her dreams.

She and I had lived together ever since, I continuing to turn out, each with less enthusiasm and more labor, my stories of persons and places of which, as Campbell said but too truly, I knew nothing whatever. Finally I had reached my determination to write no more "slush," profitable though it might be. I invited Jim to visit me; he had come and the conversation at the boathouse and his remarks at the bedroom door were all the satisfaction that visit had brought me so far.

I sat there in my study, going over all this, not so fully as I have set it down here, but fully nevertheless, and the possibility of finding even a glimmer of interest or a hint of fictional foundation in Hephzibah or her life or mine was as remote at the end of my thinking as it had been at the beginning. There might be a story there, or a part of a story, but I could not write it. The real trouble was that I could not write anything. With which, conclusion, exactly what I started with, I blew out the lamp and went upstairs to bed.

Next morning Jim and I went for another sail from which we did not return until nearly dinner-time. During that whole forenoon he did not mention the promised "prescription," although I offered him plenty of opportunities and threw out various hints by way of bait.

He ignored the bait altogether and, though he talked a great deal and asked a good many questions, both talk and questions had no bearing on the all-important problem which had been my real reason for inviting him to Bayport. He questioned me again concerning my way of spending my time, about my savings, how much money I had put by, and the like, but I was not particularly interested in these matters and they were not his business, to put it plainly. At least, I could not see that they were.

I answered him as briefly as possible and, I am afraid, behaved rather boorishly to one, who next to Hephzy, was perhaps the best friend I had in the world. His apparent lack of interest hurt and disappointed me and I did not care if he knew it. My impatience must have been apparent enough, but if so it did not trouble him; he chatted and laughed and told stories all the way from the landing to the house and announced to Hephzy, who had stayed at home from church in order to prepare and cook clam chowder and chicken pie and a "Queen pudding," that he had an appetite like a starved shark.

When, at last, that appetite was satisfied, he and I adjourned to the sitting-room for a farewell smoke. His train left at three-thirty and it lacked but an hour of that time. He had worn my suit, the one which Hephzibah had laid out for him the day before, but had changed to his own again and packed his bag before dinner.

We camped in the wing chairs and he lighted his cigar. Then, to my astonishment, he rose and shut the door.

"What did you do that for?" I asked.

He came back to his chair.

"Because I'm going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle," he replied, "and I don't want anyone, not even a Cape Cod cousin, butting in. Kent, I told you that before I went I was going to prescribe for you, didn't I? Well, I'm going to do it now. Are you ready for the prescription?"

"I have been ready for it for some time," I retorted. "I began to think you had forgotten it altogether."

"I hadn't. But I wanted it to be the last word you should hear from me and I didn't want to give you time to think up a lot of fool objections to spring on me before I left. Look here, I'm your doctor now; do you understand? You called me in as a specialist and what I say goes. Is that understood?"

"I hear you."

"You've got to do more than hear me. You've got to do what I tell you. I know what ails you. You've buried yourself in the mud down here. Wake up, you clam! Come out of your shell. Stir around. Stop thinking about yourself and think of something worth while."

"Dear! dear! hark to the voice of the oracle. And what is the something worth while I am to think about; you?"

"Yes, by George! me! Me and the dear public! Here are thirty-five thousand seekers after the--the higher literature, panting open-mouthed for another Knowles classic. And you sit back here and cover yourself with sand and seaweed and say you won't give it to them."

"You're wrong. I say I can't."

"You will, though."

"I won't. You can bet high on that."

"You will, and I'll bet higher. YOU write no more stories! You! Why, confound you, you couldn't help it if you tried. You needn't write another 'Black Brig' unless you want to. You needn't--you mustn't write anything UNTIL you want to. But, by George! you'll get up and open your eyes and stir around, and keep stirring until the time comes when you've found something or someone you DO want to write about. THEN you'll write; you will, for I know you. It may turn out to be what you call 'slush,' or it may not, but you'll write it, mark my words."

He was serious now, serious enough even to suit me. But what he had said did not suit me.

"Don't talk nonsense, Jim," I said. "Don't you suppose I have thought--"

"Thought! that's just it; you do nothing but think. Stop thinking. Stop being a quahaug--a dead one, anyway. Drop the whole business, drop Bayport, drop America, if you like. Get up, clear out, go to China, go to Europe, go to--Well, never mind, but go somewhere. Go somewhere and forget it. Travel, take a long trip, start for one place and, if you change your mind before you get there, go somewhere else. It doesn't make much difference where, so that you go, and see different things. I'm talking now, Kent Knowles, and it isn't altogether because it pays us to publish your books, either. You drop Bayport and drop writing. Go out and pick up and go. Stay six months, stay a year, stay two years, but keep alive and meet people and give what you flatter yourself is a brain house-cleaning. Confound you, you've kept it shut like one of these best front parlors down here. Open the windows and air out. Let the outside light in. An idea may come with it; it is barely possible, even to you!"

He was out of breath by this time. I was in a somewhat similar condition for his tirade had taken mine away. However, I managed to express my feelings.

"Humph!" I grunted. "And so this is your wonderful prescription. I am to travel, am I?"

"You are. You can afford it, and I'll see that you do."

"And just what port would you recommend?"

"I don't care, I tell you, except that it ought to be a long way off. I'm not joking, Kent; this is straight. A good long jaunt around the world would do you a barrel of good. Don't stop to think about it, just start, that's all. Will you?"

I laughed. The idea of my starting on a pleasure trip was ridiculous. If ever there was a home-loving and home-staying person it was I. The bare thought of leaving my comfort and my books and Hephzy made me shudder. I hadn't the least desire to see other countries and meet other people. I hated sleeping cars and railway trains and traveling acquaintances. So I laughed.

"Sorry, Jim," I said, "but I'm afraid I can't take your prescription."

"Why not?"

"For one reason because I don't want to."

"That's no reason at all. It doesn't make any difference what you want. Anything else?"

"Yes. I would no more wander about creation all alone than--"

"Take someone with you."

"Who? Will you go, yourself?"

He shook his head.

"I wish I could," he said, and I think he meant it. "I'd like nothing better. I'd keep you alive, you can bet on that. But I can't leave the literature works just now. I'll do my best to find someone who will, though. I know a lot of good fellows who travel--"

I held up my hand. "That's enough," I interrupted. "They can't travel with me. They wouldn't be good fellows long if they did."

He struck the chair arm with his fist.

"You're as near impossible as you can be, aren't you," he exclaimed. "Never mind; you're going to do as I tell you. I never gave you bad advice yet, now did I?"

"No--o. No, but--"

"I'm not giving it to you now. You'll go and you'll go in a hurry. I'll give you a week to think the idea over. At the end of that time if I don't hear from you I'll be down here again, and I'll worry you every minute until you'll go anywhere to get rid of me. Kent, you must do it. You aren't written out, as you call it, but you are rusting out, fast. If you don't get away and polish up you'll never do a thing worth while. You'll be another what's-his-name--Ase Tidditt; that's what you'll be. I can see it coming on. You're ossifying; you're narrowing; you're--"

I broke in here. I didn't like to be called narrow and I did not like to be paired with Asaph Tidditt, although our venerable town clerk is a good citizen and all right, in his way. But I had flattered myself that way was not mine.

"Stop it, Jim!" I ordered. "Don't blow off any more steam in this ridiculous fashion. If this is all you have to say to me, you may as well stop."

"Stop! I've only begun. I'll stop when you start, and not before. Will

you go?"

"I can't, Jim. You know I can't."

"I know you can and I know you're going to. There!" rising and laying a hand on my shoulder, "it is time for ME to be starting. Kent, old man, I want you to promise me that you will do as I tell you. Will you?"

"I can't, Jim. I would if I could, but--"

"Will you promise me to think the idea over? Think it over carefully; don't think of anything else for the rest of the week? Will you promise me to do that?"

I hesitated. I was perfectly sure that all my thinking would but strengthen my determination to remain at home, but I did not like to appear too stubborn.

"Why, yes, Jim," I said, doubtfully, "I promise so much, if that is any satisfaction to you."

"All right. I'll give you until Friday to make up your mind. If I don't hear from you by that time I shall take it for granted that you have made it up in the wrong way and I'll be here on Saturday. I'll keep the process up week in and week out until you give in. That's MY promise. Come on. We must be moving."

He said good-bye to Hephzy and we walked together to the station. His last words as we shook hands by the car steps were: "Remember--think. But don't you dare think of anything else." My answer was a dubious shake of the head. Then the train pulled out.

I believe that afternoon and evening to have been the "bluest" of all my blue periods, and I had had some blue ones prior to Jim's visit. I was dreadfully disappointed. Of course I should have realized that no advice or "prescription" could help me. As Campbell had said, "It was up to me;" I must help myself; but I had been trying to help myself for months and I had not succeeded. I had--foolishly, I admit--relied upon him to give me a new idea, a fresh inspiration, and he had not done it. I was disappointed and more discouraged than ever.

My state of mind may seem ridiculous. Perhaps it was. I was in good health, not very old--except in my feelings--and my stories, even the "Black Brig," had not been failures, by any means. But I am sure that every man or woman who writes, or paints, or does creative work of any kind, will understand and sympathize with me. I had "gone stale," that is the technical name for my disease, and to "go stale" is no joke. If you doubt it ask the writer or painter of your acquaintance. Ask him if he ever has felt that he could write or paint no more, and then ask him how he liked the feeling. The fact that he has written or painted a great deal since has no bearing on the matter. "Staleness" is purely a mental ailment, and the confident assurance of would-be doctors that its attacks are seldom fatal doesn't help the sufferer at the time. He knows he is dead, and that is no better, then, than being dead in earnest.

I knew I was dead, so far as my writing was concerned, and the advice to go away and bury myself in a strange country did not appeal to me. It might be true that I was already buried in Bayport, but that was my home cemetery, at all events. The more I thought of Jim Campbell's

prescription the less I felt like taking it.

However, I kept on with the thinking; I had promised to do that. On Wednesday came a postcard from Jim, himself, demanding information. "When and where are you going?" he wrote. "Wire answer." I did not wire answer. I was not going anywhere.

I thrust the card into my pocket and, turning away from the frame of letter boxes, faced Captain Cyrus Whittaker, who, like myself, had come to Simmons's for his mail. He greeted me cordially.

"Hello, Kent," he hailed. "How are you?"

"About the same as usual, Captain," I answered, shortly.

"That's pretty fair, by the looks. You don't look too happy, though, come to notice it. What's the matter; got bad news?"

"No. I haven't any news, good or bad."

"That so? Then I'll give you some. Phoebe and I are going to start for California to-morrow."

"You are? To California? Why?"

"Oh, just for instance, that's all. Time's come when I have to go somewhere, and the Yosemite and the big trees look good to me. It's this way, Kent; I like Bayport, you know that. Nobody's more in love with this old town than I am; it's my home and I mean to live and die here, if I have luck. But it don't do for me to stay here all the time. If I do I begin to be no good, like a strawberry plant that's been kept in one place too long and has quit bearin'. The only thing to do with that plant is to transplant it and let it get nourishment in a new spot. Then you can move it back by and by and it's all right. Same way with me. Every once in a while I have to be transplanted so's to freshen up. My brains need somethin' besides post-office talk and sewin'-circle gossip to keep them from shrivelin'. I was commencin' to feel the shrivel, so it's California for Phoebe and me. Better come along, Kent. You're beginnin' to shrivel a little, ain't you?"

Was it as apparent as all that? I was indignant.

"Do I look it?" I demanded.

"No--o, but I ain't sure that you don't act it. No offence, you understand. Just a little ground bait to coax you to come on the California cruise along with Phoebe and me, that's all."

It was not likely that I should accept. Two are company and three a crowd, and if ever two were company Captain Cy and his wife were those two. I thanked him and declined, but I asked a question.

"You believe in travel as a restorative, you do?" I asked.

"Hey? I sartin do. Change your course once in awhile, same as you change your clothes. Wearin' the same suit and cruisin' in the same puddle all the time ain't healthy. You're too apt to get sick of the clothes and puddle both."

"But you don't believe in traveling alone, do you?"

"No," emphatically, "I don't, generally speakin'. If you go off by yourself you're too likely to keep thinkin' ABOUT yourself. Take somebody with you; somebody you're used to and know well and like, though. Travelin' with strangers is a little mite worse than travelin' alone. You want to be mighty sure of your shipmate."

I walked home. Hephzibah was in the sitting-room, reading and knitting a stocking, a stocking for me. She did not need to use her eyes for the knitting; I am quite sure she could have knit in her sleep.

"Hello, Hosity," she said, "been up to the office, have you? Any mail?"

"Nothing much. Humph! Still reading that Raymond and Whitcomb circular?"

"No, not that one. This is one I got last year. I've been sittin' here plannin' out just where I'd go and what I'd see if I could. It's the next best thing to really goin'."

I looked at her. All at once a new idea began to crystallize in my mind. It was a curious idea, a ridiculous idea, and yet--and yet it seemed--

"Hephzy," said I, suddenly, "would you really like to go abroad?"

"WOULD I? Hosity, how you talk! You know I've been crazy to go ever since I was a little girl. I don't know what makes me so. Perhaps it's the salt water in my blood. All our folks were sailors and ship captains. They went everywhere. I presume likely it takes more than one generation to kill off that sort of thing."

"And you really want to go?"

"Of course I do."

"Then why haven't you gone? You could afford to take a moderate-priced tour."

Hephzy laughed over her knitting.

"I guess," she said, "I haven't gone for the reason you haven't, Hosity. You could afford, it, too--you know you could. But how could I go and leave you? Why, I shouldn't sleep a minute wonderin' if you were wearin' clothes without holes in 'em and if you changed your flannels when the weather changed and ate what you ought to, and all that. You've been so--so sort of dependent on me and I've been so used to takin' care of you that I don't believe either of us would be happy anywhere without the other. I know certain sure _I_ shouldn't."

I did not answer immediately. The idea, the amazing, ridiculous idea which had burst upon me suddenly began to lose something of its absurdity. Somehow it began to look like the answer to my riddle. I realized that my main objection to the Campbell prescription had been that I must take it alone or with strangers. And now--

"Hephzy," I demanded, "would you go away--on a trip abroad--with me?"

She put down the knitting.

"Hosy Knowles!" she exclaimed. "WHAT are you talkin' about?"

"But would you?"

"I presume likely I would, if I had the chance; but it isn't likely that--where are you goin'?"

I did not answer. I hurried out of the sitting-room and out of the house.

When I returned I found her still knitting. The circular lay on the floor at her feet. She regarded me anxiously.

"Hosy," she demanded, "where--"

I interrupted. "Hephzy," said I, "I have been to the station to send a telegram."

"A telegram? A TELEGRAM! For mercy sakes, who's dead?"

Telegrams in Bayport usually mean death or desperate illness. I laughed.

"No one is dead, Hephzy," I replied. "In fact it is barely possible that someone is coming to life. I telegraphed Mr. Campbell to engage passage for you and me on some steamer leaving for Europe next week."

Hephzibah turned pale. The partially knitted sock dropped beside the circular.

"Why--why--what--?" she gasped.

"On a steamer leaving next week," I repeated. "You want to travel, Hephzy. Jim says I must. So we'll travel together."

She did not believe I meant it, of course, and it took a long time to convince her. But when at last she began to believe--at least to the extent of believing that I had sent the telegram--her next remark was characteristic.

"But I--I can't go, Hosy," declared Hephzibah. "I CAN'T. Who--who would take care of the cat and the hens?"

CHAPTER IV

In Which Hephzy and I and the Plutonia Sail Together

The week which began that Wednesday afternoon seems, as I look back to it now, a bit of the remote past, instead of seven days of a year ago. Its happenings, important and wonderful as they were, seem trivial and tame compared with those which came afterward. And yet, at the time, that week was a season of wild excitement and delightful anticipation for Hephzibah, and of excitement not unmingled with doubts and misgivings for me. For us both it was a busy week, to put it mildly.

Once convinced that I meant what I said and that I was not "raving distracted," which I think was her first diagnosis of my case, Hephzy's

practical mind began to unearth objections, first to her going at all and, second, to going on such short notice.

"I don't think I'd better, Hopsy," she said. "You're awful good to ask me and I know you think you mean it, but I don't believe I ought to do it, even if I felt as if I could leave the house and everything alone. You see, I've lived here in Bayport so long that I'm old-fashioned and funny and countrified, I guess. You'd be ashamed of me."

I smiled. "When I am ashamed of you, Hephzy," I replied, "I shall be on my way to the insane asylum, not to Europe. You are much more likely to be ashamed of me."

"The idea! And you the pride of this town! The only author that ever lived in it--unless you call Joshua Snow an author, and he lived in the poorhouse and nobody but himself was proud of HIM."

Josh Snow was Bayport's Homer, its only native poet. He wrote the immortal ballad of the scallop industry, which begins:

"On a fine morning at break of day,
When the ice has all gone out of the bay,
And the sun is shining nice and it is like spring,
Then all hands start to go scallop-ING."

In order to get the fullest measure of music from this lyric gem you should put a strong emphasis on the final "ing." Joshua always did and the summer people never seemed to tire of hearing him recite it. There are eighteen more verses.

"I shall not be ashamed of you, Hephzy," I repeated. "You know it perfectly well. And I shall not go unless you go."

"But I can't go, Hopsy. I couldn't leave the hens and the cat. They'd starve; you know they would."

"Susanna will look after them. I'll leave money for their provender. And I will pay Susanna for taking care of them. She has fallen in love with the cat; she'll be only too glad to adopt it."

"And I haven't got a single thing fit to wear."

"Neither have I. We will buy complete fit-outs in Boston or New York."

"But--"

There were innumerable "buts." I answered them as best I could. Also I reiterated my determination not to go unless she did. I told of Campbell's advice and laid strong emphasis on the fact that he had said travel was my only hope. Unless she wished me to die of despair she must agree to travel with me.

"And you have said over and over again that your one desire was to go abroad," I added, as a final clincher.

"I know it. I know I have. But--but now when it comes to really goin' I'm not so sure. Uncle Bedny Small was always declarin' in

prayer-meetin' that he wanted to die so as to get to Heaven, but when he was taken down with influenza he made his folks call both doctors here in town and one from Harniss. I don't know whether I want to go or not, Hosity. I--I'm frightened, I guess."

Jim's answer to my telegram arrived the very next day.

"Have engaged two staterooms for ship sailing Wednesday the tenth," it read. "Hearty congratulations on your good sense. Who is your companion? Write particulars."

The telegram quashed the last of Hephzy's objections. The fares had been paid and she was certain they must be "dreadful expensive." All that money could not be wasted, so she accepted the inevitable and began preparations.

I did not write the "particulars" requested. I had a feeling that Campbell might consider my choice of a traveling companion a queer one and, although my mind was made up and his opinion could not change it, I thought it just as well to wait until our arrival in New York before telling him. So I wrote a brief note stating that my friend and I would reach New York on the morning of the tenth and that I would see him there. Also I asked, for my part, the name of the steamer he had selected.

His answer was as vague as mine. He congratulated me once more upon my decision, prophesied great things as the result of what he called my "foreign junket," and gave some valuable advice concerning the necessary outfit, clothes, trunks and the like. "Travel light," he wrote. "You can buy whatever else you may need on the other side. 'Phone as soon as you reach New York." But he did not tell me the name of the ship, nor for what port she was to sail.

So Hephzy and I were obliged to turn to the newspapers for information upon those more or less important subjects, and we speculated and guessed not a little. The New York dailies were not obtainable in Bayport except during the summer months and the Boston publications did not give the New York sailings. I wrote to a friend in Boston and he sent me the leading journals of the former city and, as soon as they arrived, Hephzy sat down upon the sitting-room carpet--which she had insisted upon having taken up to be packed away in moth balls--to look at the maritime advertisements. I am quite certain it was the only time she sat down, except at meals, that day.

I selected one of the papers and she another. We reached the same conclusion simultaneously.

"Why, it must be--" she began.

"The Princess Eulalie," I finished.

"It is the only one that sails on the tenth. There is one on the eleventh, though."

"Yes, but that one is the 'Plutonia,' one of the fastest and most expensive liners afloat. It isn't likely that Jim had booked us for the 'Plutonia.' She would scarcely be in our--in my class."

"Humph! I guess she isn't any too good for a famous man like you, Hosity.

But I would look funny on her, I give in. I've read about her. She's always full of lords and ladies and millionaires and things. Just the sort of folks you write about. She'd be just the one for you."

I shook my head. "My lords and ladies are only paper dolls, Hephzy," I said, ruefully. "I should be as lost as you among the flesh and blood variety. No, the 'Princess Eulalie' must be ours. She runs to Amsterdam, though. Odd that Jim should send me to Holland."

Hephzy nodded and then offered a solution.

"I don't doubt he did it on purpose," she declared. "He knew neither you nor I was anxious to go to England. He knows we don't think much of the English, after our experience with that Morley brute."

"No, he doesn't know any such thing. I've never told him a word about Morley. And he doesn't know you're going, Hephzy. I've kept that as a--as a surprise for him."

"Well, never mind. I'd rather go to Amsterdam than England. It's nearer to France."

I was surprised. "Nearer to France?" I repeated. "What difference does that make? We don't know anyone in France."

Hephzibah was plainly shocked. "Why, Hosity!" she protested. "Have you forgotten Little Frank? He is in France somewhere, or he was at last accounts."

"Good Lord!" I groaned. Then I got up and went out. I had forgotten "Little Frank" and hoped that she had. If she was to flit about Europe seeing "Little Frank" on every corner I foresaw trouble. "Little Frank" was likely to be the bane of my existence.

We left Bayport on Monday morning. The house was cleaned and swept and scoured and moth-proofed from top to bottom. Every door was double-locked and every window nailed. Burglars are unknown in Bayport, but that didn't make any difference. "You can't be too careful," said Hephzy. I was of the opinion that you could.

The cat had been "farmed out" with Susanna's people and Susanna herself was to feed the hens twice a day, lock them in each night and let them out each morning. Their keeper had a carefully prepared schedule as to quantity and quality of food; Hephzy had prepared and furnished it.

"And don't you give 'em any fish," ordered Hephzy. "I ate a chicken once that had been fed on fish, and--my soul!"

There was quite an assemblage at the station to see us off. Captain Whittaker and his wife were not there, of course; they were near California by this time. But Mr. Partridge, the minister, was there and so was his wife; and Asaph Tidditt and Mr. and Mrs. Bailey Bangs and Captain Josiah Dimick and HIS wife, and several others. Oh, yes! and Angeline Phinney. Angeline was there, of course. If anything happened in Bayport and Angeline was not there to help it happen, then--I don't know what then; the experiment had never been tried in my lifetime.

Everyone said pleasant things to us. They really seemed sorry to have us leave Bayport, but for our sakes they expressed themselves as glad. It

would be such a glorious trip; we would have so much to tell when we got back. Mr. Partridge said he should plan for me to give a little talk to the Sunday school upon my return. It would be a wonderful thing for the children. To my mind the most wonderful part of the idea was that he should take my consent for granted. _I_ talk to the Sunday school! I, the Quahaug! My knees shook even at the thought.

Keturah Bangs hoped we would have a "lovely time." She declared that it had been the one ambition of her life to go sight-seeing. But she should never do it--no, no! Such things wasn't for her. If she had a husband like some women it might be, but not as 'twas. She had long ago given up hopin' to do anything but keep boarders, and she had to do that all by herself.

Bailey, her husband, grinned sheepishly but, for a wonder, he did not attempt defence. I gathered that Bailey was learning wisdom. It was time; he had attended his wife's academy a long while.

Captain Dimick brought a bag of apples, greenings, some he had kept in the cellar over winter. "Nice to eat on the cars," he told us. Everyone asked us to send postcards. Miss Phinney was especially solicitous.

"It'll be just lovely to know where you be and what you're doin'," she declared.

When the train had started and we had waved the last good-bys from the window Hephzibah expressed her opinion concerning Angeline's request.

"I send HER postcards!" she snapped. "I think I see myself doin' it! All she cares about 'em is so she can run from Dan to Beersheba showin' 'em to everybody and talkin' about how extravagant we are and wonderin' if we borrowed the money. But there! it won't make any difference. If I don't send 'em to her she'll read all I send to other folks. She and Rebecca Simmons are close as two peas in a pod and Becky reads everything that comes through her husband's post-office. All that aren't sealed, that is--yes, and some that are, I shouldn't wonder, if they're not sealed tight."

Her next remark was a surprising one.

"Hosy," she said, "how much they all think of you, don't they. Isn't it nice to know you're so popular."

I turned in the seat to stare at her.

"Popular!" I repeated. "Hephzy, I have a good deal of respect for your brain, generally speaking, but there are times when I think it shows signs of softening."

She did not resent my candor; she paid absolutely no attention to it.

"I don't mean popular with everybody, rag, tag and bobtail and all, like--well, Eben Salters," she went on. "But the folks that count all respect and like you, Hosy. I know they do."

Mr. Salters is our leading local statesman--since the departure of the Honorable Heman Atkins. He has filled every office in his native village and he has served one term as representative in the State House at Boston. He IS popular.

"It is marvelous how affection can be concealed," I observed, with sarcasm. Hephzy was back at me like a flash.

"Of course they don't tell you of it," she said. "If they did you'd probably tell 'em to their faces that they were fibbin' and not speak to 'em again. But they do like you, and I know it."

It was useless to carry the argument further. When Hephzy begins chanting my praises I find it easier to surrender--and change the subject.

In Boston we shopped. It seems to me that we did nothing else. I bought what I needed the very first day, clothes, hat, steamer coat and traveling cap included. It did not take me long; fortunately I am of the average height and shape and the salesmen found me easy to please. My shopping tour was ended by three o'clock and I spent the remainder of the afternoon at a bookseller's. There was a set of "Early English Poets" there, nineteen little, fat, chunky volumes, not new and shiny and grand, but middle-aged and shabby and comfortable, which appealed to me. The price, however, was high; I had the uneasy feeling that I ought not to afford it. Then the bookseller himself, who also was fat and comfortably shabby, and who had beguiled from me the information that I was about to travel, suggested that the "Poets" would make very pleasant reading en route.

"I have found," he said, beaming over his spectacles, "that a little book of this kind," patting one of the volumes, "which may be carried in the pocket, is a rare traveling companion. When you wish his society he is there, and when you tire of him you can shut him up. You can't do that with all traveling companions, you know. Ha! ha!"

He chuckled over his joke and I chuckled with him. Humor of that kind is expensive, for I bought the "English Poets" and ordered them sent to my hotel. It was not until they were delivered, an hour later, that I began to wonder what I should do with them. Our trunks were likely to be crowded and I could not carry all of the nineteen volumes in my pockets.

Hephzibah, who had been shopping on her own hook, did not return until nearly seven. She returned weary and almost empty-handed.

"But didn't you buy ANYTHING?" I asked. "Where in the world have you been?"

She had been everywhere, so she said. This wasn't entirely true, but I gathered that she had visited about every department store in the city. She had found ever so many things she liked, but oh dear! they did cost so much.

"There was one traveling coat that I did want dreadfully," she said. "It was a dark brown, not too dark, but just light enough so it wouldn't show water spots. I've been out sailing enough times to know how your things get water-spotted. It fitted me real nice; there wouldn't have to be a thing done to it. But it cost thirty-one dollars! 'My soul!' says I, 'I can't afford THAT!' But they didn't have anything cheaper that wouldn't have made me look like one of those awful play-actin' girls that came to Bayport with the Uncle Tom's Cabin show. And I tried everywhere and nothin' pleased me so well."

"So you didn't buy the coat?"

"BUY it? My soul Hosity, didn't I tell you it cost--"

"I know. What else did you see that you didn't buy?"

"Hey? Oh, I saw a suit, a nice lady-like suit, and I tried it on. That fitted me, too, only the sleeves would have to be shortened. And it would have gone SO well with that coat. But the suit cost FORTY dollars. 'Good land!' I said, 'haven't you got ANYTHING for poor folks?' And you ought to have seen the look that girl gave me! And a hat--oh, yes, I saw a hat! It was--"

There was a great deal more. Summed up it amounted to something like this: All that suited her had been too high-priced and all that she considered within her means hadn't suited her at all. So she had bought practically nothing but a few non-essentials. And we were to leave for New York the following night and sail for Europe the day after.

"Hephzy," said I, "you will go shopping again to-morrow morning and I'll go with you."

Go we did, and we bought the coat and the hat and the suit and various other things. With each purchase Hephzy's groans and protests at my reckless extravagance grew louder. At last I had an inspiration.

"Hephzy," said I, "when we meet Little Frank over there in France, or wherever he may be, you will want him to be favorably impressed with your appearance, won't you? These things cost money of course, but we must think of Little Frank. He has never seen his American relatives and so much depends on a first impression."

Hephzy regarded me with suspicion. "Humph!" she sniffed, "that's the first time I ever knew you to give in that there WAS a Little Frank. All right, I sha'n't say any more, but I hope the foreign poorhouses are more comfortable than ours, that's all. If you make me keep on this way, I'll fetch up in one before the first month's over."

We left for New York on the five o'clock train. Packing those "Early English Poets" was a confounded nuisance. They had to be stuffed here, there and everywhere amid my wearing apparel and Hephzibah prophesied evil to come.

"Books are the worse things goin' to make creases," she declared. "They're all sharp edges."

I had to carry two of the volumes in my pockets, even then, at the very start. They might prove delightful traveling companions, as the bookman had said, but they were most uncomfortable things to sit on.

We reached the Grand Central station on time and went to a nearby hotel. I should have sent the heavier baggage directly to the steamer, but I was not sure--absolutely sure--which steamer it was to be. The "Princess Eulalie" almost certainly, but I did not dare take the risk.

Hephzy called to me from the room adjoining mine at twelve that night.

"Just think, Hosity!" she cried, "this is the last night either of us will spend on dry land."

"Heavens! I hope it won't be as bad as that," I retorted. "Holland is pretty wet, so they say, but we should be able to find some dry spots."

She did not laugh. "You know what I mean," she observed. "To-morrow night at twelve o'clock we shall be far out on the vasty deep."

"We shall be on the 'Princess Eulalie,'" I answered. "Go to sleep."

Neither of us spoke the truth. At twelve the following night we were neither "far out on the vasty deep" nor on the "Princess Eulalie."

My first move after breakfast was to telephone Campbell at his city home. He hailed me joyfully and ordered me to stay where I was, that is, at the hotel. He would be there in an hour, he said.

He was five minutes ahead of his promise. We shook hands heartily.

"You are going to take my prescription, after all," he crowed. "Didn't I tell you I was the only real doctor for sick authors? Bully for you! Wish I was going with you. Who is?"

"Come to my room and I'll show you," said I. "You may be surprised."

"See here! you haven't gone and dug up another fossilized bookworm like yourself, have you? If you have, I refuse--"

"Come and see."

We took the elevator to the fourth floor and walked to my room. I opened the door.

"Hephzy," said I, "here is someone you know."

Hephzy, who had been looking out of the window of her room, hurried in.

"Well, Mr. Campbell!" she exclaimed, holding out her hand, "how do you do? We got here all right, you see. But the way Hosy has been wastin' money, his and mine, buyin' things we didn't need, I began to think one spell we'd never get any further. Is it time to start for the steamer yet?"

Jim's face was worth looking at. He shook Hephzibah's hand mechanically, but he did not speak. Instead he looked at her and at me. I didn't speak either; I was having a thoroughly good time.

"Had we ought to start now?" repeated Hephzibah. "I'm all ready but puttin' on my things."

Jim came out of his trance. He dropped the hand and came to me.

"Are you--is she--" he stammered.

"Yes," said I. "Miss Cahoon is going with me. I wrote you I had selected a good traveling companion. I have, haven't I?"

"He would have it so, Mr. Campbell," put in Hephzy. "I said no and kept on sayin' it, but he vowed and declared he wouldn't go unless I did. I know you must think it's queer my taggin' along, but it isn't any

queerer to you than it is to me."

Jim behaved very well, considering. He did not laugh. For a moment I thought he was going to; if he had I don't know what I should have done, said things for which I might have been sorry later on, probably. But he did not laugh. He didn't even express the tremendous surprise which he must have felt. Instead he shook hands again with both of us and said it was fine, bully, just the thing.

"To tell the truth, Miss Cahoon," he declared, "I have been rather fearful of this pet infant of ours. I didn't know what sort of helpless creature he might have coaxed into roaming loose with him in the wilds of Europe. I expected another babe in the woods and I was contemplating cabling the police to look out for them and shoo away the wolves. But he'll be all right now. Yes, indeed! he'll be looked out for now."

"Then you approve?" I asked.

He shot a side-long glance at me. "Approve!" he repeated. "I'm crazy about the whole business."

I judged he considered me crazy, hopelessly so. I did not care. I agreed with him in this--the whole business was insane and Hephzibah's going was the only sensible thing about it, so far.

His next question was concerning our baggage. I told him I had left it at the railway station because I was not sure where it should be sent.

"What time does the 'Princess Eulalie' sail?" I asked.

He looked at me oddly. "What?" he queried. "The 'Princess Eulalie'? Twelve o'clock, I believe, I'm not sure."

"You're not sure! And it is after nine now. It strikes me that--"

"Never mind what strikes you. So long as it isn't lightning you shouldn't complain. Have you the baggage checks? Give them to me."

I handed him the checks, obediently, and he stepped to the telephone and gave a number. A short conversation followed. Then he hung up the receiver.

"One of the men from the office will be here soon," he said. "He will attend to all your baggage, get it aboard the ship and see that it is put in your staterooms. Now, then, tell me all about it. What have you been doing since I saw you? When did you arrive? How did you happen to think of taking--er--Miss Cahoon with you? Tell me the whole."

I told him. Hephzy assisted, sitting on the edge of a rocking chair and asking me what time it was at intervals of ten minutes. She was decidedly fidgety. When she went to Boston she usually reached the station half an hour before train time, and to sit calmly in a hotel room, when the ship that was to take us to the ends of the earth was to sail in two hours, was a reckless gamble with Fate, to her mind.

The man from the office came and the baggage checks were turned over to him. So also were our bags and our umbrellas. Campbell stepped into the hall and the pair held a whispered conversation. Hephzy seized the opportunity to express to me her perturbation.

"My soul, Hosity!" she whispered. "Mr. Campbell's out of his head, ain't he? Here we are a sittin' and sittin' and time's goin' by. We'll be too late. Can't you make him hurry?"

I was almost as nervous as she was, but I would not have let our guardian know it for the world. If we lost a dozen steamers I shouldn't call his attention to the fact. I might be a "Babe in the Wood," but he should not have the satisfaction of hearing me whimper.

He came back to the room a moment later and began asking more questions. Our answers, particularly Hephzy's, seemed to please him a great deal. At some of them he laughed uproariously. At last he looked at his watch.

"Almost eleven," he observed. "I must be getting around to the office. Miss Cahoon will you excuse Kent and me for an hour or so? I have his letters of credit and the tickets in our safe and he had better come around with me and get them. If you have any last bits of shopping to do, now is your opportunity. Or you might wait here if you prefer. We will be back at half-past twelve and lunch together."

I started. Hephzy sprang from the chair.

"Half-past twelve!" I cried.

"Lunch together!" gasped Hephzy. "Why, Mr. Campbell! the 'Princess Eulalie' sails at noon. You said so yourself!"

Jim smiled. "I know I did," he replied, "but that is immaterial. You are not concerned with the 'Princess Eulalie.' Your passages are booked on the 'Plutonia' and she doesn't leave her dock until one o'clock to-morrow morning. We will meet here for lunch at twelve-thirty. Come, Kent."

I didn't attempt an answer. I am not exactly sure what I did. A few minutes later I walked out of that room with Campbell and I have a hazy recollection of leaving Hephzy seated in the rocker and of hearing her voice, as the door closed, repeating over and over:

"The 'Plutonia'! My soul and body! The 'Plutonia'! Me--ME on the 'Plutonia'!"

What I said and did afterwards doesn't make much difference. I know I called my publisher a number of disrespectful names not one of which he deserved.

"Confound you!" I cried. "You know I wouldn't have dreamed of taking a passage on a ship like that. She's a floating Waldorf, everyone says so. Dress and swagger society and--Oh, you idiot! I wanted quiet! I wanted to be alone! I wanted--"

Jim interrupted me.

"I know you did," he said. "But you're not going to have them. You've been alone too much. You need a change. If I know the 'Plutonia'--and I've crossed on her four times--you're going to have it."

He burst into a roar of laughter. We were in a cab, fortunately, or his behavior would have attracted attention. I could have choked him.

"You imbecile!" I cried. "I have a good mind to throw the whole thing up and go home to Bayport. By George, I will!"

He continued to chuckle.

"I see you doing it!" he observed. "How about your--what's her name?--Hephzibah? Going to tell her that it's all off, are you? Going to tell her that you will forfeit your passage money and hers? Why, man, haven't you a heart? If she was booked for Paradise instead of Paris she couldn't be any happier. Don't be foolish! Your trunks are on the 'Plutonia' and on the 'Plutonia' you'll be to-night. It's the best thing that can happen to you. I did it on purpose. You'll thank me come day."

I didn't thank him then.

We returned to the hotel at twelve-thirty, my pocket-book loaded with tickets and letters of credit and unfamiliar white paper notes bearing the name of the Bank of England. Hephzibah was still in the rocking chair. I am sure she had not left it.

We lunched in the hotel dining-room. Campbell ordered the luncheon and paid for it while Hephzibah exclaimed at his extravagance. She was too excited to eat much and too worried concerning the extent of her wardrobe to talk of less important matters.

"Oh dear, Hosity!" she wailed, "WHY didn't I buy another best dress. DO you suppose my black one will be good enough? All those lords and ladies and millionaires on the 'Plutonia'! Won't they think I'm dreadful poverty-stricken. I saw a dress I wanted awfully--in one of those Boston stores it was; but I didn't buy it because it was so dear. And I didn't tell you I wanted it because I knew if I did you'd buy it. You're so reckless with money. But now I wish I'd bought it myself. What WILL all those rich people think of me?"

"About what they think of me, Hephzy, I imagine," I answered, ruefully. "Jim here has put up a joke on us. He is the only one who is getting any fun out of it."

Jim, for a wonder, was serious. "Miss Cahoon," he declared, earnestly, "don't worry. I'm sure the black silk is all right; but if it wasn't it wouldn't make any difference. On the 'Plutonia' nobody notices other people's clothes. Most of them are too busy noticing their own. If Kent has his evening togs and you have the black silk you'll pass muster. You'll have a gorgeous time. I only wish I was going with you."

He repeated the wish several times during the afternoon. He insisted on taking us to a matinee and Hephzy's comments on the performance seemed to amuse him hugely. It had been eleven years, so she said, since she went to the theater.

"Unless you count 'Uncle Tom' or 'Ten Nights in a Barroom,' or some of those other plays that come to Bayport," she added. "I suppose I'm making a perfect fool of myself laughin' and cryin' over what's nothin' but make-believe, but I can't help it. Isn't it splendid, Hosity! I wonder what Father would say if he could know that his daughter was really travelin'--just goin' to Europe! He used to worry a good deal, in his last years, about me. Seemed to feel that he hadn't taken me around and done as much for me as he ought to in the days when he could. 'Twas just

nonsense, his feelin' that way, and I told him so. But I wonder if he knows now how happy I am. I hope he does. My goodness! I can't realize it myself. Oh, there goes the curtain up again! Oh, ain't that pretty! I AM actin' ridiculous, I know, Mr. Campbell,' but you mustn't mind. Laugh at me all you want to; I sha'n't care a bit."

Jim didn't laugh--then. Neither did I. He and I looked at each other and I think the same thought was in both our minds. Good, kind, whole-souled, self-sacrificing Hephzibah! The last misgiving, the last doubt as to the wisdom of my choice of a traveling companion vanished from my thoughts. For the first time I was actually glad I was going, glad because of the happiness it would mean to her.

When we came out of the theater Campbell reached down in the crowd to shake my hand.

"Congratulations, old man," he whispered; "you did exactly the right thing. You surprised me, I admit, but you were dead right. She's a brick. But don't I wish I was going along! Oh my! oh my! to think of you two wandering about Europe together! If only I might be there to see and hear! Kent, keep a diary; for my sake, promise me you'll keep a diary. Put down everything she says and read it to me when you get home."

He left us soon afterward. He had given up the entire day to me and would, I know, have cheerfully given the evening as well, but I would not hear of it. A messenger from the office had brought him word of the presence in New York of a distinguished scientist who was preparing a manuscript for publication and the scientist had requested an interview that night. Campbell was very anxious to obtain that manuscript and I knew it. Therefore I insisted that he leave us. He was loathe to do so.

"I hate to, Kent," he declared. "I had set my heart on seeing you on board and seeing you safely started. But I do want to nail Scheinfeldt, I must admit. The book is one that he has been at work on for years and two other publishing houses are as anxious as ours to get it. To-night is my chance, and to-morrow may be too late."

"Then you must not miss the chance. You must go, and go now."

"I don't like to. Sure you've got everything you need? Your tickets and your letters of credit and all? Sure you have money enough to carry you across comfortably?"

"Yes, and more than enough, even on the 'Plutonia.'"

"Well, all right, then. When you reach London go to our English branch--you have the address, Camford Street, just off the Strand--and whatever help you may need they'll give you. I've cabled them instructions. Think you can get down to the ship all right?"

I laughed. "I think it fairly possible," I said. "If I lose my way, or Hephzy is kidnapped, I'll speak to the police or telephone you."

"The latter would be safer and much less expensive. Well, good-by, Kent. Remember now, you're going for a good time and you're to forget literature. Write often and keep in touch with me. Good-by, Miss Cahoon. Take care of this--er--clam of ours, won't you. Don't let anyone eat him on the half-shell, or anything like that."

Hephzy smiled. "They'd have to eat me first," she said, "and I'm pretty old and tough. I'll look after him, Mr. Campbell, don't you worry."

"I don't. Good luck to you both--and good-by."

A final handshake and he was gone. Hephzy looked after him.

"There!" she exclaimed; "I really begin to believe I'm goin'. Somehow I feel as if the last rope had been cast off. We've got to depend on ourselves now, Hosy, dear. Mercy! how silly I am talkin'. A body would think I was homesick before I started."

I did not answer, for I WAS homesick. We dined together at the hotel. There remained three long hours before it would be time for us to take the cab for the 'Plutonia's' wharf. I suggested another theater, but Hephzy, to my surprise, declined the invitation.

"If you don't mind, Hosy," she said, "I guess I'd rather stay right here in the room. I--I feel sort of solemn and as if I wanted to sit still and think. Perhaps it's just as well. After waitin' eleven years to go to one theater, maybe two in the same day would be more than I could stand."

So we sat together in the room at the hotel--sat and thought. The minutes dragged by. Outside beneath the windows, New York blazed and roared. I looked down at the hurrying little black manikins on the sidewalks, each, apparently, bound somewhere on business or pleasure of its own, and I wondered vaguely what that business or pleasure might be and why they hurried so. There were many single ones, of course, and occasionally groups of three or four, but couples were the most numerous. Husbands and wives, lovers and sweethearts, each with his or her life and interests bound up in the life and interests of the other. I envied them. Mine had been a solitary life, an unusual, abnormal kind of life. No one had shared its interests and ambitions with me, no one had spurred me on to higher endeavor, had loved with me and suffered with me, helping me through the shadows and laughing with me in the sunshine. No one, since Mother's death, except Hephzy and Hephzy's love and care and sacrifice, fine as they were, were different. I had missed something, I had missed a great deal, and now it was too late. Youth and high endeavor and ambition had gone by; I had left them behind. I was a solitary, queer, self-centered old bachelor, a "quahaug," as my fellow-Bayporters called me. And to ship a quahaug around the world is not likely to do the creature a great deal of good. If he lives through it he is likely to be shipped home again tougher and drier and more useless to the rest of creation than ever.

Hephzibah, too, had evidently been thinking, for she interrupted my dismal meditations with a long sigh. I started and turned toward her.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"Oh, nothin'," was the solemn answer. "I was wonderin', that's all. Just wonderin' if he would talk English. It would be a terrible thing if he could speak nothin' but French or a foreign language and I couldn't understand him. But Ardelia was American and that brute of a Morley spoke plain enough, so I suppose--"

I judged it high time to interrupt.

"Come, Hephzy," said I. "It is half-past ten. We may as well start at once."

Broadway, seen through the cab windows, was bright enough, a blaze of flashing signs and illuminated shop windows. But --th street, at the foot of which the wharves of the Trans-Atlantic Steamship Company were located, was black and dismal. It was by no means deserted, however. Before and behind and beside us were other cabs and automobiles bound in the same direction. Hephzy peered out at them in amazement.

"Mercy on us, Hosity!" she exclaimed. "I never saw such a procession of carriages. They're as far ahead and as far back of us as you can see. It is like the biggest funeral that ever was, except that they don't crawl along the way a funeral does. I'm glad of that, anyhow. I wish I didn't FEEL so much as if I was goin' to be buried. I don't know why I do. I hope it isn't a presentiment."

If it was she forgot it a few minutes later. The cab stopped before a mammoth doorway in a long, low building and a person in uniform opened the door. The wide street was crowded with vehicles and from them were descending people attired as if for a party rather than an ocean voyage. I helped Hephzy to alight and, while I was paying the cab driver, she looked about her.

"Hosity! Hosity!" she whispered, seizing my arm tight, "we've made a mistake. This isn't the steamboat; this is--is a weddin' or somethin'. Look! look!"

I looked, looked at the silk hats, the opera cloaks, the jewels and those who wore them. For a moment I, too, was certain there must be a mistake. Then I looked upward and saw above the big doorway the flashing electric sign of the "Trans-Atlantic Navigation Company."

"No, Hephzy," said I; "I guess it is the right place. Come."

I gave her my arm--that is, she continued to clutch it with both hands--and we moved forward with the crowd, through the doorway, past a long, moving inclined plane up which bags, valises, bundles of golf sticks and all sorts of lighter baggage were gliding, and faced another and smaller door.

"Lift this way! This way to the lift!" bawled a voice.

"What's a lift?" whispered Hephzy, tremulously, "Hosity, what's a lift?"

"An elevator," I whispered in reply.

"But we can't go on board a steamboat in an elevator, can we? I never heard--"

I don't know what she never heard. The sentence was not finished. Into the lift we went. On either side of us were men in evening dress and directly in front was a large woman, hatless and opera-cloaked, with diamonds in her ears and a rustle of silk at every point of her persons. The car reeked with perfume.

The large woman wriggled uneasily.

"George," she said, in a loud whisper, "why do they crowd these lifts

in this disgusting way? And WHY," with another wriggle, "do they permit PERSONS with packages to use them?"

As we emerged from the elevator Hephzy whispered again.

"She meant us, Hosy," she said. "I've got three of those books of yours in this bundle under my arm. I COULDN'T squeeze 'em into either of the valises. But she needn't have been so disagreeable about it, need she."

Still following the crowd, we passed through more wide doorways and into a huge loft where, through mammoth openings at our left, the cool air from the river blew upon our faces. Beyond these openings loomed an enormous something with rows of railed walks leading up its sides. Hephzibah and I, moving in a sort of bewildered dream, found ourselves ascending one of these walks. At its end was another doorway and, beyond, a great room, with more elevators and a mosaic floor, and mahogany and gilt and gorgeousness, and silk and broadcloth and satin.

Hephzy gasped and stopped short.

"It IS a mistake, Hosy!" she cried. "Where is the steamer?"

I smiled. I felt almost as "green" and bewildered as she, but I tried not to show my feelings.

"It is all right, Hephzy," I answered. "This is the steamer. I know it doesn't look like one, but it is. This is the 'Plutonia' and we are on board at last."

Two hours later we leaned together over the rail and watched the lights of New York grow fainter behind us.

Hephzibah drew a deep breath.

"It is so," she said. "It is really so. We ARE, aren't we, Hosy."

"We are," said I. "There is no doubt of it."

"I wonder what will happen to us before we see those lights again."

"I wonder."

"Do you think HE--Do you think Little Frank--"

"Hephzy," I interrupted, "if we are going to bed at all before morning, we had better start now."

"All right, Hosy. But you mustn't say 'go to bed.' Say 'turn in.' Everyone calls going to bed 'turning in' aboard a vessel."

CHAPTER V

In Which We View, and Even Mingle Slightly with, the Upper Classes

It is astonishing--the ease with which the human mind can accustom itself to the unfamiliar and hitherto strange. Nothing could have been

more unfamiliar or strange to Hephzibah and me than an ocean voyage and the "Plutonia." And yet before three days of that voyage were at an end we were accustomed to both--to a degree. We had learned to do certain things and not to do others. Some pet illusions had been shattered, and new and, at first, surprising items of information had lost their newness and come to be accepted as everyday facts.

For example, we learned that people in real life actually wore monocles, something, which I, of course, had known to be true but which had seemed nevertheless an unreality, part of a stage play, a "dress-up" game for children and amateur actors. The "English swell" in the performances of the Bayport Dramatic Society always wore a single eyeglass, but he also wore Dundreary whiskers and clothes which would have won him admittance to the Home for Feeble-Minded Youth without the formality of an examination. His "English accent" was a combination of the East Bayport twang and an Irish brogue and he was a blithering idiot in appearance and behavior. No one in his senses could have accepted him as anything human and the eyeglass had been but a part of his unreal absurdity.

And yet, here on the "Plutonia," were at least a dozen men, men of dignity and manner, who sported monocles and acted as if they were used to them. The first evening before we left port, one or two were in evidence; the next afternoon, in the Lounge, there were more. The fact that they were on an English ship, bound for England, brought the monocles out of their concealment, as Hephzy said, "like hoptoads after the first spring thaw." Her amazed comments were unique.

"But what good are they, Hopsy?" she demanded. "Can they see with 'em?"

"I suppose they can," I answered. "You can see better with your spectacles than you can without them."

"Humph! I can see better with two eyes than I can with one, as far as that goes. I don't believe they wear 'em for seein' at all. Take that man there," pointing to a long, lank Canadian in a yellow ulster, whom the irreverent smoking-room had already christened "The Duke of Labrador." "Look at him! He didn't wear a sign of one until this mornin'. If he needed it to see with he'd have worn it before, wouldn't he? Don't tell me! He wears it because he wants people to think he's a regular boarder at Windsor Castle. And he isn't; he comes from Toronto, and that's only a few miles from the United States. Ugh! You foolish thing!" as the "Duke of Labrador" strutted by our deck-chairs; "I suppose you think you're pretty, don't you? Well, you're not. You look for all the world like a lighthouse with one window in it and the lamp out."

I laughed. "Hephzy," said I, "every nation has its peculiarities and the monocle is an English national institution, like--well, like tea, for instance."

"Institution! Don't talk to me about institutions! I know the institution I'd put HIM in."

She didn't fancy the "Duke of Labrador." Neither did she fancy tea at breakfast and coffee at dinner. But she learned to accept the first. Two sessions with the "Plutonia's" breakfast coffee completed her education.

"Bring me tea," she said to our table steward on the third morning. "I've tried most every kind of coffee and lived through it, but I'm

gettin' too old to keep on experimentin' with my health. Bring me tea and I'll try to forget what time it is."

We had tea at breakfast, therefore, and tea at four in the afternoon. Hephzibah and I learned to take it with the rest. She watched her fellow-passengers, however, and as usual had something to say concerning their behavior.

"Did you hear that, Hosity?" she whispered, as we sat together in the "Lounge," sipping tea and nibbling thin bread and butter and the inevitable plum cake. "Did you hear what that woman said about her husband?"

I had not heard, and said so.

"Well, judgin' by her actions, I thought her husband was lost and she was sure he had been washed overboard. 'Where is Edward?' she kept askin'. 'Poor Edward! What WILL he do? Where is he?' I was gettin' real anxious, and then it turned out that she was afraid that, if he didn't come soon, he'd miss his tea. My soul! Hosity, I've been thinkin' and do you know the conclusion I've come to?"

"No," I replied. "What is it?"

"Well, it sounds awfully irreverent, but I've come to the conclusion that the first part of the Genesis in the English scriptures must be different than ours. I'm sure they think that the earth was created in six days and, on the seventh, Adam and Eve had tea. I believe it for an absolute fact."

The pet illusion, the loss of which caused her the most severe shock, was that concerning the nobility. On the morning of our first day afloat the passenger lists were distributed. Hephzibah was early on deck. Fortunately neither she nor I were in the least discomfited by the motion of the ship, then or at any time. We proved to be good sailors; Hephzibah declared it was in the blood.

"For a Knowles or a Cahoon to be seasick," she announced, "would be a disgrace. Our men folks for four generations would turn over in their graves."

She was early on deck that first morning and, at breakfast she and I had the table to ourselves. She had the passenger list propped against the sugar bowl and was reading the names.

"My gracious, Hosity!" she exclaimed. "What, do you think! There are five 'Sirs' on board and one 'Lord'! Just think of it! Where do you suppose they are?"

"In their berths, probably, at this hour," I answered.

"Then I'm goin' to stay right here till they come out. I'm goin' to see 'em and know what they look like if I sit at this table all day."

I smiled. "I wouldn't do that, Hephzy," said I. "We can see them at lunch."

"Oh! O--Oh! And there's a Princess here! Princess B-e-r-g-e-n-s-t-e-i-n--Bergenstein. Princess Bergenstein. What do you

suppose she's Princess of?"

"Princess of Jerusalem, I should imagine," I answered. "Oh, I see! You've skipped a line, Hephzy. Bergenstein belongs to another person. The Princess's name is Berkovitchky. Russian or Polish, perhaps."

"I don't care if she's Chinese; I mean to see her. I never expected to look at a live Princess in MY life."

We stopped in the hall at the entrance to the dining-saloon to examine the table chart. Hephzibah made careful notes of the tables at which the knights and the lord and the Princess were seated and their locations. At lunch she consulted the notes.

"The lord sits right behind us at that little table there," she said, excitedly. "That table for two is marked 'Lord and Lady Erkskine.' Now we must watch when they come in."

A few minutes later a gray-haired little man, accompanied by a middle-aged woman entered the saloon and were seated at the small table by an obsequious steward. Hephzy gasped.

"Why--why, Hosity!" she exclaimed. "That isn't the lord, is it? THAT?"

"I suppose it must be," I answered. When our own Steward came I asked him.

"Yes, sir," he answered, with unctious. "Yes, sir, that is Lord and Lady Erkskine, sir, thank you, sir."

Hephzy stared at Lord and Lady Erkskine. I gave our luncheon order, and the steward departed. Then her indignant disgust and disappointment burst forth.

"Well! well!" she exclaimed. "And that is a real live lord! That is! Why, Hosity, he's the livin' image of Asaph Tidditt back in Bayport. If Ase could afford clothes like that he might be his twin brother. Well! I guess that's enough. I don't want to see that Princess any more. Just as like as not she'd look like Susanna Wixon."

Her criticisms were not confined to passengers of other nationalities. Some of our own came in for comment quite as severe.

"Look at those girls at that table over there," she whispered. "The two in red, I mean. One of 'em has got a little flag pinned on her dress. What do you suppose that is for?"

I looked at the young ladies in red. They were vivacious damsels and their conversation and laughter were by no means subdued. A middle-aged man and woman and two young fellows were their table-mates and the group attracted a great deal of attention.

"What has she got that flag pinned on her for?" repeated Hephzy.

"She wishes everyone to know she's an American exportation, I suppose," I answered. "She is evidently proud of her country."

"Humph! Her country wouldn't be proud of her, if it had to listen to her the way we do. There's some exports it doesn't pay to advertise, I

guess, and she and her sister are that kind. Every time they laugh I can see that Lady Erkskine shrivel up like a sensitive plant. I hope she don't think all American girls are like those two."

"She probably does."

"Well, IF she does she's makin' a big mistake. I might as well believe all Englishmen were like this specimen comin' now, and I don't believe that, even if I do hail from Bayport."

The specimen was the "Duke of Labrador," who sauntered by, monocle in eye, hands in pockets and an elaborate affection of the "Oxford stoop" which he must have spent time and effort in acquiring. Hephzibah shook her head.

"I wish Toronto was further from home than it is," she declared. "But there! I shan't worry about him. I'll leave him for Lord Erkskine and his wife to be ashamed of. He's their countryman, or he hopes he is. I've got enough to do bein' ashamed of those two American girls."

It may be gathered from these conversations that Hephzy and I had been so fortunate as to obtain a table by ourselves. This was not the case. There were four seats at our table and, according to the chart of the dining-saloon, one of them should be occupied by a "Miss Rutledge of New York" and the other by "A. Carleton Heathcroft of London." Miss Rutledge we had not seen at all. Our table steward informed us that the lady was "hindisposed" and confined to her room. She was an actress, he added. Hephzy, whose New England training had imbued her with the conviction that all people connected with the stage must be highly undesirable as acquaintances, was quite satisfied. "Of course I'm sorry she isn't well," she confided to me "but I'm awfully glad she won't be at our table. I shouldn't want to hurt her feelin's, but I couldn't talk to her as I would to an ordinary person. I COULDN'T! All I should be able to think of was what she wore, or didn't wear, when she was actin' her parts. I expect I'm old-fashioned, but when I think of those girls in the pictures outside that theater--the one we didn't go to--I--well--mercy!"

The "pictures" were the posters advertising a popular musical comedy which Campbell had at first suggested our witnessing the afternoon of our stay in New York. Hephzibah's shocked expression and my whispered advice had brought about a change of plans. We saw a perfectly respectable, though thrilling, melodrama instead. I might have relieved my relative's mind by assuring her that all actresses were not necessarily attired as "merry villagers," but the probable result of my assurance seemed scarcely worth the effort.

A. Carleton Heathcroft, Esquire, was not acquainted with the stage, in a professional way, at any rate. He was a slim and elegant gentleman, dressed with elaborate care, who appeared profoundly bored with life in general and our society in particular. He sported one of Hephzibah's detestations, a monocle, and spoke, when he spoke at all, with a languid drawl and what I learned later was a Piccadilly accent. He favored us with his company during our first day afloat; after that we saw him amid the select group at that much sought--by some--center of shipboard prominence, "the Captain's table."

Oddly enough Hephzibah did not resent the Heathcroft condescension and single eyeglass as much as I had expected. She explained her feeling in

this way.

"I know he's dreadfully high and mighty and all that," she said. "And the way he said 'Really?' when you and I spoke to him was enough to squelch even an Angelina Phinney. But I didn't care so much. Anybody, even a body as green as I am, can see that he actually IS somebody when he's at home, not a make-believe, like that Toronto man. And I'm glad for our waiter's sake that he's gone somewhere else. The poor thing bowed so low when he came in and was so terribly humble every time Mr. Heathcroft spoke to him. I should hate to feel I must say 'Thank you' when I was told that the food was 'rotten bad.' I never thought 'rotten' was a nice word, but all these English folks say it. I heard that pretty English girl over there tell her father that it was a 'jolly rotten mornin',' and she's as nice and sweet as she can be. Well, I'm learnin' fast, Hosy. I can see a woman smoke a cigarette now and not shiver--much. Old Bridget Doyle up in West Bayport, used to smoke a pipe and the whole town talked about it. She'd be right at home in that sittin'-room they call a 'Lounge' after dinner, wouldn't she?"

My acquaintance with A. Carleton Heathcroft, which appeared to have ended almost as soon as it began, was renewed in an odd way. I was in the "Smoke-Room" after dinner the third evening out, enjoying a cigar and idly listening to the bidding for pools on the ship's run, that time-honored custom which helps the traveling gentleman of sporting proclivities to kill time and lose money. On board the "Plutonia," with its unusually large quota of millionaires and personages, the bidding was lively and the prices paid for favored numbers high. Needless to say I was not one of the bidders. My interest was merely casual.

The auctioneer that evening was a famous comedian with an international reputation and his chatter, as he urged his hearers to higher bids, was clever and amusing. I was listening to it and smiling at the jokes when a voice at my elbow said:

"Five pounds."

I turned and saw that the speaker was Heathcroft. His monocle was in his eye, a cigarette was between his fingers and he looked as if he had been newly washed and ironed and pressed from head to foot. He nodded carelessly and I bowed in return.

"Five pounds," repeated Mr. Heathcroft.

The auctioneer acknowledged the bid and proceeded to urge his audience on to higher flights. The flights were made and my companion capped each with one more lofty. Eight, nine, ten pounds were bid. Heathcroft bid eleven. Someone at the opposite side of the room bid twelve. It seemed ridiculous to me. Possibly my face expressed my feeling; at any rate something caused the immaculate gentleman in the next chair to address me instead of the auctioneer.

"I say," he said, "that's running a bit high, isn't it?"

"It seems so to me," I replied. "The number is five hundred and eighty-six and I think we shall do better than that."

"Oh, do you! Really! And why do you think so, may I ask?"

"Because we are having a remarkably smooth sea and a favorable wind."

"Oh, but you forget the fog. There's quite a bit of fog about us now, isn't there."

I wish I could describe the Heathcroft manner of saying "Isn't there." I can't, however; there is no use trying.

"It will amount to nothing," I answered. "The glass is high and there is no indication of bad weather. Our run this noon was five hundred and ninety-one, you remember."

"Yes. But we did have extraordinarily good weather for that."

"Why, not particularly good. We slowed down about midnight. There was a real fog then and the glass was low. The second officer told me it dropped very suddenly and there was a heavy sea running. For an hour between twelve and one we were making not much more than half our usual speed."

"Really! That's interesting. May I ask if you and the second officer are friends?"

"Scarcely that. He and I exchanged a few words on deck this morning, that's all."

"But he told you about the fog and the--what is it--the glass, and all that. Fancy! that's extremely odd. I'm acquainted with the captain in a trifling sort of way; I sit at his table, I mean to say. And I assure you he doesn't tell us a word. And, by Jove, we cross-question him, too! Rather!"

I smiled. I could imagine the cross-questioning.

"I suppose the captain is obliged to be non-committal," I observed. "That's part of his job. The second officer meant to be, I have no doubt, but perhaps my remarks showed that I was really interested in ships and the sea. My father and grandfather, too, for that matter were seafaring men, both captains. That may have made the second officer more communicative. Not that he said anything of importance, of course."

Mr. Heathcroft seemed very interested. He actually removed his eyeglass.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "You know something about it, then. I thought it was extraordinary, but now I see. And you think our run will be better than five hundred and eighty?"

"It should be, unless there is a remarkable change. This ship makes over six hundred, day after day, in good weather. She should do at least six hundred by to-morrow noon, unless there is a sudden change, as I said."

"But six hundred would be--it would be the high field, by Jove!"

"Anything over five hundred and ninety-four would be that. The numbers are very low to-night. Far too low, I should say."

Heathcroft was silent. The auctioneer, having forced the bid on number five hundred and eighty-six up to thirteen pounds ten, was imploring his hearers not to permit a certain winner to be sacrificed at this absurd figure.

"Fourteen pounds, gentlemen," he begged. "For the sake of the wife and children, for the honor of the star spangled banner and the union jack,--DON'T hesitate--don't even stammer--below fourteen pounds."

He looked in our direction as he said it. Mr. Heathcroft made no sign. He produced a gold cigarette box and extended it in my direction.

"Will you?" he inquired.

"No, thank you," I replied. "I will smoke a cigar, if you don't mind."

He did not appear to mind. He lighted his cigarette, readjusted his monocle, and stared stonily at the gesticulating auctioneer.

The bidding went on. One by one the numbers were sold until all were gone. Then the auctioneer announced that bids for the "high field," that is, any number above five hundred and ninety-four, were in order. My companion suddenly came to life.

"Ten pounds," he called.

I started. "For mercy sake, Mr. Heathcroft," I protested, "don't let anything I have said influence your bidding. I may be entirely wrong."

He turned and surveyed me through the eyeglass.

"You may wish to bid yourself," he drawled. "Careless of me. So sorry. Shall I withdraw the bid?"

"No, no. I'm not going to bid. I only--"

"Eleven pounds I am offered, gentlemen," shouted the auctioneer. "Eleven pounds! It would be like robbing an orphan asylum. Do I hear twelve?"

He heard twelve immediately--from Mr. Heathcroft.

Thirteen pounds were bid. Evidently others shared my opinion concerning the value of the "high field." Heathcroft promptly raised it to fourteen. I ventured another protest. So far as effect was concerned I might as well have been talking to one of the smoke-stacks. The bidding was lively and lengthy. At last the "high field" went to Mr. A. Carleton Heathcroft for twenty-one pounds, approximately one hundred and five dollars. I thought it time for me to make my escape. I was wondering where I should hide next day, when the run was announced.

"Greatly obliged to you, I'm sure," drawled the fortunate bidder. "Won't you join me in a whisky and soda or something?"

I declined the whisky and soda.

"Sorry," said Mr. Heathcroft. "Jolly grateful for putting me right, Mr.--er--"

"Knowles is my name," I said. He might have remembered it; I remembered his perfectly.

"Of course--Knowles. Thank you so much, Knowles. Thank you and the second officer. Nothing like having professional information--eh, what?"

Rather!"

There seemed to be no doubt in his mind that he was going to win. There was more than a doubt in mine. I told Hephzy of my experience when I joined her in the Lounge. My attempts to say "Really" and "Isn't it" and "Rather" in the Heathcroft manner and with the Heathcroft accent pleased her very much. As to the result of my unpremeditated "tip" she was quite indifferent.

"If he loses it will serve him good and right," she declared. "Gamblin's poor business and I sha'n't care if he does lose."

"I shall," I observed. "I feel responsible in a way and I shall be sorry."

"SO sorry,' you mean, Hosity. That's what that blunderin' steward said when he stepped on my skirt and tore the gatherin' all loose. I told him he wasn't half as sorry as I was."

But at noon next day, when the observation was taken and the run posted on the bulletin board the figure was six hundred and two. My "tip" had been a good one after all and A. Carleton Heathcroft, Esquire, was richer by some seven hundred dollars, even after the expenses of treating the "smoke-room" and feeing the smoke-room steward had been deducted. I did not visit the smoke-room to share in the treat. I feared I might be expected to furnish more professional information. But that evening a bottle of vintage champagne was produced by our obsequious table steward. "With Mr. 'Eathcroft's compliments, sir, thank you, sir," announced the latter.

Hephzibah looked at the gilt-topped bottle.

"WHAT in the world will we do with it, Hosity?" she demanded.

"Why, drink it, I suppose," I answered. "It is the only thing we can do. We can't send it back."

"But you can't drink the whole of it, and I'm sure I sha'n't start in to be a drunkard at my age. I'll take the least little bit of a drop, just to see what it tastes like. I've read about champagne, just as I've read about lords and ladies, all my life, but I never expected to see either of 'em. Well there!" after a very small sip from the glass, "there's another pet idea gone to smash. A lord looks like Ase Tidditt, and champagne tastes like vinegar and soda. Tut! tut! tut! if I had to drink that sour stuff all my life I'd probably look like Asaph, too. No wonder that Erkskine man is such a shriveled-up thing."

I glanced toward the captain's table. Mr. Heathcroft raised his glass. I bowed and raised mine. The group at that table, the captain included, were looking in my direction. I judged that my smoke-room acquaintance had told them of my wonderful "tip." I imagined I could see the sarcastic smile upon the captain's face. I did not care for that kind of celebrity.

But the affair had one quite unexpected result. The next forenoon as Hephzibah and I were reclining in our deck-chairs the captain himself, florid-faced, gray-bearded, gold-laced and grand, halted before us.

"I believe your name is Knowles, sir," he said, raising his cap.

"It is," I replied. I wondered what in the world was coming next. Was he going to take me to task for talking with his second officer?

"Your home is in Bayport, Massachusetts, I see by the passenger list," he went on. "Is that Bayport on Cape Cod, may I ask?"

"Yes," I replied, more puzzled than ever.

"I once knew a Knowles from your town, sir. He was a seafaring man like myself. His name was Philander Knowles, and when I knew him he was commander of the bark 'Ranger.'"

"He was my father," I said.

Captain Stone extended his hand.

"Mr. Knowles," he declared, "this is a great pleasure, sir. I knew your father years ago when I was a young man, mate of one of our ships engaged in the Italian fruit trade. He was very kind to me at that time. I have never forgotten it. May I sit down?"

The chair next to ours happened to be unoccupied at the moment and he took it. I introduced Hephzibah and we chatted for some time. The captain appeared delighted to meet the son of his old acquaintance. Father and he had met in Messina--Father's ship was in the fruit trade also at that time--and something or other he had done to help young Stone had made a great impression on the latter. I don't know what the something was, whether it was monetary help or assistance in getting out of a serious scrape; Stone did not tell me and I didn't ask. But, at any rate, the pair had become very friendly there and at subsequent meetings in the Mediterranean ports. The captain asked all sorts of questions about Father, his life, his family and his death aboard the sinking "Monarch of the Seas." Hephzibah furnished most of the particulars. She remembered them well.

Captain Stone nodded solemnly.

"That is the way the master of a ship should die," he declared. "Your father, Mr. Knowles, was a man and he died like one. He was my first American acquaintance and he gave me a new idea of Yankees--if you'll excuse my calling them that, sir."

Hephzy had a comment to make.

"There are SOME pretty fair Yankees," she observed, drily. "ALL the good folks haven't moved back to England yet."

The captain solemnly assured her that he was certain of it.

"Though two of the best are on their way," I added, with a wink at Hephzy. This attempt at humor was entirely lost. Our companion said he presumed I referred to Mr. and Mrs. Van Hook, who sat next him at table.

"And that leads me to ask if Miss Cahoon and yourself will not join us," he went on. "I could easily arrange for two places."

I looked at Hephzy. Her face expressed decided disapproval and she shook her head.

"Thank you, Captain Stone," I said; "but we have a table to ourselves and are very comfortable. We should not think of troubling you to that extent."

He assured us it would not be a trouble, but a pleasure. We were firm in our refusal, however, and he ceased to urge. He declared his intention of seeing that our quarters were adequate, offered to accompany us through the engine-rooms and the working portions of the ship whenever we wished, ordered the deck steward, who was all but standing on his head in obsequious desire to oblige, to take good care of us, shook hands once more, and went away. Hephzibah drew a long breath.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed; "sit at HIS table! I guess not! There's another lord and his wife there, to say nothin' of the Van Hooks. I'd look pretty, in my Cape Cod clothes, perched up there, wouldn't I! A hen is all right in her place, but she don't belong in a peacock cage. And they drink champagne ALL the time there; I've watched 'em. No thank you, I'll stay in the henyard along with the everyday fowls."

"Odd that he should have known Father," I observed. "Well, I suppose the proper remark to make, under the circumstances, is that this is a small world. That is what nine-tenths of Bayport would say."

"It's what I say, too," declared Hephzy, with emphasis. "Well, it's awful encouraging for us, isn't it."

"Encouraging? What do you mean?"

"Why, I mean about Little Frank. It makes me feel surer than ever that we shall run across him."

I suppressed a groan. "Hephzy," said I, "why on earth should the fact that Captain Stone knew my father encourage you to believe that we shall meet a person we never knew at all?"

"Hosy, how you do talk! If you and I, just cruisin' this way across the broadside of creation, run across a man that knew Cousin Philander thirty-nine years ago, isn't it just as reasonable to suppose we'll meet a child who was born twenty-one years ago? I should say 'twas! Hosy, I've had a presentiment about this cruise of ours: We're SENT on it; that's what I think--we're sent. Oh, you can laugh! You'll see by and by. THEN you won't laugh."

"No, Hephzy," I admitted, resignedly, "I won't laugh then, I promise you. If I ever reach the stage where I see a Little Frank I promise you I sha'n't laugh. I'll believe diseases of the brain are contagious, like the measles, and I'll send for a doctor."

The captain met us again in the dining-room that evening. He came over to our table and chatted for some time. His visit caused quite a sensation. Shipboard society is a little world by itself and the ship's captain is the head of it. Persons who would, very likely, have passed Captain Stone on Fifth Avenue or Piccadilly without recognizing him now toadied to him as if he were a Czar, which, in a way, I suppose he is when afloat. His familiarity with us shed a sort of reflected glory upon Hephzy and me. Several of our fellow-passengers spoke to us that evening for the first time.

A. Carleton Heathcroft, Esquire, was not among the Lounge habitués; the smoke-room was his accustomed haunt. But the next forenoon as I leaned over the rail of the after promenade deck watching the antics of the "Stokers' Band" which was performing for the benefit of the second-class with an eye toward pennies and small silver from all classes, Heathcroft sauntered up and leaned beside me. We exchanged good-mornings. I thanked him for the wine.

"Quite unnecessary, Knowles," he said. "Least I could do, it seems to me. I pulled quite a tidy bit from that inside information of yours; I did really. Awfully obliged, and all that. You seem to have a wide acquaintance among the officers. That captain chap tells us he knew your father--the sailor one you told me of, you understand."

Having had but one father I understood perfectly. We chatted in a inconsequential way for a short time. In the course of our conversation I happened to mention that I wrote, professionally. To my surprise Heathcroft was impressed.

"Do you, really!" he exclaimed. "That's interesting, isn't it now! I have a cousin who writes. Don't know why she does it; she doesn't get her writings printed, but she keeps on. It is a habit of hers. Curious dissipation--eh, what? Does that--er--Miss--that companion of yours, write also?"

I laughed and informed him that writing was not one of Hephzibah's bad habits.

"Extraordinary woman, isn't she," he said. "I met her just now, walking about, and I happened to mention that I was taking the air. She said she wouldn't quarrel with me because of that. The more I took the better she would like it; she could spare about a gale and a quarter and not feel--What did she call it? Oh yes, 'scrimped.' What is 'scrimped,' may I ask?"

I explained the meaning of "scrimped." Heathcroft was much amused.

"It WAS blowing a bit strong up forward there," he declared. "That was a clever way of putting it, wasn't it?"

"She is a clever woman," I said, shortly.

Heathcroft did not enthuse.

"Oh," he said dubiously. "A relative of yours, I suppose."

"A cousin, that's all."

"One's relatives, particularly the feminine relatives, incline toward eccentricity as they grow older, don't you think. I have an aunt down in Sussex, who is queer. A good sort, too, no end of money, a big place and all that, but odd. She and I get on well together--I am her pet, I suppose I may say--but, by Jove, she has quarreled with everyone else in the family. I let her have her own way and it has convinced her that I am the only rational Heathcroft in existence. Do you golf, Knowles?"

"I attempt something in that line. I doubt if my efforts should be called golf."

"It is a rotten game when one is off form, isn't it. If you are down in Sussex and I chance to be there I should be glad to have you play an eighteen with me. Burglestone Bogs is the village. Anyone will direct you to the Manor. If I'm not there, introduce yourself to my aunt. Lady Kent Carey is the name. She'll be jolly glad to welcome you if you tell her you know me. I'm her sole interest in life, the greenhouses excepted, of course. Cultivating roses and rearing me are her hobbies."

I thought it improbable that the golfers of Burglestone Bogs would ever be put to shame by the brilliancy of my game. I thanked him, however. I was surprised at the invitation. I had been under the impression, derived from my reading, that the average Englishman required an acquaintance of several months before proffering hospitality. No doubt Mr. Heathcroft was not an average Englishman.

"Will you be in London long?" he asked. "I suppose not. You're probably off on a hurricane jaunt from one end of the Continent to the other. Two hours at Stratford, bowing before Shakespeare's tomb, a Derby through the cathedral towns, and then the Channel boat, eh? That's the American way, isn't it?"

"It is not our way," I replied. "We have no itinerary. I don't know where we may go or how long we shall stay."

Evidently I rose again in his estimation.

"Have you picked your hotel in London?" he inquired.

"No. I shall be glad of any help you may be kind enough to give along that line."

He reflected. "There's a decent little hotel in Mayfair," he said, after a moment. "A private sort of shop. I don't use it myself; generally put up at the club, I mean to say. But my aunt and my sisters do. They're quite mad about it. It is--Ah--Bancroft's--that's it, Bancroft's Hotel. I'll give you the address before I leave."

I thanked him again. He was certainly trying to be kind. No doubt the kindness was due to his sense of obligation engendered by what he called my "professional information," but it was kindness all the same.

The first bugle for luncheon sounded. Mr. Heathcroft turned to go.

"I'll see you again, Knowles," he said, "and give you the hotel street and number and all that. Hope you'll like it. If you shouldn't the Langham is not bad--quiet and old-fashioned, but really very fair. And if you care for something more public and--Ah--American, there are always the Savoy and the Cecil. Here is my card. If I can be of any service to you while you are in town drop me a line at my clubs, either of them. I must be toddling. By, by."

He "toddled" and I sought my room to prepare for luncheon.

Two days more and our voyage was at an end. We saw more of our friend the captain during those days and of Heathcroft as well. The former fulfilled his promise of showing us through the ship, and Hephzy and I, descending greasy iron stairways and twisting through narrow passages, saw great rooms full of mighty machinery, and a cavern where perspiring, grimy men, looking but half-human in the red light from the furnace

mouths, toiled ceaselessly with pokers and shovels.

We stood at the forward end of the promenade deck at night, looking out into the blackness, and heard the clang of four bells from the shadows at the bow, the answering clang from the crow's-nest on the foremast, and the weird cry of "All's well" from the lookouts. This experience made a great impression on us both. Hephzy expressed my feeling exactly when she said in a hushed whisper:

"There, Hosity! for the first time I feel as if I really was on board a ship at sea. My father and your father and all our men-folks for ever so far back have heard that 'All's well'--yes, and called it, too, when they first went as sailors. Just think of it! Why Father was only sixteen when he shipped; just a boy, that's all. I've heard him say 'All's well' over and over again; 'twas a kind of byword with him. This whole thing seems like somethin' callin' to me out of the past and gone. Don't you feel it?"

I felt it, as she did. The black night, the quiet, the loneliness, the salt spray on our faces and the wash of the waves alongside, the high singsong wail from lookout to lookout--it WAS a voice from the past, the call of generations of sea-beaten, weather-worn, brave old Cape Codders to their descendants, reminding the latter of a dead and gone profession and of thousands of fine, old ships which had plowed the ocean in the days when "Plutonias" were unknown.

We attended the concert in the Lounge, and the ball on the promenade deck which followed. Mr. Heathcroft, who seemed to have made the acquaintance of most of the pretty girls on board, informed us in the intervals between a two-step and a tango, that he had been "dancing madly."

"You Americans are extraordinary people," he added. "Your dances are as extraordinary as your food. That Mrs. Van Hook, who sits near me at table, was indulging in--what do you call them?--oh, yes, griddle cakes--this morning. Begged me to try them. I declined. Horrid things they were. Round, like a--like a washing-flannel, and swimming in treacle. Frightful!"

"And that man," commented Hephzy, "eats cold toast and strawberry preserves for breakfast and washes 'em down with three cups of tea. And he calls nice hot pancakes frightful!"

At ten o'clock in the morning of the sixth day we sighted the Irish coast through the dripping haze which shrouded it and at four we dropped anchor abreast the breakwater of the little Welsh village which was to be our landing place. The sun was shining dimly by this time and the rounded hills and the mountains beyond them, the green slopes dotted with farms and checkered with hedges and stone walls, the gray stone fort with its white-washed barrack buildings, the spires and chimneys of the village in the hollow--all these combined to make a picture which was homelike and yet not like home, foreign and yet strangely familiar.

We leaned over the rail and watched the trunks and boxes and bags and bundles shoot down the slide into the baggage and mail-boat which lay alongside. Hephzy was nervous.

"They'll smash everything to pieces--they surely will!" she declared. "Either that or smash themselves, I don't know which is liable to happen

first. Mercy on us! Did you see that? That box hit the man right in the back!"

"It didn't hurt him," I said, reassuringly. "It was nothing but a hat-box."

"Hurt HIM--no! But I guess likely it didn't do the hat much good. I thought baggage smashin' was an American institution, but they've got some experts over here. Oh, my soul and body! there goes MY trunk--end over end, of course. Well, I'm glad there's no eggs in it, anyway. Josiah Dimick always used to carry two dozen eggs to his daughter-in-law every time he went to Boston. He had 'em in a box once and put the box on the seat alongside of him and a big fat woman came and sat--Oh! that was your trunk, Hosity! Did you hear it hit? I expect every one of those 'English Poets' went from top to bottom then, right through all your clothes. Never mind, I suppose it's all part of travelin'."

Mr. Heathcroft, looking more English than ever in his natty top coat, and hat at the back of his head, sauntered up. He was, for him, almost enthusiastic.

"Looking at the water, were you?" he queried. "Glorious color, isn't it. One never sees a sea like that or a sky like that anywhere but here at home."

Hephzy looked at the sea and sky. It was plain that she wished to admire, for his sake, but her admiration was qualified.

"Don't you think if they were a little brighter and bluer they'd be prettier?" she asked.

Heathcroft stared at her through his monocle.

"Bluer?" he repeated. "My dear woman, there are no skies as blue as the English skies. They are quite celebrated--really."

He sauntered on again, evidently disgusted at our lack of appreciation.

"He must be color-blind," I observed. Hephzy was more charitable.

"I guess likely everybody's home things are best," she said. "I suppose this green-streaked water and those gray clouds do look bright and blue to him. We must make allowances, Hosity. He never saw an August mornin' at Bayport, with a northwest wind blowin' and the bay white and blue to the edge of all creation. That's been denied him. He means well, poor thing; he don't know any better."

An hour later we landed from the passenger tender at a stone pier covered with substantial stone buildings. Uniformed custom officers and uniformed policemen stood in line as we came up the gang-plank. Behind them, funny little locomotives attached to queer cars which appeared to be all doors, puffed and panted.

Hephzibah looked about her.

"Yes," she said, with conviction. "I'm believin' it more and more all the time. It is England, just like the pictures. How many times I've seen engines like that in pictures, and cars like that, too. I never thought I'd ride in 'em. My goodness me? Hephzibah Jane Cahoon, you're

in England--YOU are! You needn't be afraid to turn over for fear of wakin' up, either. You're awake and alive and in England! Hosity," with a sudden burst of exuberance, "hold on to me tight. I'm just as likely to wave my hat and hurrah as I am to do anything. Hold on to me--tight."

We got through the perfunctory customs examination without trouble. Our tickets provided by Campbell, included those for the railway journey to London. I secured a first-class compartment at the booking-office and a guard conducted us to it and closed the door. Another short delay and then, with a whistle as queer and unfamiliar as its own appearance, the little locomotive began to pull our train out of the station.

Hephzy leaned back against the cushions with a sigh of supreme content.

"And now," said I, "for London. London! think of it, Hephzy!"

Hephzy shook her head.

"I'm thinkin' of it," she said. "London--the biggest city in the world! Who knows, Hosity? France is such a little ways off; probably Little Frank has been to London a hundred times. He may even be there now. Who knows? I shouldn't be surprised if we met him right in London. I sha'n't be surprised at anything anymore. I'm in England and on my way to London; that's surprise enough. NOTHIN' could be more wonderful than that."

CHAPTER VI

In Which We Are Received at Bancroft's Hotel and I Receive a Letter

It was late when we reached London, nearly eleven o'clock. The long train journey was a delight. During the few hours of daylight and dusk we peered through the car windows at the scenery flying past; at the villages, the green fields, the hedges, the neat, trim farms.

"Everything looks as if it has been swept and dusted," declared Hephzy. "There aren't any waste places at all. What do they do with their spare land?"

"They haven't any," I answered. "Land is too valuable to waste. There's another thatched roof. It looks like those in the pictures, doesn't it."

Hephzy nodded. "Just exactly," she said. "Everything looks like the pictures. I feel as if I'd seen it all before. If that engine didn't toot so much like a tin whistle I should almost think it was a picture. But it isn't--it isn't; it's real, and you and I are part of it."

We dined on the train. Night came and our window-pictures changed to glimpses of flashing lights interspersed with shadowy blotches of darkness. At length the lights became more and more frequent and began to string out in long lines marking suburban streets. Then the little locomotive tooted its tin whistle frantically and we rolled slowly under a great train shed--Paddington Station and London itself.

Amid the crowd on the platform Hephzy and I stood, two lone wanderers not exactly sure what we should do next. About us the busy crowd jostled and pushed. Relatives met relatives and fathers and mothers met sons and

daughters returning home after long separations. No one met us, no one was interested in us at all, except the porters and the cabmen. I selected a red-faced chunky porter who was a decidedly able person, apparently capable of managing anything except the letter h. The acrobatics which he performed with that defenceless consonant were marvelous. I have said that I selected him; that he selected me would be nearer the truth.

"Cab, sir. Yes, sir, thank you, sir," he said. "Leave that to me, sir. Will you 'ave a fourwheeler or a hordinary cab, sir?"

I wasn't exactly certain what a fourwheeler might be. I had read about them often enough, but I had never seen one pictured and properly labeled. For the matter of that, all the vehicles in sight appeared to have four wheels. So I said, at a venture, that I thought an ordinary cab would do.

"Yes, sir; 'ere you are, sir. Your boxes are in the luggage van, I suppose, sir."

I took it for granted he meant my trunks and those were in what I, in my ignorance, would have called a baggage car:

"Yes, sir," said the porter. "If the lidy will be good enough to wait 'ere, sir, you and I will go hafter the boxes, sir."

Cautioning Hephzy not to stir from her moorings on any account I followed my guide to the "luggage van." This crowded car disgorged our two steamer trunks and, my particular porter having corraled a fellow-craftsman to help him, the trunks were dragged to the waiting cab.

I found Hephzy waiting, outwardly calm, but inwardly excited.

"I saw one at last," she declared. "I'd about come to believe there wasn't such a thing, but there is; I just saw one."

"One--what?" I asked, puzzled.

"An Englishman with side-whiskers. They wasn't as big and long as those in the pictures, but they were side-whiskers. I feel better. When you've been brought up to believe every Englishman wore 'em, it was kind of humiliatin' not to see one single set."

I paid my porters--I learned afterward that, like most Americans, I had given them altogether too much--and we climbed into the cab with our bags. The "boxes," or trunks, were on the driver's seat and on the roof.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

I hesitated. Even at this late date I had not made up my mind exactly "where to." My decision was a hasty one.

"Why--er--to--to Bancroft's Hotel," I said. "Blithe Street, just off Piccadilly."

I think the driver was somewhat astonished. Very few of his American passengers selected Bancroft's as a stopping place, I imagine. However, his answer was prompt.

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir," he said. The cab rolled out of the station.

"I suppose," said Hephzy, reflectively, "if you had told him or that porter man that they were everlastin' idiots they'd have thanked you just the same and called you 'sir' four times besides."

"No doubt they would."

"Yes, sir, I'm perfectly sure they would--thank you, sir. So this is London. It doesn't look such an awful lot different from Boston or New York so far."

But Bancroft's, when we reached it, was as unlike a Boston or New York hotel as anything could be. A short, quiet, eminently respectable street, leading from Piccadilly; a street fenced in, on both sides, by three-story, solid, eminently respectable houses of brick and stone. No signs, no street cars, no crowds, no glaring lights. Merely a gas lamp burning over the fanlight of a spotless white door, and the words "Bancroft's Hotel" in mosaic lettering set in a white stone slab in the pavement.

The cab pulled up before the white door and Hephzy and I looked out of the window. The same thought was in both our minds.

"This can't be the place," said I.

"This isn't a hotel, is it, Hesy?" asked Hephzy.

The white door opened and a brisk, red-cheeked English boy in uniform hastened to the cab. Before he reached it I had seen the lettering in the pavement and knew that, in spite of appearances, we had reached our destination.

"This is it, Hephzy," I said. "Come."

The boy opened the cab door and we alighted. Then in the doorway of "Bancroft's" appeared a stout, red-faced and very dignified person, also in uniform. This person wore short "mutton-chop" whiskers and had the air of a member of the Royal Family; that is to say, the air which a member of the Royal Family might be expected to have.

"Good evening, sir," said the personage, bowing respectfully. The bow was a triumph in itself; not too low, not abject in the least, not familiar; a bow which implied much, but promised nothing; a bow which seemed to demand references, but was far from repellent or bullying. Altogether a wonderful bow.

"Good evening," said I. "This is Bancroft's Hotel, is it not?"

"Yes, sir."

"I wish to secure rooms for this lady and myself, if possible."

"Yes, sir. This way, sir, if you please. Richard," this to the boy and in a tone entirely different--the tone of a commanding officer to a private--"see to the gentleman's luggage. This way, sir; thank you, sir."

I hesitated. "The cabman has not been paid," I stammered. I was a trifle overawed by the grandeur of the mutton-chops and the "sir."

"I will attend to that, sir. If you will be good enough to come in, sir."

We entered and found ourselves in a narrow hall, old-fashioned, homelike and as spotless as the white door. Two more uniforms bowed before us.

"Thank you, sir," said the member of the Royal Family. It was with difficulty that I repressed the desire to tell him he was quite welcome. His manner of thanking me seemed to imply that we had conferred a favor.

"I will speak to Mr. Jameson," he went on, with another bow. Then he left us.

"Is--is that Mr. Bancroft?" whispered Hephzy.

I shook my head. "It must be the Prince of Wales, at least," I whispered in return. "I infer that there is no Mr. Bancroft."

It developed that I was right. Mr. Jameson was the proprietor of the hotel, and Mr. Jameson was a pleasant, refined, quiet man of middle age. He appeared from somewhere or other, ascertained our wants, stated that he had a few vacant rooms and could accommodate us.

"Do you wish a sitting-room?" he asked.

I was not sure. I wanted comfort, that I knew, and I said so. I mentioned, as an afterthought, that Mr. Heathcroft had recommended Bancroft's to me.

The Heathcroft name seemed to settle everything. Mr. Jameson summoned the representative of royalty and spoke to him in a low tone. The representative--his name, I learned later, was Henry and he was butler and major-domo at Bancroft's--bowed once more. A few minutes later we were shown to an apartment on the second floor front, a room large, old-fashioned, furnished with easy-chairs, tables and a big, comfortable sofa. Sofa and easy-chairs were covered with figured, glazed chintz.

"Your sitting-room, sir," said Henry. "Your bedrooms open off it, sir. The chambermaid will 'ave them ready in a moment, sir. Richard and the porter will bring up your luggage and the boxes. Will you and the lady wish supper, sir? Thank you, sir. Very good, sir. Will you require a fire, sir?"

The room was a trifle chilly. There was a small iron grate at its end, and a coal fire ready to kindle. I answered that a fire might be enjoyable.

"Yes, sir," said Henry. "Himmediately, sir."

Soon Hephzy and I were drinking hot tea and eating bread and butter and plum cake before a snapping fire. George, the waiter, had brought us the tea and accessories and set the table; the chambermaid had prepared the bedrooms; Henry had supervised everything.

"Well," observed Hephzy, with a sigh of content, "I feel better satisfied every minute. When we were in the hack--cab, I mean--I

couldn't realize we weren't ridin' through an American city. The houses and sidewalks and everything--what I could see of 'em--looked so much like Boston that I was sort of disappointed. I wanted it to be more different, some way. But this IS different. This may be a hotel--I suppose likely 'tis--but it don't seem like one, does it? If it wasn't for the Henry and that Richard and that--what's his name? George--and all the rest, I should think I was in Cap'n Cyrus Whittaker's settin'-room back home. The furniture looks like Cap'n Cy's and the pictures look like those he has, and--and everything looks as stiff and starched and old-fashioned as can be. But the Cap'n never had a Henry. No, sirree, Henry don't belong on Cape Cod! Hossy," with a sudden burst of confidence, "it's a good thing I saw that Lord Erskine first. If I hadn't found out what a live lord looked like I'd have thought Henry was one sure. Do you really think it's right for me to call him by his Christian name? It seems sort of--sort of irreverent, somehow."

I wish it were possible for me to describe in detail our first days at Bancroft's. If it were not for the fact that so many really important events and happenings remain to be described--if it were not that the most momentous event of my life, the event that was the beginning of the great change in that life--if that event were not so close at hand, I should be tempted to linger upon those first few days. They were strange and wonderful and funny to Hephzibah and me. The strangeness and the wonder wore off gradually; the fun still sticks in my memory.

To have one's bedroom invaded at an early hour by a chambermaid who, apparently quite oblivious of the fact that the bed was still occupied by a male, proceeded to draw the curtains, bring the hot water and fill the tin tub for my bath, was astonishing and funny enough, Hephzibah's comments on the proceeding were funnier still.

"Do you mean to tell me," she demanded, "that that hussy was brazen enough to march right in here before you got up?"

"Yes," I said. "I am only thankful that I HADN'T got up."

"Well! I must say! Did she fetch the water in a garden waterin'-pot, same as she did to me?"

"Just the same."

"And did she pour it into that--that flat dishpan on the floor and tell you your 'bawth' was ready?"

"She did."

"Humph! Of all the--I hope she cleared out THEN?"

"She did."

"That's a mercy, anyhow. Did you take a bath in that dishpan?"

"I tried."

"Well, I didn't. I'd as soon try to bathe in a saucer. I'd have felt as if I'd needed a teaspoon to dip up the half pint of water and pour it over me. Don't these English folks have real bathtubs for grown-up people?"

I did not know, then. Later I learned that Bancroft's Hotel possessed several bathrooms, and that I might use one if I preferred. Being an American I did so prefer. Most of the guests, being English, preferred the "dishpans."

We learned to accept the early morning visits of the chambermaid as matters of course. We learned to order breakfast the night before and to eat it in our sitting-room. We tasted a "grilled sole" for the first time, and although Hephzy persisted in referring to it as "fried flatfish" we liked the taste. We became accustomed to being waited upon, to do next to nothing for ourselves, and I found that a valet who laid out my evening clothes, put the studs in my shirts, selected my neckties, and saw that my shoes were polished, was a rather convenient person to have about. Hephzy fumed a good deal at first; she declared that she felt ashamed, an able-bodied woman like her, to sit around with her hands folded and do nothing. She asked her maid a great many questions, and the answers she received explained some of her puzzles.

"Do you know what that poor thing gets a week?" she observed, referring to the maid. "Eight shillin's--two dollars a week, that's what she gets. And your valet man doesn't get any more. I can see now how Mr. Jameson can afford to keep so much help at the board he charges. I pay that Susanna Wixon thing at Bayport three dollars and she doesn't know enough to boil water without burnin' it on, scarcely. And Peters--why in the world do they call women by their last names?--Peters, she's the maid, says it's a real nice place and she's quite satisfied. Well, where ignorance is bliss it's foolish to be sensible, I suppose; but _I_ wouldn't fetch and carry for the President's wife, to say nothin' of an everyday body like me, for two dollars a week."

We learned that the hotel dining-room was a "Coffee Room."

"Nobody with sense would take coffee there--not more'n once, they wouldn't," declared Hephzy. "I asked Peters why they didn't call it the 'Tea Room' and be done with it. She said because it was the Coffee Room. I suppose likely that was an answer, but I felt a good deal as if I'd come out of the same hole I went in at. She thanked me for askin' her, though; she never forgets that."

We became accustomed to addressing the lordly Henry by his Christian name and found him a most obliging person. He, like everyone else, had instantly recognized us as Americans, and, consequently, was condescendingly kind to strangers from a distant and barbarous country.

"What SORT of place do they think the States are?" asked Hephzy. "That's what they always call home--'the States'--and they seem to think it's about as big as a pocket handkerchief. That Henry asked me if the red Indians were numerous where we lived. I said no--as soon as I could say anything; I told him there was only one tribe of Red Men in town and they were white. I guess he thought I was crazy, but it don't make any difference. And Peters said she had a cousin in a place called Chicago and did I know him. What do you think of that?"

"What did you tell her?" I inquired.

"Hey? Oh, I told her that, bein' as Chicago was a thousand miles from Bayport, I hadn't had time to do much visitin' there. I told her the truth, but she didn't believe it. I could see she didn't. She thinks Chicago and San Francisco and New York and Boston are nests of wigwams

in the same patch of woods and all hands that live there have been scalped at least once. SUCH ignorance!"

Henry, at my request, procured seats for us at one of the London theaters. There we saw a good play, splendidly acted, and Hephzy laughed and wept at the performance. As usual, however, she had a characteristic comment to make.

"Why do they call the front seats the 'stalls'?" she whispered to me between the acts. "Stalls! The idea! I'm no horse. Perhaps they call 'em that because folks are donkeys enough to pay two dollars and a half for the privilege of sittin' in 'em. Don't YOU be so extravagant again, Hosy."

One of the characters in the play was supposed to be an American gentleman, and his behavior and dress and speech stirred me to indignation. I asked the question which every American asks under similar circumstances.

"Why on earth," I demanded, "do they permit that fellow to make such a fool of himself? He yells and drawls and whines through his nose and wears clothes which would make an American cry. That last scene was supposed to be a reception and he wore an outing suit and no waistcoat. Do they suppose such a fellow would be tolerated in respectable society in the United States?"

And now it was Hephzy's turn to be philosophical.

"I guess likely the answer to that is simple enough," she said. "He's what they think an American ought to be, even if he isn't. If he behaved like a human bein' he wouldn't be the kind of American they expect on the stage. After all, he isn't any worse than the Englishmen we have in the Dramatic Society's plays at home. I haven't seen one of that kind since I got here; and I've given up expectin' to--unless you and I go to some crazy asylum--which isn't likely."

We rode on the tops of busses, we visited the Tower, and Westminster Abbey, and Saint Paul's. We saw the Horse Guard sentinels on duty in Whitehall, and watched the ceremony of guard changing at St. James's. Hephzy was impressed, in her own way, by the uniforms of the "Cold Streams."

"There!" she exclaimed, "I've seen 'em walk. Now I feel better. When they stood there, with those red jackets and with the fur hats on their heads, I couldn't make myself believe they hadn't been taken out of a box for children to play with. I wanted to get up close so as to see if their feet were glued to round pieces of wood like Noah's and Ham's and Japhet's in the Ark. But they aren't wood, they're alive. They're men, not toys. I'm glad I've seen 'em. THEY are satisfyin'. They make me more reconciled to a King with a Derby hat on."

She and I had stood in the crowd fringing the park mall and seen King George trot by on horseback. His Majesty's lack of crown and robes and scepter had been a great disappointment to Hephzy; I think she expected the crown at least.

I had, of course, visited the London office of my publishers, in Camford Street and had found Mr. Matthews, the manager, expecting me. Jim Campbell had cabled and written of my coming and Matthews' welcome was a

warm one. He was kindness itself. All my financial responsibilities were to be shifted to his shoulders. I was to use the office as a bank, as a tourist agency, even as a guide's headquarters. He put his clerks at my disposal; they would conduct us on sight-seeing expeditions whenever and wherever we wished. He even made out a list of places in and about London which we, as strangers, should see.

His cordiality and thoughtfulness were appreciated. They made me feel less alone and less dependent upon my own resources. Campbell had arranged that all letters addressed to me in America should be forwarded to the Camford Street office, and Matthews insisted that I should write my own letters there. I began to make it a practice to drop in at the office almost every morning before starting on the day's round of sight-seeing.

Bancroft's Hotel also began to seem less strange and more homelike. Mr. Jameson, the proprietor, was a fine fellow--quiet, refined, and pleasant. He, too, tried to help us in every possible way. His wife, a sweet-faced Englishwoman, made Hephzy's acquaintance and Hephzy liked her extremely.

"She's as nice as she can be," declared Hephzy. "If it wasn't that she says 'Fancy!' and 'Really!' instead of 'My gracious!' and 'I want to know!' I should think I was talking to a Cape Codder, the best kind of one. She's got sense, too. SHE don't ask about 'red Indians' in Bayport."

Among the multitude of our new experiences we learned the value of a judicious "tip." We had learned something concerning tips on the "Plutonia"; Campbell had coached us concerning those, and we were provided with a schedule of rates--so much to the bedroom steward, so much to the stewardess, to the deck steward, to the "boots," and all the rest. But tipping in London we were obliged to adjust for ourselves, and the result of our education was surprising.

At Saint Paul's an elderly and impressively haughty person in a black robe showed us through the Crypt and delivered learned lectures before the tombs of Nelson and Wellington. His appearance and manner were somewhat awe-inspiring, especially to Hephzy, who asked me, in a whisper, if I thought likely he was a bishop or a canon or something. When the round was ended and we were leaving the Crypt she saw me put a hand in my pocket.

"Mercy sakes, Hosity," she whispered. "You aren't goin' to offer him money, are you? He'll be insulted. I'd as soon think of givin' Mr. Partridge, our minister, money for takin' us to the cemetery to see the first settlers' gravestones. Don't you do it. He'll throw it back at you. I'll be so ashamed."

But I had been watching our fellow-sight-seers as they filed out, and when our time came I dropped two shillings in the hand of the black-robed dignitary. The hand did not spurn the coins, which I--rather timidly, I confess--dropped into it. Instead it closed upon them tightly and the haughty lips thanked me, not profusely, not even smilingly, but thanked me, nevertheless.

At our visit to the Law Courts a similar experience awaited us. Another dignified and elderly person, who, judging by his appearance, should have been a judge at least, not only accepted the shilling I gave him,

but bowed, smiled and offered to conduct us to the divorce court.

"A very interesting case there, sir, just now," he murmured, confidingly. "Very interesting and sensational indeed, sir. You and the lady will enjoy it, I'm sure, sir. All Americans do."

Hephzy was indignant.

"Well!" she exclaimed, as we emerged upon the Strand. "Well! I must say! What sort of folks does he think we are, I'd like to know. Divorce case! I'd be ashamed to hear one. And that old man bein' so wicked and ridiculous for twenty-five cents! Hossy, I do believe if you'd given him another shillin' he'd have introduced us to that man in the red robe and cotton wool wig--What did he call him?--Oh, yes, the Lord Chief Justice. And I suppose you'd have had to tip HIM, too."

The first two weeks of our stay in London came to an end. Our plans were still as indefinite as ever. How long we should stay, where we should go next, what we should do when we decided where that "next" was to be--all these questions we had not considered at all. I, for my part, was curiously uninterested in the future. I was enjoying myself in an idle, irresponsible way, and I could not seem to concentrate my thoughts upon a definite course of action. If I did permit myself to think I found my thoughts straying to my work and there they faced the same impassable wall. I felt no inclination to write; I was just as certain as ever that I should never write again. Thinking along this line only brought back the old feeling of despondency. So I refused to think and, taking Jim's advice, put work and responsibility from my mind. We would remain in London as long as we were contented there. When the spirit moved we would move with it--somewhere--either about England or to the Continent. I did not know which and I did not care; I did not seem to care much about anything.

Hephzy was perfectly happy. London to her was as wonderful as ever. She never tired of sight-seeing, and on occasions when I felt disinclined to leave the hotel she went out alone, shopping or wandering about the streets.

She scarcely mentioned "Little Frank" and I took care not to remind her of that mythical youth. I had expected her to see him on every street corner, to be brought face to face with unsuspecting young Englishmen and made to ask ridiculous questions which might lead to our being taken in charge as a pair of demented foreigners. But my forebodings were not realized. London was so huge and the crowds so great that even Hephzy's courage faltered. To select Little Frank from the multitude was a task too great, even for her, I imagine. At any rate, she did not make the attempt, and the belief that we were "sent" upon our pilgrimage for that express purpose she had not expressed since our evening on the train.

The third week passed. I was growing tired of trotting about. Not tired of London in particular. The gray, dingy, historic, wonderful old city was still fascinating. It is hard to conceive of an intelligent person's ever growing weary of the narrow streets with the familiar names--Fleet Street, Fetter Lane, Pudding Lane and all the rest--names as familiar to a reader of history or English fiction as that of his own town. To wander into an unknown street and to learn that it is Shoreditch, or to look up at an ancient building and discover it to be the Charterhouse, were ever fresh miracles to me, as I am sure they must be to every book-loving American. No, I was not tired of London. Had I come there

under other circumstances I should have been as happy and content as Hephzy herself. But, now that the novelty was wearing off, I was beginning to think again, to think of myself--the very thing I had determined, and still meant, not to do.

One afternoon I drifted into the Camford Street office. Hephzy had left me at Piccadilly Circus and was now, it was safe to presume, enjoying a delightful sojourn amid the shops of Regent and Oxford Streets. When she returned she would have a half-dozen purchases to display, a two-and-six glove bargain from Robinson's, a bit of lace from Selfridge's, a knick-knack from Liberty's--"All so MUCH cheaper than you can get 'em in Boston, Hosy." She would have had a glorious time.

Matthews, the manager at Camford Street, was out, but Holton, the head clerk--I was learning to speak of him as a "clark"--was in.

"There are some American letters for you, sir," he said. "I was about to send them to your hotel."

He gave me the letters--four of them altogether--and I went into the private office to look them over. My first batch of mail from home; it gave me a small thrill to see two-cent stamps in the corners of the envelopes.

One of the letters was from Campbell. I opened it first of all. Jim wrote a rambling, good-humored letter, a mixture of business, news, advice and nonsense. "The Black Brig" had gone into another edition. Considering my opinion of such "slush" I should be ashamed to accept the royalties, but he would continue to give my account credit for them until I cabled to the contrary. He trusted we were behaving ourselves in a manner which would reflect credit upon our country. I was to be sure not to let Hephzy marry a title. And so on, for six pages. The letter was almost like a chat with Jim himself, and I read it with chuckles and a pang of homesickness.

One of the envelopes bore Hephzy's name and I, of course, did not open it. It was postmarked "Bayport" and I thought I recognized the handwriting as Susanna Wixon's. The third letter turned out to be not a letter at all, but a bill from Sylvanus Cahoon, who took care of our "lots" in the Bayport cemetery. It had been my intention to pay all bills before leaving home, but, somehow or other, Sylvanus's had been overlooked. I must send him a check at once.

The fourth and last envelope was stained and crumpled. It had traveled a long way. To my surprise I noticed that the stamp in the corner was English and the postmark "London." The address, moreover, was "Captain Barnabas Cahoon, Bayport, Massachusetts, U. S. A." The letter had obviously been mailed in London, had journeyed to Bayport, from there to New York, and had then been forwarded to London again. Someone, presumably Simmons, the postmaster, had written "Care Hosea Knowles" and my publisher's New York address in the lower corner. This had been scratched out and "28 Camford Street, London, England," added.

I looked at the envelope. Who in the world, or in England, could have written Captain Barnabas--Captain Barnabas Cahoon, my great-uncle, dead so many years? At first I was inclined to hand the letter, unopened, to Hephzy. She was Captain Barnabas's daughter and it belonged to her by right. But I knew Hephzy had no secrets from me and, besides, my curiosity was great. At length I yielded to it and tore open the

envelope.

Inside was a sheet of thin foreign paper, both sides covered with writing. I read the first line.

"Captain Barnabas Cahoon.

"Sir:

"You are my nearest relative, my mother's father, and I--"

"I uttered an exclamation. Then I stepped to the door of the private office, made sure that it was shut, came back, sat down in the chair before the desk which Mr. Matthews had put at my disposal, and read the letter from beginning to end. This is what I read:

"Captain Barnabas Cahoon.

"Sir:

"You are my nearest relative, my mother's father, and I, therefore, address this letter to you. I know little concerning you. I do not know even that you are still living in Bayport, or that you are living at all. (N.B. In case Captain Cahoon is not living this letter is to be read and acted upon by his heirs, upon whose estate I have an equal claim.) My mother, Ardelia Cahoon Morley, died in Liverpool in 1896. My father, Strickland Morley, died in Paris in December, 1908. I, as their only child, am their heir, and I am writing to you asking what I might demand--that is, a portion of the money which was my mother's and which you kept from her and from my father all these years. My father told me the whole story before he died, and he also told me that he had written you several times, but that his letters had been ignored. My father was an English gentleman and he was proud; that is why he did not take legal steps against you for the recovery of what was his by law in England OR ANY CIVILISED COUNTRY, one may presume. He would not STOOP to such measures even against those who, as you know well, so meanly and fraudulently deprived him and his of their inheritance. He is dead now. He died lacking the comforts and luxuries with which you might and SHOULD have provided him. His forbearance was wonderful and characteristic, but had I known of it sooner I should have insisted upon demanding from you the money which was his. I am now demanding it myself. Not BEGGING; that I wish THOROUGHLY understood. I am giving you the opportunity to make a partial restitution, that is all. It is what he would have wished, and his wish ALONE prevents my putting the whole matter in my solicitor's hands. If I do not hear from you within a reasonable time I shall know what to do. You may address me care Mrs. Briggs, 218 ---- Street, London, England.

"Awaiting your reply, I am, sir,

"Yours,

"FRANCIS STRICKLAND MORLEY.

"P. S.

"I am not to be considered under ANY circumstances a subject for

charity. I am NOT begging. You, I am given to understand, are a wealthy man. I demand my share of that wealth--that is all."

I read this amazing epistle through once. Then, after rising and walking about the office to make sure that I was thoroughly awake, I sat down and read it again. There was no mistake. I had read it correctly. The writing was somewhat illegible in spots and the signature was blotted, but it was from Francis Strickland Morley. From "Little Frank!" I think my first and greatest sensation was of tremendous surprise that there really was a "Little Frank." Hephzy had been right. Once more I should have to take off my hat to Hephzy.

The surprise remained, but other sensations came to keep it company. The extraordinary fact of the letter's reaching me when and where it did, in London, the city from which it was written and where, doubtless, the writer still was. If I chose I might, perhaps, that very afternoon, meet and talk with Ardelia Cahoon's son, with "Little Frank" himself. I could scarcely realize it. Hephzy had declared that our coming to London was the result of a special dispensation--we had been "sent" there. In the face of this miracle I was not disposed to contradict her.

The letter itself was more extraordinary than all else. It was that of a young person, of a hot-headed boy. But WHAT a boy he must be! What an unlicked, impudent, arrogant young cub! The boyishness was evident in every line, in the underscored words, the pitiful attempt at dignity and the silly veiled threats. He was so insistent upon the statement that he was not a beggar. And yet he could write a begging letter like this. He did not ask for charity, not he, he demanded it. Demanded it--he, the son of a thief, demanded, from those whom his father had robbed, his "rights." He should have his rights; I would see to that.

I was angry enough but, as I read the letter for the third time, the pitifulness of it became more apparent. I imagined Francis Strickland Morley to be the replica of the Strickland Morley whom I remembered, the useless, incompetent, inadequate son of a good-for-nothing father. No doubt the father was responsible for such a letter as this having been written. Doubtless he HAD told the boy all sorts of tales; perhaps he HAD declared himself to be the defrauded instead of the defrauder; he was quite capable of it. Possibly the youngster did believe he had a claim upon the wealthy relatives in that "uncivilized" country, America. The wealthy relatives! I thought of Captain Barnabas's last years, of Hephzibah's plucky fight against poverty, of my own lost opportunities, of the college course which I had been obliged to forego. My indignation returned. I would not go back at once to Hephzy with the letter. I would, myself, seek out the writer of that letter, and, if I found him, he and I would have a heart to heart talk which should disabuse his mind of a few illusions. We would have a full and complete understanding.

I hastily made a memorandum of the address, "Care Mrs. Briggs," thrust the letter back into the envelope, put it and my other mail into my pocket, and walked out into the main office. Holton, the clerk, looked up from his desk. Probably my feelings showed in my face, for he said:

"What is it, Mr. Knowles? No bad news, I trust, sir."

"No," I answered, shortly. "Where is ---- Street? Is it far from here?"

It was rather far from there, in Camberwell, on the Surrey side of the

river. I might take a bus at such a corner and change again at so and so. It sounded like a journey and I was impatient. I suggested that I might take a cab. Certainly I could do that. William, the boy, would call a cab at once.

William did so and I gave the driver the address from my memoranda. Through the Strand I was whirled, across Blackfriars Bridge and on through the intricate web of avenues and streets on the Surrey side. The locality did not impress me favorably. There was an abundance of "pubs" and of fried-fish shops where "jellied eels" seemed to be a viand much in demand.

--- Street, when I reached it, was dingy and third rate. Three-storied old brick houses, with shops on their first floors, predominated. Number 218 was one of these. The signs "Lodgings" over the tarnished bell-pull and the name "Briggs" on the plate beside it proved that I had located the house from which the letter had been sent.

I paid my cabman, dismissed him, and rang the bell. A slouchy maid-servant answered the ring.

"Is Mr. Francis Morley in?" I asked.

The maid looked at me.

"Wat, sir?" she said.

"Does Mr. Francis Morley live here?" I asked, raising my voice. "Is he in?"

The maid's face was as wooden as the door-post. Her mouth, already open, opened still wider and she continued to stare. A step sounded in the dark hall behind her and another voice said, sharply:

"'Oo is it, 'Arriet? And w'at does 'e want?"

The maid grinned. "'E wants to see MISTER Morley, ma'am," she said, with a giggle.

She was pushed aside and a red-faced woman, with thin lips and scowl, took her place.

"OO do you want to see?" she demanded.

"Francis Morley. Does he live here?"

"OO?"

"Francis Morley." My answer was sharp enough this time. I began to think I had invaded a colony of imbeciles--or owls; their conversation seemed limited to "oos."

"W'at do you want to see--to see Morley for?" demanded the red-faced female.

"On business. Is Mrs. Briggs in?"

"I'm Mrs. Briggs."

"Good! I'm glad of that. Now will you tell me if Mr. Morley is in?"

"There ain't no Mr. Morley. There's a--"

She was interrupted. From the hall, apparently from the top of the flight of stairs, another was heard, a feminine voice like the others, but unlike them--decidedly unlike.

"Who is it, Mrs. Briggs?" said this voice. "Does the gentleman wish to see me?"

"No, 'e don't," declared Mrs. Briggs, with emphasis. "'E wants to see Mister Morley and I'm telling 'im there ain't none such."

"But are you sure he doesn't mean Miss Morley? Ask him, please."

Before the Briggs woman could reply I spoke again.

"I want to see a Francis Morley," I repeated, loudly. "I have come here in answer to a letter. The letter gave this as his address. If he isn't here, will you be good enough to tell me where he is? I--"

There was another interruption, an exclamation from the darkness behind Mrs. Briggs and the maid.

"Oh!" said the third voice, with a little catch in it. "Who is it, please? Who is it? What is the person's name?"

Mrs. Briggs scowled at me.

"Wat's your name?" she snapped.

"My name is Knowles. I am an American relative of Mr. Morley's and I'm here in answer to a letter written by Mr. Morley himself."

There was a moment's silence. Then the third voice said:

"Ask--ask him to come up. Show him up, Mrs. Briggs, if you please."

Mrs. Briggs grunted and stepped aside. I entered the hall.

"First floor back," mumbled the landlady. "Straight as you go. You won't need any showin'."

I mounted the stairs. The landing at the top was dark, but the door at the rear was ajar. I knocked. A voice, the same voice I had heard before, bade me come in. I entered the room.

It was a dingy little room, sparsely furnished, with a bed and two chairs, a dilapidated washstand and a battered bureau. I noticed these afterwards. Just then my attention was centered upon the occupant of the room, a young woman, scarcely more than a girl, dark-haired, dark-eyed, slender and graceful. She was standing by the bureau, resting one hand upon it, and gazing at me, with a strange expression, a curious compound of fright, surprise and defiance. She did not speak. I was embarrassed.

"I beg your pardon," I stammered. "I am afraid there is some mistake. I came here in answer to a letter written by a Francis Morley, who is--well, I suppose he is a distant relative of mine."

She stepped forward and closed the door by which I had entered. Then she turned and faced me.

"You are an American," she said.

"Yes, I am an American. I--"

She interrupted me.

"Do you--do you come from--from Bayport, Massachusetts?" she faltered.

I stared at her. "Why, yes," I admitted. "I do come from Bayport. How in the world did you--"

"Was the letter you speak of addressed to Captain Barnabas Cahoon?"

"Yes."

"Then--then there isn't any mistake. I wrote it."

I imagine that my mouth opened as wide as the maid's had done.

"You!" I exclaimed. "Why--why--it was written by Francis Morley--Francis Strickland Morley."

"I am Frances Strickland Morley."

I heard this, of course, but I did not comprehend it. I had been working along the lines of a fixed idea. Now that idea had been knocked into a cocked hat, and my intellect had been knocked with it.

"Why--why, no," I repeated, stupidly. "Francis Morley is the son of Strickland Morley."

"There was no son," impatiently. "I am Frances Morley, I tell you. I am Strickland Morley's daughter. I wrote that letter."

I sat down upon the nearest of the two chairs. I was obliged to sit. I could not stand and face the fact which, at least, even my benumbed brain was beginning to comprehend. The mistake was a simple one, merely the difference between an "i" and an "e" in a name, that was all. And yet that mistake--that slight difference between "Francis" and "Frances"--explained the amazing difference between the Little Frank of Hephzibah's fancy and the reality before me.

The real Little Frank was a girl.

CHAPTER VII

In Which a Dream Becomes a Reality

I said nothing immediately. I could not. It was "Little Frank" who resumed the conversation. "Who are you?" she asked.

"Who--I beg your pardon? I am rather upset, I'm afraid. I didn't

expect--that is, I expected.... Well, I didn't expect THIS! What was it you asked me?"

"I asked you who you were."

"My name is Knowles--Kent Knowles. I am Captain Cahoon's grand-nephew."

"His grand-nephew. Then--Did Captain Cahoon send you to me?"

"Send me! I beg your pardon once more. No.... No. Captain Cahoon is dead. He has been dead nearly ten years. No one sent me."

"Then why did you come? You have my letter; you said so."

"Yes; I--I have your letter. I received it about an hour ago. It was forwarded to me--to my cousin and me--here in London."

"Here in London! Then you did not come to London in answer to that letter?"

"No. My cousin and I--"

"What cousin? What is his name?"

"His name? It isn't a--That is, the cousin is a woman. She is Miss Hephzibah Cahoon, your--your mother's half-sister. She is--Why, she is your aunt!"

It was a fact; Hephzibah was this young lady's aunt. I don't know why that seemed so impossible and ridiculous, but it did. The young lady herself seemed to find it so.

"My aunt?" she repeated. "I didn't know--But--but, why is my--my aunt here with you?"

"We are on a pleasure trip. We--I beg your pardon. What have I been thinking of? Don't stand. Please sit down."

She accepted the invitation. As she walked toward the chair it seemed to me that she staggered a little. I noticed then for the first time, how very slender she was, almost emaciated. There were dark hollows beneath her eyes and her face was as white as the bed-linen--No, I am wrong; it was whiter than Mrs. Briggs' bed-linen.

"Are you ill?" I asked involuntarily.

She did not answer. She seated herself in the chair and fixed her dark eyes upon me. They were large eyes and very dark. Hephzy said, when she first saw them, that they looked like "burnt holes in a blanket." Perhaps they did; that simile did not occur to me.

"You have read my letter?" she asked.

It was evident that I must have read the letter or I should not have learned where to find her, but I did not call attention to this. I said simply that I had read the letter.

"Then what do you propose?" she asked.

"Propose?"

"Yes," impatiently. "What proposition do you make me? If you have read the letter you must know what I mean. You must have come here for the purpose of saying something, of making some offer. What is it?"

I was speechless. I had come there to find an impudent young blackguard and tell him what I thought of him. That was as near a definite reason for my coming as any. If I had not acted upon impulse, if I had stopped to consider, it is quite likely that I should not have come at all. But the blackguard was--was--well, he was not and never had been. In his place was this white-faced, frail girl. I couldn't tell her what I thought of her. I didn't know what to think.

She waited for me to answer and, as I continued to play the dumb idiot, her impatience grew. Her brows--very dark brown they were, almost black against the pallor of her face--drew together and her foot began to pat the faded carpet. "I am waiting," she said.

I realized that I must say something, so I said the only thing which occurred to me. It was a question.

"Your father is dead?" I asked.

She nodded. "My letter told you that," she answered. "He died in Paris three years ago."

"And--and had he no relatives here in England?"

She hesitated before replying. "No near relatives whom he cared to recognize," she answered haughtily. "My father, Mr. Knowles was a gentleman and, having been most unjustly treated by his own family, as well as by OTHERS"--with a marked emphasis on the word--"he did not stoop, even in his illness and distress, to beg where he should have commanded."

"Oh! Oh, I see," I said, feebly.

"There is no reason why you should see. My father was the second son and--But this is quite irrelevant. You, an American, can scarcely be expected to understand English family customs. It is sufficient that, for reasons of his own, my father had for years been estranged from his own people."

The air with which this was delivered was quite overwhelming. If I had not known Strickland Morley, and a little of his history, I should have been crushed.

"Then you have been quite alone since his death?" I asked.

Again she hesitated. "For a time," she said, after a moment. "I lived with a married cousin of his in one of the London suburbs. Then I--But really, Mr. Knowles, I cannot see that my private affairs need interest you. As I understand it, this interview of ours is quite impersonal, in a sense. You understand, of course--you must understand--that in writing as I did I was not seeking the acquaintance of my mother's relatives. I do not desire their friendship. I am not asking them for anything. I am giving them the opportunity to do justice, to give me what is my own--my OWN. If you don't understand this I--I--Oh, you MUST understand it!"

She rose from the chair. Her eyes were flashing and she was trembling from head to foot. Again I realized how weak and frail she was.

"You must understand," she repeated. "You MUST!"

"Yes, yes," I said hastily. "I think I--I suppose I understand your feelings. But--"

"There are no buts. Don't pretend there are. Do you think for one instant that I am begging, asking you for HELP? YOU--of all the world!"

This seemed personal enough, in spite of her protestations.

"But you never met me before," I said, involuntarily.

"You never knew of my existence."

She stamped her foot. "I knew of my American relatives," she cried, scornfully. "I knew of them and their--Oh, I cannot say the word!"

"Your father told you--" I began. She burst out at me like a flame.

"My father," she declared, "was a brave, kind, noble man. Don't mention his name to me. I won't have you speak of him. If it were not for his forbearance and self-sacrifice you--all of you--would be--would be--Oh, don't speak of my father! Don't!"

To my amazement and utter discomfort she sank into the chair and burst into tears. I was completely demoralized.

"Don't, Miss Morley," I begged. "Please don't."

She continued to sob hysterically. To make matters worse sounds from behind the closed door led me to think that someone--presumably that confounded Mrs. Briggs--was listening at the keyhole.

"Don't, Miss Morley," I pleaded. "Don't!"

My pleas were unavailing. The young lady sobbed and sobbed. I fidgeted on the edge of my chair in an agony of mortified embarrassment. "Don'ts" were quite useless and I could think of nothing else to say except "Compose yourself" and that, somehow or other, was too ridiculously reminiscent of Mr. Pickwick and Mrs. Bardell. It was an idiotic situation for me to be in. Some men--men of experience with woman-kind--might have known how to handle it, but I had had no such experience. It was all my fault, of course; I should not have mentioned her father. But how was I to know that Strickland Morley was a persecuted saint? I should have called him everything but that.

At last I had an inspiration.

"You are ill," I said, rising. "I will call someone."

That had the desired effect. My newly found third--or was it fourth or fifth--cousin made a move in protest. She fought down her emotion, her sobs ceased, and she leaned back in her chair looking paler and weaker than ever. I should have pitied her if she had not been so superior and insultingly scornful in her manner toward me. I--Well, yes, I did pity

her, even as it was.

"Don't," she said, in her turn. "Don't call anyone. I am not ill--not now."

"But you have been," I put in, I don't know why.

"I have not been well for some time. But I am not ill. I am quite strong enough to hear what you have to say."

This might have been satisfactory if I had had anything to say. I had not. She evidently expected me to express repentance for something or other and make some sort of proposition. I was not repentant and I had no proposition to make. But how was I to tell her that without bringing on another storm? Oh, if I had had time to consider. If I had not come alone. If Hephzy,--cool-headed, sensible Hephzy--were only with me.

"I--I--" I began. Then desperately: "I scarcely know what to say, Miss Morley," I faltered. "I came here, as I told you, expecting to find a--a--"

"What, pray?" with a haughty lift of the dark eyebrows. "What did you expect to find, may I ask?"

"Nothing--that is, I--Well, never mind that. I came on the spur of the moment, immediately after receiving your letter. I have had no time to think, to consult my--your aunt--"

"What has my--AUNT" with withering emphasis, "to do with it? Why should you consult her?"

"Well, she is your mother's nearest relative, I suppose. She is Captain Cahoon's daughter and at least as much interested as I. I must consult her, of course. But, frankly, Miss Morley, I think I ought to tell you that you are under a misapprehension. There are matters which you don't understand."

"I understand everything. I understand only too well. What do you mean by a misapprehension? Do you mean--do you dare to insinuate that my father did not tell me the truth?"

"Oh, no, no," I interrupted. That was exactly what I did mean, but I was not going to let the shade of the departed Strickland appear again until I was out of that room and house. "I am not insinuating anything."

"I am very glad to hear it. I wish you to know that I perfectly understand EVERYTHING."

That seemed to settle it; at any rate it settled me for the time. I took up my hat.

"Miss Morley," I said, "I can't discuss this matter further just now. I must consult my cousin first. She and I will call upon you to-morrow at any hour you may name."

She was disappointed; that was plain. I thought for the moment that she was going to break down again. But she did not; she controlled her feelings and faced me firmly and pluckily.

"At nine--no, at ten to-morrow, then," she said. "I shall expect your final answer then."

"Very well."

"You will come? Of course; I am forgetting. You said you would."

"We will be here at ten. Here is my address."

I gave her my card, scribbling the street and number of Bancroft's in pencil in the corner. She took the card.

"Thank you. Good afternoon," she said.

I said "Good afternoon" and opened the door. The hall outside was empty, but someone was descending the stairs in a great hurry. I descended also. At the top step I glanced once more into the room I had just left. Frances Strickland Morley--Little Frank--was seated in the chair, one hand before her eyes. Her attitude expressed complete weariness and utter collapse. She had said she was not sick, but she looked sick--she did indeed.

Harriet, the slouchy maid, was not in evidence, so I opened the street door for myself. As I reached the sidewalk--I suppose, as this was England, I should call it the "pavement"--I was accosted by Mrs. Briggs. She was out of breath; I am quite sure she had reached that pavement but the moment before.

"Ow is she?" demanded Mrs. Briggs.

"Who?" I asked, not too politely.

"That Morley one. Is she goin' to be hill again?"

"How do I know? Has she been sick--ill, I mean?"

"Huh! Hill! 'Er? Now, now, sir! I give you my word she's been hill hever since she came 'ere. I thought one time she was goin' to die on my 'ands. And 'oo was to pay for 'er buryin', I'd like to know? That's w'at it is! 'Oo's goin' to pay for 'er buryin' and the food she eats; to say nothin' of 'er room money, and that's been owin' me for a matter of three weeks?"

"How should I know who is going to pay for it? She will, I suppose."

"She! W'at with? She ain't got a bob to bless 'erself with, she ain't. She's broke, stony broke. Honly for my kind 'eart she'd a been out on the street afore this. That and 'er tellin' me she was expectin' money from 'er rich friends in the States. You're from the States, ain't you, sir?"

"Yes. But do you mean to tell me that Miss Morley has no money of her own?"

"Of course I mean it. W'en she come 'ere she told me she was on the stage. A hopera singer, she said she was. She 'ad money then, enough to pay 'er way, she 'ad. She was expectin' to go with some troupe or other, but she never 'as. Oh, them stage people! Don't I know 'em? Ain't I 'ad experience of 'em? A woman as 'as let lodgin's as long as me? If it

wasn't for them rich friends in the States I 'ave never put up with 'er the way I 'ave. You're from the States, ain't you, sir?"

"Yes, yes, I'm from the States. Now, see here, Mrs. Briggs; I'm coming back here to-morrow. If--Well, if Miss Morley needs anything, food or medicines or anything, in the meantime, you see that she has them. I'll pay you when I come."

Mrs. Briggs actually smiled. She would have patted my arm if I had not jerked it out of the way.

"You trust me, sir," she whispered, confidingly. "You trust my kind 'eart. I'll look after 'er like she was my own daughter."

I should have hated to trust even my worst enemy--if I had one--to Mrs. Briggs' "kind heart." I walked off in disgust. I found a cab at the next corner and, bidding the driver take me to Bancroft's, threw myself back on the cushions. This was a lovely mess! This was a beautiful climax to the first act--no, merely the prologue--of the drama of Hephzy's and my pilgrimage. What would Jim Campbell say to this? I was to be absolutely care-free; I was not to worry about myself or anyone else. That was the essential part of his famous "prescription." And now, here I was, with this impossible situation and more impossible young woman on my hands. If Little Frank had been a boy, a healthy boy, it would be bad enough. But Little Frank was a girl--a sick girl, without a penny. And a girl thoroughly convinced that she was the rightful heir to goodness knows how much wealth--wealth of which we, the uncivilized, unprincipled natives of an unprincipled, uncivilized country, had robbed her parents and herself. Little Frank had been a dream before; now he--she, I mean--was a nightmare; worse than that, for one wakes from a nightmare. And I was on my way to tell Hephzy!

Well, I told her. She was in our sitting-room when I reached the hotel and I told her the whole story. I began by reading the letter. Before she had recovered from the shock of the reading, I told her that I had actually met and talked with Little Frank; and while this astounding bit of news was, so to speak, soaking into her bewildered brain, I went on to impart the crowning item of information--namely, that Little Frank was Miss Frances. Then I sat back and awaited what might follow.

Her first coherent remark was one which I had not expected--and I had expected almost anything.

"Oh, Hosity," gasped Hephzy, "tell me--tell me before you say anything else. Does he--she, I mean--look like Ardelia?"

"Eh? What?" I stammered. "Look like--look like what?"

"Not what--who. Does she look like Ardelia? Like her mother? Oh, I HOPE she doesn't favor her father's side! I did so want our Little Frank to look like his--her--I CAN'T get used to it--like my poor Ardelia. Does she?"

"Goodness knows! I don't know who she looks like. I didn't notice."

"You didn't! I should have noticed that before anything else. What kind of a girl is she? Is she pretty?"

"I don't know. She isn't ugly, I should say. I wasn't particularly

interested in her looks. The fact that she was at all was enough; I haven't gotten over that yet. What are we going to do with her? Or are we going to do anything? Those are the questions I should like to have answered. For heaven's sake, Hephzy, don't talk about her personal appearance. There she is and here are we. What are we going to do?"

Hephzy shook her head. "I don't know, Hosity," she admitted. "I don't know, I'm sure. This is--this is--Oh, didn't I tell you we were SENT--sent by Providence!"

I was silent. If we had been "sent," as she called it, I was far from certain that Providence was responsible. I was more inclined to place the responsibility in a totally different quarter.

"I think," she continued, "I think you'd better tell me the whole thing all over again, Hosity. Tell it slow and don't leave out a word. Tell me what sort of place she was in and what she said and how she looked, as near as you can remember. I'll try and pay attention; I'll try as hard as I can. It'll be a job. All I can think of now is that to-morrow mornin'--only to-morrow mornin'--I'm going to see Little Frank--Ardelia's Little Frank."

I complied with her request, giving every detail of my afternoon's experience. I reread the letter, and handed it to her, that she might read it herself. I described Mrs. Briggs and what I had seen of Mrs. Briggs' lodging-house. I described Miss Morley as best I could, dark eyes, dark hair and the look of weakness and frailty. I repeated our conversation word for word; I had forgotten nothing of that. Hephzy listened in silence. When I had finished she sighed.

"The poor thing," she said. "I do pity her so."

"Pity her!" I exclaimed. "Well, perhaps I pity her, too, in a way. But my pity and yours don't alter the situation. She doesn't want pity. She doesn't want help. She flew at me like a wildcat when I asked if she was ill. Her personal affairs, she says, are not ours; she doesn't want our acquaintance or our friendship. She has gotten some crazy notion in her head that you and I and Uncle Barnabas have cheated her out of an inheritance, and she wants that! Inheritance! Good Lord! A fine inheritance hers is! Daughter of the man who robbed us of everything we had."

"I know--I know. But SHE doesn't know, does she, Hosity. Her father must have told her--"

"He told her a barrel of lies, of course. What they were I can't imagine, but that fellow was capable of anything. Know! No, she doesn't know now, but she will have to know."

"Are you goin' to tell her, Hosity?"

I stared in amazement.

"Tell her!" I repeated. "What do you mean? You don't intend letting her think that WE are the thieves, do you? That's what she thinks now. Of course I shall tell her."

"It will be awful hard to tell. She worshipped her father, I guess. He was a dreadful fascinatin' man, when he wanted to be. He could make a

body believe black was white. Poor Ardelia thought he was--"

"I can't help that. I'm not Ardelia."

"I know, but she is Ardelia's child. Hosy, if you are so set on tellin' her why didn't you tell her this afternoon? It would have been just as easy then as to-morrow."

This was a staggerer. A truthful answer would be so humiliating. I had not told Frances Morley that her father was a thief and a liar because I couldn't muster courage to do it. She had seemed so alone and friendless and ill. I lacked the pluck to face the situation. But I could not tell Hephzy this.

"Why didn't you tell her?" she repeated.

"Oh, bosh!" I exclaimed, impatiently. "This is nonsense and you know it, Hephzy. She'll have to be told and you and I must tell her. DON'T look at me like that. What else are we to do?"

Another shake of the head.

"I don't know. I can't decide any more than you can, Hosy. What do YOU think we should do?"

"I don't know."

With which unsatisfactory remark this particular conversation ended. I went to my room to dress for dinner. I had no appetite and dinner was not appealing; but I did not want to discuss Little Frank any longer. I mentally cursed Jim Campbell a good many times that evening and during the better part of a sleepless night. If it were not for him I should be in Bayport instead of London. From a distance of three thousand miles I could, without the least hesitancy, have told Strickland Morley's "heir" what to do.

Hephzy did not come down to dinner at all. From behind the door of her room she told me, in a peculiar tone, that she could not eat. I could not eat, either, but I made the pretence of doing so. The next morning, at breakfast in the sitting-room, we were a silent pair. I don't know what George, the waiter, thought of us.

At a quarter after nine I turned away from the window through which I had been moodily regarding the donkey cart of a flower huckster in the street below.

"You'd better get on your things," I said. "It is time for us to go."

Hephzy donned her hat and wrap. Then she came over to me.

"Don't be cross, Hosy," she pleaded. "I've been thinkin' it over all night long and I've come to the conclusion that you are probably right. She hasn't any real claim on us, of course; it's the other way around, if anything. You do just as you think best and I'll back you up."

"Then you agree that we should tell her the truth."

"Yes, if you think so. I'm goin' to leave it all in your hands. Whatever you do will be right. I'll trust you as I always have."

It was a big responsibility, it seemed to me. I did wish she had been more emphatic. However, I set my teeth and resolved upon a course of action. Pity and charity and all the rest of it I would not consider. Right was right, and justice was justice. I would end a disagreeable business as quickly as I could.

Mrs. Briggs' lodging-house, viewed from the outside, was no more inviting at ten in the morning than it had been at four in the afternoon. I expected Hephzy to make some comment upon the dirty steps and the still dirtier front door. She did neither. We stood together upon the steps and I rang the bell.

Mrs. Briggs herself opened the door. I think she had been watching from behind the curtains and had seen our cab draw up at the curb. She was in a state of great agitation, a combination of relieved anxiety, excitement and overdone politeness.

"Good mornin', sir," she said; "and good mornin', lady. I've been expectin' you, and so 'as she, poor dear. I thought one w'ile she was that hill she couldn't see you, but Lor' bless you, I've nursed 'er same as if she was my own daughter. I told you I would sir, now didn't I."

One word in this harangue caught my attention.

"Ill?" I repeated. "What do you mean? Is she worse than she was yesterday?"

Mrs. Briggs held up her hands. "Worse!" she cried. "Why, bless your 'art, sir, she was quite well yesterday. Quite 'erself, she was, when you come. But after you went away she seemed to go all to pieces like. W'en I went hup to 'er, to carry 'er 'er tea--She always 'as 'er tea; I've been a mother to 'er, I 'ave--she'll tell you so. W'en I went hup with the tea there she was in a faint. W'ite as if she was dead. My word, sir, I was frightened. And all night she's been tossin' about, a-cryin' out and--"

"Where is she now?" put in Hephzy, sharply.

"She's in 'er room ma'am. Dressed she is; she would dress, knowin' of your comin', though I told 'er she shouldn't. She's dressed, but she's lyin' down. She would 'ave tried to sit hup, but THAT I wouldn't 'ave, ma'am. 'Now, dearie,' I told 'er--"

But I would not hear any more. As for Hephzy she was in the dingy front hall already.

"Shall we go up?" I asked, impatiently.

"Of COURSE you're to go hup. She's a-waitin' for you. But sir--sir," she caught my sleeve; "if you think she's goin' to be ill and needin' the doctor, just pass the word to me. A doctor she shall 'ave, the best there is in London. All I ask you is to pay--"

I heard no more. Hephzy was on her way up the stairs and I followed. The door of the first floor back was closed. I rapped upon it.

"Come in," said the voice I remembered, but now it sounded weaker than before.

Hephzy looked at me. I nodded.

"You go first," I whispered. "You can call me when you are ready."

Hephzy opened the door and entered the room. I closed the door behind her.

Silence for what seemed a long, long time. Then the door opened again and Hephzy appeared. Her cheeks were wet with tears. She put her arms about my neck.

"Oh, Hosy," she whispered, "she's real sick. And--and--Oh, Hosy, how COULD you see her and not see! She's the very image of Ardelia. The very image! Come."

I followed her into the room. It was no brighter now, in the middle of a--for London--bright forenoon, than it had been on my previous visit. Just as dingy and forbidding and forlorn as ever. But now there was no defiant figure erect to meet me. The figure was lying upon the bed, and the pale cheeks of yesterday were flushed with fever. Miss Morley had looked far from well when I first saw her; now she looked very ill indeed.

She acknowledged my good-morning with a distant bow. Her illness had not quenched her spirit, that was plain. She attempted to rise, but Hephzy gently pushed her back upon the pillow.

"You stay right there," she urged. "Stay right there. We can talk just as well, and Mr. Knowles won't mind; will you, Hosy."

I stammered something or other. My errand, difficult as it had been from the first, now seemed impossible. I had come there to say certain things--I had made up my mind to say them; but how was I to say such things to a girl as ill as this one was. I would not have said them to Strickland Morley himself, under such circumstances.

"I--I am very sorry you are not well, Miss Morley," I faltered.

She thanked me, but there was no warmth in the thanks.

"I am not well," she said; "but that need make no difference. I presume you and this--this lady are prepared to make a definite proposition to me. I am well enough to hear it."

Hephzy and I looked at each other. I looked for help, but Hephzy's expression was not helpful at all. It might have meant anything--or nothing.

"Miss Morley," I began. "Miss Morley, I--I--"

"Well, sir?"

"Miss Morley, I--I don't know what to say to you."

She rose to a sitting posture. Hephzy again tried to restrain her, but this time she would not be restrained.

"Don't know what to say?" she repeated. "Don't know what to say? Then

why did you come here?"

"I came--we came because--because I promised we would come."

"But WHY did you come?"

Hephzy leaned toward her.

"Please, please," she begged. "Don't get all excited like this. You mustn't. You'll make yourself sicker, you know. You must lie down and be quiet. Hosity--oh, please, Hosity, be careful."

Miss Morley paid no attention. She was regarding me with eyes which looked me through and through. Her thin hands clutched the bedclothes.

"WHY did you come?" she demanded. "My letter was plain enough, certainly. What I said yesterday was perfectly plain. I told you I did not wish your acquaintance or your friendship. Friendship--" with a blaze of scorn, "from YOU! I--I told you--I--"

"Hush! hush! please don't," begged Hephzy. "You mustn't. You're too weak and sick. Oh, Hosity, do be careful."

I was quite willing to be careful--if I had known how.

"I think," I said, "that this interview had better be postponed. Really, Miss Morley, you are not in a condition to--"

She sprang to her feet and stood there trembling.

"My condition has nothing to do with it," she cried. "Oh, CAN'T I make you understand! I am trying to be lenient, to be--to be--And you come here, you and this woman, and try to--to--You MUST understand! I don't want to know you. I don't want your pity! After your treatment of my mother and my father, I--I--I... Oh!"

She staggered, put her hands to her head, sank upon the bed, and then collapsed in a dead faint.

Hephzy was at her side in a moment. She knew what to do if I did not.

"Quick!" she cried, turning to me. "Send for the doctor; she has fainted. Hurry! And send that--that Briggs woman to me. Don't stand there like that. HURRY!"

I found the Briggs woman in the lower hall. From her I learned the name and address of the nearest physician, also the nearest public telephone. Mrs. Briggs went up to Hephzy and I hastened out to telephone.

Oh, those London telephones! After innumerable rings and "Hellos" from me, and "Are you theres" from Central, I, at last, was connected with the doctor's office and, by great good luck, with the doctor himself. He promised to come at once. In ten minutes I met him at the door and conducted him to the room above.

He was in that room a long time. Meanwhile, I waited in the hall, pacing up and down, trying to think my way through this maze. I had succeeded in thinking myself still deeper into it when the physician reappeared.

"How is she?" I asked.

"She is conscious again, but weak, of course. If she can be kept quiet and have proper care and nourishment and freedom from worry she will, probably, gain strength and health. There is nothing seriously wrong physically, so far as I can see."

I was glad to hear that and said so.

"Of course," he went on, "her nerves are completely unstrung. She seems to have been under a great mental strain and her surroundings are not--" He paused, and then added, "Is the young lady a relative of yours?"

"Ye--es, I suppose--She is a distant relative, yes."

"Humph! Has she no near relatives? Here in England, I mean. You and the lady with you are Americans, I judge."

I ignored the last sentence. I could not see that our being Americans concerned him.

"She has no near relatives in England, so far as I know," I answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Merely because--Well, to be frank, because if she had such relatives I should strongly recommend their taking charge of her. She is very weak and in a condition where she might become seriously ill."

"I see. You mean that she should not remain here."

"I do mean that, decidedly. This," with a wave of the hand and a glance about the bare, dirty, dark hall, "is not--Well, she seems to be a young person of some refinement and--"

He did not finish the sentence, but I understood.

"I see," I interrupted. "And yet she is not seriously ill."

"Not now--no. Her weakness is due to mental strain and--well, to a lack of nutrition as much as anything."

"Lack of nutrition? You mean she hasn't had enough to eat!"

"Yes. Of course I can't be certain, but that would be my opinion if I were forced to give one. At all events, she should be taken from here as soon as possible."

I reflected. "A hospital?" I suggested.

"She might be taken to a hospital, of course. But she is scarcely ill enough for that. A good, comfortable home would be better. Somewhere where she might have quiet and rest. If she had relatives I should strongly urge her going to them. She should not be left to herself; I would not be responsible for the consequences if she were. A person in her condition might--might be capable of any rash act."

This was plain enough, but it did not make my course of action plainer to me.

"Is she well enough to be moved--now?" I asked.

"Yes. If she is not moved she is likely to be less well."

I paid him for the visit; he gave me a prescription--"To quiet the nerves," he explained--and went away. I was to send for him whenever his services were needed. Then I entered the room.

Hephzy and Mrs. Briggs were sitting beside the bed. The face upon the pillow looked whiter and more pitiful than ever. The dark eyes were closed.

Hephzy signaled me to silence. She rose and tiptoed over to me. I led her out into the hall.

"She's sort of dozin' now," she whispered. "The poor thing is worn out. What did the doctor say?"

I told her what the doctor had said.

"He's just right," she declared. "She's half starved, that's what's the matter with her. That and frettin' and worryin' have just about killed her. What are you goin' to do, Hosity?"

"How do I know!" I answered, impatiently. "I don't see exactly why we are called upon to do anything. Do you?"

"No--o, I--I don't know as we are called on. No--o. I--"

"Well, do you?"

"No. I know how you feel, Hosity. Considerin' how her father treated us, I won't blame you no matter what you do."

"Confound her father! I only wish it were he we had to deal with."

Hephzy was silent. I took a turn up and down the hall.

"The doctor says she should be taken away from here at once," I observed.

Hephzy nodded. "There's no doubt about that," she declared with emphasis. "I wouldn't trust a sick cat to that Briggs woman. She's a--well, she's what she is."

"I suggested a hospital, but he didn't approve," I went on. "He recommended some comfortable home with care and quiet and all the rest of it. Her relatives should look after her, he said. She hasn't any relatives that we know of, or any home to go to."

Again Hephzy was silent. I waited, growing momentarily more nervous and fretful. Of all impossible situations this was the most impossible. And to make it worse, Hephzy, the usually prompt, reliable Hephzy, was of no use at all.

"Do say something," I snapped. "What shall we do?"

"I don't know, Hosity, dear. Why!... Where are you going?"

"I'm going to the drug-store to get this prescription filled. I'll be back soon."

The drug-store--it was a "chemist's shop" of course--was at the corner. It was the chemist's telephone that I had used when I called the doctor. I gave the clerk the prescription and, while he was busy with it, I paced up and down the floor of the shop. At length I sat down before the telephone and demanded a number.

When I returned to the lodging-house I gave Hephzy the powders which the chemist's clerk had prepared.

"Is she any better?" I asked.

"She's just about the same."

"What does she say?"

"She's too weak and sick to say anything. I don't imagine she knows or cares what is happening to her."

"Is she strong enough to get downstairs to a cab, or to ride in one afterward?"

"I guess so. We could help her, you know. But, Hopsy, what cab? What do you mean? What are you going to do?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm going to take her away from this hole. I must. I don't want to; there's no reason why I should and every reason why I shouldn't; but--Oh, well, confound it! I've got to. We CAN'T let her starve and die here."

"But where are you going to take her?"

"There's only one place to take her; that's to Bancroft's. I've 'phoned and engaged a room next to ours. She'll have to stay with us for the present. Oh, I don't like it any better than you do."

To my intense surprise, Hephzy threw her arms about my neck and hugged me.

"I knew you would, Hopsy!" she sobbed. "I knew you would. I was dyin' to have you, but I wouldn't have asked for the world. You're the best man that ever lived. I knew you wouldn't leave poor Ardelia's little girl to--to--Oh, I'm so grateful. You're the best man in the world."

I freed myself from the embrace as soon as I could. I didn't feel like the best man in the world. I felt like a Quixotic fool.

Fortunately I was too busy for the next hour to think of my feelings. Hephzy went in to arrange for the transfer of the invalid to the cab and to collect and pack her most necessary belongings. I spent my time in a financial wrangle with Mrs. Briggs. The number of items which that woman wished included in her bill was surprising. Candles and soap--the bill itself was the sole evidence of soap's ever having made its appearance in that house--and washing and tea and food and goodness knows what. The total was amazing. I verified the addition, or, rather, corrected it, and then offered half of the sum demanded. This offer was received with protestations, tears and voluble demands to know if I 'ad the 'art to

rob a lone widow who couldn't protect herself. Finally we compromised on a three-quarter basis and Mrs. Briggs receipted the bill. She said her kind disposition would be the undoing of her and she knew it. She was too silly and soft-hearted to let lodgings.

We had very little trouble in carrying or leading Little Frank to the cab. The effect of the doctor's powders--they must have contained some sort of opiate--was to render the girl only partially conscious of what was going on and we got her to and into the vehicle without difficulty. During the drive to Bancroft's she dozed on Hephzy's shoulder.

Her room--it was next to Hephzy's, with a connecting door--was ready and we led her up the stairs. Mr. and Mrs. Jameson were very kind and sympathetic. They asked surprisingly few questions.

"Poor young lady," said Mr. Jameson, when he and I were together in our sitting-room. "She is quite ill, isn't she."

"Yes," I admitted. "It is not a serious illness, however. She needs quiet and care more than anything else."

"Yes, sir. We will do our best to see that she has both. A relative of yours, sir, I think you said."

"A--a--my niece," I answered, on the spur of the moment. She was Hephzy's niece, of course. As a matter of fact, she was scarcely related to me. However, it seemed useless to explain.

"I didn't know you had English relatives, Mr. Knowles. I had been under the impression that you and Miss Cahoon were strangers here."

So had I, but I did not explain that, either. Mrs. Jameson joined us.

"She will sleep now, I think," she said. "She is quite quiet and peaceful. A near relative of yours, Mr. Knowles?"

"She is Mr. Knowles's niece," explained her husband.

"Oh, yes. A sweet girl she seems. And very pretty, isn't she."

I did not answer. Mr. Jameson and his wife turned to go.

"I presume you will wish to communicate with her people," said the former. "Shall I send you telegram forms?"

"Not now," I stammered. Telegrams! Her people! She had no people. We were her people. We had taken her in charge and were responsible. And how and when would that responsibility be shifted!

What on earth should we do with her?

Hephzy tiptoed in. Her expression was a curious one. She was very solemn, but not sad; the solemnity was not that of sorrow, but appeared to be a sort of spiritual uplift, a kind of reverent joy.

"She's asleep," she said, gravely; "she's asleep, Hosy."

There was precious little comfort in that.

"She'll wake up by and by," I said. "And then--what?"

"I don't know."

"Neither do I--now. But we shall have to know pretty soon."

"I suppose we shall, but I can't--I can't seem to think of anything that's ahead of us. All I can think is that my Little Frank--my Ardelia's Little Frank--is here, here with us, at last."

"And TO last, so far as I can see. Hephzy, for heaven's sake, do try to be sensible. Do you realize what this means? As soon as she is well enough to understand what has happened she will want to know what 'proposition' we have to make. And when we tell her we have none to make, she'll probably collapse again. And then--and then--what shall we do?"

"I don't know, Hosity. I declare I don't know."

I strode into my own room and slammed the door.

"Damn!" said I, with enthusiasm.

"What?" queried Hephzy, from the sitting-room. "What did you say, Hosity?"

I did not tell her.

CHAPTER VIII

In Which the Pilgrims Become Tenants

Two weeks later we left Bancroft's and went to Mayberry. Two weeks only, and yet in that two weeks all our plans--if our indefinite visions of irresponsible flitting about Great Britain and the continent might be called plans--had changed utterly. Our pilgrimage was, apparently, ended--it had become an indefinite stay. We were no longer pilgrims, but tenants, tenants in an English rectory, of all places in the world. I, the Cape Cod quahaug, had become an English country gentleman--or a country gentleman in England--for the summer, at least.

Little Frank--Miss Frances Morley--was responsible for the change, of course. Her sudden materialization and the freak of fortune which had thrown her, weak and ill, upon our hands, were responsible for everything. For how much more, how many other changes, she would be responsible the future only could answer. And the future would answer in its own good, or bad, time. My conundrum "What are we going to do with her?" was as much of a puzzle as ever. For my part I gave it up. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof--much more than sufficient.

For the first twenty-four hours following the arrival of "my niece" at Bancroft's Hotel the situation regarding that niece remained as it was. Miss Morley--or Frances--or Frank as Hephzy persisted in calling her--was too ill to care what had happened, or, at least, to speak of it. She spoke very little, was confined to her room and bed and slept the greater part of the time. The doctor whom I called, on Mr. Jameson's recommendation, confirmed his fellow practitioner's diagnosis; the young

lady, he said, was suffering from general weakness and the effect of nervous strain. She needed absolute rest, care and quiet. There was no organic disease.

But on the morning of the second day she was much better and willing, even anxious to talk. She assailed Hephzy with questions and Hephzy, although she tried to avoid answering most, was obliged to answer some of them. She reported the interview to me during luncheon.

"She didn't seem to remember much about comin' here, or what happened before or afterward," said Hephzy. "But she wanted to know it all. I told her the best I could. 'You couldn't stay there,' I said. 'That Briggs hyena wasn't fit to take care of any human bein' and neither Hosy nor I could leave you in her hands. So we brought you here to the hotel where we're stoppin'.' She thought this over a spell and then she wanted to know whose idea bringin' her here was, yours or mine. I said 'twas yours, and just like you, too; you were the kindest-hearted man in the world, I said. Oh, you needn't look at me like that, Hosy. It's the plain truth, and you know it."

"Humph!" I grunted. "If the young lady were a mind-reader she might--well, never mind. What else did she say?"

"Oh, a good many things. Wanted to know if her bill at Mrs. Briggs' was paid. I said it was. She thought about that and then she gave me orders that you and I were to keep account of every cent--no, penny--we spent for her. She should insist upon that. If we had the idea that she was a subject of charity we were mistaken. She fairly withered me with a look from those big eyes of hers. Ardelia's eyes all over again! Or they would be if they were blue instead of brown. I remember--"

I cut short the reminiscence. I was in no mood to listen to the praises of any Morley.

"What answer did you make to that?" I asked.

"What could I say? I didn't want any more faintin' spells or hysterics, either. I said we weren't thinkin' of offerin' charity and if it would please her to have us run an expense book we'd do it, of course. She asked what the doctor said about her condition. I told her he said she must keep absolutely quiet and not fret about anything or she'd have an awful relapse. That was pretty strong but I meant it that way. Answerin' questions that haven't got any answer to 'em is too much of a strain for ME. You try it some time yourself and see."

"I have tried it, thank you. Well, is that all? Did she tell you anything about herself; where she has been or what she has been or what she has been doing since her precious father died?"

"No, not a word. I was dyin' to ask her, but I didn't. She says she wants to talk with the doctor next time he comes, that's all."

She did talk with the doctor, although not during his next call. Several days passed before he would permit her to talk with him. Meanwhile he and I had several talks. What he told me brought my conundrum no nearer its answer.

She was recovering rapidly, he said, but for weeks at least her delicate nervous organism must be handled with care. The slightest set-back

would be disastrous. He asked if we intended remaining at Bancroft's indefinitely. I had no intentions--those I had had were wiped off my mental slate--so I said I did not know, our future plans were vague. He suggested a sojourn in the country, in some pleasant retired spot in the rural districts.

"An out-of-door life, walks, rides and sports of all sorts would do your niece a world of good, Mr. Knowles," he declared. "She needs just that. A very attractive young lady, sir, if you'll pardon my saying so," he went on. "Were her people Londoners, may I ask?"

He might ask but I had no intention of telling him. What I knew concerning my "niece's" people were things not usually told to strangers. I evaded the question.

"Has she had a recent bereavement?" he queried. "I hope you'll not think me merely idly inquisitive. I cannot understand how a young woman, normally healthy and well, should have been brought to such a strait. Our English girls, Mr. Knowles, do not suffer from nerves, as I am told your American young women so frequently do. Has your niece been in the States with you?"

I said she had not. Incidentally I informed him that American young women did NOT frequently suffer from nerves. He said "Really," but he did not believe me, I'm certain. He was a good fellow, and intelligent, but his ideas of "the States" had been gathered, largely, I think, from newspapers and novels. He was convinced that most Americans were confirmed neurotics and dyspeptics, just as Hephzy had believed all Englishmen wore side-whiskers.

I changed the conversation as soon as I could. I could tell him so little concerning my newly found "niece." I knew about as much concerning her life as he did. It is distinctly unpleasant to be uncle to someone you know nothing at all about. I devoutly wished I had not said she was my niece. I repeated that wish many times afterward.

Miss Morley's talk with the physician had definite results, surprising results. Following that talk she sent word by the doctor that she wished to see Hephzy and me. We went into her room. She was sitting in a chair by the window, and was wearing a rather pretty wrapper, or kimono, or whatever that sort of garment is called. At any rate, it was becoming. I was obliged to admit that the general opinion expressed by the Jamesons and Hephzy and the doctor--that she was pretty, was correct enough. She was pretty, but that did not help matters any.

She asked us--no, she commanded us to sit down. Her manner was decidedly business-like. She wasted no time in preliminaries, but came straight to the point, and that point was the one which I had dreaded. She asked us what decision we had reached concerning her.

"Have you decided what your offer is to be?" she asked.

I looked at Hephzy and she at me. Neither of us derived comfort from the exchange of looks. However, something must be done, or said, and I braced myself to say it.

"Miss Morley," I began, "before I answer that question I should like to ask you one. What do you expect us to do?"

She regarded me coldly. "I expect," she said, "that you and this--that you and Miss Cahoon will arrange to pay me the money which was my mother's and which my grandfather should have turned over to her while he lived."

Again I looked at Hephzy and again I braced myself for the scene which I was certain would follow.

"It is your impression then," I said, "that your mother had money of her own and that Captain Barnabas, your grandfather, kept that money for his own use."

"It is not an impression," haughtily; "I know it to be a fact."

"How do you know it?"

"My father told me so, during his last illness."

"Was--pardon me--was your father himself at the time? Was he--er--rational?"

"Rational! My father?"

"I mean--I mean was he himself--mentally? He was not delirious when he told you?"

"Delirious! Mr. Knowles, I am trying to be patient, but for the last time I warn you that I will not listen to insinuations against my father."

"I am not insinuating anything. I am seeking information. Were you and your father together a great deal? Did you know him well? Just what did he tell you?"

She hesitated before replying. When she spoke it was with an exaggerated air of patient toleration, as if she were addressing an unreasonable child.

"I will answer you," she said. "I will answer you because, so far, I have no fault to find with your behavior toward me. You and my--and my aunt have been as reasonable as I, perhaps, should expect, everything considered. Your bringing me here and providing for me was even kind, I suppose. So I will answer your questions. My father and I were not together a great deal. I attended a convent school in France and saw Father only at intervals. I supposed him to possess an independent income. It was only when he was--was unable to work," with a quiver in her voice, "that I learned how he lived. He had been obliged to depend upon his music, upon his violin playing, to earn money enough to keep us both alive. Then he told me of--of his life in America and how my mother and he had been--been cheated and defrauded by those who--who--Oh, DON'T ask me any more! Don't!"

"I must ask you. I must ask you to tell me this: How was he defrauded, as you call it?"

"I have told you, already. My mother's fortune--"

"But your mother had no fortune."

The anticipated scene was imminent. She sprang to her feet, but being too weak to stand, sank back again. Hephzy looked appealingly at me.

"Hosy," she cautioned; "Oh, Hosy, be careful! Think how sick she has been."

"I am thinking, Hephzy. I mean to be careful. But what I said is the truth, and you know it."

Hephzy would have replied, but Little Frank motioned her to be silent.

"Hush!" she commanded. "Mr. Knowles, what do you mean? My mother had money, a great deal of money. I don't know the exact sum, but my father said--You know it! You MUST know it. It was in my grandfather's care and--"

"Your grandfather had no money. He--well, he lost every dollar he had. He died as poor as a church rat."

Another interval of silence, during which I endured a piercing scrutiny from the dark eyes. Then Miss Morley's tone changed.

"Indeed!" she said, sarcastically. "You surprise me, Mr. Knowles. What became of the money, may I ask? I understand that my grandfather was a wealthy man."

"He was fairly well-to-do at one time, but he lost his money and died poor."

"How did he lose it?"

The question was a plain one and demanded a plain and satisfying answer. But how could I give that answer--then? Hephzy was shaking her head violently. I stammered and faltered and looked guilty, I have no doubt.

"Well?" said Miss Morley.

"He--he lost it, that is sufficient. You must take my word for it. Captain Cahoon died without a dollar of his own."

"When did he LOSE his wealth?" with sarcastic emphasis.

"Years ago. About the time your parents left the United States. There, there, Hephzy! I know. I'm doing my best."

"Indeed! When did he die?"

"Long ago--more than ten years ago."

"But my parents left America long before that. If my grandfather was penniless how did he manage to live all those years? What supported him?"

"Your aunt--Miss Cahoon here--had money in her own right."

"SHE had money and my mother had not. Yet both were Captain Cahoon's daughters. How did that happen?"

It seemed to me that it was Hephzy's time to play the target. I turned

to her.

"Miss Cahoon will probably answer that herself," I observed, maliciously.

Hephzibah appeared more embarrassed than I.

"I--I--Oh, what difference does all this make?" she faltered. "Hosy has told you the truth, Frances. Really and truly he has. Father was poor as poverty when he died and all his last years, too. All his money had gone."

"Yes, so I have heard Mr. Knowles say. But how did it go?"

"In--in--well, it was invested in stocks and things and--and--"

"Do you mean that he speculated in shares?"

"Well, not--not--"

"I see. Oh, I see. Father told me a little concerning those speculations. He warned Captain Cahoon before he left the States, but his warnings were not heeded, I presume. And you wish me to believe that ALL the money was lost--my mother's and all. Is that what you mean?"

"Your mother HAD no money," I put in, desperately, "I have told you--"

"You have told me many things, Mr. Knowles. Even admitting that my grandfather lost his money, as you say, why should I suffer because of his folly? I am not asking for HIS money. I am demanding money that was my mother's and is now mine. That I expected from him and now I expect it from you, his heirs."

"But your mother had no--"

"I do not care to hear that again. I know she had money."

"But how do you know?"

"Because my father told me she had, and my father did not lie."

There we were again--just where we started. The doctor re-entered the room and insisted upon his patient's being left to herself. She must lie down and rest, he said. His manner was one of distinct disapproval. It was evident that he considered Hephzy and me disturbers of the peace; in fact he intimated as much when he joined us in the sitting-room in a few minutes.

"I am afraid I made a mistake in permitting the conference," he said. "The young lady seems much agitated, Mr. Knowles. If she is, complete nervous prostration may follow. She may be an invalid for months or even years. I strongly recommend her being taken into the country as soon as possible."

This speech and the manner in which it was made were impressive and alarming. The possibilities at which it hinted were more alarming still. We made no attempt to discuss family matters with Little Frank that day nor the next.

But on the day following, when I returned from my morning visit to Camford Street, I found Hephzy awaiting me in the sitting-room. She was very solemn.

"Hosy," she said, "sit down. I've got somethin' to tell you."

"About her?" I asked, apprehensively.

"Yes. She's just been talkin' to me."

"She has! I thought we agreed not to talk with her at all."

"We did, and I tried not to. But when I went in to see her just now she was waitin' for me. She had somethin' to say, she said, and she said it--Oh, my goodness, yes! she said it."

"What did she say? Has she sent for her lawyer--her solicitor, or whatever he is?"

"No, she hasn't done that. I don't know but I 'most wish she had. He wouldn't be any harder to talk to than she is. Hosy, she's made up her mind."

"Made up her mind! I thought HER mind was already made up."

"It was, but she's made it up again. That doctor has been talkin' to her and she's really frightened about her health, I think. Anyhow, she has decided that her principal business just now is to get well. She told me she had decided not to press her claim upon us for the present. If we wished to make an offer of what she calls restitution, she'll listen to it; but she judges we are not ready to make one."

"Humph! her judgment is correct so far."

"Yes, but that isn't all. While she is waitin' for that offer she expects us to take care of her. She has been thinkin', she says, and she has come to the conclusion that our providin' for her as we have done isn't charity--or needn't be considered as charity--at all. She is willin' to consider it a part of that precious restitution she's forever talkin' about. We are to take care of her, and pay her doctor's bills, and take her into the country as he recommends, and--"

I interrupted. "Great Scott!" I cried, "does she expect us to ADOPT her?"

"I don't know what she expects; I'm tryin' to tell you what she said. We're to do all this and keep a strict account of all it costs, and then when we are ready to make a--a proposition, as she calls it, this account can be subtracted from the money she thinks we've got that belongs to her."

"But there isn't any money belonging to her. I told her so, and so did you."

"I know, but we might tell her a thousand times and it wouldn't affect her father's tellin' her once. Oh, that Strickland Morley! If only--"

"Hush! hush, Hephzy... Well, by George! of all the--this thing has gone far enough. It has gone too far. We made a great mistake in bringing

her here, in having anything to do with her at all--but we shan't go on making mistakes. We must stop where we are. She must be told the truth now--to-day."

"I know--I know, Hosity; but who'll tell her?"

"I will."

"She won't believe you."

"Then she must disbelieve. She can call in her solicitor and I'll make him believe."

Hephzy was silent. Her silence annoyed me.

"Why don't you say something?" I demanded. "You know what I say is plain common-sense."

"I suppose it is--I suppose 'tis. But, Hosity, if you start in tellin' her again you know what'll happen. The doctor said the least little thing would bring on nervous prostration. And if she has that, WHAT will become of her?"

It was my turn to hesitate.

"You couldn't--we couldn't turn her out into the street if she was nervous prostrated, could we," pleaded Hephzy. "After all, she's Ardelia's daughter and--"

"She's Strickland Morley's daughter. There is no doubt of that. Hereditary influence is plain enough in her case."

"I know, but she is Ardelia's daughter, too. I don't see how we can tell her, Hosity; not until she's well and strong again."

I was never more thoroughly angry in my life. My patience was exhausted.

"Look here, Hephzy," I cried: "what is it you are leading up to? You're not proposing--actually proposing that we adopt this girl, are you?"

"No--no--o. Not exactly that, of course. But we might take her into the country somewhere and--"

"Oh, DO be sensible! Do you realize what that would mean? We should have to give up our trip, stop sightseeing, stop everything we had planned to do, and turn ourselves into nurses running a sanitarium for the benefit of a girl whose father's rascality made your father a pauper. And, not only do this, but be treated by her as if--as if--"

"There, there, Hosity! I know what it will mean. I know what it would mean to you and I don't mean for you to do it. You've done enough and more than enough. But with me it's different. I could do it."

"You?"

"Yes. I've got some money of my own. I could find a nice, cheap, quiet boardin'-house in the country round here somewhere and she and I could go there and stay until she got well. You needn't go at all; you could go off travelin' by yourself and--"

"Hephzy, what are you talking about?"

"I mean it. I've thought it all out, Hosy. Ever since Ardelia and I had that last talk together and she whispered to me that--that--well, especially ever since I knew there was a Little Frank I've been thinkin' and plannin' about that Little Frank; you know I have. He--she isn't the kind of Little Frank I expected, but she's, my sister's baby and I can't--I CAN'T, turn her away to be sick and die. I can't do it. I shouldn't dare face Ardelia in--on the other side if I did. No, I guess it's my duty and I'm goin' to go on with it. But with you it's different. She isn't any real relation to you. You've done enough--and more than enough--as it is."

This was the climax. Of course I might have expected it, but of course I didn't. As soon as I recovered, or partially recovered, from my stupefaction I expostulated and scolded and argued. Hephzy was quiet but firm. She hated to part from me--she couldn't bear to think of it; but on the other hand she couldn't abandon her Ardelia's little girl. The interview ended by my walking out of the room and out of Bancroft's in disgust.

I did not return until late in the afternoon. I was in better humor then. Hephzy was still in the sitting-room; she looked as if she had been crying.

"Hosy," she said, as I entered, "I--I hope you don't think I'm too ungrateful. I'm not. Really I'm not. And I care as much for you as if you was my own boy. I can't leave you; I sha'n't. If you say for us to--"

I interrupted.

"Hephzy," I said, "I shan't say anything. I know perfectly well that you couldn't leave me any more than I could leave you. I have arranged with Matthews to set about house-hunting at once. As soon as rural England is ready for us, we shall be ready for it. After all, what difference does it make? I was ordered to get fresh experience. I might as well get it by becoming keeper of a sanitarium as any other way."

Hephzy looked at me. She rose from her chair.

"Hosy," she cried, "what--a sanitarium?"

"We'll keep it together," I said, smiling. "You and I and Little Frank. And it is likely to be a wonderful establishment."

Hephzy said--she said a great deal, principally concerning my generosity and goodness and kindness and self-sacrifice. I tried to shut off the flow, but it was not until I began to laugh that it ceased.

"Why!" cried Hephzy. "You're laughin'! What in the world? I don't see anything to laugh at."

"Don't you? I do. Oh, dear me! I--I, the Bayport quahaug to--Ho! ho! Hephzy, let me laugh. If there is any fun in this perfectly devilish situation let me enjoy it while I can."

And that is how and why I decided to become a country gentleman

instead of a traveler. When I told Matthews of my intention he had been petrified with astonishment. I had written Campbell of that intention. I devoutly wished I might see his face when he read my letter.

For days and days Hephzy and I "house-hunted." We engaged a nurse to look after the future patient of the "sanitarium" while we did our best to look for the sanitarium itself. Mr. Matthews gave us the addresses of real estate agents and we journeyed from suburb to suburb and from seashore to hills. We saw several "semi-detached villas." The name "semi-detached villa" had an appealing sound, especially to Hephzy, but the villas themselves did not appeal. They turned out to be what we, in America, would have called "two-family houses."

"And I never did like the idea of livin' in a two-family house," declared Hephzy. "I've known plenty of real nice folks who did live in 'em, or one-half of one of 'em, but it usually happened that the folks in the other half was a dreadful mean set. They let their dog chase your cat and if your hens scratched up their flower garden they were real unlikely about it. I've heard Father tell about Cap'n Noah Doane and Cap'n Elkanah Howes who used to live in Bayport. They'd been chums all their lives and when they retired from the sea they thought 'twould be lovely to build a double house so's they would be right close together all the time. Well, they did it and they hadn't been settled more'n a month when they began quarrelin'. Cap'n Noah's wife wanted the house painted yellow and Mrs. Cap'n Elkanah, she wanted it green. They started the fuss and it ended by one-half bein' yellow and t'other half green--such an outrage you never saw--and a big fence down the middle of the front yard, and the two families not speakin', and law-suits and land knows what all. They wouldn't even go to the same church nor be buried in the same graveyard. No sir-ee! no two-family house for us if I can help it. We've got troubles enough inside the family without fightin' the neighbors."

"But think of the beautiful names," I observed. "Those names ought to appeal to your poetic soul, Hephzy. We haven't seen a villa yet, no matter how dingy, or small, that wasn't christened 'Rosemary Terrace' or 'Sunnylawn' or something. That last one--the shack with the broken windows--was labeled 'Broadview' and it faced an alley ending at a brick stable."

"I know it," she said. "If they'd called it 'Narrowview' or 'Cow Prospect' 'twould have been more fittin', I should say. But I think givin' names to homes is sort of pretty, just the same. We might call our house at home 'Writer's Rest.' A writer lives in it, you know."

"And he has rested more than he has written of late," I observed. "'Quahaug Stew' or 'The Tureen' would be better, I should say."

When we expressed disapproval of the semi-detached villas our real estate brokers flew to the other extremity and proceeded to show us "estates." These estates comprised acres of ground, mansions, game-keepers' and lodge-keepers' houses, and goodness knows what. Some, so the brokers were particular to inform us, were celebrated for their "shooting."

The villas were not good enough; the estates were altogether too good. We inspected but one and then declined to see more.

"Shootin'!" sniffed Hephzy. "I should feel like shootin' myself every

time I paid the rent. I'd HAVE to do it the second time. 'Twould be a quicker end than starvin', 'and the first month would bring us to that."

We found one pleasant cottage in a suburb bearing the euphonious name of "Leatherhead"--that is, the village was named "Leatherhead"; the cottage was "Ash Clump." I teased Hephzy by referring to it as "Ash Dump," but it really was a pretty, roomy house, with gardens and flowers. For the matter of that, every cottage we visited, even the smallest, was bowered in flowers.

Hephzy's romantic spirit objected strongly to "Leatherhead," but I told her nothing could be more appropriate.

"This whole proposition--Beg pardon; I didn't mean to use that word; we've heard enough concerning 'propositions'--but really, Hephzy, 'Leatherhead' is very appropriate for us. If we weren't leather-headed and deserving of leather medals we should not be hunting houses at all. We should have left Little Frank and her affairs in a lawyer's hands and be enjoying ourselves as we intended. Leatherhead for the leather-heads; it's another dispensation of Providence."

"Ash Dump"--"Clump," I mean--was owned by a person named Cripps, Solomon Cripps. Mr. Cripps was a stout, mutton-chopped individual, strongly suggestive of Bancroft's "Henry." He was rather pompous and surly when I first knocked at the door of his residence, but when he learned we were house-hunting and had our eyes upon the "Clump," he became very polite indeed. "A 'eavenly spot," he declared it to be. "A beautiful neighborhood. Near the shops and not far from the Primitive Wesleyan chapel." He and Mrs. Cripps attended the chapel, he informed us.

I did not fancy Mr. Cripps; he was too--too something, I was not sure what. And Mrs. Cripps, whom we met later, was of a similar type. They, like everyone else, recognized us as Americans at once and they spoke highly of the "States."

"A very fine country, I am informed," said Mr. Cripps. "New, of course, but very fine indeed. Young men make money there. Much money--yes."

Mrs. Cripps wished to know if Americans were a religious people, as a rule. Religion, true spiritual religion was on the wane in England.

I gathered that she and her husband were doing their best to keep it up to the standard. I had read, in books by English writers, of the British middle-class Pharisee. I judged the Crippses to be Pharisees.

Hephzy's opinion was like mine.

"If ever there was a sanctimonious hypocrite it's that Mrs. Cripps," she declared. "And her husband ain't any better. They remind me of Deacon Hardy and his wife back home. He always passed the plate in church and she was head of the sewin' circle, but when it came to lettin' go of an extry cent for the minister's salary they had glue on their fingers. Father used to say that the Deacon passed the plate himself so nobody could see how little he put in it. They were the ones that always brought a stick of salt herrin' to the donation parties."

We didn't like the Crippses, but we did like "Ash Clump." We had almost decided to take it when our plans were quashed by the member of our party on whose account we had planned solely. Miss Morley flatly refused

to go to Leatherhead.

"Don't ask ME why," said Hephzy, to whom the refusal had been made. "I don't know. All I know is that the very name 'Leatherhead' turned her whiter than she has been for a week. She just put that little foot of hers down and said no. I said 'Why not?' and she said 'Never mind.' So I guess we sha'n't be Leatherheaded--in that way--this summer."

I was angry and impatient, but when I tried to reason with the young lady I met a crushing refusal and a decided snub.

"I do not care," said Little Frank, calmly and coldly, "to explain my reasons. I have them, and that is sufficient. I shall not go to--that town or that place."

"But why?" I begged, restraining my desire to shake her.

"I have my reasons. You may go there, if you wish. That is your right. But I shall not. And before you go I shall insist upon a settlement of my claim."

The "claim" could neither be settled nor discussed; the doctor's warning was no less insistent although his patient was steadily improving. I faced the alternative of my compliance or her nervous prostration and I chose the former. My desire to shake her remained.

So "Ash Clump" was given up. Hephzy and I speculated much concerning Little Frank's aversion to Leatherhead.

"It must be," said Hephzy, "that she knows somebody there, or somethin' like that. That's likely, I suppose. You know we don't know much about her or what she's done since her father died, Hosity. I've tried to ask her but she won't tell. I wish we did know."

"I don't," I snarled. "I wish to heaven we had never known her at all."

Hephzy sighed. "It IS awful hard for you," she said. "And yet, if we had come to know her in another way you--we might have been glad. I--I think she could be as sweet as she is pretty to folks she didn't consider thieves--and Americans. She does hate Americans. That's her precious pa's doin's, I suppose likely."

The next afternoon we saw the advertisement in the Standard. George, the waiter, brought two of the London dailies to our room each day. The advertisement read as follows:

"To Let for the Summer Months--Furnished. A Rectory in Mayberry, Sussex. Ten rooms, servants' quarters, vegetable gardens, small fruit, tennis court, etc., etc. Water and gas laid on. Golf near by. Terms low. Rector--Mayberry, Sussex."

"I answered it, Hosity," said Hephzy.

"You did!"

"Yes. It sounded so nice I couldn't help it. It would be lovely to live in a rectory, wouldn't it."

"Lovely--and expensive," I answered. "I'm afraid a rectory with tennis courts and servants' quarters and all the rest of it will prove too grand for a pair of Bayporters like you and me. However, your answering the ad does no harm; it doesn't commit us to anything."

But when the answer to the answer came it was even more appealing than the advertisement itself. And the terms, although a trifle higher than we had planned to pay, were not entirely beyond our means. The rector--his name was Cole--urged us to visit Mayberry and see the place for ourselves. We were to take the train for Haddington on Hill where the trap would meet us. Mayberry was two miles from Haddington on Hill, it appeared.

We decided to go, but before writing of our intention, Hephzy consulted the most particular member of our party.

"It's no use doing anything until we ask her," she said. "She may be as down on Mayberry as she was on Leatherhead."

But she was not. She had no objections to Mayberry. So, after writing and making the necessary arrangements, we took the train one bright, sunny morning, and after a ride of an hour or more, alighted at Haddington on Hill.

Haddington on Hill was not on a hill at all, unless a knoll in the middle of a wide flat meadow be called that. There were no houses near the railway station, either rectories or any other sort. We were the only passengers to leave the train there.

The trap, however, was waiting. The horse which drew it was a black, plump little animal, and the driver was a neat English lad who touched his hat and assisted Hephzy to the back seat of the vehicle. I climbed up beside her.

The road wound over the knoll and away across the meadow. On either side were farm lands, fields of young grain, or pastures with flocks of sheep grazing contentedly. In the distance, in every direction, one caught glimpses of little villages with gray church towers rising amid the foliage. Each field and pasture was bordered with a hedge instead of a fence, and over all hung the soft, light blue haze which is so characteristic of good weather in England.

Birds which we took to be crows, but which we learned afterward were rooks, whirled and circled. As we turned a corner a smaller bird rose from the grass beside the road and soared upward, singing with all its little might until it was a fluttering speck against the sky. Hephzy watched it, her eyes shining.

"I believe," she cried, excitedly, "I do believe that is a skylark. Do you suppose it is?"

"A lark, yes, lady," said our driver.

"A lark, a real skylark! Just think of it, Hopsy. I've heard a real lark. Well, Hephzibah Cahoon, you may never get into a book, but you're livin' among book things every day of your life. 'And singin' ever soars and soarin' ever singest.' I'd sing, too, if I knew how. You needn't be frightened--I sha'n't try."

The meadows ended at the foot of another hill, a real one this time. At our left, crowning the hill, a big house, a mansion with towers and turrets, rose above the trees. Hephzy whispered to me.

"You don't suppose THAT is the rectory, do you, Hosy?" she asked, in an awestricken tone.

"If it is we may as well go back to London," I answered. "But it isn't. Nothing lower in churchly rank than a bishop could keep up that establishment."

The driver settled our doubts for us.

"The Manor House, sir," he said, pointing with his whip. "The estate begins here, sir."

The "estate" was bordered by a high iron fence, stretching as far as we could see. Beside that fence we rode for some distance. Then another turn in the road and we entered the street of a little village, a village of picturesque little houses, brick or stone always--not a frame house among them. Many of the roofs were thatched. Flowers and climbing vines and little gardens everywhere. The village looked as if it had been there, just as it was, for centuries.

"This is Mayberry, sir," said our driver. "That is the rectory, next the church."

We could see the church tower and the roof, but the rectory was not yet visible to our eyes. We turned in between two of the houses, larger and more pretentious than the rest. The driver alighted and opened a big wooden gate. Before us was a driveway, shaded by great elms and bordered by rose hedges. At the end of the driveway was an old-fashioned, comfortable looking, brick house. Vines hid the most of the bricks. Flower beds covered its foundations. A gray-haired old gentleman stood in the doorway.

This was the rectory we had come to see and the gray-haired gentleman was the Reverend Mr. Cole, the rector.

"My soul!" whispered Hephzy, looking aghast at the spacious grounds, "we can never hire THIS. This is too expensive and grand for us, Hosy. Look at the grass to cut and the flowers to attend to, and the house to run. No wonder the servants have 'quarters.' My soul and body! I thought a rector was a kind of minister, and a rectory was a sort of parsonage, but I guess I'm off my course, as Father used to say. Either that or ministers' wages are higher than they are in Bayport. No, this place isn't for you and me, Hosy."

But it was. Before we left that rectory in the afternoon I had agreed to lease it until the middle of September, servants--there were five of them, groom and gardener included--horse and trap, tennis court, vegetable garden, fruit, flowers and all. It developed that the terms, which I had considered rather too high for my purse, included the servants' wages, vegetables from the garden, strawberries and other "small fruit"--everything. Even food for the horse was included in that all-embracing rent.

As Hephzy said, everything considered, the rent of Mayberry Rectory was

lower than that of a fair-sized summer cottage at Bayport.

The Reverend Mr. Cole was a delightful gentleman. His wife was equally kind and agreeable. I think they were, at first, rather unpleasantly surprised to find that their prospective tenants were from the "States"; but Hephzy and I managed to behave as unlike savages as we could, and the Cole manner grew less and less reserved. Mr. Cole and his wife were planning to spend a long vacation in Switzerland and his "living," or parish, was to be left in charge of his two curates. There was a son at Oxford who was to join them on their vacation.

Mr. Cole and I walked about the grounds and visited the church, the yard of which, with its weather-beaten gravestones and fine old trees, adjoined the rectory on the western side, behind the tall hedge.

The church was built of stone, of course, and a portion of it was older than the Norman conquest. Before the altar steps were two ancient effigies of knights in armor, with crossed gauntlets and their feet supported by crouching lions. These old fellows were scratched and scarred and initialed. Upon one noble nose were the letters "A. H. N. 1694." I decided that vandalism was not a modern innovation.

While the rector and I were inspecting the church, Mrs. Cole and Hephzy were making a tour of the house. They met us at the door. Mrs. Cole's eyes were twinkling; I judged that she had found Hephzy amusing. If this was true it had not warped her judgment, however, for, a moment later when she and I were alone, she said:

"Your cousin, Miss Cahoon, is a good housekeeper, I imagine."

"She is all of that," I said, decidedly.

"Yes, she was very particular concerning the kitchen and scullery and the maids' rooms. Are all American housekeepers as particular?"

"Not all. Miss Cahoon is unique in many ways; but she is a remarkable woman in all."

"Yes. I am sure of it. And she has such a typical American accent, hasn't she."

We were to take possession on the following Monday. We lunched at the "Red Cow," the village inn, where the meal was served in the parlor and the landlord's daughter waited upon us. The plump black horse drew us to the railway station, and we took the train for London.

We have learned, by this time, that second, or even third-class travel was quite good enough for short journeys and that very few English people paid for first-class compartments. We were fortunate enough to have a second-class compartment to ourselves this time, and, when we were seated, Hephzy asked a question.

"Did you think to speak about the golf, Hosy?" she said. "You will want to play some, won't you?"

"Yes," said I. "I did ask about it. It seems that the golf course is a private one, on the big estate we passed on the way from the station. Permission is always given the rectory tenants."

"Oh! my gracious, isn't that grand! That estate isn't in Mayberry. The Mayberry bounds--that's what Mrs. Cole called them--and just this side. The estate is in the village of--of Burgleston Bogs. Burgleston Bogs--it's a funny name. Seem's if I'd heard it before."

"You have," said I, in surprise. "Burgleston Bogs is where that Heathcroft chap whom we met on the steamer visits occasionally. His aunt has a big place there. By George! you don't suppose that estate belongs to his aunt, do you?"

Hephzy gasped. "I wouldn't wonder," she cried. "I wouldn't wonder if it did. And his aunt was Lady Somebody, wasn't she. Maybe you'll meet him there. Goodness sakes! just think of your playin' golf with a Lady's nephew."

"I doubt if we need to think of it," I observed. "Mr. Carleton Heathcroft on board ship may be friendly with American plebeians, but on shore, and when visiting his aunt, he may be quite different. I fancy he and I will not play many holes together."

Hephzy laughed. "You 'fancy,'" she repeated. "You'll be sayin' 'My word' next. My! Hosity, you ARE gettin' English."

"Indeed I'm not!" I declared, with emphasis. "My experience with an English relative is sufficient of itself to prevent that. Miss Frances Morley and I are compatriots for the summer only."

CHAPTER IX

In Which We Make the Acquaintance of Mayberry and a Portion of Burgleston Bogs

We migrated to Mayberry the following Monday, as we had agreed to do. Miss Morley went with us, of course. I secured a first-class apartment for our party and the journey was a comfortable and quiet one. Our invalid was too weak to talk a great deal even if she had wished, which she apparently did not. Johnson, the groom, met us at Haddington on Hill and we drove to the rectory. There Miss Morley, very tired and worn out, was escorted to her room by Hephzy and Charlotte, the housemaid. She was perfectly willing to remain in that room, in fact she did not leave it for several days.

Meanwhile Hephzy and I were doing our best to become acquainted with our new and novel mode of life. Hephzy took charge of the household and was, in a way, quite in her element; in another way she was distinctly out of it.

"I did think I was gettin' used to bein' waited on, Hosity," she confided, "but it looks as if I'll have to begin all over again. Managin' one hired girl like Susanna was a job and I tell you I thought managin' three, same as we've got here, would be a staggerer. But it isn't. Somehow the kind of help over here don't seem to need managin'. They manage me more than I do them. There's Mrs. Wigham, the cook. Mrs. Cole told me she was a 'superior' person and I guess she is--at any rate, she's superior to me in some things. She knows what a 'gooseberry fool' is and I'm sure I don't. I felt like another kind of fool when she told

me she was goin' to make one, as a 'sweet,' for dinner to-night. As nigh as I can make out it's a sort of gooseberry pie, but _I_ should never have called a gooseberry pie a 'sweet'; a 'sour' would have been better, accordin' to my reckonin'. However, all desserts over here are 'sweets' and fruit is dessert. Then there's Charlotte, the housemaid, and Baker, the 'between-maid'--between upstairs and down, I suppose that means--and Grimmer, the gardener, and Johnson, the boy that takes care of the horse. Each one of 'em seems to know exactly what their own job is and just as exactly where it leaves off and t'other's job begins. I never saw such obligin' but independent folks in my life. As for my own job, that seems to be settin' still with my hands folded. Well, it's a brand new one and it's goin' to take me one spell to get used to it."

It seemed likely to be a "spell" before I became accustomed to my own "job," that of being a country gentleman with nothing to do but play the part. When I went out to walk about the rectory garden, Grimmer touched his hat. When, however, I ventured to pick a few flowers in that garden, his expression of shocked disapproval was so marked that I felt I must have made a dreadful mistake. I had, of course. Grimmer was in charge of those flowers and if I wished any picked I was expected to tell him to pick them. Picking them myself was equivalent to admitting that I was not accustomed to having a gardener in my employ, in other words that I was not a real gentleman at all. I might wait an hour for Johnson to return from some errand or other and harness the horse; but I must on no account save time by harnessing the animal myself. That sort of labor was not done by the "gentry." I should have lost caste with the servants a dozen times during my first few days in the rectory were it not for one saving grace; I was an American, and almost any peculiar thing was expected of an American.

When I strolled along the village street the male villagers, especially the older ones, touched their hats to me. The old women bowed or courtesied. Also they invariably paused, when I had passed, to stare after me. The group at the blacksmith shop--where the stone coping of the low wall was worn in hollows by the generations of idlers who had sat upon it, just as their descendants were sitting upon it now--turned, after I had passed, to stare. There would be a pause in the conversation, then an outburst of talk and laughter. They were talking about the "foreigner" of course, and laughing at him. At the tailor's, where I sent my clothes to be pressed, the tailor himself, a gray-haired, round-shouldered antique, ventured an opinion concerning those clothes. "That coat was not made in England, sir," he said. "We don't make 'em that way 'ere, sir. That's a bit foreign, that coat, sir."

Yes, I was a foreigner. It was hard to realize. In a way everything was so homelike; the people looked like people I had known at home, their faces were New England faces quite as much as they were old England. But their clothes were just a little different, and their ways were different, and a dry-goods store was a "draper's shop," and a drug-store was a "chemist's," and candies were "sweeties" and a public school was a "board school" and a boarding-school was a "public school." And I might be polite and pleasant to these people--persons out of my "class"--but I must not be too cordial, for if I did, in the eyes of these very people, I lost caste and they would despise me.

Yes, I was a foreigner; it was a queer feeling.

Coming from America and particularly from democratic Bayport, where

everyone is as good as anyone else provided he behaves himself, the class distinction in Mayberry was strange at first. I do not mean that there was not independence there; there was, among the poorest as well as the richer element. Every male Mayberryite voted as he thought, I am sure; and was self-respecting and independent. He would have resented any infringement of his rights just as Englishmen have resented such infringements and fought against them since history began. But what I am trying to make plain is that political equality and social equality were by no means synonymous. A man was a man for 'a' that, but when he was a gentleman he was 'a' that' and more. And when he was possessed of a title he was revered because of that title, or the title itself was revered. The hatter in London where I purchased a new "bowler," had a row of shelves upon which were boxes containing, so I was told, the spare titles of eminent customers. And those hat-boxes were lettered like this: "The Right Hon. Col. Wainwright, V.C.," "His Grace the Duke of Leicester," "Sir George Tupman, K.C.B.," etc., etc. It was my first impression that the hatter was responsible for thus proclaiming his customers' titles, but one day I saw Richard, convoyed by Henry, reverently bearing a suitcase into Bancroft's Hotel. And that suitcase bore upon its side the inscription, in very large letters, "Lord Eustace Stairs." Then I realized that Lord Eustace, like the owners of the hat-boxes, recognizing the value of a title, advertised it accordingly.

I laughed when I saw the suitcase and the hat-boxes. When I told Hephzy about the latter she laughed, too.

"That's funny, isn't it," she said. "Suppose the folks that have their names on the mugs in the barber shop back home had 'em lettered 'Cap'n Elkanah Crowell,' 'Judge the Hon. Ezra Salters,' 'The Grand Exalted Schem Order of Red Men George Kendrick.' How everybody would laugh, wouldn't they. Why they'd laugh Cap'n Elkanah and Ezra and Kendrick out of town."

So they would have done--in Bayport--but not in Mayberry or London. Titles and rank and class in England are established and accepted institutions, and are not laughed at, for where institutions of that kind are laughed at they soon cease to be. Hephzy summed it up pretty well when she said:

"After all, it all depends on what you've been brought up to, doesn't it, Hosi. Your coat don't look funny to you because you've always worn that kind of coat, but that tailor man thought 'twas funny because he never saw one made like it. And a lord takin' his lordship seriously seems funny to us, but it doesn't seem so to him or to the tailor. They've been brought up to it, same as you have to the coat."

On one point she and I had agreed before coming to Mayberry, that was that we must not expect calls from the neighbors or social intercourse with the people of Mayberry.

"They don't know anything about us," said I, "except that we are Americans, and that may or may not be a recommendation, according to the kind of Americans they have previously met. The Englishman, so all the books tell us, is reserved and distant at first. He requires a long acquaintance before admitting strangers to his home life and we shall probably have no opportunity to make that acquaintance. If we were to stay in Mayberry a year, and behaved ourselves, we might in time be accepted as desirable, but not during the first summer. So if they leave us to ourselves we must make the best of it."

Hephzy agreed thoroughly. "You're right," she said. "And, after all, it's just what would happen anywhere. You remember when that Portygee family came to Bayport and lived in the Solon Blodgett house. Nobody would have anything to do with 'em for a long time because they were foreigners, but they turned out to be real nice folks after all. We're foreigners here and you can't blame the Mayberry people for not takin' chances; it looks as if nobody in it ever had taken a chance, as if it had been just the way it is since Noah came out of the Ark. I never felt so new and shiny in my life as I do around this old rectory and this old town."

Which was all perfectly true and yet the fact remains that, "new and shiny" as we were, the Mayberry people--those of our "class"--began to call upon us almost immediately, to invite us to their homes, to show us little kindnesses, and to be whole-souled and hospitable and friendly as if we had known them and they us for years. It was one of the greatest surprises, and remains one of the most pleasant recollections, of my brief career as a resident in England, the kindly cordiality of these neighbors in Mayberry.

The first caller was Dr. Bayliss, who occupied "Jasmine Gables," the pretty house next door. He dropped in one morning, introduced himself, shook hands and chatted for an hour. That afternoon his wife called upon Hephzy. The next day I played a round of golf upon the private course on the Manor House grounds, the Burgleston Bogs grounds--with the doctor and his son, young Herbert Bayliss, just through Cambridge and the medical college at London. Young Bayliss was a pleasant, good-looking young chap and I liked him as I did his father. He was at present acting as his father's assistant in caring for the former's practice, a practice which embraced three or four villages and a ten-mile stretch of country.

Naturally I was interested in the Manor estate and its owner. The grounds were beautiful, three square miles in extent and cared for, so Bayliss, Senior, told me, by some hundred and fifty men, seventy of whom were gardeners. Of the Manor House itself I caught a glimpse, gray-turreted and huge, set at the end of lawns and flower beds, with fountains playing and statues gleaming white amid the foliage. I asked some questions concerning its owner. Yes, she was Lady Kent Carey and she had a nephew named Heathcroft. So there was a chance, after all, that I might again meet my ship acquaintance who abhorred "griddle cakes." I imagined he would be somewhat surprised at that meeting. It was an odd coincidence.

As for the game of golf, my part of it, the least said the better. Doctor Bayliss, who, it developed, was an enthusiast at the game, was kind enough to tell me I had a "topping" drive. I thanked him, but there was altogether too much "topping" connected with my play that forenoon to make my thanks enthusiastic. I determined to practice assiduously before attempting another match. Somehow I felt responsible for the golfing honor of my country.

Other callers came to the rectory. The two curates, their names were Judson and Worcester, visited us; young men, both of them, and good fellows, Worcester particularly. Although they wore clerical garb they were not in the least "preachy." Hephzy, although she liked them, expressed surprise.

"They didn't act a bit like ministers," she said. "They didn't ask us to come to meetin' nor hint at prayin' with the family or anything, yet they looked for all the while like two Methodist parsons, young ones. A curate is a kind of new-hatched rector, isn't he?"

"Not exactly," I answered. "He is only partially hatched. But, whatever you do, don't tell them they look like Methodists; they wouldn't consider it a compliment."

Hephzy was a Methodist herself and she resented the slur. "Well, I guess a Methodist is as good as an Episcopalian," she declared. "And they don't ACT like Methodists. Why, one of 'em smoked a pipe. Just imagine Mr. Partridge smokin' a pipe!"

Mr. Judson and I played eighteen holes of golf together. He played a little worse than I did and I felt better. The honor of Bayport's golf had been partially vindicated.

While all this was going on our patient remained, for the greater part of the time, in her room. She was improving steadily. Doctor Bayliss, whom I had asked to attend her, declared, as his London associates had done, that all she needed was rest, quiet and the good air and food which she was certain to get in Mayberry. He, too, like the physician at Bancroft's, seemed impressed by her appearance and manner. And he also asked similar embarrassing questions.

"Delightful young lady, Miss Morley," he observed. "One of our English girls, Knowles. She informs me that she IS English."

"Partly English," I could not help saying. "Her mother was an American."

"Oh, indeed! You know she didn't tell me that, now did she."

"Perhaps not."

"No, by Jove, she didn't. But she has lived all her life in England?"

"Yes--in England and France."

"Your niece, I think you said."

I had said it, unfortunately, and it could not be unsaid now without many explanations. So I nodded.

"She doesn't--er--behave like an American. She hasn't the American manner, I mean to say. Now Miss Cahoon has--er--she has--"

"Miss Cahoon's manner is American. So is mine; we ARE Americans, you see."

"Yes, yes, of course," hastily. "When are you and I to have the nine holes you promised, Knowles?"

One fine afternoon the invalid came downstairs. The "between-maid" had arranged chairs and the table on the lawn. We were to have tea there; we had tea every day, of course--were getting quite accustomed to it.

Frances--I may as well begin calling her that--looked in better health then than at any time since our meeting. She was becomingly, although

simply gowned, and there was a dash of color in her cheeks. Hephzibah escorted her to the tea table. I rose to meet them.

"Frank--Frances, I mean--is goin' to join us to-day," said Hephzy. "She's beginnin' to look real well again, isn't she."

I said she was. Frances nodded to me and took one of the chairs, the most comfortable one. She appeared perfectly self-possessed, which I was sure I did not. I was embarrassed, of course. Each time I met the girl the impossible situation in which she had placed us became more impossible, to my mind. And the question, "What on earth shall we do with her?" more insistent.

Hephzy poured the tea. Frances, cup in hand, looked about her.

"This is rather a nice place, after all," she observed, "isn't it."

"It's a real lovely place," declared Hephzy with enthusiasm.

The young lady cast another appraising glance at our surroundings.

"Yes," she repeated, "it's a jolly old house and the grounds are not bad at all."

Her tone nettled me. Everything considered I thought she might have shown a little more enthusiasm.

"I infer that you expected something much worse," I observed.

"Oh, of course I didn't know what to expect. How should I? I had no hand in selecting it, you know."

"She's hardly seen it," put in Hephzy. "She was too sick when she came to notice much, I guess, and this is the first time she has been out doors."

"I am glad you approve," I observed, drily.

My sarcasm was wasted. Miss Morley said again that she did approve, of what she had seen, and added that we seemed to have chosen very well.

"I don't suppose," said Hephzy, complacently, "that there are many much prettier places in England than this one."

"Oh, indeed there are. But all England is beautiful, of course."

I thought of Mrs. Briggs' lodging-house, but I did not refer to it. Our guest--or my "niece"--or our ward--it was hard to classify her--changed the subject.

"Have you met any of the people about here?" she asked.

Hephzy burst into enthusiastic praise of the Baylisses and the curates and the Coles.

"They're all just as nice as they can be," she declared. "I never met nicer folks, at home or anywhere."

Frances nodded. "All English people are nice," she said.

Again I thought of Mrs. Briggs and again I kept my thoughts to myself. Hephzy went on rhapsodizing. I paid little attention until I heard her speak my name.

"And Hosity thinks so, too. Don't you, Hosity?" she said.

I answered yes, on the chance. Frances regarded me oddly.

"I thought--I understood that your name was Kent, Mr. Knowles," she said.

"It is."

"Then why does Miss Cahoon always--"

Hephzy interrupted. "Oh, I always call him Hosity," she explained. "It's a kind of pet name of mine. It's short for Hosea. His whole name is Hosea Kent Knowles, but 'most everybody but me does call him Kent. I don't think he likes Hosea very well."

Our companion looked very much as if she did not wonder at my dislike. Her eyes twinkled.

"Hosea," she repeated. "That is an odd name. The original Hosea was a prophet, wasn't he? Are you a prophet, Mr. Knowles?"

"Far from it," I answered, with decision. If I had been a prophet I should have been forewarned and, consequently, forearmed.

She smiled and against my will I was forced to admit that her smile was attractive; she was prettier than ever when she smiled.

"I remember now," she said; "all Americans have Scriptural names. I have read about them in books."

"Hosity writes books," said Hephzy, proudly. "That's his profession; he's an author."

"Oh, really, is he! How interesting!"

"Yes, he is. He has written ever so many books; haven't you, Hosity."

I didn't answer. My self and my "profession" were the last subjects I cared to discuss. The young lady's smile broadened.

"And where do you write your books, Mr. Knowles?" she asked. "In--er--Bayport?"

"Yes," I answered, shortly. "Hephzy, Miss Morley will have another cup of tea, I think."

"Oh, no, thank you. But tell me about your books, Mr. Knowles. Are they stories of Bayport?"

"No indeed!" Hephzy would do my talking for me, and I could not order her to be quiet. "No indeed!" she declared. "He writes about lords and ladies and counts and such. He hardly ever writes about everyday people like the ones in Bayport. You would like his books, Frances. You would

enjoy readin' 'em, I know."

"I am sure I should. They must be delightful. I do hope you brought some with you, Mr. Knowles."

"He didn't, but I did. I'll lend you some, Frances. I'll lend you 'The Queen's Amulet.' That's a splendid story."

"I am sure it must be. So you write about queens, too, Mr. Knowles. I thought Americans scorned royalty. And what is his queen's name, Miss Cahoon? Is it Scriptural?"

"Oh, no indeed! Besides, all Americans' names aren't out of the Bible, any more than the names in England are. That man who wanted to let us his house in Copperhead--no, Leatherhead--funny I should forget THAT awful name--he was named Solomon--Solomon Cripps... Why, what is it?"

Miss Morley's smile and the mischievous twinkle had vanished. She looked startled, and even frightened, it seemed to me.

"What is it, Frances?" repeated Hephzy, anxiously.

"Nothing--nothing. Solomon--what was it? Solomon Cripps. That is an odd name. And you met this Mr.--er--Cripps?"

"Yes, we met him. He had a house he wanted to let us, and I guess we'd have taken it, too, only you seemed to hate the name of Leatherhead so. Don't you remember you did? I don't blame you. Of the things to call a pretty town that's about the worst."

"Yes, it is rather frightful. But this, Mr.--er--Cripps; was he as bad as his name? Did you talk with him?"

"Only about the house. Hosy a

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