

A Romance of Billy-Goat Hill

Alice Hegan Rice

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[Illustration: "Do you believe in love, Doctor?"]

A ROMANCE OF BILLY-GOAT HILL

BY

ALICE HEGAN RICE

Author of
Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch
Lovey Mary, Sandy, Etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

By GEORGE WEIGHT

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"Do you believe in love, Doctor?"

The Colonel leaned back upon his knees and glared at Morley

There was a sharp report, a smothered groan, then a heavy fall

She held it to the flame, and watched it burn to ashes on the hearth

Maria began to cry, and forgot to jolt the Boarder

Mrs. Sequin paused with her hand on the banister

"It was a great wrong I did you, Don; can you forgive me?"

"Tell me quick! How do you know about the shooting?"

CHAPTER I

It was springtime in Kentucky, gay, irresponsible, Southern springtime, that comes bursting impetuously through highways and byways, heedless of possible frosts and impossible fruitions. A glamour of tender new green enveloped the world, and the air was sweet with the odor of young and growing things. The brown river, streaked with green where the fresher currents of the creeks poured in, circled the base of a long hill that dominated the landscape from every direction.

In spite of the fact that impertinent railroads were beginning to crawl about its feet, and the flotsam and jetsam of the adjacent city were gradually being deposited at its base, it nevertheless reared its granite shoulders proudly and defiantly against the sky.

From the early days when the hill and rich surrounding farm lands had been granted to the old pioneer William Carsey, one generation of

Carseys after another had lived in the stately old mansion that now stood like the last remaining fortress against the city's invasion. Sagging cornices and discolored walls had not dispelled the atmosphere of contentment that enveloped the place, an effect heightened by the wide front porch which ran straight across the face of it, like a broad, complacent smile. Some old houses, like old gallants, bear an unmistakable air of past prosperity, of past affairs. Romance has trailed her garments near them and the fragrance lingers.

Thornwood, shabby and neglected, could still afford to drowse in the sunshine and smile over the past. It remembered the time when its hospitality was the boast of the countryside, when its stables held the best string of horses in the State; when its smokehouse, now groaning under a pile of lumber, sheltered shoulders of pork, and sides of bacon, and long lines of juicy, sugar-cured hams; when the cellar quartered battalions of cobwebby bottles that stood at attention on the low hanging shelves. It was a house ripe with experience and mellow with memories, a wise, old, sophisticated house, that had had its day, and enjoyed it, and now, through with ambitions, and through with striving, had settled down to a peaceful old age.

On this particular Sunday afternoon Colonel Bob Carsey, the third of his name, sat on the porch in a weather-beaten mahogany rocker, making himself a mint julep. He was a stout, elderly gentleman, and, like the rocking chair, was weather-beaten, and of a slightly mahogany hue. His features, having long ago given up the struggle against encroaching flesh, were now merely slight indentures, and mild protuberances, with the exception of the eyes which still blazed away defiantly, like twinkling lights at the end of a passage. Across his feet with nose on paws lay a dog, and about him was scattered a profusion of fishing paraphernalia.

The Colonel, carefully crushing the mint between his stubby fingers, stirred it with the sugar at the bottom of his tall glass; then, resting the concoction on the broad arm of the rocker, and without turning his head, lifted his voice in stentorian command:

"Jimpson!"

No answer. He turned his head slightly to the left, in the general direction of the negro cabins whose roofs could be seen through the trees, and sent another summons hurtling through the bushes:

"Jimpson!"

Again he waited, and again there was no response. The Colonel sighed resignedly, and spreading a large bordered handkerchief over his obliterated features, clasped his fat hands with some difficulty about his ample girth, and slept. When he awoke he began exactly where he had left off, only this time turning his head slightly to the right, and sending his command toward the kitchen wing.

A door slammed somewhere in the distance, and presently a shuffling of feet was heard in the hall, and a small, alert old negro presented himself to his master with an air of cheerful conciliation.

The Colonel did not turn his head; he gazed with an air of great injury at the tops of the locust trees, clasping his tumbler as it rested on the arm of the rocker.

"Jimpson," he began, after the culprit had suffered his silence some minutes.

"Now, Cunnel," began Jimpson nervously. He had evidently rehearsed this scene in the past.

"Just answer my questions," insisted the Colonel. "_Is_ this my house?"

"Yas, sir, but Carline, she--"

"And are you my nigger?" persisted the Colonel plaintively.

"Yas, sir; but you see, Carline--"

"And haven't I, for twenty years," persisted the Colonel, "been taking a mint julep at half past two on Sunday afternoons?"

"Yas, sir, I was a comin'--"

"Then you don't regard it as an unreasonable request, that a gentleman should ask his own nigger, in his own house, to bring him a small piece of ice?" The Colonel's sense of injury was becoming so overpowering that the offender might have been crushed by contrition had not a laugh made them both look up.

Standing in the doorway was a young girl in a short riding habit, and a small hat of red felt that was carelessly pinned to her bright, tumbled hair. Her eyes were dark, and round like those of a child, and they danced from object to object as if eager to miss none of the good things that the world had to offer. Joy of life and radiant youth seemed to flash from her face and figure.

"What's the matter, Squire Daddy?" she asked, pausing on the threshold. "Mad again?" The Colonel's head twitched in her direction, but he held it stiff.

"Well, please don't kill Uncle Jimpson 'til he finds my gloves. I don't know where I took them off."

"Yas 'm, Miss Lady," Jimpson welcomed the diversion. "I'll find 'em jes as soon as I git yer Paw his ice."

"Oh, Daddy'll wait, won't you, Dad? I'm in a hurry."

For a moment Jimpson and the Colonel eyed each other, then the Colonel's gaze shifted.

"I'll git de ice fer you on my way back," Jimpson whispered reassuringly. "I spec' dat chile _is_ in a hurry."

The young lady in question gave no appearance of haste as she perched herself on the arm of her father's chair, and presented a boot-lace for him to tie.

"Going fishing, Dad?" she asked.

"Yes," said the Colonel, struggling to make a two-loop bow-knot. "Noah

Wicker and I are going down below the mill dam. Want to come along?"

"I can't. I'm going riding."

"That's good. Who with?"

"With Don Morley."

The smile that had returned to the Colonel's face during this conversation contracted suddenly, leaving his mouth a round little button of disapprobation.

"What in thunder is he doing up here anyhow; why don't he go on back to town where he belongs?"

"Don?" Miss Lady pretended to effect a part in the few straggling hairs that adorned his forehead. "Why, he's staying over to the Wickers' while he looks around for a farm. Here's a gray hair, Daddy! I'd pull it out only there are two more on that other side now than there are on this."

"Buying a farm, is he?" The Colonel waxed a deeper mahogany. "Well, this place is not for sale. I should think he could find something better to do with his time than hanging around here. For two weeks I haven't been able to sit on this porch for five minutes without having him under my feet! What's the sense of his coming so often?"

Miss Lady caught him by the ears, and turned his irate face up to her own.

"He comes to see me!" she announced, emphasizing each word with a nod. "He likes horses and dogs and me, and I like horses and dogs and him. But I like you, too, Daddy."

The Colonel refused to be beguiled by such blandishments.

"I'll speak to him when he comes. He needn't think just because he is a city fellow, he can take a daughter of mine racing all over the country on Sunday afternoon!"

"Why, Dad, that's absurd! Don't you take me yourself almost every Sunday? And don't I go with Noah, and the Brooks boys whenever I like?"

"Well, you can't go to-day."

"But this is Donald's last day. He goes back to town to-night, and he may go abroad next week to stay ever and ever so long."

The Colonel brought his fist down on his knees: "I don't care a hang where he goes. It's you we are talking about. You've got to promise me not to go with him this afternoon."

"But why?"

"Because," the Colonel argued feebly, "because it's Sunday."

Miss Lady sat for a moment looking straight before her and there was a contraction of her lips that might have passed for a comic imitation

of her father's had it not softened into a smile.

"Suppose I won't promise?" she said.

The Colonel's free hand gripped the arm of the chair, and he looked as if he had every intention in the world of being firm.

"You see, if it is wrong for me to go riding on Sunday," went on Miss Lady, "it's wrong for you to go fishing. Suppose we both reform and stay at home?"

The Colonel's eyes involuntarily flew to his cherished tackle, lying ready for action on the top step, then they came back with a snap to the top of a locust tree.

Miss Lady squeezed his arm and laughed: "Of course you don't want to stay at home this glorious afternoon, neither do I! Now, that's settled. Here comes Noah; I'll go and fix your lunch."

It was not by any means the first time the daughter of the house of Carsey had scored in a contest with her father. His subjection had begun on that morning now nearly twenty years ago, when she had been placed in his arms, a motherless bundle of helplessness without even a personal name to begin life with.

That question of a name had baffled him. He had consulted all the neighbors, considered all the possibilities in the back of the dictionary, and even had recourse to the tombstones in the old cemetery, but the haunting fear that in days to come she might not like his choice, held him back from a final decision. In the meanwhile she was "The Little Lady," then "Lady," and finally through the negroes it got to be "Miss Lady." So the Colonel weakly compromised in the matter by deciding to wait until she was old enough to name herself. When that time arrived she stubbornly refused to exchange her nickname for a real one. A halfhearted effort was made to harness her up to "Elizabeth," but she flatly declined to answer to the appellation.

She and Noah Wicker, the son of a neighboring farmer, had run wild on the big place, and it was Miss Lady who invariably got to the top of the peach tree first, or dared to wade the farthest into the stream. All through the summer days her little bare legs raced beside Noah's sturdier brown ones. She could handle a fishing rod as well as her father, could ride and drive and shoot, and was on terms of easy friendship with every neighbor who passed over the brow of Billy-goat Hill.

The matter of education had been the first serious break in this idyllic existence. After romping through the country school, she had had several young and pretty governesses, all of whom had succumbed to the charms of neighboring country swains, and abandoned their young charge, to start establishments of their own. Then came wise counsel from without and after many tears she was sent to a boarding school in the city.

The older teachers at Miss Gibbs' Select School for Young Ladies still recall their trials during the one year Miss Lady was enrolled. She was pretty, yes, and clever, and lovable, oh, yes! And at this point usually followed a number of stories of her generosity and impulsive

kindness; "but," the conclusion always ran, "such a strange, wild little creature, so intolerant of convention, in dress, in education, in religion. Quite impossible in a young ladies' seminary."

After one term of imprisonment Miss Lady escaped to the outdoor world again, and implored her devoted "Dad" to let her grow up in ignorance, protesting passionately that she did not want puffs on her head, and heels on her shoes, and whalebones about her waist. That she didn't care whether $X + Y = Z$, or not, and that going to church and saying the same thing a dozen times, drove all ideas of religion out of her head. She would study at home, she declared, anything, everything he suggested, if only she could do it, in her own way, out of doors.

So the sorely puzzled Colonel had procured her the necessary textbooks, and she had plunged into her original method of self-education. She usually fought out her mathematical battles down by the river, using a stick on the sand for her calculations; history she studied in the fork of an old elm, declaiming the most dramatic episodes aloud, to the edification of the sparrows.

In the long winter months her favorite haunt was a little unused room over the front hall, traditionally known as the library. Its only possible excuse for the name was its one piece of furniture, a battered secretary containing a small collection of musty volumes that did credit to the taste of some long-departed Carsey.

Miss Lady had discovered the library in her paper-doll days, and had ruthlessly clipped small bonneted ladies with flounced skirts from magazines that dated back to the first year of publication. Later she had discovered that some of the ladies had jokes on their backs, or rather pieces of jokes, the rest of which she hunted up in the old magazines. It was an easy step from the magazines to the books, and in time she knew them all, from the little dog-eared copy of Horace in the upper left-hand corner, to the fat Don Quixote in the lower right.

In this neglected little room, with its festoons of cobwebs, its musty smell and its sense of old, forgotten things and people, she would tuck herself away with a pocket full of apples, to study and read by the hour.

The Colonel had done his part, and she was determined to do hers; for three years she kept sturdily at it, devouring the things she could understand, and blithely skipping those she could not, extracting meanwhile a vast amount of pleasure out of each passing day. For the thing that differentiated Miss Lady from the rest of her fellow kind was that she was usually glad. She liked to get up in the morning and to go to bed at night, a peculiarity in itself sufficiently great to individualize her. She greeted each new experience with enthusiasm and managed to extract the largest possible quota of happiness out of the smallest and most insignificant occasion.

As she went singing through the hall, the Colonel tried to frown over his glasses, but he was only partially successful. She was too satisfying a sight with her shining hair and eyes, and lithe, supple figure, every motion of which bespoke that quick, unconscious freedom of body peculiar to children and those favored of the gods, who never grow old.

The tall, awkward young man who had by this time arrived at the porch, followed the Colonel's gaze, and then, without speaking, sat down on the steps and clasped his hands about his knees. Noah Wicker's awkwardness, however manifest to others, was evidently a matter of small moment to him. He had apparently accepted the companionship of unmanageable arms and legs without question, and without embarrassment. His stubby blond hair rose straight from a high, broad forehead, and grew down in square patches in front of his ears. His eyes, small and steady, surveyed the world with profound indifference.

When Miss Lady disappeared the Colonel turned upon him suddenly:

"What about this rich young fellow over at your house? Who is he anyhow?"

"Morley?" Noah crossed his knees deliberately. "Why, he's a brother-in-law of Mr. Sequin."

"Not Basil Sequin, the president of the People's Bank! You don't say!" The Colonel paused for a moment to digest this fact, then he went on: "Hell-bent on farming I hear; wants your father to look around for a place."

This not being in the form of a question, Noah conserved his energies.

"Don't amount to a hill of beans, I'll warrant," continued the Colonel, with a watchful eye on Noah for denial or confirmation, but Noah was noncommittal. "When a fellow gets to be twenty-three years old and can't find anything better to do than to run around the country spending his money, and playing with the girls, there's a screw loose somewhere. What does he know about stock-farming?"

"Says he's been reading up."

"Fiddlesticks!" roared the Colonel. "You can't learn farming out of a book! What does he know about horses?"

"Oh! He's on to horses all right," Noah grinned ambiguously. "You and I couldn't teach him anything about horses."

"Can he shoot?"

"Can't hit a barn door."

The Colonel heaved a deep sigh, drained the last drops from his tumbler, then leaned forward, confidentially:

"Noah Wicker, do you like that young chap?"

"Like him?" Noah looked up in surprise. "Why, everybody likes Don Morley."

"I don't," said the Colonel fiercely. "Here he comes now. I wish you'd look at that!"

A headlong young man in model riding costume, astride a bob-tailed sorrel, rashly took a fence where gate there was none, and came cantering across the Colonel's favorite stretch of blue grass.

"Awfully sorry to have cut across, Colonel!" he called out in tones that spoke little contrition. "Slipped my trolley as usual and got lost in the bullrushes. Hope I haven't kept Miss Lady waiting?"

The Colonel rose and extended a hand of welcome. A true Kentuckian may commit murder and still be a gentleman, but to fail in hospitality is to forfeit even his own self-respect.

"My daughter, Mr. Morley, will be out presently," he announced with great formality.

"And how are you, Mike?" went on young Morley, stooping to pat the dog; "didn't mean to cut you, old fellow, 'pon my word I didn't."

The dog, a shaggy beast, with small, plaintive eyes looking out from a fringe of wiry hair, expressed his appreciation of this attention with all the emotion a stump of tail would permit.

"It's a bully day!" continued the visitor with enthusiasm, wiping his wrists and forehead, and tossing his hair back. "If I weren't going to town to-night I'd ask you to take me fishing, Colonel. Hello! What kind of a reel is that?"

Now the article which had attracted attention happened to be an invention of the Colonel's, something he had been working on for a long time, so he could not resist explaining its unique qualities.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Morley, turning it over and over admiringly. "If that isn't the cleverest thing I ever saw. This little screw regulates the slack, doesn't it? Does your legal mind get on to that, Wick?"

"It was a great job to get that to fit," said the Colonel, nattered in spite of himself. "Took me the best part of a week to puzzle out that one point."

"A week!" exclaimed Morley. "It would have taken me months! Oh! here she is!" and from the very ardent look that leapt into his face, and the alacrity with which he sprang up, it might have been doubted whether his mind had been wholly upon the matter under discussion.

Miss Lady greeted him with almost boyish frankness, but there was an unmistakable flush under the smooth tan of her cheek that did not escape the vigilant eye of the Colonel.

"Here you are, Dad! here you are, Noah!" she said, tossing a small package to each; "sandwiches and hard boiled eggs for two."

"Put the salt in for the eggs?" asked the Colonel, having had experience with her lunches.

"I believe I did. Open yours and see, Noah. Say, Daddy darling!" she swooped down upon him from the rear, slipping an arm about his neck as he knelt on the porch to collect his hooks and lines, "you are going to let me ride Prince, just this once, aren't you?"

[Illustration: The Colonel leaned back upon his knees and glared at Morley.]

The Colonel gasped, partly from strangulation, and partly from amazement.

"Prince!" he cried. "Well, I reckon not! That colt's hardly broken to the saddle. He threw Jimpson last week."

"Well, I'm not Jimpson. Please, Daddy, just this once."

"If that's the little beast Wick was telling me about," said Morley, "we are certainly not going to trust you on him."

The Colonel leaned back upon his knees where he knelt on the porch, and glared at Morley.

"Who do you mean by we?"

"The conservative party of which I, for once, am a member. From all I can hear of that colt, no girl could handle him."

"You are absolutely mistaken, sir! I taught my daughter to straddle a horse before I taught her to walk. Handle him? Of course she can handle him! Jimpson!" he roared in conclusion, "put the side-saddle on Prince!"

CHAPTER II

The Cane Run Road lay straight ahead, now white under the full light of the sun, now dappled with tiny dancing shadows from the interlaced twigs overhead, new clothed in their garb of green. White and purple violets peeped from the fence corners, and overhead the birds made busy in the branches.

Two young people, flushed and smiling, drew rein and looked at each other. In the eyes of each was a challenge.

"I'll race you to the mill!" cried Miss Lady, tugging at her bridle. "Don't start 'til I give the word. Now, go!"

Off through the smiling, sunlit fields they dashed, too impetuous and young, and gloriously free, to waste a thought on that inexorable wheel of life, upon which sooner or later the most irresponsible must break their wings. On and on they went, neck to neck, the gallop breaking into a run. Down past the blacksmith's, past the old mill which was to have been the goal, through the long covered bridge, over the hill and out again on the level road where they still kept abreast.

And close upon them, with head up and mane flying, came another steed, free, irresponsible, unbridled, invisible. It was Romance, pounding in their wake; Romance, whose hoof beats made their pulses dance in unison, whose breath upon their cheeks made them laugh for joy in the face of the wind.

They were almost to the city now, having reached that slovenly suburb that had given its plebeian name to the once aristocratic

neighborhood. Clouds of dust whirled in their wake, and stones flew right and left under the horses' hoofs; men in carts pulled their teams to the side of the road to let the mad pair pass; dogs dashed from dark doorways, barking furiously.

Suddenly, just as they neared the railroad junction, the sharp whistle of an engine sent Prince plunging into the air. Donald rose in his stirrups and made a frantic clutch at the horse's head, but even as he missed it, he heard the clanging signal for an approaching train and saw the gates immediately in front of them descending. Instantly he flung himself out of the saddle, and sprang for Prince's head. The horse, almost under the nose of the engine, reared frantically, swerved, then came to a trembling stand, as Miss Lady deftly loosened her skirt from the pommel, and swung herself to the ground.

In a second Don was beside her.

"Are you hurt?" he cried, catching her arm with his free hand and looking anxiously into her face.

"Not a bit. Who won?" she asked with a little catch in her voice.

"Lord! You were plucky! If anything had happened to you!" his hand tightened on her wrist, and he drew in his breath sharply.

The afternoon freight came lumbering by, and they stood close together with the hot breath of the engine in their faces. Her hair blew across his face and he could feel her body trembling against his shoulder. Neither of them seemed to be aware of the fact that he still held her hand, and that the horses were tugging at their respective bridles.

As the train thundered past and the gates lifted, Miss Lady turned quickly and began to pin up her loosened hair.

"Pretty narrow shave, Miss," commented a redheaded man with a flag, hurrying across the track, and joining an old apple-woman and two small boys who constituted an interested audience.

"I seen you a-coming an' would 'a' let you through, only I'm a-substitutin' on this job, and wasn't in fer takin' no extry risks."

"Here, boy!" cried Donald, "hold my horse. The girth's broken; I'll have to make another hole in the strap."

The word "boy" being a generic term was promptly appropriated by each of the youngsters as applying to himself, and a fierce scramble ensued in which the larger was victorious.

"Skeeter's it," announced the flagman, a self-constituted umpire. "Git out 'er the way there, Chick, and give the gent a chanct to see what he's a-doin'."

Chick, a large-headed, small-bodied goblin of a boy, made an unintelligible, guttural sound in his throat and remained where he was, evidently considering it of paramount importance that he should see what the gentleman was doing.

It was with some difficulty that the new hole in the strap was made, and to secure the buckle more firmly Don gave it several sharp raps

with the handle of his riding whip. At the last one the silver knob flew from the handle and rolled to the roadside.

In an instant the small boys were after it, the older having deserted his post without compunction, when a question of booty was involved. They grappled together in the dust of the road, long before they reached the prize, and with arms and legs entwined rolled toward it.

Chick was underneath when they arrived, but he loosened his clutch of Skeeter's throat, and darted forth a small, grimy hand that closed upon the treasure. In an instant Skeeter seized upon the clenched fist, and was wrenching it open, when a third party entered the fray.

"The little one got it!" cried Miss Lady indignantly; "he got it first! Give it to him this minute!"

"I be damned if I do!" shouted Skeeter, roused to fury by the combat.

"I'll be damned if you don't," said Miss Lady, equally determined.

The skirmish was fierce but short, and by the time Don got to them, Miss Lady had restored the spoils to the lawful victor, and was assisting the vanquished foe to wipe the dust from his eyes.

"Well, partner," said Donald to Chick, "what have you got to say to the young lady for taking your part?"

"He ain't got nothin' to say," said Skeeter glibly. "He's dumb. Nobody but me can't understand him. He says thank you, ma'am."

Chick having uttered no sound, it was evident that Skeeter depended upon telepathy.

"He's a ash-barrel baby," went on Skeeter, eager to impart information; "he ain't got no real folks, and he's been to the Juvenile Court twict; onct for hopping freights and onct fer me and him smashin' winders."

All eyes were turned upon the hero, who immediately became absorbed in his whip-handle. He was small, and exceedingly thin, and exceedingly dirty. The most conspicuous things about him were his large, wistful eyes, and his broad smile that showed where his teeth were going to be. Across his narrow chest a ragged elbowless coat was hitched together by one button, while a pair of bare, spindling legs dwindled away respectively into a high black shoe, and a low-cut tan one, both of which were well ventilated at the heels.

"I don't believe he's very bad," smiled Miss Lady, catching his chin in her hand and turning his face up to hers. "Are you, Chick?"

He made a queer guttural sound in his throat but, his official interpreter being by this time absorbed in the horses, was unable to make himself understood.

"It must be awful for a boy not to be able to ask questions!" she went on, looking down at him, then seeing something in his face that other people missed, she suddenly drew him to her and gave him a little motherly squeeze.

The ride home was somewhat leisurely, for the accident, slight as it was, had sobered the riders, and there was, moreover, a subject under discussion that called for considerable earnest expostulation on one side, and much tantalizing evasion on the other.

"It all depends upon you," Donald was saying, as they climbed the last hill. "Cropsie Decker starts for the coast to-morrow but the steamer doesn't sail for ten days. Shall I go or stay?"

"But you were so mad about it two weeks ago, you could scarcely wait to start."

"Lots of things can happen in two weeks. Shall I stay?"

"What do your family think about it?"

"My family? Oh, you mean my sister. She doesn't make a habit of losing sleep over my affairs. She'd probably say go. I am rather unpopular with her just now, because I don't approve of this affair between my niece Margery and Fred Dillingham. I fancy she'd be rather relieved to get me out of the way. In fact, everybody says go, except Doctor Queerington. He is a cousin of ours, used to be my English professor, up at the university. He has always harbored the illusion that I can write. Wants me to settle down some place in the country and go at it in earnest."

"You don't mean John Jay Queerington, the author?" Miss Lady said eagerly. "Is he really your cousin? Daddy went to school to his father, and has told me so much about him, that without seeing him, I could write a book on the subject."

"Great old chap in his way, an authority on heaven knows how many subjects, yet he scarcely makes enough money to take care of his children."

"But think of the books he is giving to the world! He told Daddy he was on his thirteenth volume!"

"Yes, he swims around most of the time in a sea of declensions, conjugations, and syntaxes, in Greek, Latin and English."

"I think he's magnificent!" cried Miss Lady, trying to hold Prince down to a walk. "I adore people who do great things and amount to something."

"All of which I suppose is meant to reflect on a poor devil who doesn't do things and doesn't amount to anything?"

"I never said so."

"See here," said Donald whimsically, "for two weeks you have been getting me not to do things. When I think of all the things I have promised you, I can feel my hair turning white. Having polished me off on the don'ts, you aren't going to begin on the do's, are you?"

"Indeed I am. Does Doctor Queerington really think you could be a writer?"

"He has been after me about it ever since I was a youngster. I'm

always scribbling at something, but there is nothing in it. Besides," he added with a smile, "I'm going to be a farmer."

Miss Lady threw back her head and laughed:

"He wants to be a farmer
And with the farmers stand
The hay seed on his forehead
And a rake within his hand."

"Oh! Don Morley, one minute it's the Orient, the next it's literature, and the next a farm; you don't know what you want!"

"Yes, I do, too," he caught her bridle and brought the horses close together. "I know perfectly what I want, and so do you. Haven't I told you four times a day for two weeks?"

She looked away to the far horizon where a bank of formidable clouds was forming:

"Oh, we all think we want things one day and forget about them the next. Life is made up of desires that seem big and vital one minute, and little and absurd the next. I guess we get what's best for us in the end."

"I haven't so far!" Don said fiercely. "I've gotten what was worst for me and I've made the worst of it."

They had turned into the lane now and were walking their horses up to the stile where Jimpson was waiting to take them.

"Don't put my mare up," directed Donald. "I've got to ride back to town to-night. There's rain in those clouds; I ought to be starting this minute."

But his haste was evidently not imperative, for he followed Miss Lady through the narrow winding paths, between a tangle of shrubs and vines, into the old-fashioned flower garden. The spiraea was just putting out its long, feathery plumes of white, and the lilacs nodded white and purple in the breeze.

"Here's the first wild rose!" cried Miss Lady, darting to a corner of the old stone wall; "the idea of its daring to come out so soon!"

He took the frail little blossom and smiled at it half quizzically: "It's funny," he said awkwardly, "your giving me this. You know, it's what you made me think of, the first time I saw you,--a wild rose. Didn't she, Mike?"

Mike, who had been dreaming all afternoon on the porch, had gotten up reluctantly as they passed and followed them. He had a slow, lopsided gait, and his tongue dangled from the side of his mouth. It was evidently a sacrifice for him to accompany them, but duty was duty.

"You angel dog! Come here to your Missus!" commanded Miss Lady, as she and Donald dropped down in the old barrel-stave hammock, that had swung beneath the lilacs since the Colonel was a boy.

But Mike ambled past her, and after snuggling up to Don with a great

show of intimacy lay down at his feet.

"I'm glad somebody loves me," Donald said.

"It's your riding boots, Mike likes. He never had a chance to taste tan shoe polish before!"

"What do you like me for?"

"Me? Who said I did?"

"Don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I like tan boots, too. Why didn't you tell me my hair had tumbled down again?"

"Because you are so beautiful, with it like that, Miss Lady--"

"Now, Don, if you begin again I shall go straight in the house. What did you mean by saying you had gotten what was worst for you, and you had made the worst of it?"

"Oh, the way I've been brought up. You see my sister took me when I was a baby, and I guess I was an awful nuisance to her. She liked to travel, and kept it up a good while even after Margery was born. I grew up in hotels and on steamers and trains, going to school wherever we happened to be staying long enough; sometimes in France, sometimes in Switzerland, sometimes in America. I remember one Christmas when I was about six, we were in a hotel in Paris. My nurse put me to bed early so she could go out with her sweetheart, and told me there wasn't any Santa Claus, so I wouldn't stay awake watching for him. I hate that woman to this day! I can remember the big, lonesome room, and the red curtains, and the crystal chandelier and the way I cried because there wasn't any Santa Claus, and because I didn't have a sweetheart!"

"Poor little chap! It was a mother you wanted."

"Perhaps. Sister was good to me. But she didn't understand me; she never has. She has always given me too much of everything, advice included."

"But since you have been grown, you've had lots of time to--to--take things into your own hands."

"Well, I did for a while. I managed to squeeze through the university, then I went into the shops and had a bully time for five months, but it made no end of a row! Sister felt that after all she had done for me, I oughtn't to go dead against her wishes, and I guess she was right. Then I went into the bank and was beginning to get the hang of things, when she had a nervous collapse and was ordered to Egypt for the winter. My brother-in-law couldn't take her, so he sent me."

"But you stayed longer than she did."

"Yes, I played around on the Riviera for a while."

"And you have been home, how long?"

"Three months. Honestly, I meant to buckle down to something right off, but Cropsie Decker got this offer to go to the Orient for the _Herald-Post_, and asked me to go along. I was keen about it until--until I came down here."

They were both silent for a while, watching a spider that was exploring Don's boot-lace.

"It all seems so footless now. What I want is a house of my own, a home, I mean. I never had much of that sort of thing--I'm not quite sure I knew what a home was until I saw Thornwood."

"Isn't it dear?" asked Miss Lady with a loving look over her shoulder at the old house silhouetted against the sky. "I could kiss every brick of it, I love it so."

"I wish I didn't have to go back to town tonight!" burst out Donald inconsequentially. "I wish I never had to go back to it!"

"Why?"

"Oh, for lots of reasons. I'm a different fellow down here in the country, with things to do, and the right sort of things to think about, and--and you! You see," he smiled without looking up, "I'm not much good in town."

"How do you mean?" asked Miss Lady, with disconcerting frankness.

Donald shrugged his broad shoulders: "Oh! I don't know. I get into things before I know it. This Eastern trip, now; it sounded great when I said I'd go, Cropsie is a regular bird, the best fellow in the world to go on such a lark with, but--"

Miss Lady shot a glance at the handsome, boyish, irresponsible face beside her.

"Don't go, Don!" she whispered impulsively; "stay here and buy your farm!"

"You mean it!" he demanded, seizing her hands. "You want me to stay?"

The blood surged into her cheeks, but she did not withdraw her hands. Into her eager, luminous eyes had leapt the response that had been held in abeyance all afternoon.

"If I stay," he pressed hotly, "if I settle down and behave myself, and make good, you'll promise me--"

"Jimpson!" thundered a familiar voice from the road. "That good-for-nothing, lazy nigger, why don't he come help me with these things? Jimpson!"

"I'll tell him, Dad!" called Miss Lady, springing from the hammock.

"But wait!" pleaded Donald, "just a minute. I've got to beat that storm to town, and tell Decker the trip is off. But I'll be back in the morning! Perhaps to breakfast. Oh, my darling, I am so happy! Say you love me! Say it!"

Old Mike stirred in his slumbers, then opened one eye. It was evidently time for him to take some action. When two young people are standing very close with clasped hands and love-lit eyes in the dim fragrance of an old garden, even a dog of a chaperon knows that it is time to interfere! With great presence of mind he discovered an imaginary squirrel in the hedge directly beside them, and set up such a furious barking that Miss Lady looked around and laughed. For a second she stood, her head thrown back, a teasing, half-shy, half-daring look on her face, then she dropped a swift kiss on the hand that clasped hers, and without a word went flying crimson-cheeked up the lilac-bordered path.

CHAPTER III

Donald Morley rode back to town through the coming storm, in that particular state of ecstasy that mortals are permitted to enjoy but once in a lifetime. Not that falling in love was a novel sensation; on the contrary a varied experience had made him agreeably familiar with all the symptoms. But this, he assured himself with passionate vehemence, was something altogether and absolutely different. Between now and that morning when he had idly ridden out to Wicker's in search of a farm, lay a sea as wide as Destiny!

There in the country he had unexpectedly come upon his fate and with characteristic impetuosity had pursued and overtaken it. Other girls may have stirred his heart, but it had remained for a wild little pagan of the woods to stir his soul. He had laid bare to her the most secret places of his being, had confessed his sins, and received absolution. From this time on the frivolities of youth lay behind him, and ambition sat upon his brow. He would cut out the trip to the Orient, buy a farm and settle down to work as if he hadn't a penny in the world. Once the Colonel was made to recognize his worth, the gates of Paradise would be open!

He thought of the home he would build for her, and the flowers that would encompass it, of the horses and dogs they would have and perhaps--The memory of her face as she clasped Chick in the road flashed over him, and he straightened his shoulders suddenly and smiled almost tremulously. Yes, he'd be worthy of her, from this time forward life should hold no higher privilege!

It was after seven o'clock by the time he reached the Junction, and heavy mutterings of thunder could be heard in the west.

"Does this street go through to the boulevard?" he asked of a man, pointing with his knobless whip.

The lank person addressed removed his weight from the telegraph pole that had supported it and sauntered forward. As he did so Donald recognized the red-headed umpire of the afternoon.

"No, sir, Captain," he said, "it do not. This here is Bean Alley. These city politicians has got their own way of running streets; they take a pencil you see and draw a line along the property of folks that can pay for streets. The balance of us sets in mud puddles." The man

evidently found some difficulty in expressing himself without the assistance of profanity. There were blanks left between the words, which he supplied mentally with compressed lips and lifting of shaggy brows, that served as an effective substitute. His conversation printed would resemble these grammatical exercises, struggled with an early youth, in which "a----dog----attacked a----boy with a----stick."

But his suppressed eloquence was lost upon his hearer, for Donald had become absorbed in a theatrical poster, which represented a preternaturally slim young lady, poised on a champagne bottle, coyly surveying an admiring world through the extended fingers of a small black gloved hand. It was "La Florine," whose charms he had heard recounted times without number by Mr. Cropsie Decker.

This evening, the poster announced, "La Florine" would for the first time in any American city, perform her incomparable dance, "The Serpent of the Nile."

Don had consulted his watch, and made a lightning calculation as to the time in which he could get a bite of supper and reach the Gayety, before he remembered that he was a reformed character. Then he sternly withdrew his gaze from the lady who peeped through her fingers in the dusk, and brought it back to the red-headed person, who had continued his conversation with unbroken volubility.

"... and she says to me," he was concluding "'Mr. Flathers,' she says, 'it's a privelege to help such as you. A man what's been in the gutter times without number, and bore the awful horrors of delirium tremens four times and still can feel the stirrings of Christianity in his bosom.'"

Donald looked at him and laughed. Here was evidently a fellow sinner.

"So you've straightened up, have you? How does it feel?"

Mr. Flathers cast a sidelong glance upward as if to size up the handsome young gentleman on horseback.

"Mighty depressin'," he confessed, "with a thirst that's been accumulatin' for weeks and weeks, and a sick wife, and a adobted child that ain't spoke a word for seven years. But I'm restin' on the Lord. He well pervide."

"Oh, you'll get along!" said Don, feeling uncommonly lenient toward his fellow men. "Here's a dollar if that will help you out a bit."

"It will," said Mr. Flathers reassuringly; "it undoubtably will. I got much to be thankful for, I know that. Fer instance I never was a poor relation! That's more than lots of men kin say! The fact are, there ain't airy one in my whole family connection what's got any more 'n I have!"

The shower that had been threatening began now in earnest, and Donald started toward town at a brisk canter, but before he had gone two squares the rain was driving in sheets across the street, and he was obliged to dismount and seek shelter in the doorway of an isolated building that stood at the end of the common. It was a double door with the upper parts in colored glass, on which was boldly lettered,

The CANT-PASS-IT SALOON.

In one of the windows a placard informed the famishing residents of Billy-goat Hill that their thirst might not be assuaged until after twelve o'clock on Sunday night.

As Donald stood in the doorway, an automobile turned the corner and came to a stop, the lights from the lamps shining on the wet street, and throwing everything outside their radius into sudden darkness.

A man got out of the machine and ran for shelter. He was coughing, and held his collar close about his throat.

"Why, hello, Dillingham," said Morley, recognizing him. "How did you get out here?"

"Joy-riding," said Dillingham with a curl of his lip. "Tried to make a short cut, and got marooned. What are you doing here?"

"I've been out in the country for a couple of weeks. Got caught in the shower. What's the matter? Are you sick?"

Dillingham was leaning against the door jamb, shivering. He was a short, sallow, delicate-looking young fellow with self-explanatory puffs under his somewhat prominent eyes.

"Chilled to the bone," he chattered. "I've got to get something to warm me up. Is this a saloon?"

"Yes, but it's closed. Won't be open until midnight."

Mr. Dillingham made a sweeping condemnation of a city administration that would countenance such a proceeding, then set his wits to work to evade the law.

"Whose joint is this, anyhow?" he asked, glancing up. "Sheeley's? Why, of course. I've been out here to prize fights. He lives somewhere around here. Ugh! but I'm cold. I'll be a corpse this time next week if I don't head off this chill. Let's look him up and get a drink."

Donald hesitated to spring the news of his reformation upon one who was already in a weakened condition. He assured himself that he would refuse when the time came. In the meanwhile no reason presented itself for refusing to assist his friend in quest of a life-preserver.

"Sheeley used to live in one of those shacks over there. It's letting up a bit, suppose we go over?" proposed Dillingham, shaking the water out of his cap.

"Been out to the house to-day?" asked Donald as they splashed through the mud.

"Just came from there. The truth is Margery and I have fixed things up at last. Any congratulations?"

"To be sure," said Donald, extending a wet hand, but frowning into the darkness. "Have you told my sister?"

"Mrs. Sequin?" Dillingham smiled with superior amusement. "I guess she

didn't have to be told. I imagine she thought of it before we did. Rather keen on me, you know, from the start."

Donald drew in his breath but said nothing. Had it not been true, how he would have enjoyed punching Dill's head!

"You get off to the Orient this week, I suppose," went on Dillingham. "Lucky devil! Decker asked me to go along. If it hadn't been for the paternal grandparent I'd have gone in a minute, but he put his foot down. When do you sail?"

"I've given up the trip. I'm going to buy a farm out near the Wickers', and get down to work."

Dillingham whistled incredulously:

"Yes, I see you doing it! You are counting on pulling off the Derby, I suppose?"

"No, I'm not going to enter my horse."

"What! Why Lickety-Split could win that race in a walk. All the crowd say you stand to win. Here, this is the shanty; at least it's where he used to live."

A bright light streamed from the uncurtained window of a small cottage, revealing a family group within. A fat, smiling woman in curl papers, with a baby in her arms, and six youngsters in varying stages of Sabbath cleanliness, hung upon the words of a man who sat in a large, plush self-rocker, and read from a highly colored picture book. In the head of the family Dillingham recognized Richard Sheeley, expugilist, and present proprietor of the Cant-Pass-It.

"Well, if it ain't Mr. Dillingham!" exclaimed Sheeley, throwing open the door in answer to their knock. "Soaked through, ain't you? Little somethin' to warm you up? Sure. Just come in and wait 'til I git on my shoes and find an umbrella and I'll go over with you. Don't keep a drop here," he added in a whisper, behind a hand so large that he evidently regarded it as sound proof. "Missus won't stand fer it, 'count of the kids, eh?"

"That's him, Ma, the one I was telling you about," Richard Sheeley, Jr.,--yclept "Skeeter"--tugged at his mother's sleeve, nodding his head at Donald, who was making love to the smallest and shyest of the daughters of the house.

"She ain't as meek as she looks!" Mrs. Sheeley was saying, as she tried to get the child from behind her skirts. "She's got her popper's temper along with his smartness. They ain't either one of them got a grain of sense when they git mad. I never seen a child with such a temper, did you, Popper?"

But Sheeley did not heed her; he was busy doing the honors to one he evidently considered an honored guest.

"Sit right down here, Mr. Dillingham, lemme take the book out of the chair. I was just reading to the Missus and the kids a book Skeeter brought home from Sunday School, all about Dan'l and the lions' den. Tall tale that, Mr. Dillingham. About one of the raciest animal

articles I ever come across."

When they were ready to go, Mrs. Sheeley followed them anxiously to the door.

"It's a awful stormy night, Popper; you ain't going to stay, are you?"

"Not long. I'll be back to finish the story. So long, kids!" He swung himself down the wooden steps, between his two well-groomed companions, looking back now and then at the bright, open doorway, where the smiling fat woman stood surrounded by half a dozen tow-headed children.

Just as they reached the saloon, the storm, which had evidently only paused for breath, broke in all its fury. The thunder rolled nearer and flashes of lightning pierced the darkness.

"Here! The side door!" shouted Sheeley.

"Wait till I strike a match. I'll take the umbrella. Go right upstairs, if you don't mind. I want you to see the improvements I been making. There ain't a saloon this side the city limits that's got the 'quipment for sparring matches mine has."

"Get busy with some whisky in the meanwhile," reminded Dillingham sharply; "and I say, can't you make a fire somewhere? I'm chattering like an idiot."

"Sure I can. There's a stove up there, and a bottle or two of extra fine liquor. Jes' step right up."

Half way up the ill-lighted stairs they paused. Above the wind and the rain, a curious sound had come from below as if someone had stumbled against something.

"Who is that?" Sheeley demanded sharply, leaning over the banister and peering down into the gloom.

No answer came, but a draught of wind blew in from somewhere, swaying the gas-jet.

"Oh! it's a window that's left open," said Sheeley. "That fool bartender! I'll just go down and fasten it."

The lock proved stubborn, and it was with some difficulty that he forced it into place. Meanwhile the two young men had lit the gas in the large upper room and were inspecting the elevated stage where boxers were wont to engage surreptitiously in the noble art of self-defense.

"Take yours straight I believe, Mr. Dillingham?" said Sheeley, rejoining them; "an' yer gentleman friend?"

"Nothing for me," said Morley with unnecessary firmness. "I'll just wait a second until the storm lets up, then be off to town."

"Do any boxing these days, Dick?" asked Dillingham, pouring himself a second drink of whisky, as he hovered over the newly kindled fire.

"Oh! I don the mitts occasionally to gratify me friends. My long suit these days is faro; more money in it."

Donald, standing at the window, staring out at the wild night, drummed impatiently on the pane.

"Hurry up, Dill," he said. "I don't want to keep my mare standing so long in the rain."

"Your mare be hanged," said Dillingham; "just wait ten minutes until I get thawed out, and I'll go with you."

Donald had waited ten minutes for Dill before, but never with the present sense of responsibility, born of his new connection with the family. He knew that his only chance of getting him home was to humor him.

How the wind whistled across the window! He wondered what Miss Lady was doing? Was she sitting by the table in the cozy living-room at Thornwood, with the lamplight on her hair? Was she at the harpsichord, singing to the Colonel? Was she standing, as he was standing, at the window, peering out into the wild night, and thinking,--and longing--?

"What's the matter with a little game of poker?" asked Sheeley, lightly running a deck of cards up the length of his arm and reversing them with a deftness that spoke of long familiarity.

"Great idea!" exclaimed Dillingham expansively. "Just pass that bottle, will you? What's that, Morley? Haven't got time? What in thunder's the matter with you to-night?"

Donald retorted, with great dignity, that nothing in thunder was the matter with him, except that he wanted to get back to town.

"Better not start with it storming like this," urged Sheeley, as a crash of thunder shook the windows. "It'll let up soon."

"Tell you what I'll do!" said Dillingham, putting an arm across Donald's shoulder affectionately, and speaking a trifle unsteadily. "If you'll play a couple of games I'll go home with you--You ought to be willing to do that for a fellow that's going to be your uncle. I mean your nephew."

"And you'll go the minute the rain lets up?"

"Yes, if you'll play with us."

Donald stood irresolute, watching Dillingham's thin, unsteady fingers shuffle the cards. He must get him home somehow, for Margery's sake. Dill never knew when to stop, he was good for the night unless somebody intervened.

Sheeley caught his eye and nodded significantly.

"All right!" said Donald, dropping into the vacant chair. "Only two games remember! No whisky, thanks. What's the ante?"

CHAPTER IV

When Miss Lady had championed the cause of the oppressed that afternoon, she had unknowingly spoiled a criminal in the making. Chick Flathers, at the advanced age of eleven, had been so impressed by the injustice of social conditions that he had dedicated himself to a life of crime. He had already achieved two appearances in the Juvenile Court, and two days in the Detention Home. He was now fully decided to be a burglar.

To be sure there were extenuating circumstances for Chick. It was unquestionably a handicap to have opened his eyes for the first time in an ash barrel, and in Mr. Flathers' ash barrel at that. The transfer in a patrol wagon to an incubator in the City Hospital had been the next move, hence back to Mr. Flathers' who, inasmuch as it was his ash barrel, felt called upon by Providence to adopt the foundling.

The next misfortune that befell him was in being dropped out of the window on his head, during one of Maria Flathers' absent-minded moments. This apparently did not affect his head, but in time it seriously affected his speech. The fact that he had so much to say, without being able to say it, resulted in a dammed-up current that sometimes overflowed in temper and viciousness. He talked a great deal, but nobody was able, or took the pains to try, to understand him. That is, not until Skeeter Sheeley gave him his nickname and became his official interpreter.

Their friendship dated from a memorable day when Skeeter had for the first time heard of the incubator incident, and had promptly accosted the Flathers' foundling as "Chicken." The insult had been instantly resented in a battle so fierce and so bloody, that the details of it became historic in the annals of Billy-goat Hill. Chick, though of lighter weight, and feeble muscle, was armed with righteous indignation. He observed no rules, but fought with arms, legs, teeth and nails. The odds were against him however, and he had to be assisted from the field, a vanquished hero.

From that time on, by one of those mysterious laws that govern boydom, the two were inseparable companions, waging open war on all adjoining neighborhoods, engaging in predatory expeditions in their own, and, when interest in life flagged, fighting each other.

Skeeter interpreted all that Chick said, interpreted it freely, and with imagination, and Chick apparently considered himself honor bound to accept the interpretation and stand for it, no matter how far it came from expressing his meaning.

Eleven years of wickedness had thus been swaggered through when Chick suddenly and unexpectedly fell in love. It was when the beautiful young lady at the railroad crossing had bent above him like a succoring angel, that he had been forced to change his classification of the human race. Hitherto it had been divided into grown people and children, henceforth it was divided into men and women!

All that Sunday afternoon he went about in a dream. He could not get over the fact that she had taken his part, that she had put her arm

around him, and smiled at him. Once or twice when nobody was looking, he put his very dirty hand on his cheek and felt the spot where her fingers had rested.

But this new and tender emotion was not allowed to interfere with the special project that Chick had in mind. It was a project so colossal in its nature, that not even Skeeter was to be admitted to the secret. For six weeks Chick had been the victim of a gaming system, and to-night he was to take his revenge.

At supper time Skeeter recognized a convention of civilization and repaired to the bosom of his family, but Chick being accountable to nobody, and recognizing no conventions, stole a couple of apples from a passing cart, and repaired to the dump heap to wait for the dark.

He had not long to wait, for great black clouds were covering the sky, and he could no longer see the houses at the end of the alley. Carefully storing his apple cores in his pocket for future trades, he picked his way over the tin cans and debris, until he reached the Junction. Here he hesitated. It was there that he and Skeeter had tussled for the whip. It was here that the young lady had come to his rescue, and said she didn't believe he was so very bad. Gee! but she was a pretty young lady, and her hand was so soft, and her voice--

Chick rammed his hands in his pockets and pulled his cap over his eyes. This was no way for a cove to be feeling when he had a job to do! With watchful eyes for passers-by, he slipped through an opening in the fence, and entered the switch-yard. When he emerged he staggered under the weight of a crowbar which he vainly tried to hide under his ragged jacket.

Just at the intersection of Bean Alley and the switch-yard, where the dusk banked up densely in the corners, he stopped again. He was watching his chance to get across the wide common, undetected. Twice he started, and twice he shrank back and flattened himself against the wall as some one passed.

If, to the casual observer, Chick was but a dirty, ragged little boy, undersized and underfed, and rather frightened, to himself at least he was a bold desperado, about to avenge himself for a wrong committed.

Thunder muttered ominously, and a drop of rain fell on his face as he skirted the common, and reached the big, dark saloon at the cross-roads. Skirting the side wall, he crept to the rear, and felt for the open window which he had discovered earlier in the day. It was a low window and easy of access, and he lost no time in climbing in.

The passage was in utter darkness, but he felt his way along the wall until he reached a door. Here he fumbled for the knob and opened it. A street lamp outside threw a dim, wavering light into the room, revealing the long bar with its shining fixtures. Chick put down his crowbar and tremblingly removed his coat. According to the moving pictures of criminals, that was the first move. Then he resolutely grasped his weapon and with thumping heart approached his enemy.

It appeared a very innocent enemy as it stood there in the half light, announcing in printed letters across its face, that seven out of every ten persons who put a nickel in the slot, received a prize in money. But Chick knew that it lied! Had it not eaten up his nickels week

after week? Had he not worked for it, fought for it, and bled for it, confidently believing that the prize would be his? And there it stood gorged with his precious nickels, mysterious and fascinating still, but treacherous through and through!

In a blaze of wrath Chick dealt it a sounding blow with the crowbar, then crouched in terror for what might happen. There was no sound but the dash of rain against the windows, and the heavy rumble of thunder overhead. Once more Chick grasped his heavy weapon and began the attack in earnest. Blow followed blow, as fast as his small arms could swing the crowbar. Suddenly a spring seemed to snap, and out poured a stream of money that rolled about his feet, and off into the farthest corners of the room.

Chick crouched on the floor, overcome by his exertions and the success of his venture. Wealth was within his reach, more wealth than he had ever dreamed of! Not unintelligible gold and silver, but dear, familiar nickels, whose purchasing power he knew. But no thought of appropriation crossed his mind as he knelt there, fingering the glittering pile. He was carefully counting out his rightful share, the eleven nickels that the slot machine had stolen from him, and his hesitation came from the fact that he was trying to select the shiniest ones!

Having gotten what he came for, he once more shouldered his crowbar, and let himself out into the dark passage. Here he stopped in terror! Something was snorting and hissing without, something that sounded as if it might be the Devil!

In Chick's creed there was but one affirmation. He believed absolutely in the Devil. He knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that he was red, and cloven-footed and that his tail ended in a hard, sharp, spike, like Mammy Flathers' ice-pick. He also knew that when he breathed, it was in groans and hisses, such as he was hearing at the present moment. Chick's hair would have risen on his head, it wanted to, but it was not long enough.

For a moment he stood breathless, then he drew a sigh of relief. It wasn't anything but an automobile after all! He tiptoed to a window and peered out. The lamps from the machine threw long lights across the shining wet street, but nothing else was visible.

After a long while he heard voices at the side door. Somebody was coming into the saloon! He could hear the doorknob turning, and a key in the latch. He started back to the barroom, then remembering a little closet under the steps where he and Skeeter used to play, he felt along the wall. There it was! And just in time for him to stumble in and pull the door to, leaving enough crack to breathe through, in case his breath ever came back.

The side door was flung open, and the sputter of a match was followed by the feeble light from a gas-jet at the end of the passage.

"Here, I'll take the umbrella!" said a voice he dreaded next to the Devil's. It was Sheeley; he would go into the barroom, and discover the wreckage of the slot-machine! Chick was beginning to feel the handcuffs on his wrists, when he became aware of ascending footsteps overhead. What were they going up-stairs for? Was it a sparring match? Forgetting his precarious position he leaned forward to listen,

upsetting a box on the shelf beside him.

"Who's that?" came in Sheeley's fiercest tones from the stairway above, and Chick cowered back into the dark with chattering teeth. Then he heard him say something about the window, and followed the sound of his heavy footsteps down the stairs and up again.

Now was his chance to escape while they were up-stairs. With utmost caution he pushed open the closet door, and on hands and knees began his perilous journey to the window. It was at that moment that he decided positively that he would not be a burglar. A plumber took fewer risks, and made more money. Once at the window he was unable to budge the lock. Standing on the sill, whimpering with fear, he wrestled with it frantically, bruising his fingers, and tearing his nails, but he could not move it. Then he tried the door but Sheeley had evidently locked it and taken out the key.

A blinding flash of lightning sent him scurrying back to his hiding-place, where he sank on the floor, shivering and cringing. Nearer and nearer roared the thunder, and the wind seemed as anxious to get into the house as he was eager to get out of it. Gradually his arms and legs ceased jerking, his head relaxed against an empty box, he laid his hand against the cheek that had been patted and forgot his troubles in sleep.

When he awoke he heard loud voices overhead. At first he supposed he was at home, and that the voice was only Mr. Flathers enjoying one of his periodical backslidings. But Dick Sheeley's voice recalled him; Dick was mad at somebody, and when Dick got mad he fought. Not a boy on Billy-goat Hill but would have faced death to see the ex-prizefighter in a row. It was a distinction that placed one at a bound in the front ranks of juvenile aristocracy.

Chick crept from his hiding-place and listened. The voices grew louder and more excited. Drawn as by a magnet he slipped up the stairs step by step. At the top was an off-set in the hall, a corner in which he could hide, unseen from the open door beyond. There he lay on his stomach and wriggled forward until his eye was on a line with the crack in the half-open door.

Three men were sitting around a card table, two of them with their backs to him; and Dick facing them with his jaw set and his teeth showing. All three were talking at once, and Dick was the most excited of the three.

"You didn't have no ace of spades to show down! You discarded it. You know you did, you--cheat!" He had risen and was shaking his fist in the face of the thin young man.

"It's a lie, you common curl!" cried the other wildly, but before the words were well out of his mouth, Sheeley's mighty right arm had shot out across the table and struck him in the face.

"Sheeley! For God's sake, don't you see Dillingham's drunk?" protested the other young man whom Chick recognized as his friend of the afternoon.

"Drunk or no drunk, he can't call me a liar!" yelled Sheeley, and the next instant Chick, with his heart pounding madly between him and the

floor, was in his element. It was a fight! A real one, in which the hero of Billy-goat Hill held his own against two opponents.

The tumblers and the whisky bottles went first, the liquor dripping from the table to floor; then a chair was overturned, and a window-pane shattered to the ground below.

The thin young man hadn't sense to stop; again and again he flung his insults at the infuriated Sheeley, impatiently fighting off the efforts of his companion who sought to part them. Suddenly Chick saw him step back, while the others were grappling, and fumble in his rear pocket. He saw him steady himself against the door jamb, not four feet away, and raise a pistol. There was a sharp report, a smothered groan, then a heavy fall.

The man with the pistol flung it through the broken window, then staggered to the table where he sank down with his head on his arms.

What had happened in the corner, Chick could not tell, but in a few minutes _his_ young man came swiftly into his line of vision, and shook the limp figure half lying on the table.

"Get up, Dill! For God's sake! Are you too drunk to crank up your machine? As soon as I can get that blood stopped I must go for a doctor."

The dazed eyes of the drunken man looked at him in helpless terror!

"I can't stay here!"

[Illustration: There was a sharp report, a smothered groan, then a heavy fall.]

"You've got to stay here! Can't you see you are in no fix to run a machine? Brace up, you idiot; we've got to _do_ something and do it quick. Go down and try to crank up. Here's the door key! I'll be there as soon as I can get the blood stopped!"

The man at the table staggered to the door, passed through the hall, so close to Chick that he almost trod upon him, then went swaying down the stairs, steadying himself by wall and banister. Chick heard the side door slam, and the chug of the machine, then realized that it was turning the corner.

The young man in the room rushed frantically to the window and leaned out, then he said something savage under his breath, and plunged out into the passage and headlong down the steps. Chick heard the side door bang again, and a moment later the gallop of a horse.

Then everything was still, but the noisy beating of his heart that threatened to burst its confines. Through the crack he saw the table with its broken tumblers, and the whisky drip, dripping on the floor; he saw the chairs overturned, and the gas-jet flickering in the wind from the broken window.

The thing he could not see was what lay in the corner, the huddled-up, blood-stained hulk of a something for which a smiling, fat woman and six tow-headed youngsters were waiting across the common. Chick crawled to the head of the stairs, and as he reached the top step his

hand touched a hard object. He picked it up and held it to the light, and as he did so, the joy that often blossoms on the brink of tragedy was his for a moment. It was the riding whip whose handle he had fallen heir to that afternoon!

Down the steps, through the door and out into the rain-soaked night he sped; across the common, through the switch-yard, and down the narrow, noisome darkness of Bean Alley. Over a ram-shackled fence, and up a dilapidated porch he clambered like a cat, until he reached the small loft in the Flathers' two-roomed mansion which he called home.

Here the hardened criminal, the breaker of laws, and of slot machines, the would-be burglar, threw himself upon an old mattress, and with two grimy fists in his eyes sobbed out his heart to the rafters above.

It was not repentance for his sins, neither was it terror of the secret that was locked behind his inarticulate lips, although both of them had a part. It was because a beautiful young lady had taken his part, and put her arms about him, and refused to believe that he was as bad as Skeeter Sheeley said he was.

CHAPTER V

During the rest of the week the rainstorm, that had started all the trouble, continued to hover ominously, breaking forth day after day in fierce, petulant showers. Out at Thornwood the aspect was most dreary; the low-lying ground in front of the house was under water for a quarter of a mile, trees, limp and draggled, stood disconsolate in an unfamiliar lake, the bridge below the dam was washed away, and horses going to the creek for water were constantly being caught by the current, and having to be rescued by ropes. In the flower garden dirty-faced little blossoms lay in the mud, vines trailed across the paths, all the fragrance and color seemed to be soaked out of everything by those continuous, pelting showers.

Within the house it was not much gayer. The front hall, with its steep, narrow stairway, and floor-covering of highly ornate landscape oilcloth, was in a perpetual twilight. An occasional glint from white woodwork, or the gold molding of a picture, strove in vain to dispel the gloom. The parlor, at the right of the hall, was sepulchral with its window cracks stuffed with paper, and the shutters securely closed. To be sure, the living-room on the other side of the hall did its best to look cheerful, but even that comfortable spot with its low ceiling and battered mahogany furniture, its high cupboards flanking the wide, stone fireplace, and its friendly litter of every-day necessities, was not equal to the occasion.

One afternoon when the Colonel came in from the chicken yard where he and Uncle Jimpson had constituted themselves a salvage corps, he surprised Miss Lady sitting in the dusk on the floor before the empty fireplace, with suspicious traces of tears upon her face.

"Make a light," blustered the Colonel; "you mustn't sit around in the dark like this, you know. Where's my pipe?"

She sprang up and found the missing article, and with a great show of cheerfulness lit the lamp and held the match out for him to light his pipe.

"What's the matter?" asked the Colonel; "sort of trembly, ain't you?"

"Me? Watch me!" She held the match very straight and very tight, then as it wavered, blew it out and dropped it down his sleeve. "There's some mail over there on the table for you, Daddy dear. Noah brought it down from town in his buggy."

She said it very carelessly, and even enumerated the contents as she handed it to him:

"Two circulars, a letter from the seed man, the _Confederate Veteran_ and the newspapers."

"Nothing for you?"

"Nothing."

Under his scrutiny Miss Lady's eyes fell, and she turned abruptly to the window, while the Colonel, mouth open, pipe in hand, watched her.

He had never seen his girl like this in her life! What business had her lip to tremble in the middle of a sentence, or her eyes to brim with sudden tears, making her turn her back on her adoring Dad, and busy herself with the window curtain?

Of course it is upsetting to have a friend, whom you have been seeing daily for a couple of weeks, get into trouble such as young Donald Morley had fallen into. It made even the Colonel feel bad, he didn't deny it. But what business had the kitten to be taking it all so to heart? Why was she called upon to champion this young stranger's cause so hotly, to resent every insinuation, and to contend! passionately that he would be able to explain everything? Morley had not explained. Three days had dragged past and nothing had been heard from him. Nothing probably would be heard from him! The Colonel wanted to feel victorious, but he did! not. Instead, he cast anxious and sympathetic glances at the back of his daughter's head, and surreptitiously wiped his small snub nose on the corner of his red-bordered handkerchief.

He had a good mind to give up his trip to Virginia! To be sure, he had looked forward for months to celebrating Founders' Day at the old college. If it weren't for seeing all the old boys, he would stay at home. By George! the little girl came first; he would stay at home anyhow!

"Those gloves," he burst out by way of breaking the news; "the thin ones I told you to mend. Well, you needn't mend them."

"I haven't," said Miss Lady, "but I'll do it now."

"Needn't mind. Won't need 'em. Fact is, I ain't going."

"Yes you are," said Miss Lady, adding inconsequently, "Why not?"

"Needed here at home. Roads washed out, everything out of fix. Decided to stay at home." Miss Lady wheeled from the window where she had been

tracing the raindrops on the pane, and made a rush for him, establishing herself on his lap, as far as one could establish oneself on such a perpendicular surface.

"You are not going to do anything of the kind. Uncle Jimpson is going to drive you in to town to catch the first train in the morning."

"I ain't going," insisted the Colonel, shaking his head doggedly.

"Yes you are. Where's your traveling bag?"

"On the top shelf of the cupboard. But I'm not going." He said it firmly, but the next instant he asked, "Did Jimpson press my gray suit?"

"Oh! Squire Daddy, I'm so sorry I forgot to tell him! I'll tell him now."

"Too late!" the Colonel sighed in resignation; "no use talking any more about it."

"Yes there is! Your enthusiasm's just gotten damp like everything else. I am going to tell Uncle Jimpson to make a little fire to cheer us up, then we'll all go to work to get you ready."

It seemed to be a relief to her to bustle about and set things in motion. In a short while she had a cheerful blaze going on the hearth, and the curtains drawn against the dreary twilight without.

The Colonel sat in the middle of the room, watching Uncle Jimpson and Aunt Caroline collect his scattered wardrobe, keeping a vigilant eye meanwhile upon Miss Lady. He simply did not intend to have her unhappy! It was preposterous! Altogether out of the question! His little girl crying around in corners where he couldn't see her? The idea of such a thing! If she must cry, what was the matter with his shoulder?

"You ain't got but four hankchiefs in de wash, Cunnel," announced Aunt Caroline from her knees beside a large wicker basket. "Don't look lak dat's enough fer a white gem-man to start off on a trip wif."

"Jimpson," the Colonel looked up reproachfully, "did you hear that? You have actually let me get down to four handkerchiefs."

"And socks," continued Caroline, enjoying the opportunity of emphasizing the shortcomings of her lesser half, "'bout sebenteen, all singles. No two scarcely de same color."

"Miss Lady, she been 'cumulatin' 'em to darn 'em," explained Jimpson, glad to shift responsibility. "She 'low she gwine to tak a day off some o' dese days, an' mend up ever'thing in de house."

The Colonel glanced around: "Where is Miss Lady?"

"Out in de hall, readin' de evenin' paper. Nebber did see dat chile tek so much notice ob de newspaper. Yas, sir, I'll call her."

"Any later news of the shooting?" asked the Colonel casually, when she returned.

"Yes, Mr. Dillingham was indicted and arraigned before the court. The case was passed until June first."

"And Sheeley? What of his condition?"

"The paper says he will lose his eye, but that he will probably get well."

"And--and nothing has been heard of Morley?"

"Not yet."

After supper, when all the preparations for the trip were completed, and the cheerful presence of Uncle Jimpson and Aunt Caroline removed, the Colonel and Miss Lady sat before the dying fire, and tried to make conversation. Outside wet branches swept the windows, and sudden gusts of rain beat against the panes.

"Thirty years since I saw some of the old boys," the Colonel said, trying to warm up to his coming journey. "I'll miss old Professor Queerington, but John Jay will be there. We are planning to come home together. Fine man, he is, fine man!"

"Who? Oh, yes, Doctor Queerington."

"Just a little boy when I boarded at his father's. He can't be much over forty now. The smartest man the old college ever turned out! And just as good as he's smart. A little too much book learning maybe, and not any too much common sense, but there ain't many heads built to carry both. He's sound though, sound to the core, and that's saying a good deal these days. What's the matter? Sleepy?"

"No, just the fidgets. Say, Daddy, what do you suppose they will do with Mr. Dillingham, if he is convicted?"

"Penitentiary offense, I hear. But Noah says they'll get him off. Old General Dillingham has plenty of money, and friends at court. He'll take care of his grandson."

"But if he is cleared," began Miss Lady, "that throws the guilt on--"

"Now see here," interrupted the Colonel, "you stop bothering your little head about that trial. Go over there and play me a couple of good old tunes, and then we'll both trot to bed."

Miss Lady's soft untrained voice began bravely enough. She described with feeling the charms of Annie Laurie, and was half way through Robin Adair before she faltered, started anew, stumbled again, then came to an ignominious halt.

"Tut! tut!" said the Colonel fussily, getting himself out of his chair in an incredibly short time for so stout a gentleman. "This won't do, you know; this ain't right!"

"It's that silly old piece!" said Miss Lady petulantly. "It always works on my feelings."

"But it wouldn't make you cry like this. Come, tell me."

"There's nothing to tell--that is--"

"Well, never mind then. Just cry it out. That's right. Don't mind me. Just your old Dad." And with much fussing and petting and foolish assurances that he was her Daddy, he got her over to the sofa. Sitting on the floor with her arms across his knees, she wept with the abandonment of a child, while his short, stubby fingers tenderly stroked her shining hair. At last when the storm had subsided and she was able to look up, he took her face between his hands.

"Out with it, kitten!" he demanded. "What's troubling you? Don Morley business?"

She kissed his nearest hand.

"Thought so. You--you got to like him pretty well, eh?"

She nodded between her sobs.

"Better 'n most anybody?" he asked it jealously, but unflinchingly.

"Except you, Daddy." It was a faint whisper, but it was reassuring.

"And what about him?" the Colonel continued.

Another burst of tears, then a resolute effort at self-control.

"He meant to do what's right. I know he did! He promised to give up drinking and gambling and go to work."

"He made a good start!" The Colonel knocked the ashes from his pipe. "And after he got into the fracas, what in thunder did he run away for? Why didn't he stay and face it out? Any fool would know that if Dillingham is cleared, the suspicion would all be on him."

"But, Daddy, we haven't heard his side yet. If I could just hear from him, or see him."

"See him!" he exploded. "What in the name of the devil do you want to see him for? No siree! Not while Bob Carsey's got any buckshot left in his gun! Do you think there's any chance of his prowling 'round here while I'm gone? That settles it! I'll not budge an inch. Tell Jimpson! Tell Caroline! Unpack my things."

"But, Daddy, wait! He is probably out at the coast by this time. Besides, he hasn't written or sent any word. How do we know that... that he wants to come back?" "He'll try it all right. I saw how things were going. I saw how he looked at you. The impudent young hound!"

"Daddy! Please don't! You don't know him. He will explain everything when he writes, I know he will!"

"But he won't write! He won't have the face to. The idea of his going straight off from my girl, and getting mixed up in a scrape like this! You've got to promise me never to speak to the young scoundrel again!"

"But if he explains?"

"Why hasn't he done so? Because he can't. Besides, I don't want him to. We are through with him from now on. Promise me never to have anything more to do with him."

She hesitated, and the Colonel began to fling the things out of his bag in great agitation.

"Please, Squire Daddy!" She caught his hands, and looked at him, and something in her pleading eyes and quivering lips was so reminiscent of another face he had loved, that he broke down completely and had to have recourse to one of his four clean handkerchiefs that were still in the bag.

He was an old fool, he declared between violent blowings of his nose, and clearings of his throat. Was only doing what he thought was his duty. Didn't mean to make her unhappy. Didn't have sense enough to bring up a girl. Had tried to, though! Always would try. Only she mustn't be unhappy; he couldn't stand that. It would kill him if she dared to be unhappy!

And Miss Lady with her arms about his neck, making futile dabs at his streaming eyes with her little wet knot of a handkerchief, passionately declared that she would promise him anything under the sun, that she was going to be happy, that she was happy!

"Not yet," said the Colonel, with much mopping of his brow; "but you will be! We'll straighten it out. Soon as I get back, I'll take the matter up. Sift it clean to the bottom. We'll give Morley every chance to square himself. But 'til then, you won't see him if you can help it, or read his letters, if he writes? You don't mind promising me that much, do you?"

"I promise, Daddy."

Oh! the promises made for a day, and kept through the years, what a lot of tangled lives they have to answer for!

Miss Lady put the Colonel's things back in his bag, and stooped to kiss him good night.

"Sure you don't mind my going?", he asked, studying her face. "I'll be back Saturday night."

"All right. Good-by, I won't be up in the morning when you start. Have a good time, Daddy dear, and--and don't worry about me."

He lit her candle for her and carried it to the steps where he kissed her again.

"My little girl," he whispered.

The house grew still. Out on the landing the tall clock ticked off the hours to midnight; the fire died to an ember; from the porch without came the drip, drip, drip of the gutter. Still the Colonel sat in his split-bottom chair, his little eyes like watch fires in the gloom, listening for the faintest sound of restlessness from the room above.

CHAPTER VI

The sudden light of publicity that had fallen upon the Cant-Pass-It saloon sent a glow over that entire region of Billy-goat Hill. Everybody had something to talk about, and everybody talked, except Chick.

Phineas Flathers appointed himself headquarters for information, and devoted himself exclusively to arguing about the matter. Myrtella, his twin sister, who for fifteen years had presided over innumerable cooking ranges throughout the city, almost lost her new place through her interest in the affair.

The one subject upon which Myrtella Flathers considered herself a connoisseur was murder. In sundry third floors back, she had for years followed the current casualties with burning interest. Realism, romance, intrigue, adventure, she found them all, in these grim recitals of daily crime.

Myrtella and Phineas Flathers had been cast into the sea of life at an early age to sink or swim as they saw fit. Myrtella had survived by combating the waves, while Phineas adopted the less arduous expedient of floating.

To him work appeared a wholly artificial and abnormal action, self-imposed and unnecessary. The stage of life presented so many opportunities for him to exercise his histrionic ability, that the idea of settling down to a routine of labor seemed a waste of talent. With far-reaching discernment he had early perceived that a straight part was not for him.

In casting about for a field that promised the widest opportunity for his talent, he discovered the Immanuel Church in the city. Here philanthropy burned with such zealous enthusiasm that the harvest was not sufficient for the laborers. Phineas saw his chance and grasped it. He became a Prodigal Son.

From that time on his sole vocation was attending church. Three times a week, regardless of the inclemency of the weather, he unwound his long legs from the chair rungs in the Cant-Pass-It, carefully smoothed his red hair, and made his way to a front pew in the Immanuel Church. At intervals, calculated to a nicety, he fell from grace, and was reclaimed, passing from periods of grave backsliding into periods of great religious fervor. Meanwhile he followed the Scriptures literally and took no thought of the morrow. His reliance in Providence and the Ladies' Aid became, in time, absolute.

Nor did Phineas Flathers' self-respect suffer in the least by this mode of living. In no sense did he consider himself an incumbent. Did he not three times a week give a masterly presentation of "our needy poor," "our brother-in-misfortune"? Did he not freely offer up his family for each new church society to cut its wisdom teeth upon? Had Maria, his wife, not labored wearily through unintelligible tracts, and Chick, his adopted son, done penance in Sunday School, as often as three Sundays in succession? Considering all things, Phineas felt that the church got a great deal for its money.

Myrtella Flathers, following another method, had for fifteen years fought every obstacle that crossed her path. She had left in her wake traditions of unexcelled cooking, and unparalleled cleanliness, together with a vanquished army of mistresses, housemaids, laundresses, and butlers. She belonged to the order of Cooks Militant, and she had long since won her spurs.

Among the things which Myrtella in her sweeping condemnation of life in general disapproved, none loomed larger than her brother and his family. But the bond of blood, stronger than likes or dislikes, favor or prejudice, brought her back to him again and again, to share with him her substance, and to criticize his conduct.

On this particular afternoon she had started out for Billy-goat Hill to hear about the shooting, and to break the news to the family, that she had gotten a new place. This happened with such regularity, that it would not have deserved attention, had not the astounding fact to be added that Myrtella was pleased. In her fifteen years of rebellious services she had never before approximated a place that gave satisfaction. To be sure there were dark and not-to-be-remembered instances where she had failed to give satisfaction herself, but usually it was the place, "the new place," with its varying code of musts and must-nots, that caused Myrtella to spend many of her days in the Intelligence Office, or on street-cars, or tramping through the streets in quest of that ever elusive "good home."

She had started out on her pilgrimage in a fairly equable frame of mind, but before she got well under way, the wind had made her furious. It was a frisky March breeze that had gotten left behind and now wandered into May, bent on mischief.

Myrtella tacked into it, like a sailing sloop, full rigged and all sails set, an angular, heavy-set person with a belligerent expression strangely at variance with the embarrassed, almost timid movements of her hands and feet. Short locks of straight black hair whipped across her face, her skirts, blown tightly back against her knees, bellied in the wind, while her wide-brimmed hat caught the full force of the blast, like a veritable top-sail.

By the time she had taken three tacks to cross the common, and was ready to come about at the corner, there was a balloon jibe, that sent the sails all flapping against the mast, and left her in such a flurry of indignation, that she failed to see a string that stretched its insidious length, two inches above the pavement, from fence to curb.

After her fall, instead of expiring of apoplexy, as might have been expected from her countenance, Myrtella picked herself up from the pavement and, peeping through a crack in the fence, smiled. It was an expression so unfamiliar to her features that they scarcely knew how to manage it.

"I see you, Chick!" she said in a voice that strove to be gentle; "why don't you come on out here and speak to me?"

Chick and Skeeter, recognized a significant bulge to the string bag which she carried, scrambled forth, the former skilfully evading her outstretched arm of welcome.

"He says," interposed the ever-ready Skeeter, as his companion made

queer noises in his throat, "that he never knowed it was you. He never went to trip you up. Honest to goodness! You ain't mad, are you?"

"No, I ain't mad." Myrtella still smiled as she brushed the dust from her skirt. "Here's a orange I brought you, Chick. You ain't been sick, have you?"

"Naw! He ain't been sick, but he took that bath you ast him to, and where's his nickel at?"

Myrtella stood and watched the boys until the corner grocery swallowed them and their new nickel, then she sighed and turned into Bean Alley.

There were no streets here, and an occasional rock or tin can were the only islands in a sea of mud. The Flathers' cottage, consisting of two rooms and a half attic, rested its weight against the cottage next it, with something of the blind reliance that Phineas Flathers rested upon the Church. On its other side it commanded an uninterrupted view of the Dump Heap, which was the background for all the juvenile social life of that section of Billy-goat Hill.

Here ships were launched in mud puddles, flower gardens attempted in tin cans, and fierce wars waged between rival gangs; here embryo mothers played with stick and rag dolls, and aspirants for the circus performed acrobatic feats on the one bit of fence that had not tumbled down. And all this activity went on almost under the wheels of the dump carts that passed to and fro all day. Myrtella, picking her way through the mud, was just turning the corner of the Flathers' house when her eyes fell upon a broken window-pane stuffed with a woolen skirt which she had given to Maria to make over into trousers for Chick. She promptly jerked it out with a force that brought the glass with it, and by the time she reached the back door, her jaw was set and her brows knit.

Considering the fact that the rear room was a composite kitchen, laundry, dining-room, pantry, coal house and cellar, the glances with which Myrtella swept the chamber and its one occupant, might have been a trifle less severe. It was a glance in which her individual abhorrence of dirt combined with her racial disapproval of "in-laws."

In the one space in the room that was not preempted, Maria Flathers bent above a wash tub, feebly persuading black garments to become gray. That was all she asked of them. She was not ambitious. Ambition, like everything else, had been soaked out of her long ago by those hot, steaming suds that enveloped her the greater part of her waking hours, and left her physically, mentally, and morally limp. Her one strong instinct was motherhood; but five little Flathers, opening feeble eyes on their future environment, had become so discouraged that they promptly closed them again. It was as if they really could not stand the prospect of life in that home with Mr. and Mrs. Flathers for parents!

Only Chick survived, the ash-barrel baby, who really was not theirs at all, but who having begun life in their back yard, continued as everything else continued when once established at the Flathers', for the simple reason that no one ever took the trouble to change the existing disorder of things.

As Myrtella sailed wrathfully into port and docked at the door-step,

Maria looked up with a gasp:

"Law! Myrtella, you gimme a turn. I forgot this here was your afternoon off. I thought sure you was Sheeley's rent man."

"Sheeley's?" repeated Myrtella, her curiosity getting the better of her temper, as she removed an old shoe and a flour sifter from the nearest chair and sat down.

"Yes, he's our landlord, but he gits another man to collect. Guess you heard about his gittin' shot?"

"Read every word that's been printed. Is he goin' to die?"

"Not him. Ain't nothin' the matter with him 'ceptin' his eye is blowed out. My uncle, back home, got both his eyes--You, Chick!" this to an invisible presence that manifested itself only through a shower of pebbles that followed in the wake of a fleeing cat. "Go up to the saloon, Chick, and tell yer Pappy he'll have to come on home. Yer Aunt 'Tella's here."

"Don't look like he grows a inch a year," said Myrtella thoughtfully, watching him depart.

"That there Mrs. Ivy's been after me agin to send him to the Widows and Orphans' Home. She says she can git him in, and they'll learn him to read and write."

"Well, he ain't goin'! I guess as long as I'm a payin' the grocery bills, I got a right to say who'll eat the food! What's that you are hidin'?"

Maria, who had been attempting to remove something surreptitiously from the table, looked apologetic.

"It's one of them plaster casts, I'll be bound," Myrtella continued. "I might 'a' knowed you'd git the mate to the other one, and not a square inch of space in the house to set it on! What did you give fer it?"

Mrs. Flathers withdrew her apron, and tenderly dusted the highly colored features of an Indian squaw, whose head-feathers reposed upon her arm. Then she placed it on a corner of the stove where its imposing dignity produced a momentary impression upon even the flinty Myrtella.

"How much?" she demanded heartlessly.

"A quarter down, and ten cents a week." Maria sighed. "'Twouldn't be no trouble at all if it wasn't for Phineas spending so much car-fare going to church and that bow-legged, onery rent-man, that comes sneakin' round here every week, acting like poor people just kep' money settin' 'round in jars waitin' fer the likes of him!"

Maria's hatred of the rent man was the one emotion that seemed to be left in her withered bosom. To baffle him, to evade him, to anticipate his coming and be away from home, constituted the chief object of her existence.

A bang of the gate announced the arrival of the head of the household, which was promptly followed by the strains of a hymn cheerfully whistled in rag-time.

Phineas Flathers, after months of abstinence, had reached that period where he felt that not only his constitution, but his profession would profit by a temporary fall from grace. Solicitude for his moral welfare was beginning to flag at the Church; his regular attendance, his apparent absorption in the sermon, and his emotional execution of the hymns, all went to lift him from the class of interesting converts, to the deadly commonplace of regular members. Only that afternoon he had decided to revive interest in his case at any cost. He had just treated others, as he would have others treat him at the Cant-Pass-It, when he was summoned home to see his sister.

He now presented himself in his own doorway, a hand on either side of the jamb, and bowed profoundly:

"Miss Flathers! Pleased to meet you! I see you still continue to favor yourself in looks. Lost your place, I suppose?"

"That's right, be insultin'!" Myrtella flared up haughtily; "throw it in my face that I'm hard to please, and ain't willin' to put up with any old place I come to."

"Now I wouldn't put it that I was throwing it in yer face exactly," began Phineas, anxious to propitiate.

"Which means I'm a story-teller?" Myrtella squared herself for action.

"Oh, come on along," coaxed Phineas; "no harm's meant. Go on an' tell us what you left fer."

"Who said I'd left? Puttin' words in my mouth I never thought of utterin'! I ain't left, and what's more I ain't going to. I got a good place."

Phineas whistled an aggravatingly attenuated note of surprise: "The lady you are working for must be a deaf-mute."

"She is. The same as you'll be some day. She's been dead three years."

The triumph with which she made this announcement put a momentary quietus on Phineas, and enabled her to proceed:

"It's a widower gentleman with three children that I'm cookin' for, and I ain't set eyes on one of 'em except at meal times since I hired to 'em. Queerington's their names, out on College Street, right around the corner from the Immanuel Church. He's a teacher or something, one of them bookwormy men, whose head never pays no attention to what the rest of him is doing. 'Take charge,' said he, 'of everything, do the ordering, and cooking, and don't bother me with nothing.'"

"But does he bother you?" put in Phineas astutely; "that's the real point."

"Wasn't I just tellin' you that he didn't? He's been off on a trip to Virginia; gets home to-night. I've got the whole house in the pa'm of my hand, from cellar to attic. Miss Connie, she's the oldest, as

flighty as a pidgeon and head so full of boys she don't pay no attention to another livin' thing. Then there's Miss Hattie, the second one, jes' at that spiteful thirteen age, but so busy peckin' on her sister, she ain't no time left for me--"

"Thought you said there was three children," put in Maria mildly.

"I did. You didn't think I lied, did you? Always ready to snatch up a person's words before they git 'em out of their mouth! The third one is a boy, Bertie they call him, sick and spin'ly, but a right nice little fellow. Where'd Chick go?"

"He's settin' out there on the door-step. Did you hear 'bout our shootin'?"

"Maria was tryin' to tell me, but she didn't seem to have nothin' clear to tell. Who do you think done it?"

Phineas Flathers, balancing himself on the hind legs of his chair, with his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, was nothing loath to launch forth into a full recital of the affair, embellishing it with many a flourish as he went along. In the bosom of his family he was freed from those bonds of restraint that embarrassed his utterance when in more formal society. The amount of profanity that he could dispose of in the course of an ordinary conversation was little short of astounding. This being more than an ordinary conversation and his mood being mellow, called for an extra vocabulary. He graphically set forth the facts in the case, then gave his imagination full sway in accounting for them. He interpreted the whole affair as a clash between capital and labor, a conflict between the pampered aristocrat and the common man. The shooting was the result of a deep-laid plan: Dillingham and Morley had met by appointment, moved by what motive he did not make clear, to kill Sheeley, an honest laboring man. Hadn't the one on horseback, that they say was Mr. Morley, stopped him at the crossing, on the very afternoon of the shooting, and engaged him in conversation? Phineas assured his listeners that he trembled even now when he thought of the danger he had been in!

"I'd seed him afore that day a ridin' with a pretty young lady, that most got her neck broke under a engine, but this time he was by hisself, a settin' there on his horse, as proud as a king and stirrin' me up about the rich folks not allowing us poor working classes to have no streets out here. I suspicioned somethin' right then; says I to myself, 'he's got a handsome face but his mind is a well of corruption.' And when I heard he'd shot Sheeley ...Now what in thunder is the matter with you, Chick?"

During this recital Chick had been sitting in the doorway, his knees drawn up to his chin, listening intently, but at this point he cried out in a sputter of protesting sounds.

"It's the shootin', it's done got on his mind," explained Maria, winding her long thin hair into a yet tighter knot at the back of her head. "He takes on like that every time he hears us talkin' 'bout it, and nobody can't make out a word he's sayin'. Fer two or three days I couldn't scarcely git him to eat nothin'."

"If your cooking ain't any better than it used to be I ain't surprised," Myrtella said. "How bad was Sheeley shot, Phineas?"

"Oh, he'll be laid up fer a month yit. They say the retinue of his eye was cracked right across the middle. But that ain't worryin' Sheeley. He's livin' in style at the hospital, all his bills paid, and the swells lookin' after him. I hear he ain't even goin' to prosecute. They've fixed him all right; besides he don't want to git that fly young gang down on his place. He's countin' on startin' up them sparrin' matches ag'in, as soon as the police quit noticin' him. Say, Sis, you don't happen to have a quarter 'bout you, do you?"

The peculiar persuasiveness of Phineas' voice when he threw out these financial suggestions, was very insidious. In some subtle way he made the favor all on the side of the recipient; he gave the donor, as it were, a chance to acquire merit.

But Myrtella wore the armor of experience. "No, I ain't!" she said, taking a firmer grasp on her bag. "I'm payin' the grocery man now, and buyin' clothes for Chick. What good does it do? I no more than git his hide covered than you go and sell the clothes offen his back. When are you goin' to git a job?"

"Well, you might say I had one now. Leastwise I'm a followin' Scriptures and bearin' one another's burdens. Jires, the flagman, over to the Junction has been laid up with rheumatism and he don't want the boss to know it. He sets in his box and hires me to go out and flag the trains like he tells me to."

"How many trains a day?"

"Two ups, three downs and a couple of freights."

"Should think you'd die of the exertion. How much do you get?"

"Oh, it ain't so much. But I ain't a ambitious man. What's the use of me a-slavin' and a-hordin' when I ain't got a child to leave it to? If Claude had a lived, or McKinley, I might 'a' had somethin' to work for."

"You mean you'd 'a' had somethin' to work for you. The Lord certainly done a good job when he changed His mind about lettin' them babies live."

"They're having onions next door fer supper," said Maria feebly, by way of diverting an old discussion. "I ain't been able to git 'em off my mind all afternoon."

Chick, who had been sent to the grocery to see what time it was, came back holding up five fingers.

"Gee, I got to be hiking!" said Phineas. "The passenger train from Virginia's due at five sixteen. It won't git here before a quarter of six, but I'm always there on the minute. That's what Jires pays me fer, fer bein' regular and reliable. Jes' let me get a regular habit and a clock ain't in it with me. Why, if I was to come in late at church, they'd stop the service!"

"Well, don't you be gittin' a regular habit of comin' 'round to the Queeringtons!" was Myrtella's parting shot as he rose unsteadily. "When I got anything to say to you I'll come here."

"That's right!" assented Phineas cordially; "you jes' make yourself at home. My home is your home. Maria'll tell you that I says to her only last night, I says, 'Maria, you needn't feel so cut up 'bout askin' Myrtella fer the rent this month, because this is her home, too. There ain't a board in it but I'd share with her, she knows that.' You tell her all I said, Maria, don't you keep back nothin'. Farewell!" and with an affectionate glance and a wave of the hand Phineas departed.

Now if he had followed the straight and narrow path, indicated by the rocks and tin cans, that led to the Junction, instead of the broad highway indicated by the plank walk that led to the Cant-Pass-It, the tragedy that hovered over Billy-goat Hill might have been averted.

But he had left the saloon in the midst of a heated controversy with two Italians, concerning the supremacy of America over all other nations. The fact that his country had never been proud of him in no way deterred him from being very proud of his country. Until the dispute was properly ended he felt that the honor of the nation was at stake.

His patriotic fervor ran so high that by the time he reached the crossing, the passenger train was already in sight. Jires, helpless and terrified at his post, was distractedly shouting directions from his little sentinel box.

"Flathers! There's a washout down the road! We've got to hold up the passenger train. Get out the red flag! Quick man! Be ready to signal the engineer. Three times cross ways! The red flag, you fool! the RED FLAG! Oh, my God!"

For Phineas Flathers, to whom all flags now looked red, white and blue, was standing at the crossing, joyously waving a white flag, while the engineer with his hand on the throttle, released the brakes, and sent his train thundering down the grade to destruction.

* * * * *

Meanwhile Myrtella, having finished her visit in a grand finale of pyrotechnics, in which she displayed Phineas to his wife in a number of blazing lifelike portraits, took her departure. It was not the first time she had faced the alternative of paying the rent, or seeing her only relative turned into the street, nor was it the first time that, after giving innumerable pieces of her mind to Maria, she had followed them up with the rent.

All the way home she discussed the matter audibly with herself, and was still muttering darkly when she reached the Queeringtons'. So absorbed was she in her own wrongs that she did not notice that the front door stood open, and figures were hurrying about in the hall.

As she let herself into the side door, a white-faced young girl, with her hair brushed straight back into a long braid, rushed through the pantry.

"What's the matter, Miss Hattie?"

The girl steadied herself by the banister. "It's father!" she said with chattering teeth. "There's been an awful accident just below the

Junction. They can't even bring him home. They are taking him to a place out there, a Colonel Carsey's. Colonel Carsey was killed. He was sitting right by father. Oh! Myrtella, I'm so afraid father's going to die!"

Myrtella standing helplessly before the terror-stricken girl, could find no words of sympathy. In fact she appeared even more formidable and bristling than usual.

"Well, he ain't dead yet," she said shortly, "and any how, there ain't no reason why you shouldn't have supper. Trouble always sets heavy on a empty stomach."

CHAPTER VII

The fatal accident which Phineas Flathers' misguided patriotism had precipitated, changed the course of many a life, but to none did it bring more far-reaching consequences than to the daughter of old Bob Carsey.

Miss Lady could never clearly recall those first days after her father's death. They seemed to her a confused nightmare of strange doctors and nurses, of a strange man hovering between life and death in the guest-room bed, of strange people coming and going, or sitting in hushed groups on the stiff horsehair chairs in the hall, waiting for news. Two facts alone remained fixed in the whirling chaos of unrealities; her father was dead, and no letter had come from Donald Morley.

Each day when the mail arrived she roused from her apathy, and with trembling fingers sorted out the letters, going over them again and again, and never finding the one she sought. Gradually beneath the poignant grief for her father, came the dull persistent pain of a first disillusion. The belief and loyalty with which she had started out to defend Donald began to weaken before his silence. In his trouble she had been ready to rush to him, to succor and forgive, but he had not called upon her. Now in her great need, she was calling to him, and he did not come. Suspicion began to crowd on the heels of doubt.

Had he not acknowledged his instability? Had her father not seen it from the first? Was his desire to settle down in the country but one of the whims of which his life seemed made up? Perhaps she herself had only been a passing fancy, something wanted for the moment, but soon forgotten. At the end of a week her pride rushed to arms. Whatever reason he might offer now would come too late.

The sudden plunge from irresponsible girlhood into this mysterious region of grief and doubt, where one must tread the thorny path alone, terrified and bewildered her. She did all the last sad, futile things one can do for the dead; then when all was over, fled from the confusion at Thornwood, and sought the silence of the woods. Here fierce outbursts of rebellious grief were followed by hours of apathy when she tramped for miles, seeing and hearing nothing, but urged on by an insistent desire to be in motion.

It was at the end of one of these tramps that Noah Wicker found her late one evening, on the grass by the river, sobbing out her heart at the spot where the Colonel used to fish.

Noah's words of comfort were as scarce as his other words, so he sat on a log near by and waited silently until she was ready to go home. At the stile, where he left her, he handed her a letter.

"I got it at the station this noon," he said. "Thought I'd be over earlier, but didn't know if you wanted me."

She did not hear him, the letter had come! Her fingers thrilled at its touch, and the warm blood surged to her heart. Without another thought for Noah, she sped up the walk to the house, where she locked herself into the living-room. Match after match sputtered and went out in her nervous fingers, before the lamp was lighted.

He had written! He cared! He was coming! Over and over she whispered the words to herself. Then she looked at the postmark on the heavy envelope, and her heart sank. San Francisco! After all he was not coming back!

Her eager finger was at the seal, when her eyes fell upon a briar-wood pipe that lay on the table beside a half-filled pouch of tobacco. In an instant she seemed to see a stubby brown hand reaching for it, the quick spurt of the match, the flare of light on an old weather-beaten face, then a deep-drawn breath of contentment as the Colonel settled back and held out his other hand to his little girl.

And her last promise to him had been to do nothing until Donald's name should be cleared. She could keep her promise now, but could she after she had read Donald's letter? If the mere touch of it in her hand plead for him, what would the living words do?

She looked hopelessly around the cheerful, homely room, every foot of which spoke to her of her father, and of his love for her. On the white door-frame were penciled the proud records he had made of her height on each successive birthday. On the walls were pictures of her he had treasured, from the time she was a round-eyed baby, to the present day. In the cupboard was a green box containing her first shoes, her little dresses, her first letter, her baby curls.

Over the harpsichord was a portrait of the Colonel himself, painted before she was born. It represented a dashing, young sportsman, surrounded by his pack of hounds. Twenty years ago this gallant hunter had given up the chase, with many another joy, to minister to her baby needs, to share her joys and sorrows, and be father, mother, play-fellow, all in one.

She clasped Donald Morley's letter tightly and closed her eyes. Never in her short life had she wanted to do anything so desperately as she wanted to read that letter, and yet the reading of it would mean breaking a promise to one whom she could never promise anything again. Her newly awakened love and her sense of justice pleaded hotly for Donald, but the empty room and her empty heart, and a passionate sense of loyalty to the dead, spoke mutely for her father.

After all, nothing could justify those long days of silence, that

failure on Donald's part to come to her in her trouble. Her father's judgment was probably right after all, and it was best she should put an end to the matter once and for all.

Sobbing like a child, she kissed the letter again and again, and kneeling by the fire, held it to the flame, and watched it burn to ashes on the hearth.

After that one dreary week followed another, with the same invasion of strangers, the same varying reports from the sick room. Gradually, however, the reports became more favorable, the tension eased, visitors became less frequent, and Thornwood began to settle down to its normal state.

[Illustration: She held it to the flame, and watched it burn to ashes on the hearth]

Owing to the nature of Doctor Queerington's injury, and the severe shock he had sustained, it was not thought best to move him to the city until he was stronger. The quiet country house was an excellent place for convalescence, and under the direction of his trained nurse he could be allowed to read and write, free from the annoyance that must beset him when once he returned home.

This arrangement was listlessly agreed to by Miss Lady, who had no plans for the future, and dreaded another adjustment. She was singularly alone in the world, and too dazed for the present to know what her next step should be. The only thing of which she was certain, was that she would never leave Thornwood.

On one of the first days that Doctor Queerington was allowed to sit up, she went in to see him. Her first impression in the darkened room was the kindly clasp of a hand, and a wonderful low voice that spoke words of comfort. Then gradually she saw the slender, over-serious face of a middle-aged man, with small eyes somewhat too close together, a broad intellectual forehead, and a firm, well-formed mouth that seemed a stranger to smiles.

From that time on she found his room a refuge. He had been the unknown object of her admiration since she was a child, he was her father's friend, the last to be with him before his death, and he talked to her for hours about the great mysteries of life and death. He was the only person to whom she talked who never seemed to be in doubt.

It was not the first time that the Doctor had proven a consoling presence in time of affliction. Where others conjectured, or evaded, he boldly affirmed. The universe to him was an open book, from which he enjoyed reading aloud.

One morning, six weeks after the accident, Miss Lady came into his room with a handful of flowers and found him propped up in bed, his books about him, and a note in his hand.

"I have a communication from my cousin, Mrs. Sequin," he said with the polite formality that was habitual to him. "It seems that she is going to honor me with a visit."

"Mrs. Sequin?" Miss Lady wheeled so suddenly that she overturned the vase in which she was arranging the flowers. "Now see what I've done!

"I'll fix it, Miss Wuster; don't bother."

It apparently required little self-control for the trained nurse to refrain from bothering. She was sitting with her heels firmly hooked under the rung of a straight-back chair, crocheting with passionate abandon. Filling hot-water bottles, taking temperatures, feeding patients, were mere interruptions to her real vocation of converting spools of linen thread into yards of linen lace.

"She states her intention of coming to see me," the Doctor continued, "but I cannot decipher her hieroglyphics sufficiently to find out the time. Perhaps you can assist me."

"Is this a D?" asked Miss Lady, looking over his shoulder.

"I judge so; an adaptation of the Greek character. Why the art of handwriting should be considered obsolete, I am at a loss to--"

"Oh, she says she is coming to-day," interrupted Miss Lady, "on the eleven train. I must go down and tell Uncle Jimpson to be at the station, and have Aunt Caroline put on another plate for dinner."

"Then what are you going to do, my dear?"

"I was going to the cemetery."

"You would better come up here instead. In your mental state a person is very sensitive to environment. You should avoid everything that excites the emotions. I think you can trust me to know what is best for you just now?"

"Indeed I can," Miss Lady said impulsively; "you have helped me more than anybody. Daddy would be so grateful if he knew."

"He does know," announced the Doctor with the finality of one to whom all things have been revealed. "But we must not discuss these things now. Miss Wuster has just been reading me the account of young Dillingham's trial. Perhaps you have been following it?"

"Yes," said Miss Lady without looking up.

"It is a matter of especial interest to me," continued the Doctor; "especial regret I should say. Young Dillingham is engaged to be married to the daughter of my cousin whom I expect to-day, and the other young man involved, Donald Morley, is Mrs. Sequin's brother."

"Well for the life of me," said Miss Wuster, counting stitches between her sentences, "I can't see how they got Mr. Dillingham off, unless it was the way Mr. Gooch said."

"Who is Mr. Gooch?" asked Miss Lady of the Doctor.

"The gentleman who came to see me yesterday. He is a lawyer and has followed the case closely. He does not scruple to affirm that the trial was a farce, one of those legal travesties that sometimes occur when a scion of a rich and influential family happens to transgress the law. It seems that the saloon-keeper, who was at first reasonably sure of what happened, suffered a strange lapse of memory when on the stand. Gooch thinks he was bought up, but Gooch is fallible where

human motives are involved. His misanthropy invariably colors his judgment."

"Well, nothing on earth can keep me from thinking that Mr. Dillingham did the shooting!" declared the nurse with violent partizanship. "Look at the way he sneaked home, and left the other young man to get a doctor and help move Sheeley to the hospital. Yes, sir, it's time for your medicine, just wait 'till I finish this spool and I'll go down and heat the water."

"He--he oughtn't to have gone away?" said Miss Lady, looking at the Doctor interrogatively.

"Donald, you mean? Certainly not, it was most ill-advised, probably some quixotic idea about not wanting to testify against his friend. If you knew the boy you would understand what a hot-headed, harum-scarum person he is. He was my pupil at one time and I grew quite fond of him. He has ability, undoubted ability, but he is a ship without a rudder; he has been drifting ever since he was born."

"This acquittal of Mr. Dillingham puts the blame on--on him, doesn't it?"

"Naturally. His absence at the trial was undoubtedly one of the strongest arguments in Dillingham's favor. Mr. Gooch tells me that the counsel for the defense took especial pains to throw suspicion upon Donald. The case has been confusing in the extreme, the absence of witnesses, the failure to establish the ownership of the pistol, the absurd complication about the slot machine and crowbar,--an absolute jumble of contradictory evidence. As for Donald Morley's being guilty, it's absurd! He is not the sort of man who runs away from punishment."

Miss Lady's heart swelled with gratitude. Of course Donald Morley was nothing to her now. She had assured herself of that so continuously for two months that she was beginning to believe it. She knew that he was wild, reckless and unreliable, that he had failed her in her greatest need, and that she had put him out of her life forever. But it was good of the Doctor to take his part!

"I know now what my father meant when he said you were the justest man he ever knew!" she said timidly, lifting a pair of shining eyes.

"Unfortunately for Donald the Court does not share my opinion. It is not known even by the family as yet, but Mr. Gooch tells me that Donald has been indicted by the grand jury."

"Indicted!"

"Yes, he can never return to Kentucky without standing his trial. It is a serious affair for him, I fear."

CHAPTER VIII

When in the course of the morning Uncle Jimpson started to the station to meet Mrs. Sequin, he did not have to direct the course of his

stead. Had old John not known the way from experience, the inherited memory of his ancestors would have prompted him to turn twice to the right, once to the left, and pull up at a certain corner of the station platform. For the honor of being the Carseys' "station horse" had descended to him from his father Luke, whose father Mark had in the days of prosperity traveled in harness with Matthew, fulfilling that same important office. Thus John was, in a way, enjoying the distinction of apostolic succession.

Arrived at the station Uncle Jimpson stepped jauntily around the post-office box and ostentatiously took out the Carseys' mail. It was a small act to take pride in, but in lieu of more important duties it had to serve. For the past six weeks the advent of city people at Thornwood had stirred up old ambitions in him. A new sprightliness was observable in his gait, a briskness in his speech, which Aunt Caroline did not hesitate to characterize as "taking on airs."

The blood of a butler coursed through Uncle Jimpson's veins, a stately, ebony butler who had been wont to stand at the Thornwood door during the old days and hold a silver tray covered with boutonnieres, for the arriving guests. Uncle Jimpson had inherited this tray along with an ambition that was not above buttons. Year after year he had descended with the descending Carsey fortunes, passing from the house to the horses, then to the field, and finally becoming the man of all work, but never relinquishing that dream of his youth, to stand in livery in the halls of the rich, and exercise those talents with which Providence had blessed him.

As he passed the compliments of the day with two farm hands, who were loading a wagon near by, his eye fell upon a strange object that stood in the door of the dining-room. It looked to Uncle Jimpson like pictures he had seen of lions, only it was small and white and barked remarkably like a dog.

"Dat sure am a curious lookin' animal," he observed. "Hit must b'long to a show."

One of the farm hands laughed and pointed with his thumb to the waiting-room. Uncle Jimpson tiptoed to the window and peered in. All that he could see was the back of a very imposing lady and the top of a large plumed hat.

"Is--is she a-waitin' fer anybody?" he whispered, motioning anxiously with his soft hat.

"Oh! no," said the nearest man; "she ain't waitin'; she's just enjoyin' the scenery on them railroad posters. She likes to set there, been doin' it for a half hour."

Uncle Jimpson scraped the mud from his shoes, buttoned the one button that was left on his linen coat, and dropping his hat outside the door summoned courage to present himself.

"'Scuse me, mam, but does dis heah happen to be Mrs. Sequem?"

"It is," said the lady, haughtily.

"Yas'm, dat's what I 'lowed. Dat's what I tole Carline--leastwise dat's what I st gwine tell her. Ise Cunnel Carsey's coachman."

Mrs. Sequin eyed him coldly through a silver lorgnette. "Didn't they understand that I was coming on the eleven train?"

"Yes'm, dat's right. But you allays has to 'low fer dem narrow gauges. Dey has to run slow to keep from fallin' offen de track. Dat must have been de ten o'clock train you come on."

"Not at all, I left the city at ten minutes of eleven."

"Yas'm, dat was de ten train den. De leben train don't start 'til long about noon."

"Preposterous!" said Mrs. Sequin, sweeping to her feet. "Take me to the carriage. Fanchonette! Where are you?"

Uncle Jimpson apologetically dragged forward his left foot, upon the trouser hem of which the small dog had fastened her sharp little teeth.

"Frightfully obstinate little beast," said Mrs. Sequin, "she won't let go until she gets ready. You needn't be afraid of her biting you. She couldn't be induced to bite a colored person."

Uncle Jimpson, carrying the dog along on his foot, led the way, while Mrs. Sequin, with the cautious tread of a stout person used to the treacheries of oriental rugs on hardwood floors, followed. She was a woman of full figure and imposing presence, whose elaborate coiffure and attention to detail in dress, gave evidence that the world had its claims.

At sight of the shabby, old, mud-covered buggy, and the decrepit apostolic John she paused.

Jimpson all obsequious politeness, put a linen duster over the wheel, and with a gesture worthy of Chesterfield, handed her in.

"I wish the top up," she commanded. "The glare is unspeakable."

Uncle Jimpson, standing by the wheel, shuffled his feet in embarrassment: "Yas'm," he agreed, "I'll put it up effen you want me to. But it won't stay up. No, mam, it won't stay. Looks lak in de las' two or three years it got a way o' fallin' back. Cunnel 'lowed he was gwine to git it fixed onct or twict, but he ain't done it."

Fanchonette just here became enraged at a bit of paper that was caught in the wheel, and gave vent to such a violent burst of temper that it required the undivided attention of her mistress to calm her.

Uncle Jimpson, occupying the smallest possible portion of the seat, and with one leg hanging outside the buggy, rejoiced in the proximity of so much elegance. It gave him a feeling of prosperity and importance, and made him straighten his back, crook his elbow, and even adopt a more formal manner with old John. He deeply regretted that he had not put on a clean coat and as for the buggy, he was already planning a thorough cleaning of it before driving the stylish guest back in the afternoon.

"Stop a moment!" commanded Mrs. Sequin peremptorily. "What a view! I

had no idea there was such scenery anywhere around here!"

"Yas'm, hits about de fines' sceneries in de world! You kin see from dem heights clean down to de bridge. All dis hill used to be our-alls. I 'member hearin' how Mr. Rogers Clark done gib it to de Cunnel's gran'paw fer a lan' grant when de Injuns libed here!"

"Who owns it now? Who owns the hilltop?"

"I don't know, mam. We been sellin' off considerable."

"Well, I must find out about that at once. I'll send an agent out to-morrow to look into the matter. Colonel Carsey left only one daughter, I believe, and she never married?"

Uncle Jimpson jerked the reins and looked a bit nettled.

"Not yit," he said, "but she ain't no old maid, Miss Lady ain't. Dere neber wuz a Carsey lady yit dat withered on de stalk; de trouble wif _dem_ is dey git picked too soon. Ez fer Miss Lady's ma, she wasn't but jes turned sebenteen when me an' de Cunnel went down to Alabama to marry her."

"Who are Miss Carsey's relatives, her advisers?"

"She ain't got none. She didn't hab a livin', breathin' soul but her paw, 'ceptin' me an' Carline, an' Carline's liable to drop off mos' anytime."

"But who is going to live with her?"

"I spec she gwine git married some day," Jimpson said hopefully, "all de boys been plumb 'stracted 'bout dat chile since she wuz a little girl. But she wuz so crazy 'bout her paw, she jes laff at 'em. Now de Cunnel's gone, she'll hab to git somebody else to make ober."

"Well, I must find out about that hill," said Mrs. Sequin, turning for a last glimpse. "Whose old place is this we are coming to?"

"Dis is our place, dis is Thornwood," said Uncle Jimpson, half in pride, half in apology, as he skirted the holes in the road. "It don't look lak itself. It's a terrible pretty place when it's fixed up."

"Dreadfully run down," said Mrs. Sequin to herself, making a sweeping survey of the premises, "all this front lawn ought to be terraced and have granitoid walks and formal approaches. The house could be made quite imposing."

They had turned in the long winding avenue, and were following the old gray wall that swept in a wide circle past the negro cabins, then toward the house.

Suddenly Mrs. Sequin pointed dramatically to the little porch of one of the cabins.

"A Sheraton! Great heavens! Where did it come from? What is it doing there?"

Uncle Jimpson, following the direction of her finger, looked

surprised: "Dat ain't no sheraton, dat's a sideboard. Leastwise it wuz one 'fore I fixed it into a chicken coop. I took out de drawers and put on dem cross-pieces. Got forty de purtiest little chickens you eber seen!"

"And the legs are curved and have knobs, haven't they?"

"No, mam, dey ain't no more bow-legged dan most chickens. Do you raise chickens on your place?"

"No, but we may when we get to the country. By the way, you don't happen to know of a good colored man around here, do you? One who understands horses, and would look well in livery?"

Uncle Jimpson's eyes set in their sockets. Old John and the rattling buggy faded from his consciousness. In their place he saw himself on the box seat of a grand Victoria, in a double-breasted coat and high hat, lightly shaking the reins across the backs of two sleek thoroughbreds. It was even more alluring than his cherished dream of butlerhood! Already he felt his swelling chest strain against the gold buttons!

But what about Miss Lady? Who was going to stay at Thornwood and take care of her? Domestic infelicities had rendered him callous to Aunt Caroline's claims, but Miss Lady, his "little Missis"?

"No, mam," he said dejectedly as he assisted Mrs. Sequin to alight. "I can't say ez I do, not jes' at present. Sometime I might heah ob a good man, say 'bout my size an' build. You, Mike!"

Mike had rushed at the small poodle with the apparent intention of swallowing her at a mouthful, but at Uncle Jimpson's stern reproof he snapped at a fly instead, and tried to give the impression that that was what he was after all along.

"Ain't you 'shamed ob yourself?" Uncle Jimpson muttered. "Fussin' 'round here an' stickin' out yer lip at white folks? Come on 'round back where you b'longs. You an' me is corn-field niggers, dat's all we is!"

And with that irritable dejection that often follows self-sacrifice, Uncle Jimpson limped away with the subdued Mike skulking at his heels.

CHAPTER IX

As Mrs. Basil Sequin swept up the broad steps at Thornwood, she congratulated herself upon a duty about to be accomplished. She had not foregone a bridge luncheon to make this tiresome trip to the country for purely altruistic reasons. She had come to prove to herself, and to her circle, the bond of friendship that existed between her and her distinguished cousin. Experience had taught her that an occasional reference to "my favorite cousin, John Jay Queerington, the author, you know," had its influence. "His is the only great intellect," she was fond of telling her husband, "to which I am related either by blood or marriage."

Doctor Queerington's reputation was one of those local assumptions that might be described as prenatal rather than posthumous. It was what he was going to be, that made his name an awe-inspiring word in the community, more than what he was already. It was the conviction of his friends and colleagues that a tardy world would too late recognize his genius.

After waiting impatiently for some one to respond to her vigorous use of the heavy knocker, Mrs. Sequin tucked Fanchonette under her arm and pushed open the door. The hall had doors to right and left, but before making further investigations she paused to examine minutely the tall mahogany clock, and the quaint silver candlesticks that stood on an old table at the foot of the steps.

While bending to inspect the latter, she heard a door open, and looking up saw a pretty, slender girl in a short white petticoat and a sleeveless black dress lining, which displayed a pair of remarkably shapely arms.

"Oh, I didn't know you had come!" exclaimed the young person, cordially extending a smiling welcome. "What a darling little dog! Is he a poodle?"

"She is a French poodle," said Mrs. Sequin with a manner intended to impress this exceedingly casual person. "Where shall I find my cousin, Doctor Queerington?"

"The front room up-stairs, on that side. I'd go up with you, only Miss Ferney Foster, our neighbor, is fitting this lining and she has to get back to her pickles. I wish we were born feathered like birds, don't you?"

Mrs. Sequin, who had a masculine susceptibility to a pretty face, could not repress a smile.

"I know this lining looks queer," went on the girl with an answering twinkle. "But it doesn't look any queerer than it feels. Miss Ferney doesn't know what's the matter, and neither do I. Would you mind taking a peep at it up there between the shoulders? I'll hold the doggie."

To her surprise, Mrs. Sequin found herself removing her gloves, and adjusting a badly cut lining across a smooth white neck, while the girl before her, having shifted all responsibility, fell to making love to the poodle which she cuddled in her arms.

"It's too tight here," said Mrs. Sequin, pinning and adjusting, "and too loose there. Have her take up the side seams to the place I have marked, and lengthen the shoulder seams at least an inch."

"Thank you so much. It feels heavenly now. You go right up-stairs! You can take your things off in my room, if you like, just across the hall from the Doctor's." And without further ceremony the young hostess went tripping down the hall, leaving Mrs. Sequin to ascend the stairs alone.

Ascending was one of Mrs. Sequin's chief accomplishments. Twenty-five years' experience on the social ladder had made her exceedingly

surefooted. Her reward now was in sitting on the top rung and dictating arbitrarily to all those below. She had acquired a passion for dictating, for arranging, and setting in order. The crooked seams which she had just pinned straight gave her a satisfaction that almost counteracted her annoyance at the informality of her reception.

Once established at the Doctor's bedside, with the nurse detailed to exercise Fanchonette in the yard below, she gave herself up to the pleasure of recounting at length her troubles of the past few months. She enjoyed talking, as a prima donna enjoys singing: she loved to hear the cadences of her own voice, and to watch the gestures of her jeweled hands.

"It's an unspeakable relief," she assured the Doctor, "to actually see with my own eyes that you aren't a mangled cripple from the terrible wreck! You can't imagine how frightfully anxious I've been, but then this whole spring has been a veritable nightmare. Donald and Lee Dillingham both involved in this unspeakable scrape, Margery on the verge of nervous prostration, you perhaps fatally injured, and Basil Sequin too engrossed in his own affairs to give mine a moment's consideration."

"Basil has grave responsibilities as president of the People's Bank, Katherine," said the Doctor, keeping his fingers between the leaves of the massive volume which he had regretfully closed at her entrance. "I, for one, owe him a debt of gratitude for relieving me of all financial anxiety. Besides you are always thoroughly capable of taking the reins in a family crisis."

"Yes, but it's telling on me. I notice it in bridge. I am not the player I was a year ago. This trial of Lee Dillingham's has been a hideous strain. Of course, if he had been convicted, I should have compelled Margery to break her engagement, and that would have complicated things frightfully. You know his grandfather, the old general, is the largest stockholder in the People's Bank, and Basil insists that he must not be offended. That was one reason why I was so anxious to keep Don out of the way. Even if Lee was guilty, Don couldn't appear against him when he was engaged to Margery. The only possible course was to hush up the entire affair with as little publicity as possible. Thank heaven, General Dillingham has gotten Lee off, and I am beginning to breathe again."

"And you have heard nothing from Donald?"

"No, indeed, and I hope I won't for the present. I wrote immediately after the shooting to every place I could possibly think of his going, and implored him, if he had a grain of gratitude for me, or affection for Margery, that he would keep away, and not even let his whereabouts be known until this wretched affair had blown over. I can nearly always appeal to Don on the score of gratitude. I must say for him that, like the rest of the Morley men, he sows his wild oats like a gentleman. You remember Uncle Curtis? They said at the club he was a frightful drinker, and yet not a woman of his family ever saw him intoxicated. Then look at Grandfather Morley!" Mrs. Sequin was mounted on a favorite hobby. She had a large and varied collection of family skeletons, some of rare antiquity, which she delighted in exhibiting. She could recount the details of the unfortunate matrimonial alliances on both sides of the family for generations back, and was even more infallible in the matter of birth dates than the family Bible. If a

relative by any chance got a trifle confused, and acknowledged to thirty-nine next June instead of last June, Mrs. Sequin pounced upon the error like a cat on a mouse. She could prove to him immediately that he was born the spring that Uncle Lem Miller died, and that was the same year that Grandmother Weller married the second time, therefore he _was_ thirty-nine _last_ June.

"Donald ought to return at once," declared Doctor Queerington, when she paused for breath; "if he is guilty, he ought to take his punishment; if innocent, as I believe, he ought to be vindicated."

"Well, we can't find him," said Mrs. Sequin with resigned cheerfulness. "He is probably in the Orient with Cropsie Decker. What a magnificent bed this is! Do you suppose I could buy it? Country people nearly always prefer new furniture."

The suggestion of a smile hovered over the Doctor's thin lips: "Thornwood's possessions, I imagine, are not for sale."

"I suppose the extraordinary young person I met in the front hall was Miss Carsey? What sort of a girl is she, anyhow?"

"Miss Lady?" The Doctor shifted his pillow. "An extremely nice girl, I believe. Exceedingly sympathetic and attentive to all my wants, and receptive to a remarkable degree. She has been reading to me daily, and I find rather an unusual mind, undisciplined of course, but original and interesting."

"But what amazing manners the child has! She greeted me in her bare arms, and asked me to fit a dress for her when she had never seen me before in her life. But she certainly is pretty! I haven't seen as pretty a creature for years."

"Indeed!" said the Doctor, adjusting his eyeglasses. "I had not observed it, especially. A fine, frank countenance, with dark eyes--yes, I believe I did notice that she had chestnut eyes of unusual clearness; I remember I did notice that."

"What is she going to do? Who is going to stay with her?" asked Mrs. Sequin. "Fancy a girl like that buried here in the country! Properly dressed, and toned down a bit, she'd make a sensation. I shouldn't at all mind asking her in to spend a few days with me sometime. You know I adore young people, and poor Margery, like all the other last year debutantes, is simply done for. Hasn't a spark of enthusiasm for anything. I hope you have not forgotten the fact that your Constance ought to come out this winter?"

"My dear Katherine," said the Doc

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