The Gentleman From Indiana

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Title: The Gentleman From Indiana

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Release Date: January, 2006 [EBook #9659]
[Yes, we are more than one year ahead of schedule]
[This file was first posted on October 14, 2003]
[Date last updated: June 3, 2004]

Edition: 10

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA

BY BOOTH TARKINGTON

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

CHAPTER I

THE YOUNG MAN WHO CAME TO STAY

There is a fertile stretch of flat lands in Indiana where unagrarian Eastern travellers, glancing from car-windows, shudder and return their eyes to interior upholstery, preferring even the swaying caparisons of a Pullman to the monotony without. The landscape lies interminably level: bleak in winter, a desolate plain of mud and snow; hot and dusty in summer, in its flat lonesomeness, miles on miles with not one cool hill slope away from the sun. The persistent tourist who seeks for signs of man in this sad expanse perceives a reckless amount of rail fence; at intervals a large barn; and, here and there, man himself, incurious, patient, slow, looking up from the fields apathetically as the Limited flies by. Widely separated from each other are small frame railway stations--sometimes with no other building in sight, which indicates that somewhere behind the adjacent woods a few shanties and thin cottages are grouped about a couple of brick stores.

On the station platforms there are always two or three wooden packing-boxes, apparently marked for travel, but they are sacred from disturbance and remain on the platform forever; possibly the right train never comes along. They serve to enthrone a few station loafers, who look out from under their hat-brims at the faces in the car-windows with the languid scorn a permanent fixture always has for a transient, and the pity an American feels for a fellow-being who does not live in his town. Now and then the train passes a town built scatteringly about a court-house, with a mill or two humming near the tracks. This is a county-seat, and the inhabitants and the local papers refer to it confidently as "our city." The heart of the flat lands is a central area called Carlow County, and the county-seat of Carlow is a town unhappily named in honor of its first settler, William Platt, who christened it with his blood. Natives of this place have sometimes remarked, easily, that their city had a population of from five to six thousand souls. It is easy to forgive them for such

statements; civic pride is a virtue.

The social and business energy of Plattville concentrates on the Square. Here, in summer-time, the gentlemen are wont to lounge from store to store in their shirt sleeves; and here stood the old, red-brick court-house, loosely fenced in a shady grove of maple and elm--"slipp'ry ellum"--called the "Court-House Yard." When the sun grew too hot for the dry-goods box whittlers in front of the stores around the Square and the occupants of the chairs in front of the Palace Hotel on the corner, they would go across and drape themselves over the court-house fence, under the trees, and leisurely carve there initials on the top board. The farmers hitched their teams to the fence, for there were usually loafers energetic enough to shout "Whoa!" if the flies worried the horses beyond patience. In the yard, amongst the weeds and tall, unkept grass, chickens foraged all day long; the fence was so low that the most matronly hen flew over with propriety; and there were gaps that accommodated the passage of itinerant pigs. Most of the latter, however, preferred the cool wallows of the less important street corners. Here and there a big dog lay asleep in the middle of the road, knowing well that the easy-going Samaritan, in his case, would pass by on the other side.

Only one street attained to the dignity of a name--Main Street, which formed the north side of the Square. In Carlow County, descriptive location is usually accomplished by designating the adjacent, as, "Up at Bardlocks'," "Down by Schofields'," "Right where Hibbards live," "Acrost from Sol. Tibbs's," or, "Other side of Jones's field." In winter, Main Street was a series of frozen gorges land hummocks; in fall and spring, a river of mud; in summer, a continuing dust heap; it was the best street in Plattville.

The people lived happily; and, while the world whirled on outside, they were content with their own. It would have moved their surprise as much as their indignation to hear themselves spoken of as a "secluded community"; for they sat up all night to hear the vote of New York, every campaign. Once when the President visited Rouen, seventy miles away, there were only few bankrupts (and not a baby amongst them) left in the deserted homes of Carlow County. Everybody had adventures; almost everybody saw the great man; and everybody was glad to get back home again. It was the longest journey some of them ever set upon, and these, elated as they were over their travels, determined to think twice ere they went that far from home another time.

On Saturdays, the farmers enlivened the commercial atmosphere of Plattville; and Miss Tibbs, the postmaster's sister and clerk, used to make a point of walking up and down Main Street as often as possible, to get a thrill in the realization of some poetical expressions that haunted her pleasingly; phrases she had employed frequently in her poems for the "Carlow County Herald." When thirty or forty country people were scattered along the sidewalks in front of the stores on Main Street, she would walk at nicely calculated angles to the different groups so as to leave as few gaps as possible between the figures, making them appear as near a solid phalanx as she could. Then she would murmur to herself, with the accent of soulful revel, "The thronged city streets," and, "Within the thronged city," or, "Where the thronging crowds were swarming and the great cathedral rose." Although she had never been beyond Carlow and the bordering counties in her life, all her poems were of city streets and bustling multitudes. She was one of those who had been unable to join the excursion to Rouen when the President was there; but she had listened avidly to her friends' descriptions of the crowds. Before that time her

muse had been sylvan, speaking of "Flow'rs of May," and hinting at thoughts that overcame her when she roved the woodlands thro'; but now the inspiration was become decidedly municipal and urban, evidently reluctant to depart beyond the retail portions of a metropolis. Her verses beginning, "O, my native city, bride of Hibbard's winding stream,"--Hibbard's Creek runs west of Plattville, except in time of drought--"When thy myriad lights are shining, and thy faces, like a dream, Go flitting down thy sidewalks when their daily toil is done," were pronounced, at the time of their publication, the best poem that had ever appeared in the "Herald."

This unlucky newspaper was a thorn in the side of every patriot of Carlow County. It was a poor paper; everybody knew it was a poor paper; it was so poor that everybody admitted it was a poor paper--worse, the neighboring county of Amo possessed a better paper, the "Amo Gazette." The "Carlow County Herald" was so everlastingly bad that Plattville people bent their heads bitterly and admitted even to citizens of Amo that the "Gazette" was the better paper. The "Herald" was a weekly, issued on Saturday; sometimes it hung fire over Sunday and appeared Monday evening. In their pride, the Carlow people supported the "Herald" loyally and long; but finally subscriptions began to fall off and the "Gazette" gained them. It came to pass that the "Herald" missed fire altogether for several weeks; then it came out feebly, two small advertisements occupying the whole of the fourth page. It was breathing its last. The editor was a clay-colored gentleman with a goatee, whose one surreptitious eye betokened both indolence of disposition and a certain furtive shrewdness. He collected all the outstanding subscriptions he could, on the morning of the issue just mentioned, and, thoughtfully neglecting several items on the other side of the ledger, departed from Plattville forever.

The same afternoon a young man from the East alighted on the platform of the railway station, north of the town, and, entering the rickety omnibus that lingered there, seeking whom it might rattle to deafness, demanded to be driven to the Herald Building. It did not strike the driver that the newcomer was precisely a gay young man when he climbed into the omnibus; but, an hour later, as he stood in the doorway of the edifice he had indicated as his destination, depression seemed to have settled into the marrow of his bones. Plattville was instantly alert to the stranger's presence, and interesting conjectures were hazarded all day long at the back door of Martin's Dry-Goods Emporium, where all the clerks from the stores around the Square came to play checkers or look on at the game. (This was the club during the day; in the evening the club and the game removed to the drug, book, and wall-paper store on the corner.) At supper, the new arrival and his probable purposes were discussed over every table in the town. Upon inquiry, he had informed Judd Bennett, the driver of the omnibus, that he had come to stay. Naturally, such a declaration caused a sensation, as people did not come to Plattville to live, except through the inadvertency of being born there. In addition, the young man's appearance and attire were reported to be extraordinary. Many of the curious, among them most of the marriageable females of the place, took occasion to pass and repass the sign of the "Carlow County Herald" during the evening.

Meanwhile, the stranger was seated in the dingy office upstairs with his head bowed low on his arms. Twilight stole through the dirty window-panes and faded into darkness. Night filled the room. He did not move. The young man from the East had bought the "Herald" from an agent; had bought it without ever having been within a hundred miles of Plattville. He had vastly overpaid for it. Moreover, the price he had paid for it was all the

money he had in the world.

The next morning he went bitterly to work. He hired a compositor from Rouen, a young man named Parker, who set type all night long and helped him pursue advertisements all day. The citizens shook their heads pessimistically. They had about given up the idea that the "Herald" could ever amount to anything, and they betrayed an innocent, but caustic, doubt of ability in any stranger.

One day the new editor left a note on his door; "Will return in fifteen minutes."

Mr. Rodney McCune, a politician from the neighboring county of Gaines, happening to be in Plattville on an errand to his henchmen, found the note, and wrote beneath the message the scathing inquiry, "Why?"

When he discovered this addendum, the editor smiled for the first time since his advent, and reported the incident in his next issue, using the rubric, "Why Has the 'Herald' Returned to Life?" as a text for a rousing editorial on "honesty in politics," a subject of which he already knew something. The political district to which Carlow belonged was governed by a limited number of gentlemen whose wealth was ever on the increase; and "honesty in politics" was a startling conception to the minds of the passive and resigned voters, who discussed the editorial on the street corners and in the stores. The next week there was another editorial, personal and local in its application, and thereby it became evident that the new proprietor of the "Herald" was a theorist who believed, in general, that a politician's honor should not be merely of that middling healthy species known as "honor amongst politicians"; and, in particular, that Rodney McCune should not receive the nomination of his party for Congress. Now, Mr. McCune was the undoubted dictator of the district, and his followers laughed at the stranger's fantastic onset.

But the editor was not content with the word of print; he hired a horse and rode about the country, and (to his own surprise) he proved to be an adaptable young man who enjoyed exercise with a pitchfork to the farmer's profit while the farmer talked. He talked little himself, but after listening an hour or so, he would drop a word from the saddle as he left; and then, by some surprising wizardry, the farmer, thinking over the interview, decided there was some sense in what that young fellow said, and grew curious to see what the young fellow had further to say in the "Herald."

Politics is the one subject that goes to the vitals of every rural American; and a Hoosier will talk politics after he is dead.

Everybody read the campaign editorials, and found them interesting, although there was no one who did not perceive the utter absurdity of a young stranger's dropping into Carlow and involving himself in a party fight against the boss of the district. It was entirely a party fight; for, by grace of the last gerrymander, the nomination carried with it the certainty of election. A week before the convention there came a provincial earthquake; the news passed from man to man in awe-struck whispers--McCune had withdrawn his name, making the hollowest of excuses to his cohorts. Nothing was known of the real reason for his disordered retreat, beyond the fact that he had been in Plattville on the morning before his withdrawal and had issued from a visit to the "Herald" office in a state of palsy. Mr. Parker, the Rouen printer, had been present at the close of the interview; but he held his peace at the command of his

employer. He had been called into the sanctum, and had found McCune, white and shaking, leaning on the desk.

"Parker," said the editor, exhibiting a bundle of papers he held in his hand, "I want you to witness a verbal contract between Mr. McCune and myself. These papers are an affidavit and copies of some records of a street-car company which obtained a charter while Mr McCune was in the State legislature. They were sent to me by a man I do not know, an anonymous friend of Mr. McCune's; in fact, a friend he seems to have lost. On consideration of our not printing these papers, Mr. McCune agrees to retire from politics for good. You understand, if he ever lifts his head again, politically, We publish them, and the courts will do the rest. Now, in case anything should happen to me----"

"Something will happen to you, all right," broke out McCune. "You can bank on that, you black----"

"Come," the editor interrupted, not unpleasantly "why should there be anything personal, in all this? I don't recognize you as my private enemy --not at all; and I think you are getting off rather easily; aren't you? You stay out of politics, and everything will be comfortable. You ought never to have been in it, you see. It's a mistake not to keep square, because in the long run somebody is sure to give you away--like the fellow who sent me these. You promise to hold to a strictly private life?"

"You're a traitor to the party," groaned the other, "but you only wait----"

The editor smiled sadly. "Wait nothing. Don't threaten, man. Go home to your wife. I'll give you three to one she'll be glad you are out of it."

"I'll give you three to one," said McCune, "that the White Caps will get you if you stay in Carlow. You want to look out for yourself, I tell you, my smart boy!"

"Good-day, Mr. McCune," was the answer. "Let me have your note of withdrawal before you leave town this afternoon." The young man paused a moment, then extended his hand, as he said: "Shake hands, won't you? I--I haven't meant to be too hard on you. I hope things will seem easier and gayer to you before long; and if--if anything should turn up that I can do for you in a private way, I'll be very glad, you know. Good-by."

The sound of the "Herald's" victory went over the State. The paper came out regularly. The townsfolk bought it and the farmers drove in for it. Old subscribers came back. Old advertisers renewed. The "Herald" began to sell in Amo, and Gaines County people subscribed. Carlow folk held up their heads when journalism was mentioned. Presently the "Herald" announced a news connection with Rouen, and with that, and the aid of "patent insides," began an era of three issues a week, appearing on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. The Plattville Brass Band serenaded the editor.

During the second month of the new regime of the "Herald," the working force of the paper received an addition. One night the editor found some barroom loafers tormenting a patriarchal old man who had a magnificent head and a grand white beard. He had been thrown out of a saloon, and he was drunk with the drunkenness of three weeks steady pouring. He propped himself against a wall and reproved his tormentors in Latin. "I'm walking your way, Mr. Fisbee," remarked the journalist, hooking his arm into the

old man's. "Suppose we leave our friends here and go home?"

Mr. Fisbee was the one inhabitant of the town who had an unknown past; no one knew more about him than that he had been connected with a university somewhere, and had travelled in unheard-of countries before he came to Plattville. A glamour of romance was thrown about him by the gossips, to whom he ever proved a fund of delightful speculation. There was a dark, portentous secret in his life, it was agreed; an opinion not too well confirmed by the old man's appearance. His fine eyes had a pathetic habit of wandering to the horizon in a questioning fashion that had a queer sort of hopelessness in it, as if his quest were one for the Holy Grail, perhaps; and his expression was mild, vague, and sad. He had a look of race and blood; and yet, at the first glance, one saw that he was lost in dreams, and one guessed that the dreams would never be of great practicability in their application. Some such impression of Fisbee was probably what caused the editor of the "Herald" to nickname him (in his own mind) "The White Knight," and to conceive a strong, if whimsical, fancy for him.

Old Fisbee had come (from nobody knew where) to Plattville to teach, and had been principal of the High School for ten years, instructing his pupils after a peculiar fashion of his own, neglecting the ordinary courses of High School instruction to lecture on archaeology to the dumfounded scholars; growing year by year more forgetful and absent, lost in his few books and his own reflections, until, though undeniably a scholar, he had been discharged for incompetency. He was old; he had no money and no way to make money; he could find nothing to do. The blow had seemed to daze him for a time; then he began to drop in at the hotel bar, where Wilkerson, the professional drunkard, favored him with his society. The old man understood; he knew it was the beginning of the end. He sold his books in order to continue his credit at the Palace bar, and once or twice, unable to proceed to his own dwelling, spent the night in a lumber yard, piloted thither by the hardier veteran, Wilkerson.

The morning after the editor took him home, Fisbee appeared at the "Herald" office in a new hat and a decent suit of black. He had received his salary in advance, his books had been repurchased, and he had become the reportorial staff of the "Carlow County Herald"; also, he was to write various treatises for the paper. For the first few evenings, when he started home from the office, his chief walked with him, chatting heartily, until they had passed the Palace bar. But Fisbee's redemption was complete.

The old man had a daughter. When she came to Plattville, he told her what the editor of the "Herald" had done for him.

The journalist kept steadily at his work; and, as time went on, the bitterness his predecessor's swindle had left him passed away. But his loneliness and a sense of defeat grew and deepened. When the vistas of the world had opened to his first youth, he had not thought to spend his life in such a place as Plattville; but he found himself doing it, and it was no great happiness to him that the congressional representative of the district, the gentleman whom the "Herald's" opposition to McCune had sent to Washington, came to depend on his influence for renomination; nor did the realization that the editor of the "Carlow County Herald" had come to be McCune's successor as political dictator produce a perceptibly enlivening effect on the young man. The years drifted very slowly, and to him it seemed they went by while he stood far aside and could not even see them move. He did not consider the life he led an exciting one; but the

other citizens of Carlow did when he undertook a war against the "White Caps." The natives were much more afraid of the "White Caps" than he was; they knew more about them and understood them better than he did.

CHAPTER II

THE STRANGE LADY

IT was June. From the patent inner columns of the "Carlow County Herald" might be gleaned the information (enlivened by cuts of duchesses) that the London season had reached a high point of gaiety; and that, although the weather had grown inauspiciously warm, there was sufficient gossip for the thoughtful. To the rapt mind of Miss Selina Tibbs came a delicious moment of comparison: precisely the same conditions prevailed in Plattville.

Not unduly might Miss Selina lay this flattering unction to her soul, and well might the "Herald" declare that "Carlow events were crowding thick and fast." The congressional representative of the district was to deliver a lecture at the court-house; a circus was approaching the county-seat, and its glories would be exhibited "rain or shine"; the court had cleared up the docket by sitting to unseemly hours of the night, even until ten o'clock--one farmer witness had fallen asleep while deposing that he "had knowed this man Hender some eighteen year"--and, as excitements come indeed when they do come, and it seldom rains but it pours, the identical afternoon of the lecture a strange lady descended from the Rouen Accommodation and was greeted on the platform by the wealthiest citizen of the county. Judge Briscoe, and his daughter, Minnie, and (what stirred wonder to an itch almost beyond endurance) Mr. Fisbee! and they then drove through town on the way to the Briscoe mansion, all four, apparently, in a fluster of pleasure and exhilaration, the strange lady engaged in earnest conversation with Mr. Fisbee on the back seat.

Judd Bennett had had the best stare at her, but, as he immediately fell into a dreamy and absent state, little satisfaction could be got from him, merely an exasperating statement that the stranger seemed to have a kind of new look to her. However, by means of Miss Mildy Upton, a domestic of the Briscoe household, the community was given something a little more definite. The lady's name was Sherwood; she lived in Rouen; and she had known Miss Briscoe at the eastern school the latter had attended (to the feverish agitation of Plattville) three years before; but Mildy confessed her inadequacy in the matter of Mr. Fisbee. He had driven up in the buckboard with the others and evidently expected to stay for supper Mr. Tibbs, the postmaster (it was to the postoffice that Miss Upton brought her information) suggested, as a possible explanation, that the lady was so learned that the Briscoes had invited Fisbee on the ground of his being the only person in Plattville they esteemed wise enough to converse with her; but Miss Tibbs wrecked her brother's theory by mentioning the name of Fisbee's chief.

"You see, Solomon," she sagaciously observed, "if that were true, they would have invited him, instead of Mr. Fisbee, and I wish they had. He isn't troubled with malaria, and yet the longer he lives here the sallower-looking and sadder-looking he gets. I think the company of a lovely stranger might be of great cheer to his heart, and it will be interesting to witness the meeting between them. It may be," added the

poetess, "that they _have_ already met, on his travels before he settled here. It may be that they are old friends--or even more."

"Then what," returned her brother, "what is he doin' settin' up in his office all afternoon with ink on his forehead, while Fisbee goes out ridin' with her and stays for supper after_werds_?"

Although the problem of Fisbee's attendance remained a mere maze of hopeless speculation, Mildy had been present at the opening of Miss Sherwood's trunk, and here was matter for the keen consideration of the ladies, at least. Thoughtful conversations in regard to hats and linings took place across fences and on corners of the Square that afternoon; and many gentlemen wondered (in wise silence) why their spouses were absent-minded and brooded during the evening meal.

At half-past seven, the Hon. Kedge Halloway of Amo delivered himself of his lecture; "The Past and Present. What we may Glean from Them, and Their Influence on the Future." At seven the court-room was crowded, and Miss Tibbs, seated on the platform (reserved for prominent citizens), viewed the expectant throng with rapture. It is possible that she would have confessed to witnessing a sea of faces, but it is more probable that she viewed the expectant throng. The thermometer stood at eighty-seven degrees and there was a rustle of incessantly moving palm-leaf fans as, row by row, their yellow sides twinkled in the light of eight oil lamps. The stouter ladies wielded their fans with vigor. There were some very pretty faces in Mr. Halloway's audience, but it is a peculiarity of Plattville that most of those females who do not incline to stoutness incline far in the opposite direction, and the lean ladies naturally suffered less from the temperature than their sisters. The shorn lamb is cared for, but often there seems the intention to impart a moral in the refusal of Providence to temper warm weather to the full-bodied.

Old Tom Martin expressed a strong consciousness of such intention when he observed to the shocked Miss Selina, as Mr. Bill Snoddy, the stoutest citizen of the county, waddled abnormally up the aisle: "The Almighty must be gittin" a heap of fun out of Bill Snoddy to-night."

"Oh, Mr. Martin!" exclaimed Miss Tibbs, fluttering at his irreverence.

"Why, you would yourself. Miss Seliny," returned old Tom. Mr. Martin always spoke in one key, never altering the pitch of his high, dry, unctuous drawl, though, when his purpose was more than ordinarily humorous, his voice assumed a shade of melancholy. Now and then he meditatively passed his fingers through his gray beard, which followed the line of his jaw, leaving his upper lip and most of his chin smooth-shaven. "Did you ever reason out why folks laugh so much at fat people?" he continued. "No, ma'am. Neither'd anybody else."

"Why is it, Mr. Martin?" asked Miss Selina.

"It's like the Creator's sayin', 'Let there be light.' He says, 'Let ladies be lovely--'" (Miss Tibbs bowed)--"and 'Let men-folks be honest--sometimes;' and, 'Let fat people be held up to ridicule till they fall off.' You can't tell why it is; it was jest ordained that-a-way."

The room was so crowded that the juvenile portion of the assemblage was ensconced in the windows. Strange to say, the youth of Plattville were not present under protest, as their fellows of a metropolis would have been, lectures being well understood by the young of great cities to have

instructive tendencies. The boys came to-night because they insisted upon coming. It was an event. Some of them had made sacrifices to come, enduring even the agony (next to hair-cutting in suffering) of having their ears washed. Conscious of parental eyes, they fronted the public with boyhood's professional expressionlessness, though they communicated with each other aside in a cipher-language of their own, and each group was a hot-bed of furtive gossip and sarcastic comment. Seated in the windows, they kept out what small breath of air might otherwise have stolen in to comfort the audience.

Their elders sat patiently dripping with perspiration, most of the gentlemen undergoing the unusual garniture of stiffly-starched collars, those who had not cultivated chin beards to obviate such arduous necessities of pomp and state, hardly bearing up under the added anxiety of cravats. However, they sat outwardly meek under the yoke; nearly all of them seeking a quiet solace of tobacco--not that they smoked; Heaven and the gallantry of Carlow County forbid--nor were there anywhere visible tokens of the comforting ministrations of nicotine to violate the eye of etiquette. It is an art of Plattville.

Suddenly there was a hum and a stir and a buzz of whispering in the room. Two gray old men and two pretty young women passed up the aisle to the platform. One old man was stalwart and ruddy, with a cordial eye and a handsome, smooth-shaven, big face. The other was bent and trembled slightly; his face was very white; he had a fine high brow, deeply lined, the brow of a scholar, and a grandly flowing white beard that covered his chest, the beard of a patriarch. One of the young women was tall and had the rosy cheeks and pleasant eyes of her father, who preceded her. The other was the strange lady.

A universal perturbation followed her progress up the aisle, if she had known it. She was small and fair, very daintily and beautifully made; a pretty Marquise whose head Greuze. should have painted Mrs. Columbus Landis, wife of the proprietor of the Palace Hotel, conferring with a lady in the next seat, applied an over-burdened adjective: "It ain't so much she's han'some, though she is, that--but don't you notice she's got a kind of smart look to her? Her bein' so teeny, kind of makes it more so, somehow, too." What stunned the gossips of the windows to awed admiration, however, was the unconcerned and stoical fashion in which she wore a long bodkin straight through her head. It seemed a large sacrifice merely to make sure one's hat remained in place.

The party took seats a little to the left and rear of the lecturer's table, and faced the audience. The strange lady chatted gaily with the other three, apparently as unconscious of the multitude of eyes fixed upon her as the gazers were innocent of rude intent. There were pretty young women in Plattville; Minnie Briscoe was the prettiest, and, as the local glass of fashion reflected, "the stylishest"; but this girl was different, somehow, in a way the critics were puzzled to discover--different, from the sparkle of her eyes and the crown of her trim sailor hat, to the edge of her snowy duck skirt.

Judd Bennett sighed a sigh that was heard in every corner of the room. As everybody immediately turned to look at him, he got up and went out.

It had long been a jocose fiction of Mr. Martin, who was a widower of thirty years' standing, that he and the gifted authoress by his side were in a state of courtship. Now he bent his rugged head toward her to whisper: "I never thought to see the day you'd have a rival in my

affections. Miss Seliny, but yonder looks like it. I reckon I'll have to go up to Ben Tinkle's and buy that fancy vest he's had in stock this last twelve year or more. Will you take me back when she's left the city again; Miss Seliny?" he drawled. "I expect, maybe, Miss Sherwood is one of these here summer girls. I've heard of 'em but I never see one before. You better take warning and watch me--Fisbee won't have no clear field from now on."

The stranger leaned across to speak to Miss Briscoe and her sleeve touched the left shoulder of the old man with the patriarchal white beard. A moment later he put his right hand to that shoulder and gently moved it up and down with a caressing motion over the shabby black broadcloth her garment had touched.

"Look at that old Fisbee!" exclaimed Mr. Martin, affecting indignation. "Never be 'n half as spruced up and wide awake in all his life. He's prob'ly got her to listen to him on the decorations of Nineveh--it's my belief he was there when it was destroyed. Well, if I can't cut him out we'll get our respected young friend of the 'Herald' to do it."

"Sh!" returned Miss Tibbs. "Here he is."

The seats upon the platform were all occupied, except the two foremost ones in the centre (one on each side of a little table with a lamp, a pitcher of ice-water, and a glass) reserved for the lecturer and the gentleman who was to introduce him. Steps were audible in the hall, and every one turned to watch the door, where the distinguished pair now made their appearance in a hush of expectation over which the beating of the fans alone prevailed. The Hon. Kedge Halloway was one of the gleaners of the flesh-pots, himself, and he marched into the room unostentatiously mopping his shining expanse of brow with a figured handkerchief. He was a person of solemn appearance; a fat gold watch-chain which curved across his ponderous front, adding mysteriously to his gravity. At his side strolled a very tall, thin, rather stooping--though broad-shouldered--rather shabby young man with a sallow, melancholy face and deep-set eyes that looked tired. When they were seated, the orator looked over his audience slowly and with an incomparable calm; then, as is always done, he and the melancholy young man exchanged whispers for a few moments. After this there was a pause, at the end of which the latter rose and announced that it was his pleasure and his privilege to introduce, that evening, a gentleman who needed no introduction to that assemblage. What citizen of Carlow needed an introduction, asked the speaker, to the orator they had applauded in the campaigns of the last twenty years, the statesman author of the Halloway Bill, the most honored citizen of the neighboring and flourishing county and city of Amo? And, the speaker would say, that if there were one thing the citizens of Carlow could be held to envy the citizens of Amo, it was the Honorable Kedge Halloway, the thinker, to whose widely-known paper they were about to have the pleasure and improvement of listening.

The introduction was so vehemently applauded that, had there been present a person connected with the theatrical profession, he might have been nervous for fear the introducer had prepared no encore. "Kedge is too smart to take it all to himself," commented Mr. Martin. "He knows it's half account of the man that said it."

He was not mistaken. Mr. Halloway had learned a certain perceptiveness on the stump. Resting one hand upon his unfolded notes upon the table, he turned toward the melancholy young man (who had subsided into the small of

his back in his chair) and, after clearing his throat, observed with sudden vehemence that he must thank his gifted friend for his flattering remarks, but that when he said that Carlow envied Amo a Halloway, it must be replied that Amo grudged no glory to her sister county of Carlow, but, if Amo could find envy in her heart it would be because Carlow possessed a paper so sterling, so upright, so brilliant, so enterprising as the "Carlow County Herald," and a journalist so talented, so gifted, so energetic, so fearless, as its editor.

The gentleman referred to showed very faint appreciation of these ringing compliments. There was a lamp on the table beside him, against which, to the view of Miss Sherwood of Rouen, his face was silhouetted, and very rarely had it been her lot to see a man look less enthusiastic under public and favorable comment of himself. She wondered if he, also, remembered the Muggleton cricket match and the subsequent dinner oratory.

The lecture proceeded. The orator winged away to soary heights with gestures so vigorous as to cause admiration for his pluck in making use of them on such a night; the perspiration streamed down his face, his neck grew purple, and he dared the very face of apoplexy, binding his auditors with a double spell. It is true that long before the peroration the windows were empty and the boys were eating stolen, unripe fruit in the orchards of the listeners. The thieves were sure of an alibi.

The Hon. Mr. Halloway reached a logical conclusion which convinced even the combative and unwilling that the present depends largely upon the past, while the future will be determined, for the most part, by the conditions of the present. "The future," he cried, leaning forward with an expression of solemn warning, "The future is in our own hands, ladies and gentlemen of the city of Plattville. Is it not so? We will find it so. Turn it over in your minds." He leaned backward and folded his hands benevolently on his stomach and said in a searching whisper; "Ponder it." He waited for them to ponder it, and little Mr. Swanter, the druggist and bookseller, who prided himself on his politeness and who was seated directly in front, scratched his head and knit his brows to show that he was pondering it. The stillness was intense; the fans ceased to beat; Mr. Snoddy could be heard breathing dangerously. Mr. Swanter was considering the advisability of drawing a pencil from his pocket and figuring on it upon his cuff, when suddenly, with the energy of a whirlwind, the lecturer threw out his arms to their fullest extent and roared: "It is a _fact_! It is carven on stone in the gloomy caverns of TIME. It is writ in FIRE on the imperishable walls of Fate!"

After the outburst, his voice sank with startling rapidity to a tone of honeyed confidence, and he wagged an inviting forefinger at Mr. Snoddy, who opened his mouth. "Shall we take an example? Not from the marvellous, my friends; let us seek an illustration from the ordinary. Is that not better? One familiar to the humblest of us. One we can all comprehend. One from our every-day life. One which will interest even the young. Yes. The common house-fly. On a window-sill we place a bit of fly-paper, and contiguous to it, a flower upon which the happy insect likes to feed and rest. The little fly approaches. See, he hovers between the two. One is a fatal trap, an ambuscade, and the other a safe harbor and an innocuous haven. But mystery allures him. He poises, undecided. That is the present. That, my friends, is the Present! What will he do? WHAT will he do? What will he DO? Memories of the past are whispering to him: 'Choose the flower. Light on the posy.' Here we clearly see the influence of the past upon the present. But, to employ a figure of speech, the fly-paper beckons to the insect toothsomely, and, thinks he; 'Shall I give it a try? Shall

I? Shall I give it a try?' The future is in his own hands to make or unmake. The past, the voice of Providence, has counselled him: 'Leave it alone, leave it alone, little fly. Go away from there.' Does he heed the warning? Does he heed it, ladies and gentlemen? Does he? Ah, no! He springs into the air, decides between the two attractions, one of them, so deadly to his interests and--_drops upon the fly-paper to perish miserably_! The future is in his hands no longer. We must lie upon the bed that we have made, nor can Providence change its unalterable decrees."

After the tragedy, the orator took a swallow of water, mopped his brow with the figured handkerchief and announced that a new point herewith presented itself for consideration. The audience sank back with a gasp of release from the strain of attention. Minnie Briscoe, leaning back, breathless like the others, became conscious that a tremor agitated her visitor. Miss Sherwood had bent her head behind the shelter of the judge's broad shoulders; was shaking slightly and had covered her face with her hands.

"What is it, Helen?" whispered Miss Briscoe, anxiously. "What is it? Is something the matter?"

"Nothing. Nothing, dear." She dropped her hands from her face. Her cheeks were deep crimson, and she bit her lip with determination.

"Oh, but there is! Why, you've tears in your eyes. Are you faint? What is it?"

"It is only--only----" Miss Sherwood choked, then cast a swift glance at the profile of the melancholy young man. The perfectly dismal decorum of this gentleman seemed to inspire her to maintain her own gravity. "It is only that it seemed such a pity about that fly," she explained. From where they sat the journalistic silhouette was plainly visible, and both Fisbee and Miss Sherwood looked toward it often, the former with the wistful, apologetic fidelity one sees in the eyes of an old setter watching his master.

When the lecture was over many of the audience pressed forward to shake the Hon. Mr. Halloway's hand. Tom Martin hooked his arm in that of the sallow gentleman and passed out with him.

"Mighty humanizin' view Kedge took of that there insect," remarked Mr. Martin. "I don't recollect I ever heard of no mournfuller error than that'n. I noticed you spoke of Halloway as a 'thinker,' without mentioning what kind. I didn't know, before, that you were as cautious a man as that."

"Does your satire find nothing sacred, Martin?" returned the other, "not even the Honorable Kedge Halloway?"

"I wouldn't presume," replied old Tom, "to make light of the catastrophe that overtook the heedless fly. When Halloway went on to other subjects I was so busy picturin' the last moments of that closin' life, stuck there in the fly-paper, I couldn't listen to him. But there's no use dwellin' on a sorrow we can't help. Look at the moon; it's full enough to cheer us up." They had emerged from the court-house and paused on the street as the stream of townsfolk divided and passed by them to take different routes leading from the Square. Not far away, some people were getting into a buckboard. Fisbee and Miss Sherwood were already on the rear seat.

"Who's with him, to-night, Mr. Fisbee?" asked Judge Briscoe in a low voice.

"No one. He is going directly to the office. To-morrow is Thursday, one of our days of publication."

"Oh, then it's all right. Climb in, Minnie, we're waiting for you." The judge offered his hand to his daughter.

"In a moment, father," she answered. "I'm going to ask him to call," she said to the other girl.

"But won't he--"

Miss Briscoe laughed. "He never comes to see me!" She walked over to where Martin and the young man were looking up at the moon, and addressed the journalist.

"I've been trying to get a chance to speak to you for a week," she said, offering him her hand; "I wanted to tell you I had a friend coming to visit me Won't you come to see us? She's here."

The young man bowed. "Thank you," he answered. "Thank you, very much. I shall be very glad." His tone had the meaningless quality of perfunctory courtesy; Miss Briscoe detected only the courtesy; but the strange lady marked the lack of intention in his words.

"Don't you include me, Minnie?" inquired Mr Martin, plaintively. "I'll try not to be too fascinatin', so as to give our young friend a show. It was love at first sight with me. I give Miss Seliny warning soon as your folks come in and I got a good look at the lady."

As the buckboard drove away, Miss Sherwood, who had been gazing steadfastly at the two figures still standing in the street, the tall ungainly old one, and the taller, loosely-held young one (he had not turned to look at her) withdrew her eyes from them, bent them seriously upon Fisbee, and asked: "What did you mean when you said no one was with him to-night?"

"That no one was watching him," he answered.

"Watching him? I don't understand."

"Yes; he has been shot at from the woods at night and----"

The girl shivered. "But who watches him?"

"The young men of the town. He has a habit of taking long walks after dark, and he is heedless of all remonstrance. He laughs at the idea of curtailing the limit of his strolls or keeping within the town when night has fallen; so the young men have organized a guard for him, and every evening one of them follows him until he goes to the office to work for the night. It is a different young man every evening, and the watcher follows at a distance so that he does not suspect."

"But how many people know of this arrangement?"

"Nearly every one in the county except the Cross-Roads people, though it is not improbable that they have discovered it."

"And has no one told him"

"No; it would annoy him; he would not allow it to continue. He will not even arm himself."

"They follow and watch him night after night, and every one knows and no one tells him? Oh, I must say," cried the girl, "I think these are good people."

The stalwart old man on the front seat shook out the reins and whined the whip over his roans' backs. "They are the people of your State and mine. Miss Sherwood," he said in his hearty voice, "the best people in God's world--and I'm not running for Congress, either!"

"But how about the Six-Cross-Roads people, father?" asked Minnie.

"We'll wipe them clean out some day," answered her father--"possibly judicially, possibly----"

"Surely judiciously?" suggested Miss Sherwood.

"If you care to see what a bad settlement looks like, we'll drive through there to-morrow--by daylight," said Briscoe. "Even the doctor doesn't insist on being in that neighborhood after dark. They are trying their best to get Harkless, and if they do----"

"If they do!" repeated Miss Sherwood. She clasped Fisbee's hand gently. His eyes shone and he touched her fingers with a strange, shy reverence.

"You will meet him to-morrow," he said.

She laughed and pressed his hand. "I'm afraid not. He wasn't even interested enough to look at me."

CHAPTER III

LONESOMENESS

When the rusty hands of the office clock marked half-past four, the editor-in-chief of the "Carlow County Herald" took his hand out of his hair, wiped his pen on his last notice from the White-Caps, put on his coat, swept out the close little entry, and left the sanctum for the bright June afternoon.

He chose the way to the west, strolling thoughtfully out of town by the white, hot, deserted Main Street, and thence onward by the country road into which its proud half-mile of old brick store buildings, tumbled-down frame shops and thinly painted cottages degenerated. The sun was in his face, where the road ran between the summer fields, lying waveless, low, gracious in promise; but, coming to a wood of hickory and beech and walnut that stood beyond, he might turn his down-bent-hat-brim up and hold his head erect. Here the shade fell deep and cool on the green tangle of rag and iron weed and long grass in the corners of the snake fence, although the sun beat upon the road so dose beside. There was no movement in the

crisp young leaves overhead; high in the boughs there was a quick flirt of crimson where two robins hopped noiselessly. No insect raised resentment of the lonesomeness: the late afternoon, when the air is quite still, had come; yet there rested--somewhere--on the quiet day, a faint, pleasant, woody smell. It came to the editor of the "Herald" as he climbed to the top rail of the fence for a seat, and he drew a long, deep breath to get the elusive odor more luxuriously--and then it was gone altogether.

"A habit of delicacies," he said aloud, addressing the wide silence complainingly. He drew a faded tobacco-bag and a brier pipe from his coat pocket and filled and lit the pipe. "One taste--and they quit," he finished, gazing solemnly upon the shining little town down the road. He twirled the pouch mechanically about his finger, and then, suddenly regarding it, patted it caressingly. It had been a giddy little bag, long ago, satin, and gay with embroidery in the colors of the editor's university; and although now it was frayed to the verge of tatters, it still bore an air of pristine jauntiness, an air of which its owner in no wise partook. He looked from it over the fields toward the town in the clear distance and sighed softly as he put the pouch back in his pocket, and, resting his arm on his knee and his chin in his hand, sat blowing clouds of smoke out of the shade into the sunshine, absently watching the ghostly shadows dance on the white dust of the road.

A little garter snake crept under the fence beneath him and disappeared in the underbrush; a rabbit progressing timidly on his travels by a series of brilliant dashes and terror-smitten halts, came within a few yards of him, sat up with quivering nose and eyes alight with fearful imaginings--vanished, a flash of fluffy brown and white. Shadows grew longer; the brier pipe sputtered feebly in depletion and was refilled. A cricket chirped and heard answer; there was a woodland stir of breezes; and the pair of robins left the branches overhead in eager flight, vacating before the arrival of a great flock of blackbirds hastening thither ere the eventide should be upon them. The blackbirds came, chattered, gossiped, quarrelled, and beat each other with their wings above the smoker sitting on the top fence rail.

But he had remembered--it was Commencement. To-day, a thousand miles to the east, a company of grave young gentlemen sat in semi-circular rows before a central altar, while above them rose many tiers of mothers and sisters and sweethearts, listening to the final word. He could see it all very clearly: the lines of freshly shaven, boyish faces, the dainty gowns, the flowers and bright eyes above, and the light that filtered in through stained glass to fall softly over them all, with, here and there, a vivid splash of color, Gothic shaped. He could see the throngs of white-clad loungers under the elms without, under-classmen, bored by the Latin addresses and escaped to the sward and breeze of the campus; there were the troops of roistering graduates trotting about arm in arm, and singing; he heard the mandolins on the little balconies play an old refrain and the university cheering afterward; saw the old professor he had cared for most of all, with the thin white hair straggling over his silken hood, following the band in the sparse ranks of his class. And he saw his own Commencement Day--and the station at the junction where he stood the morning after, looking across the valley at the old towers for the last time; saw the broken groups of his class, standing upon the platform on the other side of the tracks, waiting for the south-bound train as he and others waited for the north-bound--and they all sang "Should auld acquaintance be forgot;" and, while they looked across at each other, singing, the shining rails between them wavered and blurred as the engine rushed in and separated them and their lives thenceforth. He filled his

pipe again and spoke to the phantoms gliding over the dust--"Seven years!" He was occupied with the realization that there had been a man in his class whose ambition needed no restraint, his promise was so complete--in the strong belief of the university, a belief he could not help knowing--and that seven years to a day from his Commencement this man was sitting on a fence rail in Indiana.

Down the road a buggy came creaking toward him, gray with dust, the top canted permanently to one side, old and frayed, like the fat, shaggy, gray mare that drew it; her unchecked, despondent head lowering before her, while her incongruous tail waved incessantly, like the banner of a storming party. The editor did not hear the flop of the mare's feet nor the sound of the wheels, so deep was his reverie, till the vehicle was nearly opposite him. The red-faced and perspiring driver drew rein, and the journalist looked up and waved a long white hand to him in greeting.

"Howdy' do, Mr. Harkless?" called the man in the buggy. "Soakin' in the weather?" He spoke in shouts, though neither was hard of hearing.

"Yes; just soaking," answered Harkless; "it's such a gypsy day. How is Mr. Bowlder?"

"I'm givin' good satisfaction, thankye, and all at home. She's in town; goin' in after her now."

"Give Mrs. Bowlder my regards," said the journalist, comprehending the symbolism. "How is Hartley?"

The farmer's honest face shaded over, a second. "He's be'n steady ever sence the night you brought him out home; six weeks straight. I'm kind of bothered about to-morrow--It's show-day and he wants to come in town with us, and seems if I hadn't any call to say no. I reckon he'll have to take his chances--and us, too." He raised the reins and clucked to the gray mare; "Well, she'll be mad I ain't there long ago. Ride in with me?"

"No, I thank you. I'll walk in for the sake of my appetite."

"Wouldn't encourage it _too_ much--livin' at the Palace Hotel,'" observed Bowlder. "Sorry ye won't ride." He gathered the loose ends of the reins in his hands, leaned far over the dashboard and struck the mare a hearty thwack; the tattered banner of tail jerked indignantly, but she consented to move down the road. Bowlder thrust his big head through the sun-curtain behind him and continued the conversation: "See the White-Caps ain't got ye yet."

"No, not yet." Harkless laughed.

"Reckon the boys 'druther ye stayed in town after dark," the other called back; then, as the mare stumbled into a trot, "Well, come out and see us--if ye kin spare time from the jedge's." The latter clause seemed to be an afterthought intended with humor, for Bowlder accompanied it with the loud laughter of sylvan timidity, risking a joke. Harkless nodded without the least apprehension of his meaning, and waved farewell as Bowlder finally turned his attention to the mare. When the flop, flop of her hoofs had died out, the journalist realized that the day was silent no longer; it was verging into evening.

He dropped from the fence and turned his face toward town and supper. He felt the light and life about him; heard the clatter of the blackbirds

above him; heard the homing bees hum by, and saw the vista of white road and level landscape, framed on two sides by the branches of the grove, a vista of infinitely stretching fields of green, lined here and there with woodlands and flat to the horizon line, the village lying in their lap. No roll of meadow, no rise of pasture land, relieved their serenity nor shouldered up from them to be called a hill. A second great flock of blackbirds was settling down over the Plattville maples. As they hung in the fair dome of the sky below the few white clouds, it occurred to Harkless that some supping god had inadvertently peppered his custard, and now inverted and emptied his gigantic blue dish upon the earth, the innumerable little black dots seeming to poise for a moment, then floating slowly down from the heights.

A farm-bell rang in the distance, a tinkling coming small and mellow from far away, and at the lonesomeness of that sound he heaved a long, mournful sigh. The next instant he broke into laughter, for another bell rang over the fields, the court-house bell in the Square. The first four strokes were given with mechanical regularity, the pride of the custodian who operated the bell being to produce the effect of a clock-work bell such as he had once heard in the court-house at Rouen; but the fifth and sixth strokes were halting achievements, as, after four o'clock, he often lost count on the strain of the effort for precise imitation. There was a pause after the sixth, then a dubious and reluctant stroke--seven--a longer pause, followed by a final ring with desperate decision--eight! Harkless looked at his watch; it was twenty minutes of six.

As he crossed the court-house yard to the Palace Hotel, he stopped to exchange a word with the bell-ringer, who, seated on the steps, was mopping his brow with an air of hard-earned satisfaction.

"Good-evening, Schofields'," he said. "You came in strong on the last stroke, to-night."

"What we need here," responded the bell-ringer, "is more public-spirited men. I ain't kickin' on you, Mr. Harkless, no sir; but we want more men like they got in Rouen; we want men that'll git Main Street paved with block or asphalt; men that'll put in factories, men that'll act and not set round like that ole fool Martin and laugh and polly-woggle and make fun of public sperrit, day in and out. I reckon I do my best for the city."

"Oh, nobody minds Tom Martin," answered Harkless. "It's only half the time he means anything by what he says."

"That's jest what I hate about him," returned the bell-ringer in a tone of high complaint; "you can't never tell which half it is. Look at him now!" Over in front of the hotel Martin was standing, talking to the row of coatless loungers who sat with their chairs tilted back against the props of the wooden awning that projected over the sidewalk. Their faces were turned toward the court-house, and even those lost in meditative whittling had looked up to laugh. Martin, his hands in the pockets of his alpaca coat, his rusty silk hat tilted forward till the wide brim rested almost on the bridge of his nose, was addressing them in his one-keyed voice, the melancholy whine of which, though not the words, penetrated to the court-house steps.

The bell-ringer, whose name was Henry Schofield, but who was known as Schofield's Henry (popularly abbreviated to Schofields') was moved to indignation. "Look at him," he cried. "Look at him! Everlastingly goin' on

about my bell! Let him talk, jest let him talk." The supper gong boomed inside the hotel and Harkless bade the bell-ringer good-night. As he moved away the latter called after him: "He don't disturb nobody. Let him talk. Who pays any 'tention to him I'd like to know?" There was a burst of laughter from the whittlers. Schofields' sat in patient silence for a full minute, as one who knew that no official is too lofty to escape the anathemas of envy. Then he sprang to his feet and shook his fist at Martin, who was disappearing within the door of the hotel. "Go to Halifax!" he shouted.

The dining-room of the Palace Hotel was a large, airy apartment, rustling with artistically perforated and slashed pink paper that hung everywhere, at this season of the year, to lend festal effect as well as to palliate the scourge of flies. There were six or seven large tables, all vacant except that at which Columbus Landis, the landlord, sat with his guests, while his wife and children ate in the kitchen by their own preference. Transient trade was light in Plattville; nobody ever came there, except occasional commercial travellers who got out of town the instant it was possible, and who said awful things if, by the exigencies of the railway time-table, they were left over night.

Behind the host's chair stood a red-haired girl in a blue cotton gown; and in her hand she languidly waved a long instrument made of clustered strips of green and white and yellow tissue paper fastened to a wooden wand; with this she amiably amused the flies except at such times as the conversation proved too interesting, when she was apt to rest it on the shoulder of one of the guests. This happened each time the editor of the "Herald" joined in the talk. As the men seated themselves they all nodded to her and said, "G'd evening, Cynthy." Harkless always called her Charmion; no one knew why. When he came in she moved around the table to a chair directly opposite him, and held that station throughout the meal, with her eyes fixed on his face. Mr. Martin noted this manoeuvre--it occurred regularly twice a day--with a stealthy smile at the girl, and her light skin flushed while her lip curled shrewishly at the old gentleman. "Oh, all right, Cynthy," he whispered to her, and chuckled aloud at her angry toss of the head.

"Schofields' seemed to be kind of put out with me this evening," he remarked, addressing himself to the company. "He's the most ungratefullest cuss I ever come up with. I was only oratin' on how proud the city ought to be of him. He fairly keeps Plattville's sportin' spirit on the gog; 'die out, wasn't for him. There's be'n more money laid on him whether he'll strike over and above the hour, or under and below, or whether he'll strike fifteen minutes before time, or twenty after, than--well, sir, we'd all forgit the language if it wasn't for Schofields' bell to keep us talkin'; that's _my_ claim. Dull days, think of the talk he furnishes all over town. Think what he's done to promote conversation. Now, for instance, Anna Belle Bardlock's got a beau, they say"--here old Tom tilted back in his chair and turned an innocent eye upon a youth across the table, young William Todd, who was blushing over his griddle-cakes--"and I hear he's a good deal scared of Anna Belle and not just what you might call brash with her. They say every Sunday night he'll go up to Bardlocks' and call on Anna Belle from half-past six till nine, and when he's got into his chair he sets and looks at the floor and the crayon portraits till about seven; then he opens his tremblin' lips and says, 'Reckon Schofields' must be on his way to the court-house by this time.' And about an hour later, when Schofields' hits four or five, he'll speak up again, 'Say, I reckon he means eight.' 'Long towards nine o'clock, they say he skews around in his chair and says, 'Wonder if he'll strike before time or

after,' and Anna Belle answers out loud, 'I hope after,' for politeness; but in her soul she says, 'I pray before'; and then Schofields' hits her up for eighteen or twenty, and Anna Belle's company reaches for his hat. Three Sundays ago he turned around before he went out and said, 'Do you like apple-butter?' but never waited to find out. It's the same programme every Sunday evening, and Jim Bardlock says Anna Belle's so worn out you wouldn't hardly know her for the blithe creature she was last year--the excitement's be'n too much for her!"

Poor William Todd bent his fiery face over the table and suffered the general snicker in helpless silence. Then there was quiet for a space, broken only by the click of knives against the heavy china and the indolent rustle of Cynthia's fly-brush.

"Town so still," observed the landlord, finally, with a complacent glance at the dessert course of prunes to which his guests were helping themselves from a central reservoir, "Town so still, hardly seems like show-day's come round again. Yet there's be'n some shore signs lately: when my shavers come honeyin' up with, 'Say, pa, ain't they no urrands I can go for ye, pa? I like to run 'em for you, pa,'--'relse, 'Oh, pa, ain't they no water I can haul, or nothin', pa?'--'relse, as little Rosina T. says, this morning, 'Pa, I always pray fer _you_ pa,' and pa this and pa that-you can rely either Christmas or show-day's mighty close."

William Todd, taking occasion to prove himself recovered from confusion, remarked casually that there was another token of the near approach of the circus, as ole Wilkerson was drunk again.

"There's a man!" exclaimed Mr. Martin with enthusiasm. "There's the feller for _my_ money! He does his duty as a citizen more discriminatin'ly on public occasions than any man I ever see. There's Wilkerson's celebration when there's a funeral; look at the difference between it and on Fourth of July. Why, sir, it's as melancholy as a hearse-plume, and sympathy ain't the word for it when he looks at the remains, no sir; preacher nor undertaker, either, ain't _half_ as blue and respectful. Then take his circus spree. He come into the store this afternoon, head up, marchin' like a grenadier and shootin' his hand out before his face and drawin' it back again, and hollering out, 'Ta, ta, ta-ra-ta, ta, ta-ta-ra'--why, the dumbest man ever lived could see in a minute show's 'comin' to-morrow and Wilkerson's playin' the trombone. Then he'd snort and goggle like an elephant. Got the biggest sense of appropriateness of any man in the county, Wilkerson has. Folks don't half appreciate him."

As each boarder finished his meal he raided the glass of wooden toothpicks and went away with no standing on the order of his going; but Martin waited for Harkless, who, not having attended to business so concisely as the others, was the last to leave the table, and they stood for a moment under the awning outside, lighting their cigars.

"Call on the judge, to-night?" asked Martin.

"No," said Harkless. "Why?"

"Didn't you see the lady with Minnie and the judge at the lecture?"

"I caught a glimpse of her. That's what Bowlder meant, then."

"I don't know what Bowlder meant, but I guess you better go out there, young man. She might not stay here long."

CHAPTER IV

THE WALRUS AND THE CARPENTER

The Briscoe buckboard rattled along the elastic country-road, the roans setting a sharp pace as they turned eastward on the pike toward home and supper.

"They'll make the eight miles in three-quarters of an hour," said the judge, proudly. He pointed ahead with his whip. "Just beyond that bend we pass through Six-Cross-Roads."

Miss Sherwood leaned forward eagerly. "Can we see 'Mr. Wimby's' house from here?"

"No, it's on the other side, nearer town; we pass it later. It's the only respectable-looking house in this township." They reached the turn of the road, and the judge touched up his colts to a sharper gait. "No need of dallying," he observed quietly. "It always makes me a little sick just to see the place. I'd hate to have a break-down here."

They came in sight of a squalid settlement, built raggedly about a blacksmith's shop and a saloon. Half-a-dozen shanties clustered near the forge, a few roofs scattered through the shiftlessly cultivated fields, four or five barns propped by fence-rails, some sheds with gaping apertures through which the light glanced from side to side, a squad of thin, "razor-back" hogs--now and then worried by gaunt hounds--and some abused-looking hens, groping about disconsolately in the mire, a broken-topped buggy with a twisted wheel settling into the mud of the middle of the road (there was always abundant mud, here, in the dryest summer), a lowering face sneering from a broken window--Six-Cross-Roads was forbidding and forlorn enough by day. The thought of what might issue from it by night was unpleasant, and the legends of the Cross-Roads, together with an unshapen threat, easily fancied in the atmosphere of the place, made Miss Sherwood shiver as though a cold draught had crossed her.

"It is so sinister!" she exclaimed. "And so unspeakably mean! This is where they live, the people who hate him, is it? The 'White-Caps'?"

"They are just a lot of rowdies," replied Briscoe. "You have your rough corners in big cities, and I expect there are mighty few parts of any country that don't have their tough neighborhoods, only Six-Cross-Roads happens to be worse than most. They choose to call themselves 'White-Caps,' but I guess it's just a name they like to give themselves. Usually White-Caps are a vigilance committee going after rascalities the law doesn't reach, or won't reach, but these fellows are not that kind. They got together to wipe out their grudges--and sometimes they didn't need any grudge and let loose their deviltries just for pure orneriness; setting haystacks afire and such like; or, where a farmer had offended them, they would put on their silly toggery and take him out at midnight and whip him and plunder his house and chase the horses and cattle into his corn, maybe. They say the women went with them on their raids."

"And he was the first to try to stop them?"

"Well, you see our folks are pretty long-suffering," Briscoe replied, apologetically. "We'd sort of got used to the meanness of the Cross-Roads. It took a stranger to stir things up--and he did. He sent eight of 'em to the penitentiary, some for twenty years."

As they passed the saloon a man stepped into the doorway and looked at them. He was coatless and clad in garments worn to the color of dust; his bare head was curiously malformed, higher on one side than on the other, and though the buckboard passed rapidly, and at a distance, this singular lopsidedness was plainly visible to the occupants, lending an ugly significance to his meagre, yellow face. He was tall, lean, hard, powerfully built. He eyed the strangers with affected languor, and then, when they had gone by, broke into sudden, loud laughter.

"That was Bob Skillett, the worst of the lot," said the judge. "Harkless sent his son and one brother to prison, and it nearly broke his heart that he couldn't swear to Bob."

When they were beyond the village and in the open road again. Miss Sherwood took a deep breath. "I think I breathe more freely," she said. "That was a hideous laugh he sent after us. I had heard of places like this before--and I don't think I care to see many of them. As I understand it, Six-Cross-Roads is entirely vicious, isn't it; and bears the same relation to the country that the slums do to a city?'"

"That's about it. They make their own whiskey. I presume; and they have their own fights amongst themselves, but they settle 'em themselves, too, and keep their own counsel and hush it up. Lige Willetts, Minnie's friend --I guess she's told you about Lige?--well, Lige Willetts will go anywhere when he's following a covey, though mostly the boys leave this part of the country alone when they're hunting; but Lige got into a thicket back of the forge one morning, and he came on a crowd of buzzards quarrelling over a heap on the ground, and he got out in a hurry. He said he was sure it was a dog; but he ran almost all the way to Plattville."

"Father!" exclaimed his daughter, leaning from the back seat. "Don't tell such stories to Helen; she'll think we're horrible, and you'll frighten her, too."

"Well, it isn't exactly a lady's story," said the judge. He glanced at his guest's face and chuckled. "I guess we won't frighten her much," he went on. "Young lady, I don't believe you'd be afraid of many things, would you? You don't look like it. Besides, the Cross-Roads isn't Plattville, and the White-Caps have been too scared to do anything much, except try to get even with the 'Herald,' for the last two years; ever since it went for them. They're laying for Harkless partly for revenge and partly because they daren't do anything until he's out of the way."

The girl gave a low cry with a sharp intake of breath. "Ah! One grows tired of this everlasting American patience! Why don't the Plattville people do something before they----"

"It's just as I say," Briscoe answered; "our folks are sort of used to them. I expect we do about all we can; the boys look after him nights, and the main trouble is that we can't make him understand he ought to be more afraid of them. If he'd lived here all his life he would be. You know there's an old-time feud between the Cross-Roads and our folks; goes way back into pioneer history and mighty few know anything of it. Old William

Platt and the forefathers of the Bardlocks and Tibbses and Briscoes and Schofields moved up here from North Carolina a good deal just to get away from some bad neighbors, mostly Skilletts and Johnsons--one of the Skilletts had killed old William Platt's two sons. But the Skilletts and Johnsons followed all the way to Indiana to join in making the new settlement, and they shot Platt at his cabin door one night, right where the court-house stands to-day. Then the other settlers drove them out for good, and they went seven miles west and set up a still. A band of Indians, on the way to join the Shawnee Prophet at Tippecanoe, came down on the Cross-Roads, and the Cross-Roaders bought them off with bad whiskey and sent them over to Plattville. Nearly all the Plattville men were away, fighting under Harrison, and when they came back there were only a few half-crazy women and children left. They'd hid in the woods.

"The men stopped just long enough to hear how it was, and started for the Cross-Roads; but the Cross-Roads people caught them in an ambush and not many of our folks got back.

"We really never did get even with them, though all the early settlers lived and died still expecting to see the day when Plattville would go over and pay off the score. It's the same now as it was then, good stock with us, bad stock over here; and all the country riff-raff in creation come and live with 'em when other places get too hot to hold them. Only one or two of us old folks know what the original trouble was about; but you ask a Plattville man, to-day, what he thinks of the Cross-Roads and he'll be mighty apt to say, 'I guess we'll all have to go over there some time and wipe those hoodlums out.' It's been coming to that a long time. The work the 'Herald' did has come nearer bringing us even with Six-Cross-Roads than anything else ever has. Queer, too--a man that's only lived in Plattville a few years to be settling such an old score for us. They'll do their best to get him, and if they do there'll be trouble of an illegal nature. I think our people would go over there again, but I expect there wouldn't be any ambush this time; and the pioneers, might rest easier in--" He broke off suddenly and nodded to a little old man in a buckboard, who was turning off from the road into a farm lane which led up to a trim cottage with a honeysuckle vine by the door. "That's Mrs. Wimby's husband," said the judge in an undertone.

Miss Sherwood observed that "Mrs. Wimby's husband" was remarkable for the exceeding plaintiveness of his expression. He was a weazened, blank, pale-eyed little man, with a thin, white mist of neck whisker; his coat was so large for him that the sleeves were rolled up from his wrists with several turns, and, as he climbed painfully to the ground to open the gate of the lane, it needed no perspicuous eye to perceive that his trousers had been made for a much larger man, for, as his uncertain foot left the step of his vehicle, one baggy leg of the garment fell down over his foot, completely concealing his boot and hanging some inches beneath. A faintly vexed expression crossed his face as he endeavored to arrange the disorder, but he looked up and returned Briscoe's bow, sadly, with an air of explaining that he was accustomed to trouble, and that the trousers had behaved no worse than he expected.

No more inoffensive or harmless figure than this feeble little old man could be imagined; yet his was the distinction of having received a terrible visit from his neighbors of the Cross-Roads. Mrs. Wimby was a widow, who owned a comfortable farm, and she had refused every offer of the neighboring ill-eligible bachelors to share it. However, a vagabonding tinker won her heart, and after their marriage she continued to be known as "Mrs. Wimby"; for so complete was the bridegroom's insignificance that

it extended to his name, which proved quite unrememberable, and he was usually called "Widder-Woman Wimby's Husband," or, more simply, "Mr. Wimby." The bride supplied the needs of his wardrobe with the garments of her former husband, and, alleging this proceeding as the cause of their anger, the Cross-Roads raiders, clad as "White-Caps," broke into the farmhouse one night, looted it, tore the old man from his bed, and compelling his wife, who was tenderly devoted to him, to watch, they lashed him with sapling shoots till he was near to death. A little yellow cur, that had followed his master on his wanderings, was found licking the old man's wounds, and they deluged the dog with kerosene and then threw the poor animal upon a bonfire they had made, and danced around it in heartiest enjoyment.

The man recovered, but that was no palliation of the offense to the mind of a hot-eyed young man from the East, who was besieging the county authorities for redress and writing brimstone and saltpetre for his paper. The powers of the county proving either lackadaisical or timorous, he appealed to those of the State, and he went every night to sleep at a farmhouse, the owner of which had received a warning from the "White-Caps." And one night it befell that he was rewarded, for the raiders attempted an entrance. He and the farmer and the former's sons beat off the marauders and did a satisfactory amount of damage in return. Two of the "White-Caps" they captured and bound, and others they recognized. Then the State authorities hearkened to the voice of the "Herald" and its owner; there were arrests, and in the course of time there was a trial. Every prisoner proved an alibi, could have proved a dozen; but the editor of the "Herald," after virtually conducting the prosecution, went upon the stand and swore to man after man. Eight men went to the penitentiary on his evidence, five of them for twenty years. The Plattville Brass Band serenaded the editor of the "Herald" again.

There were no more raids, and the Six-Cross-Roads men who were left kept to their hovels, appalled and shaken, but, as time went by and left them unmolested, they recovered a measure of their hardiness and began to think on what they should do to the man who had brought misfortune and terror upon them. For a long time he had been publishing their threatening letters and warnings in a column which he headed: "Humor of the Day."

"Harkless don't understand the Cross-Roads," Briscoe said to Miss Sherwood as they left the Wimby farm behind; "and then he's like most of us; hardly any of us realizes that harm's ever going to come to _us_. Harkless was anxious enough about other people, but----"

The young lady interrupted him, touching his arm. "Look!" she said, "Didn't you see a child, a little girl, ahead of us on the road?"

"I noticed one a minute ago, but she's not there now," answered Briscoe.

"There was a child walking along the road just ahead, but she turned and saw us coming, and she disappeared in the most curious way; she seemed to melt into the weeds at the roadside, across from the elder-bush yonder."

The judge pulled in the horses by the elder-bush. "No child here, now," he said, "but you're right; there certainly was one, just before you spoke." The young corn was low in the fields, and there was no hiding-place in sight.

"I'm very superstitious; I am sure it was an imp," Miss Sherwood said. "An imp or a very large chameleon; she was exactly the color of the road."

"A Cross-Roads imp," said the judge, lifting the reins, "and in that case we might as well give up. I never set up to be a match for those people, and the children are as mean as their fathers, and smarter."

When the buckboard had rattled on a hundred yards or so, a little figure clad in a tattered cotton gown rose up from the weeds, not ten feet from where the judge had drawn rein, and continued its march down the road toward Plattville, capering in the dust and pursuing the buckboard with malignant gestures till the clatter of the horses was out of hearing, the vehicle out of sight.

Something over two hours later, as Mr. Martin was putting things to rights in his domain, the Dry-Goods Emporium, previous to his departure for the evening's gossip and checkers at the drug-store, he stumbled over something soft, lying on the floor behind a counter. The thing rose, and would have evaded him, but he put out his hands and pinioned it and dragged it to the show-window where the light of the fading day defined his capture. The capture shrieked and squirmed and fought earnestly. Grasped by the shoulder he held a lean, fierce-eyed, undersized girl of fourteen, clad in one ragged cotton garment, unless the coat of dust she wore over all may be esteemed another. Her cheeks were sallow, and her brow was already shrewdly lined, and her eyes were as hypocritical as they were savage. She was very thin and little, but old Tom's brown face grew a shade nearer white when the light fell upon her.

"You're no Plattville girl," he said sharply.

"You lie!" cried the child. "You lie! I am! You leave me go, will you? I'm lookin' fer pap and you're a liar!"

"You crawled in here to sleep, after your seven-mile walk, didn't you?" Martin went on.

"You're a liar," she screamed again.

"Look here," said Martin, slowly, "you go back to Six-Cross-Roads and tell your folks that if anything happens to a hair of Mr. Harkless's head every shanty in your town will burn, and your grandfather and your father and your uncles and your brothers and your cousins and your second-cousins and your third-cousins will never have the good luck to see the penitentiary. Reckon you can remember that message? But before I let you go to carry it, I guess you might as well hand out the paper they sent you over here with."

His prisoner fell into a paroxysm of rage, and struck at him.

"I'll git pap to kill ye," she shrieked. "I don' know nothin' 'bout yer Six-Cross-Roads, ner no papers, ner yer dam Mister Harkels neither, ner _you_, ye razor-backed ole devil! Pap'll kill ye; leave me go--leave me _go_!--Pap'll kill ye; I'll git him to _kill_ ye!" Suddenly her struggles ceased; her eyes closed; her tense little muscles relaxed and she drooped toward the floor; the old man shifted his grip to support her, and in an instant she twisted out of his hands and sprang out of reach, her eyes shining with triumph and venom.

"Ya-hay, Mister Razor-back!" she shrilled. "How's that fer hi? Pap'll kill

ye, Sunday. You'll be screechin' in hell in a week, an' we 'ull set up an' drink our apple-jack an' laff!" Martin pursued her lumberingly, but she was agile as a monkey, and ran dodging up and down the counters and mocked him, singing "Gran' mammy Tipsy-Toe," till at last she tired of the game and darted out of the door, flinging back a hoarse laugh at him as she went. He followed; but when he reached the street she was a mere shadow flitting under the courthouse trees. He looked after her forebodingly, then turned his eyes toward the Palace Hotel. The editor of the "Herald" was seated under the awning, with his chair tilted back against a post, gazing dreamily at the murky red afterglow in the west.

"What's the use of tryin' to bother him with it?" old Tom asked himself. "He'd only laugh." He noted that young William Todd sat near the editor, whittling absently. Martin chuckled. "William's turn to-night," he muttered. "Well, the boys take mighty good care of him." He locked the doors of the Emporium, tried them, and dropped the keys in his pocket.

As he crossed the Square to the drug-store, where his cronies awaited him, he turned again to look at the figure of the musing journalist. "I hope he'll go out to the judge's," he said, and shook his head, sadly. "I don't reckon Plattville's any too spry for that young man. Five years he's be'n here. Well, it's a good thing for us folks, but I guess it ain't exactly high-life for him." He kicked a stick out of his way impatiently. "Now, where'd that imp run to?" he grumbled.

The imp was lying under the court-house steps. When the sound of Martin's footsteps had passed away, she crept cautiously from her hiding-place and stole through the ungroomed grass to the fence opposite the hotel. Here she stretched herself flat in the weeds and took from underneath the tangled masses of her hair, where it was tied with a string, a rolled-up, crumpled slip of greasy paper. With this in her fingers, she lay peering under the fence, her fierce eyes fixed unwinkingly on Harkless and the youth sitting near him.

The street ran flat and gray in the slowly gathering dusk, straight to the western horizon where the sunset embers were strewn in long, dark-red streaks; the maple trees were clean-cut silhouettes against the pale rose and pearl tints of the sky above, and a tenderness seemed to tremble in the air. Harkless often vowed to himself he would watch no more sunsets in Plattville; he realized that their loveliness lent a too unhappy tone to the imaginings and introspections upon which he was thrown by the loneliness of the environment, and he considered that he had too much time in which to think about himself. For five years his introspections had monotonously hurled one word at him: "Failure; Failure! Failure!" He thought the sunsets were making him morbid. Could he have shared them, that would have been different.

His long, melancholy face grew longer and more melancholy in the twilight, while William Todd patiently whittled near by. Plattville had often discussed the editor's habit of silence, and Mr. Martin had suggested that possibly the reason Mr. Harkless was such a quiet man was that there was nobody for him to talk to. His hearers did not agree, for the population of Carlow County was a thing of pride, being greater than that of several bordering counties. They did agree, however, that Harkless's quiet was not unkind, whatever its cause, and that when it was broken it was usually broken to conspicuous effect. Perhaps it was because he wrote so much that he hated to talk.

A bent figure came slowly down the street, and William hailed it

cheerfully: "Evening, Mr. Fisbee."

"A good evening, Mr. Todd," answered the old man, pausing. "Ah, Mr. Harkless, I was looking for you." He had not seemed to be looking for anything beyond the boundaries of his own dreams, but he approached Harkless, tugging nervously at some papers in his pocket. "I have completed my notes for our Saturday edition. It was quite easy; there is much doing."

"Thank you, Mr. Fisbee," said Harkless, as he took the manuscript. "Have you finished your paper on the earlier Christian symbolism? I hope the 'Herald' may have the honor of printing it." This was the form they used.

"I shall be the recipient of honor, sir," returned Fisbee. "Your kind offer will speed my work; but I fear, Mr. Harkless, I very much fear, that your kindness alone prompts it, for, deeply as I desire it, I cannot truthfully say that my essays appear to increase our circulation." He made an odd, troubled gesture as he went on: "They do not seem to read them here, Mr. Harkless, although Mr. Martin assures me that he carefully peruses my article on Chaldean decoration whenever he rearranges his exhibition windows, and I bear in mind the clipping from a Rouen paper you showed me, commenting generously upon the scholarship of the 'Herald.' But for fifteen years I have tried to improve the art feeling in Plattville, and I may say that I have worked in the face of no small discouragement. In fact," (there was a slight quaver in Fisbee's voice), "I cannot remember that I ever received the slightest word or token of encouragement till you came, Mr. Harkless. Since then I have labored with refreshed energy; still, I cannot claim that our architecture shows a change for the better, and I fear the engravings upon the walls of our people exhibit no great progress in selection. And--I--I wish also to say, Mr. Harkless, if you find it necessary to make some alterations in the form of my reportorial items for Saturday's issue, I shall perfectly understand, remembering your explanation that journalism demands it. Good-evening, Mr. Harkless. Good-evening, Mr. Todd." He plodded on a few paces, then turned, irresolutely.

"What is it, Fisbee?" asked Harkless.

Fisbee stood for a moment, as though about to speak, then he smiled faintly, shook his head, and went his way. Harkless stared after him, surprised. It suddenly struck him, with a feeling of irritation, that if Fisbee had spoken it would have been to advise him to call at Judge Briscoe's. He laughed impatiently at the notion, and, drawing his pencil and a pad from his pocket, proceeded to injure his eyes in the waning twilight by the editorial perusal of the items his staff had just left in his hands. When published, the manuscript came under a flaring heading, bequeathed by Harkless's predecessor in the chair of the "Herald," and the alteration of which he felt Plattville would refuse to sanction: "Happenings of Our City." Below, was printed in smaller type: "Improvements in the World of Business," and, beneath that, came the rubric: "Also, the Cradle, the Altar, and the Tomb."

The first of Fisbee's items was thus recorded: "It may be noted that the new sign-board of Mr. H. Miller has been put in place. We cannot but regret that Mr. Miller did not instruct the painter to confine himself to a simpler method of lettering."

"Ah, Fisbee," murmured the editor, reproachfully, "that new sign-board is almost the only improvement in the World of Business Plattville has seen

this year. I wonder how many times we have used it from the first, 'It is rumored in business circles that Herve Miller contemplates'--to the exciting, 'Under Way,' and, 'Finishing Touches.' My poor White Knight, are five years of training wasted on you? Sometimes you make me fear it. Here is Plattville panting for our story of the hanging of the sign, and you throw away the climax like that!" He began to write rapidly, bending low over the pad in the half darkness. His narrative was an amplification of the interesting information (already possessed by every inhabitant) that Herve Miller had put up a new sign. After a paragraph of handsome description, "Herve is always enterprising," wrote the editor. "This is a move in the right direction. Herve, keep it up."

He glanced over the other items meditatively, making alterations here and there. The last two Fisbee had written as follows:

"There is noticeable in the new (and somewhat incongruous) portico erected by Solomon Tibbs at the residence of Mr. Henry Tibbs Willetts, an attempt at rococo decoration which cannot fail to sadden the passer-by."

"Miss Sherwood of Rouen, whom Miss Briscoe knew at the Misses Jennings' finishing-school in New York, is a guest of Judge Briscoe's household."

Fisbee's items were written in ink; and there was a blank space beneath the last. At the bottom of the page something had been scribbled in pencil. Harkless tried vainly to decipher it, but the twilight had fallen too deep, and the writing was too faint, so he struck a match and held it close to the paper. The action betokened only a languid interest, but when he caught sight of the first of the four subscribed lines he sat up straight in his chair with an ejaculation. At the bottom of Fisbee's page was written in a dainty, feminine hand, of a type he had not seen for years:

> "'The time has come,' the Walrus said,
> 'To talk of many things:
> Of shoes--and ships--and sealing-wax--
> And cabbages--and kings--'"

He put the paper in his pocket, and set off rapidly down the village street.

At his departure William Todd looked up quickly; then he got upon his feet and quietly followed the editor. In the dusk a tattered little figure rose up from the weeds across the way, and stole noiselessly after William. He was in his shirt-sleeves, his waistcoat unbuttoned and loose. On the nearest corner Mr. Todd encountered a fellow-townsman, who had been pacing up and down in front of a cottage, crooning to a protestive baby held in his arms. He had paused in his vigil to stare after Harkless.

"Whereas he bound for, William?" inquired the man with the baby.

"Briscoes'," answered William, pursuing his way.

"I reckoned he would be," commented the other, turning to his wife, who sat on the doorstep, "I reckoned so when I see that lady at the lecture last night."

The woman rose to her feet. "Hi, Bill Todd!" she said. "What you got onto the back of your vest?" William paused, put his hand behind him and encountered a paper pinned to the dangling strap of his waistcoat. The

woman ran to him and unpinned the paper. It bore a writing. They took it to where the yellow lamp-light shone through the open door, and read:

"der Sir
"FoLer harkls aL yo ples an gaRd him yoR
best venagesn is closteR, harkls not Got 3 das to liv
"We come in Wite."

"What ye think, William?" asked the man with the baby, anxiously. But the woman gave the youth a sharp push with her hand. "They never dast to do it!" she cried. "Never in the world! You hurry, Bill Todd. Don't you leave him out of your sight one second."

CHAPTER V

AT THE PASTURE BARS: ELDER-BUSHES MAY HAVE STINGS

The street upon which the Palace Hotel fronted formed the south side of the Square and ran west to the edge of the town, where it turned to the south for a quarter of a mile or more, then bent to the west again. Some distance from this second turn, there stood, fronting close on the road, a large brick house, the most pretentious mansion in Carlow County. And yet it was a homelike place, with its red-brick walls embowered in masses of cool Virginia creeper, and a comfortable veranda crossing the broad front, while half a hundred stalwart sentinels of elm and beech and poplar stood guard around it. The front walk was bordered by geraniums and hollyhocks; and honeysuckle climbed the pillars of the porch. Behind the house there was a shady little orchard; and, back of the orchard, an old-fashioned, very fragrant rose-garden, divided by a long grape arbor, extended to the shallow waters of a wandering creek; and on the bank a rustic seat was placed, beneath the sycamores.

From the first bend of the road, where it left the town and became (after some indecision) a country highway--called the pike--rather than a proud city boulevard, a pathway led through the fields to end at some pasture bars opposite the brick house.

John Harkless was leaning on the pasture bars. The stars were wan, and the full moon shone over the fields. Meadows and woodlands lay quiet under the old, sweet marvel of a June night. In the wide monotony of the flat lands, there sometimes comes a feeling that the whole earth is stretched out before one. To-night it seemed to lie so, in the pathos of silent beauty, all passive and still; yet breathing an antique message, sad, mysterious, reassuring. But there had come a divine melody adrift on the air. Through the open windows it floated. Indoors some one struck a peal of silver chords, like a harp touched by a lover, and a woman's voice was lifted. John Harkless leaned on the pasture bars and listened with upraised head and parted lips.

"To thy chamber window roving, love hath led my feet."

The Lord sent manna to the children of Israel in the wilderness. Harkless had been five years in Plattville, and a woman's voice singing Schubert's serenade came to him at last as he stood by the pasture bars of Jones's field and listened and rested his dazzled eyes on the big, white face of the moon.

How long had it been since he had heard a song, or any discourse of music other than that furnished by the Plattville Band--not that he had not taste for a brass band! But music that he loved always gave him an ache of delight and the twinge of reminiscences of old, gay days gone forever. To-night his memory leaped to the last day of a June gone seven years; to a morning when the little estuary waves twinkled in the bright sun about the boat in which he sat, the trim launch that brought a cheery party ashore from their schooner to the Casino landing at Winter Harbor, far up on the Maine coast.

It was the happiest of those last irresponsible days before he struck into his work in the world and became a failure. To-night he saw the picture as plainly as if it were yesterday; no reminiscence had risen so keenly before his eyes for years: pretty Mrs. Van Skuyt sitting beside him--pretty Mrs. Van Skuyt and her roses! What had become of her? He saw the crowd of friends waiting on the pier for their arrival, and the dozen or so emblazoned classmates (it was in the time of brilliant flannels) who suddenly sent up a volley of college cheers in his honor--how plainly the dear, old, young faces rose up before him to-night, the men from whose lives he had slipped! Dearest and jolliest of the faces was that of Tom Meredith, clubmate, classmate, his closest friend, the thin, red-headed third baseman; he could see Tom's mouth opened at least a yard, it seemed, such was his frantic vociferousness. Again and again the cheers rang out, "Harkless! Harkless!" on the end of them. In those days everybody (particularly his classmates) thought he would be minister to England in a few years, and the orchestra on the Casino porch was playing "The Conquering Hero," in his honor, and at the behest of Tom Meredith, he knew.

There were other pretty ladies besides Mrs. Van Skuyt in the launch-load from the yacht, but, as they touched the pier, pretty girls, or pretty women, or jovial gentlemen, all were overlooked in the wild scramble the college men made for their hero. They haled him forth, set him on high, bore him on their shoulders, shouting "Skal to the Viking!" and carried him up the wooded bluff to the Casino. He heard Mrs. Van Skuyt say, "Oh, we're used to it; we've put in at several other places where he had friends!" He struggled manfully to be set down, but his triumphal procession swept on. He heard bystanders telling each other, "It's that young Harkless, 'the Great Harkless,' they're all so mad about"; and while it pleased him a little to hear such things, they always made him laugh a great deal. He had never understood his popularity: he had been chief editor of the university daily, and he had done a little in athletics, and the rest of his distinction lay in college offices his mates had heaped upon him without his being able to comprehend why they did it. And yet, somehow, and in spite of himself, they had convinced him that the world was his oyster; that it would open for him at a touch. He could not help seeing how the Freshmen looked at him, how the Sophomores jumped off the narrow campus walks to let him pass; he could not help knowing that he was the great man of his time, so that "The Great Harkless" came to be one of the traditions of the university. He remembered the wild progress they made for him up the slope that morning at Winter Harbor, how the people baked on, and laughed, and clapped their hands. But at the veranda edge he had noticed a little form disappearing around a corner of the building; a young girl running away as fast as she could.

"See there!" he said, as the tribe set him down, "You have frightened the populace." And Tom Meredith stopped shouting long enough to answer, "It's my little cousin, overcome with emotion. She's been counting the hours

till you came--been hearing of you from me and others for a good while; and hasn't been able to talk or think of anything else. She's only fifteen, and the crucial moment is too much for her--the Great Harkless has arrived, and she has fled."

He remembered other incidents of his greatness, of the glory that now struck him as rarely comical; be hoped he hadn't taken it too seriously then, in the flush of his youth. Maybe, after all, he had been a, big-headed boy, but he must have bottled up his conceit tightly enough, or the other boys would have detected it and abhorred him. He was inclined to believe that he had not been very much set up by the pomp they made for him. At all events, that day at Winter Harbor had been beautiful, full of the laughter of friends and music; for there was a musicale at the Casino in the afternoon.

But the present hour grew on him as he leaned on the pasture bars, and suddenly his memories sped; and the voice that was singing Schubert's serenade across the way touched him with the urgent, personal appeal that a present beauty always had for him. It was a soprano; and without tremolo, yet came to his ear with a certain tremulous sweetness; it was soft and slender, but the listener knew it could be lifted with fullness and power if the singer would. It spoke only of the song, yet the listener thought of the singer. Under the moon thoughts run into dreams, and he dreamed that the owner of the voice, she who quoted "The Walrus and the Carpenter" on Fisbee's notes, was one to laugh with you and weep with you; yet her laughter would be tempered with sorrow, and her tears with laughter.

When the song was ended, he struck the rail he leaned upon a sharp blow with his open hand. There swept over him a feeling that he had stood precisely where he stood now, on such a night, a thousand years ago, had heard that voice and that song, had listened and been moved by the song, and the night, just as he was moved now.

He had long known himself for a sentimentalist; he had almost given up trying to cure himself. And he knew himself for a born lover; he had always been in love with some one. In his earlier youth his affections had been so constantly inconstant that he finally came to settle with his self-respect by recognizing in himself a fine constancy that worshipped one woman always--it was only the shifting image of her that changed! Somewhere (he dreamed, whimsically indulgent of the fancy; yet mocking himself for it) there was a girl whom he had never seen, who waited till he should come. She was Everything. Until he found her, he could not help adoring others who possessed little pieces and suggestions of her--her brilliancy, her courage, her short upper lip, "like a curled roseleaf," or her dear voice, or her pure profile. He had no recollection of any lady who had quite her eyes.

He had never passed a lovely stranger on the street, in the old days, without a thrill of delight and warmth. If he never saw her again, and the vision only lasted the time it takes a lady to cross the sidewalk from a shop door to a carriage, he was always a little in love with her, because she bore about her, somewhere, as did every pretty girl he ever saw, a suggestion of the far-away divinity. One does not pass lovely strangers in the streets of Plattville. Miss Briscoe was pretty, but not at all in the way that Harkless dreamed. For five years the lover in him that had loved so often had been starved of all but dreams. Only at twilight and dusk in the summer, when, strolling, he caught sight of a woman's skirt, far up the village street--half-outlined in the darkness under the cathedral arch

of meeting branches--this romancer of petticoats could sigh a true lover's sigh, and, if he kept enough distance between, fly a yearning fancy that his lady wandered there.

Ever since his university days the image of her had been growing more and more distinct. He had completely settled his mind as to her appearance and her voice. She was tall, almost too tall, he was sure of that; and out of his consciousness there had grown a sweet and vivacious young face that he knew was hers. Her hair was light-brown with gold lustres (he reveled in the gold lustres, on the proper theory that when your fancy is painting a picture you may as well go in for the whole thing and make it sumptuous), and her eyes were gray. They were very earnest, and yet they sparkled and laughed to him companionably; and sometimes he had smiled back upon her. The Undine danced before him through the lonely years, on fair nights in his walks, and came to sit by his fire on winter evenings when he stared alone at the embers.

And to-night, here in Plattville, he heard a voice he had waited for long, one that his fickle memory told him he had never heard before. But, listening, he knew better--he had heard it long ago, though when and how, he did not know, as rich and true, and ineffably tender as now. He threw a sop to his common sense. "Miss Sherwood is a little thing" (the image was so surely tall) "with a bumpy forehead and spectacles," he said to himself, "or else a provincial young lady with big eyes to pose at you." Then he felt the ridiculousness of looking after his common sense on a moonlight night in June; also, he knew that he lied.

The song had ceased, but the musician lingered, and the keys were touched to plaintive harmonies new to him. He had come to Plattville before "Cavalleria Rusticana" was sung at Rome, and now, entranced, he heard the "Intermezzo" for the first time. Listening to this, he feared to move lest he should wake from a summer-night's dream.

A ragged little shadow flitted down the path behind him, and from a solitary apple-tree, standing like a lonely ghost in the middle of the field, came the _woo_ of a screech owl--twice. It was answered--twice--from a clump of elder-bushes that grew in a fence-corner fifty yards west of the pasture bars. Then the barrel of a squirrel rifle issued, lifted out of the white elder-blossoms, and lay along the fence. The music in the house across the way ceased, and Harkless saw two white dresses come out through the long parlor windows to the veranda.

"It will be cooler out here," came the voice of the singer clearly through the quiet. "What a night!"

John vaulted the bars and started to cross the road. They saw him from the veranda, and Miss Briscoe called to him in welcome. As his tall figure stood out plainly in the bright light against the white dust, a streak of fire leaped from the elder-blossoms and there rang out the sharp report of a rifle. There were two screams from the veranda. One white figure ran into the house. The other, a little one with a gauzy wrap streaming behind, came flying out into the moonlight--straight to Harkless. There was a second report; the rifle-shot was answered by a revolver. William Todd had risen up, apparently from nowhere, and, kneeling by the pasture bars, fired at the flash of the rifle.

"Jump fer the shadder, Mr. Harkless," he shouted; "he's in them elders," and then: "Fer God's sake, comeback!"

Empty-handed as he was, the editor dashed for the treacherous elder-bush as fast as his long legs could carry him; but, before he had taken six strides, a hand clutched his sleeve, and a girl's voice quavered from close behind him:

"Don't run like that, Mr. Harkless; I can't keep up!" He wheeled about, and confronted a vision, a dainty little figure about five feet high, a flushed and lovely face, hair and draperies disarranged and flying. He stamped his foot with rage. "Get back in the house!" he cried.

"You mustn't go," she panted. "It's the only way to stop you."

"Go back to the house!" he shouted, savagely.

"Will you come?"

"Fer God's sake," cried William Todd, "come back! Keep out of the road." He was emptying his revolver at the clump of elder, the uproar of his firing blasting the night. Some one screamed from the house:

"Helen! Helen!"

John seized the girl's wrists roughly; her gray eyes flashed into his defiantly. "Will you go?" he roared.

"No!"

He dropped her wrists, caught her up in his arms as if she had been a kitten, and leaped into the shadow of the trees that leaned over the road from the yard. The rifle rang out again, and the little ball whistled venomously overhead. Harkless ran along the fence and turned in at the gate.

A loose strand of the girl's hair blew across his cheek, and in the moon her head shone with gold. She had light-brown hair and gray eyes and a short upper lip like a curled rose-leaf. He set her down on the veranda steps. Both of them laughed wildly.

"But you came with me!" she gasped triumphantly.

"I always thought you were tall," he answered; and there was afterward a time when he had to agree that this was a somewhat vague reply.

CHAPTER VI

JUNE

Judge Briscoe smiled grimly and leaned on his shot-gun in the moonlight by the veranda. He and William Todd had been trampling down the elder-bushes, and returning to the house, found Minnie alone on the porch. "Safe?" he said to his daughter, who turned an anxious face upon him. "They'll be safe enough now, and in our garden."

"Maybe I oughtn't to have let them go," she returned, nervously.

"Pooh! They're all right; that scalawag's half-way to Six-Cross-Roads by this time, isn't he, William?"

"He tuck up the fence like a scared rabbit," Mr. Todd responded, looking into his hat to avoid meeting the eyes of the lady. "I didn't have no call to toller, and he knowed how to run, I reckon. Time Mr. Harkless come out the yard again, he was near out o' sight, and we see him take across the road to the wedge-woods, near half-a-mile up. Somebody else with him then --looked like a kid. Must 'a' cut acrost the field to join him. They're fur enough towards home by this."

"Did Miss Helen shake hands with you four or five times?" asked Briscoe, chuckling.

"No. Why?"

"Because Harkless did. My hand aches, and I guess William's does, too; he nearly shook our arms off when we told him he'd been a fool. Seemed to do him good. I told him he ought to hire somebody to take a shot at him every morning before breakfast--not that it's any joking matter," the old gentleman finished, thoughtfully.

"I should say not," said William, with a deep frown and a jerk of his head toward the rear of the house. "_He_ jokes about it enough. Wouldn't even promise to carry a gun after this. Said he wouldn't know how to use it. Never shot one off since he was a boy, on the Fourth of July. This is the third time he's be'n shot at this year, but he says the others was at a-- a--what'd he call it?"

"'A merely complimentary range,'" Briscoe supplied. He handed William a cigar and bit the end off another himself. "Minnie, you better go in the house and read, I expect--unless you want to go down the creek and join those folks."

"_Me_!" she responded. "I know when to stay away, I guess. Do go and put that terrible gun up."

"No," said Briscoe, lighting his cigar, deliberately. "It's all safe; there's no question of that; but maybe William and I better go out and take a smoke in the orchard as long as they stay down at the creek."

In the garden, shafts of white light pierced the bordering trees and fell where June roses lifted their heads to breathe the mild night breeze, and here, through summer spells, the editor of the "Herald" and the lady who had run to him at the pasture bars strolled down a path trembling with shadows to where the shallow creek tinkled over the pebbles. They walked slowly, with an air of being well-accustomed friends and comrades, and for some reason it did not strike either of them as unnatural or extraordinary. They came to a bench on the bank, and he made a great fuss dusting the seat for her with his black slouch hat. Then he regretted the hat--it was a shabby old hat of a Carlow County fashion.

It was a long bench, and he seated himself rather remotely toward the end opposite her, suddenly realizing that he had walked very close to her, coming down the narrow garden path. Neither knew that neither had spoken since they left the veranda; and it had taken them a long time to come through the little orchard and the garden. She rested her chin on her hand, leaning forward and looking steadily at the creek. Her laughter had quite gone; her attitude seemed a little wistful and a little sad. He

noted that her hair curled over her brow in a way he had not pictured in the lady of his dreams; this was so much lovelier. He did not care for tall girls; he had not cared for them for almost half an hour. It was so much more beautiful to be dainty and small and piquant. He had no notion that he was sighing in a way that would have put a furnace to shame, but he turned his eyes from her because he feared that if he looked longer he might blurt out some speech about her beauty. His glance rested on the bank; but its diameter included the edge of her white skirt and the tip of a little, white, high-heeled slipper that peeped out beneath it; and he had to look away from that, too, to keep from telling her that he meant to advocate a law compelling all women to wear crisp, white gowns and white slippers on moonlight nights.

She picked a long spear of grass from the turf before her, twisted it absently in her fingers, then turned to him slowly. Her lips parted as if to speak. Then she turned away again. The action was so odd, and somehow, as she did it, so adorable, and the preserved silence was such a bond between them, that for his life he could not have helped moving half-way up the bench toward her.

"What is it?" he asked; and he spoke in a whisper he might have used at the bedside of a dying friend. He would not have laughed if he had known he did so. She twisted the spear of grass into a little ball and threw it at a stone in the water before she answered.

"Do you know, Mr. Harkless, you and I haven't 'met,' have we? Didn't we forget to be presented to each other?"

"I beg your pardon. Miss Sherwood. In the perturbation of comedy I forgot."

"It was melodrama, wasn't it?" she said. He laughed, but she shook her head.

"Comedy," he answered, "except your part of it, which you shouldn't have done. It was not arranged in honor of 'visiting ladies.' But you mustn't think me a comedian. Truly, I didn't plan it. My friend from Six-Cross-Roads must be given the credit of devising the scene-though you divined it!"

"It was a little too picturesque, I think. I know about Six-Cross-Roads. Please tell me what you mean to do."

"Nothing. What should I?"

"You mean that you will keep on letting them shoot at you, until they-- until you--" She struck the bench angrily with her hand.

"There's no summer theatre in Six-Cross-Roads; there's not even a church. Why shouldn't they?" he asked gravely. "During the long and tedious evenings it cheers the poor Cross-Reader's soul to drop over here and take a shot at me. It whiles away dull care for him, and he has the additional exercise of running all the way home."

"Ah!" she cried indignantly, "they told me you always answered like this!"

"Well, you see the Cross-Roads efforts have proved so purely hygienic for me. As a patriot I have sometimes felt extreme mortification that such bad marksmanship should exist in the county, but I console myself with the

thought that their best shots are unhappily in the penitentiary."

"There are many left. Can't you understand that they will organize again and come in a body, as they did before you broke them up? And then, if they come on a night when they know you are wandering out of town----"

"You have not the advantage of an intimate study of the most exclusive people of the Cross-Roads, Miss Sherwood. There are about twenty gentlemen who remain in that neighborhood while their relatives sojourn under discipline. If you had the entree over there, you would understand that these twenty could not gather themselves into a company and march the seven miles without physical debate in the ranks. They are not precisely amiable people, even amongst themselves. They would quarrel and shoot each other to pieces long before they got here."

"But they worked in a company once."

"Never for seven miles. Four miles was their radius. Five would see them all dead."

She struck the bench again. "Oh, you laugh at me! You make a joke of your own life and death, and laugh at everything! Have five years of Plattville taught you to do that?"

"I laugh only at taking the poor Cross-Roaders too seriously. I don't laugh at your running into fire to help a fellow-mortal."

"I knew there wasn't any risk. I knew he had to stop to load before he shot again."

"He did shoot again. If I had known you before to-night--I--" His tone changed and he spoke gravely. "I am at your feet in worship of your philanthropy. It's so much finer to risk your life for a stranger than for a friend."

"That is rather a man's point of view, isn't it?"

"You risked yours for a man you had never seen before."

"Oh, no! I saw you at the lecture; I heard you introduce the Honorable Mr. Halloway."

"Then I don't understand your wishing to save me."

She smiled unwillingly, and turned her gray eyes upon him with troubled sunniness, and, under the kindness of her regard, he set a watch upon his lips, though he knew it might not avail him. He had driveled along respectably so far, he thought, but he had the sentimental longings of years, starved of expression, culminating in his heart. She continued to look at him, wistfully, searchingly, gently. Then her eyes traveled over his big frame from his shoes (a patch of moonlight fell on them; they were dusty; he drew them under the bench with a shudder) to his broad shoulders (he shook the stoop out of them). She stretched her small hands toward him in contrast, and broke into the most delicious low laughter in the world. At this sound he knew the watch on his lips was worthless. It was a question of minutes till he should present himself to her eyes as a sentimental and susceptible imbecile. He knew it. He was in wild spirits.

"Could you realize that one of your dangers might be a shaking?" she

cried. "Is your seriousness a lost art?" Her laughter ceased suddenly. "Ah, no. I understand. Thiers said the French laugh always, in order not to weep. I haven't lived here five years. I should laugh too, if I were you."

"Look at the moon," he responded. "We Plattvillains own that with the best of metropolitans, and, for my part, I see more of it here. You do not appreciate us. We have large landscapes in the heart of the city, and what other capital possesses advantages like that? Next winter the railway station is to have a new stove for the waiting-room. Heaven itself is one of our suburbs--it is so close that all one has to do is to die. You insist upon my being French, you see, and I know you are fond of nonsense. How did you happen to put 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' at the bottom of a page of Fisbee's notes?"

"Was it? How were you sure it was I?"

"In Carlow County!"

"He might have written it himself."

"Fisbee has never in his life read anything lighter than cuneiform inscriptions."

"Miss Briscoe----"

"She doesn't read Lewis Carroll; and it was not her hand. What made you write it on Fisbee's manuscript?"

"He was with us this afternoon, and I teased him a little about your heading. 'Business and the Cradle, the Altar, and the Tomb,' isn't it? And he said it had always troubled him, but that you thought it good. So do I. He asked me if I could think of anything that you might like better, to put in place of it, and I wrote, 'The time has come,' because it was the only thing I could think of that was as appropriate and as fetching as your headlines. He was perfectly dear about it. He was so serious; he said he feared it wouldn't be acceptable. I didn't notice that the paper he handed me to write on was part of his notes, nor did he, I think. Afterward, he put it back in his pocket. It wasn't a message."

"I'm not so sure he did not notice. He is very wise. Do you know, somehow, I have the impression that the old fellow wanted me to meet you."

"How dear and good of him!" She spoke earnestly, and her face was suffused with a warm light. There was no doubt about her meaning what she said.

"It was," John answered, unsteadily. "He knew how great was my need of a few moments' companionableness with--with----"

"No," she interrupted. "I meant dear and good to me, because I think he was thinking of me, and it was for my sake he wanted us to meet."

It would have been hard to convince a woman, if she had overheard this speech, that Miss Sherwood's humility was not the calculated affectation of a coquette. Sometimes a man's unsuspicion is wiser, and Harkless knew that she was not flirting with him. In addition, he was not a fatuous man; he did not extend the implication of her words nearly so far as she would have had him.

"But I had met you," said he, "long ago."

"What!" she cried, and her eyes danced. "You actually remember?"

"Yes; do you?" he answered. "I stood in Jones's field and heard you singing, and I remembered. It was a long time since I had heard you sing:

"'I was a ruffler of Flanders,
And fought for a florin's hire.
You were the dame of my captain
And sang to my heart's desire.'

"But that is the balladist's notion. The truth is that you were a lady at the Court of Clovis, and I was a heathen captive. I heard you sing a Christian hymn--and asked for baptism." By a great effort he managed to look as if he did not mean it.

But she did not seem over-pleased with his fancy, for, the surprise fading from her face, "Oh, that was the way you remembered!" she said.

"Perhaps it was not that way alone. You won't despise me for being mawkish to-night?" he asked. "I haven't had the chance for so long."

The night air wrapped them warmly, and the balm of the little breezes that stirred the foliage around them was the smell of damask roses from the garden. The creek tinkled over the pebbles at their feet, and a drowsy bird, half-wakened by the moon, crooned languorously in the sycamores. The girl looked out at the flashing water through downcast lashes. "Is it because it is so transient that beauty is pathetic?" she said; "because we can never come back to it in quite the same way? I am a sentimental girl. If you are born so, it is never entirely teased out of you, is it? Besides, to-night is all a dream. It isn't real, you know. You couldn't be mawkish."

Her tone was gentle as a caress, and it made him tingle to his finger-tips. "How do you know?" he asked in a low voice.

"I just know. Do you think I'm very 'bold and forward'?" she said, dreamily.

"It was your song I wanted to be sentimental about. I am like one 'who through long days of toil'--only that doesn't quite apply--'and nights devoid of ease'--but I can't claim that one doesn't sleep well here; it is Plattville's specialty--like one who

"'Still heard in his soul the music
Of wonderful melodies.'"

"Those blessed old lines!" she said. "Once a thing is music or poetry, all the hand-organs and elocutionists in the world cannot ruin it, can they? Yes; to live here, out of the world, giving up the world, doing good and working for others, working for a community as you do----"

"I am not quite shameless," he interrupted, smilingly. "I was given a life sentence for incompetency, and I've served five years of it, which have been made much happier than my deserts."

"No," she persisted, "that is your way of talking of yourself; I know you would always 'run yourself down,' if one paid any attention to it. But to

give up the world, to drop out of it without regret, to come here and do what you have done, and to live the life that must be so desperately dry and dull for a man of your sort, and yet to have the kind of heart that makes wonderful melodies sing in itself--oh!" she cried, "I say that is fine!"

"You do not understand," he returned, sadly, wishing, before her, to be unmercifully just to himself. "I came here because I couldn't make a living anywhere else. And the 'wonderful melodies'--I have known you only one evening--and the melodies--" He rose to his feet and took a few steps toward the garden. "Come," he said. "Let me take you back. Let us go before I--" he finished with a helpless laugh.

She stood by the bench, one hand resting on it; she stood all in the tremulant shadow. She moved one step toward him, and a single, long sliver of light pierced the sycamores and fell upon her head. He gasped.

"What was it about the melodies?" she said.

"Nothing! I don't know how to thank you for this evening that you have given me. I--I suppose you are leaving to-morrow. No one ever stays here.--I----"

"What about the melodies?"

He gave it up. "The moon makes people insane!" he cried.

"If that is true," she returned, "then you need not be more afraid than I, because 'people' is plural. What were you saying about----"

"I _had_ heard them--in my heart. When I heard your voice to-night, I knew that it was you who sang them there--had been singing them for me always."

"So!" she cried, gaily. "All that debate about a pretty speech!" Then, sinking before him in a deep courtesy, "I am beholden to you," she said. "Do you think that no man ever made a little flattery for me before to-night?"

At the edge of the orchard, where they could keep an unseen watch on the garden and the bank of the creek. Judge Briscoe and Mr. Todd were ensconced under an apple-tree, the former still armed with his shot-gun. When the two young people got up from their bench, the two men rose hastily, and then sauntered slowly toward them. When they met, Harkless shook each of them cordially by the hand, without seeming to know it.

"We were coming to look for you," explained the judge. "William was afraid to go home alone; thought some one might take him for Mr. Harkless and shoot him before he got into town. Can you come out with young Willetts in the morning, Harkless," he went on, "and go with the ladies to see the parade? And Minnie wants you to stay to dinner and go to the show with them in the afternoon."

Harkless seized his hand and shook it fervently, and then laughed heartily, as he accepted the invitation.

At the gate, Miss Sherwood extended her hand to him and said politely, and with some flavor of mockery: "Good-night, Mr. Harkless. I do not leave to-morrow. I am very glad to have met you."

"We are going to keep her all summer if we can," said Minnie, weaving her arm about her friend's waist. "You'll come in the morning?"

"Good-night, Miss Sherwood," he returned, hilariously. "It has been such a pleasure to meet you. Thank you so much for saving my life. It was very good of you indeed. Yes, in the morning. Good-night--good-night." He shook hands with them all again, including Mr. Todd, who was going with him.

He laughed most of the way home, and Mr. Todd walked at his side in amazement. The Herald Building was a decrepit frame structure on Main Street; it had once been a small warehouse and was now sadly in need of paint. Closely adjoining it, in a large, blank-looking yard, stood a low brick cottage, over which the second story of the warehouse leaned in an effect of tipsy affection that had reminded Harkless, when he first saw it, of an old Sunday-school book wood-cut of an inebriated parent under convoy of a devoted child. The title to these two buildings and the blank yard had been included in the purchase of the "Herald"; and the cottage was Harkless's home.

There was a light burning upstairs in the "Herald" office. From the street a broad, tumble-down stairway ran up on the outside of the building to the second floor, and at the stairway railing John turned and shook his companion warmly by the hand.

"Good-night, William," he said. "It was plucky of you to join in that muss, to-night. I shan't forget it."

"I jest happened to come along," replied the other, drowsily; then, with a portentous yawn, he asked: "Ain't ye goin' to bed?"

"No; Parker wouldn't allow it."

"Well," observed William, with another yawn, which bade fair to expose the veritable soul of him, "I d'know how ye stand it. It's closte on eleven o'clock. Good-night."

John went up the steps, singing aloud:

> "For to-night we'll merry, merry be,
> For to-night we'll merry, merry be,"

and stopped on the sagging platform at the top of the stairs and gave the moon good-night with a wave of the hand and friendly laughter. At that it suddenly struck him that he was twenty-nine years of age; that he had laughed a great deal that evening; that he had laughed and laughed over things not in the least humorous, like an excited schoolboy making his first formal call; that he had shaken hands with Miss Briscoe when he left her, as if he should never see her again; that he had taken Miss Sherwood's hand twice in one very temporary parting; that he had shaken the judge's hand five times, and William's four!

"Idiot!" he cried. "What has happened to me?" Then he shook his fist at the moon and went in to work--he thought.

CHAPTER VII

MORNING: "SOME IN RAGS AND SOME IN TAGS AND SOME IN VELVET GOWNS"

The bright sun of circus-day shone into Harkless's window, and he awoke to find himself smiling. For a little while he lay content, drowsily wondering why he smiled, only knowing that there was something new. It was thus, as a boy, he had wakened on his birthday mornings, or on Christmas, or on the Fourth of July, drifting happily out of pleasant dreams into the consciousness of long-awaited delights that had come true, yet lying only half-awake in a cheerful borderland, leaving happiness undefined.

The morning breeze was fluttering at his window blind; a honeysuckle vine tapped lightly on the pane. Birds were trilling, warbling, whistling. From the street came the rumbling of wagons, merry cries of greeting, and the barking of dogs. What was it made him feel so young and strong and light-hearted? The breeze brought him the smell of June roses, fresh and sweet with dew, and then he knew why he had come smiling from his dreams. He would go a holiday-making. With that he leaped out of bed, and shouted loudly: "Zen! Hello, Xenophon!"

In answer, an ancient, very black darky put his head in at the door, his warped and wrinkled visage showing under his grizzled hair like charred paper in a fall of pine ashes. He said: "Good-mawn', suh. Yessuh. Hit's done pump' full. Good-mawn', suh."

A few moments later, the colored man, seated on the front steps of the cottage, heard a mighty splashing within, while the rafters rang with stentorian song:

"He promised to buy me a bunch o' blue ribbon,
He promised to buy me a bunch o' blue ribbon,
He promised to buy me a bunch o' blue ribbon,
To tie up my bonny brown hair

"Oh dear! What can the matter be?
Oh dear! What can the matter be?
Oh dear! What can the matter be?
Johnnie's so long at the Fair!"

At the sound of this complaint, delivered in a manly voice, the listener's jaw dropped, and his mouth opened and stayed open. "_Him!_" he muttered, faintly. "_Singin'_!"

"Well, the old Triangle knew the music of our tread;
How the peaceful Seminole would tremble in his bed!"

sang the editor.
"I dunno huccome it," exclaimed the old man, "an' dat ain' hyer ner dar; but, bless Gawd! de young man' happy!" A thought struck him suddenly, and he scratched his head. "Maybe he goin' away," he said, querulously. "What become o' ole Zen?" The splashing ceased, but not the voice, which struck into a noble marching chorus. "Oh, my Lawd," said the colored man, "I pray you listen at dat!"

"Soldiers marching up the street,
They keep the time;
They look sublime!
Hear them play Die Wacht am Rhein!
They call them Schneider's Band.

Tra la la la, la!"

The length of Main Street and all the Square resounded with the rattle of vehicles of every kind. Since earliest dawn they had been pouring into the village, a long procession on every country road. There were great red and blue farm wagons, drawn by splendid Clydesdales; the elders of the family on the front seat and on boards laid from side to side in front, or on chairs placed close behind, while, in the deep beds back of these, children tumbled in the straw, or peeped over the sides, rosy-cheeked and laughing, eyes alight with blissful anticipations. There were more pretentious two-seated cut-unders and stout buckboards, loaded down with merrymakers, four on a seat meant for two; there were rattle-trap phaetons and comfortable carry-alls drawn by steady spans; and, now and then, mule teams bringing happy negroes, ready to squander all on the first Georgia watermelons and cider. Every vehicle contained heaping baskets of good things to eat (the previous night had been a woeful Bartholomew for Carlow chickens) and underneath, where the dogs paced faithfully, swung buckets and fodder for the horses, while colts innumerable trotted dose to the maternal flanks, viewing the world with their big, new eyes in frisky surprise.

Here and there the trim side-bar buggy of some prosperous farmer's son, escorting his sweetheart, flashed along the road, the young mare stepping out in pride of blood to pass the line of wagons, the youth who held the reins, resplendent in Sunday best and even better, his scorched brown face glowing with a fine belief in the superiority of both his steed and his lady; the latter beaming out upon life and rejoicing in the light-blue ribbons on her hat, the light-blue ribbon around her waist, the light-blue, silk half-mittens on her hands, and the beautiful red coral necklace about her neck and the red coral buttons that fastened her gown in the back.

The air was full of exhilaration; everybody was laughing and shouting and calling greetings; for Carlow County was turning out, and from far and near the country people came; nay, from over the county line, clouds of dust rising from every thoroughfare and highway, and sweeping into town to herald their coming.

Dibb Zane, the "sprinkling contractor," had been at work with the town water-cart since the morning stars were bright, but he might as well have watered the streets with his tears, which, indeed, when the farmers began to come in, bringing their cyclones of dust, he drew nigh unto, after a spell of profanity as futile as his cart.

"Tief wie das Meer soll deine Liebe sein,"

hummed the editor in the cottage. His song had taken on a reflective tone as that of one who cons a problem, or musically ponders which card to play. He was kneeling before an old trunk in his bedchamber. From one compartment he took a neatly folded pair of duck trousers and a light-gray tweed coat; from another, a straw hat with a ribbon of bright colors. They had lain in the trunk a long time undisturbed; and he examined them musingly. He shook the coat and brushed it; then he laid the garments upon his bed, and proceeded to shave himself carefully, after which he donned the white trousers, the gray coat, and, rummaging in the trunk again, found a gay pink cravat, which he fastened about his tall collar (also a resurrection from the trunk) with a pearl pin. After that he had a long, solemn time arranging his hair with a pair of brushes. When at last he was suited, and his dressing completed, he sallied forth to breakfast.

Xenophon stared after him as he went out of the gate whistling heartily. The old darky lifted his hands, palms outward.

"Lan' name, who dat!" he exclaimed aloud. "Who dat in dem pan-jingeries? He jine' de circus?" His hands fell upon his knees, and he got to his feet pneumatically, shaking his head with foreboding. "Honey, honey, hit' baid luck, baid luck sing 'fo' breakfus. Trouble 'fo' de day be done. Trouble, honey, gre't trouble. Baid luck, baid luck!"

Along the Square the passing of the editor in his cool equipment evoked some gasps of astonishment; and Mr. Tibbs and his sister rushed from the postoffice to stare after him.

"He looks just beautiful, Solomon," said Miss Tibbs.

"But what's the name for them kind of clothes?" inquired her brother. "'Seems to me there's a special way of callin' 'em. 'Seems as if I see a picture of 'em, somewheres. Wasn't it on the cover of that there long-tennis box we bought and put in the window, and the country people thought it was a seining outfit?"

"It was a game, the catalogue said," observed Miss Selina. "Wasn't it?"

"It was a mighty pore investment," the postmaster answered.

As Harkless approached the hotel, a decrepit old man, in a vast straw hat and a linen duster much too large for him, came haltingly forward to meet him. He was Widow-Woman Wimby's husband. And, as did every one else, he spoke of his wife by the name of her former martial companion.

"Be'n a-lookin' fer you, Mr. Harkless," he said in a shaking spindle of a voice, as plaintive as his pale little eyes. "Mother Wimby, she sent some roses to ye. Cynthy's fixin' 'em on yer table. I'm well as ever I am; but her, she's too complaining to come in fer show-day. This morning, early, we see some the Cross-Roads folks pass the place towards town, an' she sent me in to tell ye. Oh, I knowed ye'd laugh. Says she, 'He's too much of a man to be skeered,' says she, 'these here tall, big men always 'low nothin' on earth kin hurt 'em,' says she, 'but you tell him to be keerful,' says she; an' I see Bill Skillett an' his brother on the Square lessun a half-an-hour ago, 'th my own eyes. I won't keep ye from yer breakfast.--Eph Watts is in there, eatin'. He's come back; but I guess I don't need to warn ye agin' him. He seems peaceable enough. It's the other folks you got to look out fer."

He limped away. The editor waved his hand to him from the door, but the old fellow shook his head, and made a warning, friendly gesture with his arm.

Harkless usually ate his breakfast alone, as he was the latest riser in Plattville. (There were days in the winter when he did not reach the hotel until eight o'clock.) This morning he found a bunch of white roses, still wet with dew and so fragrant that the whole room was fresh and sweet with their odor, prettily arranged in a bowl on the table, and, at his plate, the largest of all with a pin through the stem. He looked up, smilingly, and nodded at the red-haired girl. "Thank you, Charmion," he said. "That's very pretty."

She turned even redder than she always was, and answered nothing,

vigorously darting her brush at an imaginary fly on the cloth. After several minutes she said abruptly, "You're welcome."

There was a silence, finally broken by a long, gasping sigh. Astonished, he looked at the girl. Her eyes were set unfathomably upon his pink tie; the wand had dropped from her nerveless hand, and she stood rapt and immovable. She started violently from her trance. "Ain't you goin' to finish your coffee?" she asked, plying her instrument again, and, bending over him slightly, whispered: "Say, Eph Watts is over there behind you."

At a table in a far corner of the room a large gentleman in a brown frock coat was quietly eating his breakfast and reading the "Herald." He was of an ornate presence, though entirely neat. A sumptuous expanse of linen exhibited itself between the lapels of his low-cut waistcoat, and an inch of bediamonded breastpin glittered there, like an ice-ledge on a snowy mountain side. He had a steady, blue eye and a dissipated, iron-gray mustache. This personage was Mr. Ephraim Watts, who, following a calling more fashionable in the eighteenth century than in the latter decades of the nineteenth, had shaken the dust of Carlow from his feet some three years previously, at the strong request of the authorities. The "Herald" had been particularly insistent upon his deportation, and, in the local phrase, Harkless had "run him out of town." Perhaps it was because the "Herald's" opposition (as the editor explained at the time) had been merely moral and impersonal, and the editor had always confessed to a liking for the unprofessional qualities of Mr. Watts, that there was but slight embarrassment when the two gentlemen met to-day. His breakfast finished, Harkless went over to the other and extended his hand. Cynthia held her breath and clutched the back of a chair. However, Mr. Watts made no motion toward his well-known hip pocket. Instead, he rose, flushed slightly, and accepted the hand offered him.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Watts," said the journalist, cordially. "Also, if you are running with the circus and calculate on doing business here to-day, I'll have to see that you are fired out of town before noon. How are you? You're looking extremely well."

"Mr. Harkless," answered Watts, "I cherish no hard feelings, and I never said but what you done exactly right when I left, three years ago. No, sir; I'm not here in a professional way at all, and I don't want to be molested. I've connected myself with an oil company, and I'm down here to look over the ground. It beats poker and fan-tan hollow, though there ain't as many chances in favor of the dealer, and in oil it's the farmer that gets the rake-off. I've come back, but in an enterprising spirit this time, to open up a new field and shed light and money in Carlow. They told me never to show my face here again, but if you say I stay, I guess I stay. I always was sure there was oil in the county, and I want to prove it for everybody's benefit. Is it all right?"

"My dear fellow," laughed the young man, shaking the gambler's hand again, "it is all right. I have always been sorry I had to act against you. Everything is all right! Stay and bore to Corea if you like. Did ever you see such glorious weather?"

"I'll let you in on some shares," Watts called after him as he turned away. He nodded in reply and was leaving the room when Cynthia detained him by a flourish of the fly-brush. "Say," she said,--she always called him "Say"--"You've forgot your flower."

He came back, and thanked her. "Will you pin it on for me, Charmion?"

"I don't know what call you got to speak to me out of my name," she responded, looking at the floor moodily.

"Why?" he asked, surprised.

"I don't see why you want to make fun of me."

"I beg your pardon, Cynthia," he said gravely. "I didn't mean to do that. I haven't been considerate. I didn't think you'd be displeased. I'm very sorry. Won't you pin it on my coat?"

Her face was lifted in grateful pleasure, and she began to pin the rose to his lapel. Her hands were large and red and trembled. She dropped the flower, and, saying huskily, "I don't know as I could do it right," seized violently upon a pile of dishes and hurried from the room.

Harkless rescued the rose, pinned it on his coat himself, and, observing internally, for the hundredth time, that the red-haired waitress was the queerest creature in the village, set forth gaily upon his holiday.

When he reached the brick house on the pike he discovered a gentleman sunk in an easy and contemplative attitude in a big chair behind the veranda railing. At the click of the gate the lounger rose and disclosed the stalwart figure and brown, smiling, handsome face of Mr. Lige Willetts, an habitual devotee of Minnie Briscoe, and the most eligible bachelor of Carlow. "The ladies will be down right off," he said, greeting the editor's finery with a perceptible agitation and the editor himself with a friendly shake of the hand. "Mildy says to wait out here."

But immediately there was a faint rustling within the house: the swish of draperies on the stairs, a delicious whispering when light feet descend, tapping, to hearts that beat an answer, the telegraphic message, "We come! We come! We are near! We are near!" Lige Willetts stared at Harkless. He had never thought the latter good-looking until he saw him step to the door to take Miss Sherwood's hand and say in a strange, low, tense voice, "Good-morning," as if he were announcing, at the least: "Every one in the world except us two, died last night. It is a solemn thing, but I am very happy."

They walked, Minnie and Mr. Willetts a little distance in front of the others. Harkless could not have told, afterward, whether they rode, or walked, or floated on an air-ship to the court-house. All he knew distinctly was that a divinity in a pink shirt waist, and a hat that was woven of gauzy cloud by mocking fairies to make him stoop hideously to see under it, dwelt for the time on earth and was at his side, dazzling him in the morning sunshine. Last night the moon had lent her a silvery glamour; she had something of the ethereal whiteness of night-dews in that watery light, a nymph to laugh from a sparkling fountain, at the moon or, as he thought, remembering her courtesy for his pretty speech, perhaps a little lady of King Louis's court, wandering down the years from Fontainebleau and appearing to clumsy mortals sometimes, of a June night when the moon was in their heads.

But to-day she was of the clearest color, a pretty girl, whose gray eyes twinkled to his in gay companionship. He marked how the sunshine was spun into the fair shadows of her hair and seemed itself to catch a lustre, rather than to impart it, and the light of the June day drifted through the gauzy hat, touching her face with a delicate and tender flush that

came and went like the vibrating pink of early dawn. She had the divinest straight nose, tip-tilted the faintest, most alluring trifle, and a dimple cleft her chin, "the deadliest maelstrom in the world!" He thrilled through and through. He had been only vaguely conscious of the dimple in the night. It was not until he saw her by daylight that he really knew it was there.

The village hummed with life before them. They walked through shimmering airs, sweeter to breathe than nectar is to drink. She caught a butterfly, basking on a jimson weed, and, before she let it go, held it out to him in her hand. It was a white butterfly. He asked which was the butterfly.

"Bravo!" she said, tossing the captive craft above their heads and watching the small sails catch the breeze; "And so you can make little flatteries in the morning, too. It is another courtesy you should be having from me, if it weren't for the dustiness of it. Wait till we come to the board walk."

She had some big, pink roses at her waist. "In the meantime," he answered, indicating these, "I know very well a lad that would be blithe to accept a pretty token of any lady's high esteem."

"But you have one, already, a very beautiful one." She gave him a genial up-and-down glance from head to foot, half quizzical, but so quick he almost missed it. And then he was glad he had found the straw hat with the youthful ribbon, and all his other festal vestures. "And a very becoming flower a white rose is," she continued, "though I am a bold girl to be blarneying with a young gentleman I met no longer ago than last night."

"But why shouldn't you blarney with a gentleman, when you began by saving his life?"

"Or, rather, when the gentleman had the politeness to gallop about the county with me tucked under his arm?" She stood still and laughed softly, but consummately, and her eyes closed tight with the mirth of it. She had taken one of the roses from her waist, and, as she stood, holding it by the long stem, its petals lightly pressed her lips.

"You may have it--in exchange," she said. He bent down to her, and she began to fasten the pink rose in place of the white one on his coat. She did not ask him, directly or indirectly, who had put the white one there for him, because she knew by the way it was pinned that he had done it himself. "Who is it that ev'ry morning brings me these lovely flow'rs?" she burlesqued, as he bent over her.

"'Mr. Wimby,'" he returned. "I will point him out to you. You must see him, and, also, Mr. Bodeffer, the oldest inhabitant--and crossest."

"Will you present them to me?"

"No; they might talk to you and take some of my time with you away from me." Her eyes sparkled into his for the merest fraction of a second, and she laughed half mockingly. Then she dropped his lapel and they proceeded. She did not put the white rose in her belt, but carried it.

The Square was heaving with a jostling, goodnatured, happy, and constantly increasing crowd that overflowed on Main Street in both directions; and the good nature of this crowd was augmented in the ratio that its size increased. The streets were a confusion of many colors, and eager faces

filled every window opening on Main Street or the Square. Since nine o'clock all those of the courthouse had been occupied, and here most of the damsels congregated to enjoy the spectacle of the parade, and their swains attended, gallantly posting themselves at coignes of less vantage behind the ladies. Some of the faces that peeped from the dark, old court-house windows were pretty, and some of them were not pretty; but nearly all of them were rosy-cheeked, and all were pleasant to see because of the good cheer they showed. Some of the gallants affected the airy and easy, entertaining the company with badinage and repartee; some were openly bashful. Now and then one of the latter, after long deliberation, constructed a laborious compliment for his inamorata, and, after advancing and propounding half of it, again retired into himself, smit with a blissful palsy. Nearly all of them conversed in tones that might have indicated that they were separated from each other by an acre lot or two.

Here and there, along the sidewalk below, a father worked his way through the throng, a licorice-bedaubed cherub on one arm, his coat (borne with long enough) on the other; followed by a mother with the other children hanging to her skirts and tagging exasperatingly behind, holding red and blue toy balloons and delectable batons of spiral-striped peppermint in tightly closed, sadly sticky fingers.

A thousand cries rent the air; the strolling mountebanks and gypsying booth-merchants; the peanut vendors; the boys with palm-leaf fans for sale; the candy sellers; the popcorn peddlers; the Italian with the toy balloons that float like a cluster of colored bubbles above the heads of the crowd, and the balloons that wail like a baby; the red-lemonade man, shouting in the shrill voice that reaches everywhere and endures forever: "Lemo! Lemo! Ice-cole lemo! Five cents, a nickel, a half-a-dime, the twentiethpotofadollah! Lemo! Ice-cole lemo!"--all the vociferating harbingers of the circus crying their wares. Timid youth, in shoes covered with dust through which the morning polish but dimly shone, and unalterably hooked by the arm to blushing maidens, bought recklessly of peanuts, of candy, of popcorn, of all known sweetmeats, perchance; and forced their way to the lemonade stands; and there, all shyly, silently sipped the crimson-stained ambrosia. Everywhere the hawkers dinned, and everywhere was heard the plaintive squawk of the toy balloon.

But over all rose the nasal cadence of the Cheap John, reeking oratory from his big wagon on the corner: "Walk up, walk up, walk up, ladies and gents! Here we are! Here we are! Make hay while we gather the moss. Walk up, one and all. Here I put this solid gold ring, sumptuous and golden, eighteen carats, eighteen golden carats of the priceless mother of metals, toiled fer on the wild Pacific slope, eighteen garnteed, I put this golden ring, rich and golden, in the package with the hangkacheef, the elegant and blue-ruled note-paper, self-writing pens, pencil and penholder. Who takes the lot? Who takes it, ladies and gents?"

His tongue curled about his words; he seemed to love them. "Fer a quat-of-a-dollah! Don't turn away, young man--you feller in the green necktie, there. We all see the young lady on your arm is a-langrishing fer the golden ring and the package. Faint heart never won fair wummin'. There you are, sir, and you'll never regret it. Go--and be happy! Now, who's the next man to git solid with his girl fer a quat-of-a-dollah? Life is a mysterus and unviolable shadder, my friends; who kin read its orgeries? To-day we are here--but to-morrow we may be in jail. Only a quat-of-a-dollah! We are Seventh-Day Adventists, ladies and gents, a-givin' away our belongings in the awful face of Michael, fer a quat-of-a-dollah. The same price fer each-an-devery individual, lady and gent, man, wummin, wife and

child, and happiness to one and all fer a quat-of-a-dollah!"

Down the middle of the street, kept open between the waiting crowd, ran barefoot boys, many of whom had not slept at home, but had kept vigil in the night mists for the coming of the show, and, having seen the muffled pageant arrive, swathed, and with no pomp and panoply, had returned to town, rioting through jewelled cobwebs in the morning fields, happy in the pride of knowledge of what went on behind the scenes. To-night, or to-morrow, the runaways would face a woodshed reckoning with outraged ancestry; but now they caracoled in the dust with no thought of the grim deeds to be done upon them.

In the court-house yard, and so sinning in the very eye of the law, two swarthy, shifty-looking gentlemen were operating (with some greasy walnut shells and a pea) what the fanciful or unsophisticated might have been pleased to call a game of chance; and the most intent spectator of the group around them was Mr. James Bardlock, the Town Marshal. He was simply and unofficially and earnestly interested. Thus the eye of Justice may not be said to have winked upon the nefariousness now under its vision; it gazed with strong curiosity, an itch to dabble, and (it must be admitted) a growing hope of profit. The game was so direct and the player so sure. Several countrymen had won small sums, and one, a charmingly rustic stranger, with a peculiar accent (he said that him and his goil should now have a smoot' old time off his winninks--though the lady was not manifested), had won twenty-five dollars with no trouble at all. The two operators seemed depressed, declaring the luck against them and the Plattville people too brilliant at the game.

It was wonderful how the young couples worked their way arm-in-arm through the thickest crowds, never separating. Even at the lemonade stands they drank holding the glasses in their outer hands--such are the sacrifices demanded by etiquette. But, observing the gracious outpouring of fortune upon the rustic with the rare accent, a youth in a green tie disengaged his arm--for the first time in two hours--from that of a girl upon whose finger there shone a ring, sumptuous and golden, and, conducting her to a corner of the yard, bade her remain there until he returned. He had to speak to Hartly Bowlder, he explained.

Then he plunged, red-faced and excited, into the circle about the shell manipulators, and offered, to lay a wager.

"Hol' on there, Hen Fentriss," thickly objected a flushed young man beside him, "iss my turn."

"I'm first. Hartley," returned the other. "You can hold yer bosses a minute, I reckon."

"Plenty fer each and all, chents," interrupted one of the shell-men. "Place yer spondulicks on de little ball. Wich is de next lucky one to win our money? Chent bets four sixty-five he seen de little ball go under de middle shell. Up she comes! Dis time _we_ wins; Plattville can't win _every_ time. Who's de next chent?"

Fentriss edged slowly out of the circle, abashed, and with rapidly whitening cheeks. He paused for a moment, outside, slowly realizing that all his money had gone in one wild, blind whirl--the money he had earned so hard and saved so hard, to make a holiday for his sweetheart and himself. He stole one glance around the building to where a patient figure waited for him. Then he fled down a side alley and soon was out upon the

country road, tramping soddenly homeward through the dust, his chin sunk in his breast and his hands clenched tight at his sides. Now and then he stopped and bitterly hurled a stone at a piping bird on a fence, or gay Bob White in the fields. At noon the patient figure was still waiting in the corner of the court-house yard, meekly twisting the golden ring upon her finger.

But the flushed young man who had spoken thickly to her deserter drew an envied roll of bankbills from his pocket and began to bet with tipsy caution, while the circle about the gamblers watched with fervid interest, especially Mr. Bardlock, Town Marshal.

From far up Main Street came the cry "She's a-comin'! She's a-comin'!" and, this announcement of the parade proving only one of a dozen false alarms, a thousand discussions took place over old-fashioned silver timepieces as to when "she" was really due. Schofields' Henry was much appealed to as an arbiter in these discussions, from a sense of his having a good deal to do with time in a general sort of way; and thus Schofields' came to be reminded that it was getting on toward ten o'clock, whereas, in the excitement of festival, he had not yet struck nine. This, rushing forthwith to do, he did; and, in the elation of the moment, seven or eight besides. Miss Helen Sherwood was looking down on the mass of shifting color from a second-story window--whither many an eye was upturned in wonder--and she had the pleasure of seeing Schofields' emerge on the steps beneath her, when the bells had done, and heard the cheers (led by Mr. Martin) with which the laughing crowd greeted his appearance after the performance of his feat.

She turned beamingly to Harkless. "What a family it is!" she laughed. "Just one big, jolly family. I didn't know people could be like this until I came to Plattville."

"That is the word for it," he answered, resting his hand on the casement beside her. "I used to think it was desolate, but that was long ago." He leaned from the window to look down. In his dark cheek was a glow Carlow folk had never seen there; and somehow he seemed less thin and tired; indeed, he did not seem tired at all, by far the contrary; and he carried himself upright (when he was not stooping to see under the hat), though not as if he thought about it. "I believe they are the best people I know," he went on. "Perhaps it is because they have been so kind to me; but they are kind to each other, too; kind, good people----"

"I know," she said, nodding--a flower on the gauzy hat set to vibrating in a tantalizing way. "I know. There are fat women who rock and rock on piazzas by the sea, and they speak of country people as the 'lower classes.' How happy this big family is in not knowing it is the lower classes!" "We haven't read Nordau down here," said John. "Old Tom Martin's favorite work is 'The Descent of Man.' Miss Tibbs admires Tupper, and 'Beulah,' and some of us possess the works of E. P. Roe--and why not?"

"Yes; what of it," she returned, "since you escape Nordau? I think the conversation we hear from the other windows is as amusing and quite as loud as most of that I hear in Rouen during the winter; and Rouen, you know, is just like any other big place nowadays, though I suppose there are Philadelphians, for instance, who would be slow to believe a statement like that."

"Oh, but they are not all of Philadelphia----" He left the sentence, smilingly.

"And yet somebody said, 'The further West I travel the more convinced I am the Wise Men came from the East.'"

"Yes," he answered. "'From' is the important word in that."

"It was a girl from Southeast Cottonbridge, Massachusetts," said Helen, "who heard I was from Indiana and asked me if I didn't hate to live so far away from things." There was a pause, while she leaned out of the window with her face aside from him. Then she remarked carelessly, "I met her at Winter Harbor."

"Do you go to Winter Harbor?" he asked.

"We have gone there every summer until this one, for years. Have you friends who go there?"

"I had--once. There was a classmate of mine from Rouen----"

"What was his name? Perhaps I know him." She stole a glance at him. His face had fallen into sad lines, and he looked like the man who had come up the aisle with the Hon. Kedge Halloway. A few moments before he had seemed another person entirely.

"He's forgotten me, I dare say. I haven't seen him for seven years; and that's a long time, you know. Besides, he's 'out in the world,' where remembering is harder. Here in Plattville we don't forget."

"Were you ever at Winter Harbor?"

"I was--once. I spent a very happy day there long ago, when you must have been a little girl. Were you there in--"

"Listen!" she cried. "The procession is coming. Look at the crowd!" The parade had seized a psychological moment.

There was a fanfare of trumpets in the east. Lines of people rushed for the street, and, as one looked down on the straw hats and sunbonnets and many kinds of finer head apparel, tossing forward, they seemed like surf sweeping up the long beaches.

She was coming at last. The boys whooped in the middle of the street; some tossed their arms to heaven, others expressed their emotion by somersaults; those most deeply moved walked on their hands. In the distance one saw, over the heads of the multitude, tossing banners and the moving crests of triumphal cars, where "cohorts were shining in purple and gold." She _was_ coming. After all the false alarms and disappointments, she was coming!

There was another flourish of music. Immediately all the band gave sound, and then, with blare of brass and the crash of drums, the glory of the parade burst upon Plattville. Glory in the utmost! The resistless impetus of the march-time music; the flare of royal banners, of pennons on the breeze; the smiling of beautiful Court Ladies and great, silken Nobles; the swaying of howdahs on camel and elephant, and the awesome shaking of the earth beneath the elephant's feet, and the gleam of his small but devastating eye (every one declared he looked the alarmed Mr. Snoddy full in the face as he passed, and Mr. Snoddy felt not at all reassured when Tom Martin severely hinted that it was with the threatening glance of a

rival); then the badinage of the clown, creaking along in his donkey cart; the terrific recklessness of the spangled hero who was drawn by in a cage with two striped tigers; the spirit of the prancing steeds that drew the rumbling chariots, and the grace of the helmeted charioteers; the splendor of the cars and the magnificence of the paintings with which they were adorned; the ecstasy of all this glittering, shining, gorgeous pageantry needed even more than walking on your hands to express.

Last of all came the tooting calliope, followed by swarms of boys as it executed, "Wait till the clouds roll by, Jennie" with infinite dash and gusto.

When it was gone, Miss Sherwood's intent gaze relaxed--she had been looking on as eagerly as any child,--and she turned to speak to Harkless and discovered that he was no longer in the room; instead, she found Minnie and Mr. Willetts, whom he had summoned from another window.

"He was called away," explained Lige. "He thought he'd be back before the parade was over, and said you were enjoying it so much he didn't want to speak to you."

"Called away?" she said, inquiringly.

Minnie laughed. "Oh, everybody sends for Mr. Harkless."

"It was a farmer, name of Bowlder," added Mr. Willetts. "His son Hartley's drinking again, and there ain't any one but Harkless can do anything with him. You let him tackle a sick man to nurse, or a tipsy one to handle, and I tell you," Mr. Willetts went on with enthusiasm, "he is at home. It beats me,--and lots of people don't think college does a man any good! Why, the way he cured old Fis----"

"See!" cried Minnie, loudly, pointing out of the window. "Look down there. Something's happened."

There was a swirl in the crowd below. Men were running around a corner of the court-house, and the women and children were harking after. They went so fast, and there were so many of them, that immediately that whole portion of the yard became a pushing, tugging, pulling, squirming jam of people.

"It's on the other side," said Lige. "We can see from the hall window. Come quick, before these other folks fill it up."

They followed him across the building, and looked down on an agitated swarm of faces. Five men were standing on the entrance steps to the door below, and the crowd was thickly massed beyond, leaving a little semicircle clear about the steps. Those behind struggled to get closer, and leaped in the air to catch a glimpse of what was going on. Harkless stood alone on the top step, his hand resting on the shoulder of the pale and contrite and sobered Hartley. In the clear space, Jim Bardlock was standing with sheepishly hanging head, and between him and Harkless were the two gamblers of the walnut shells. The journalist held in his hand the implements of their profession.

"Give it all up," he was saying in his steady voice. "You've taken eighty-six dollars from this boy. Hand it over."

The men began to edge closer to the crowd, giving little, swift,

desperate, searching looks from left to right, and right to left, moving nervously about, like weasels in a trap. "Close up there tight," said Harkless, sharply. "Don't let them out."

"W'y can't we git no square treatment here?" one of the gamblers whined; but his eyes, blazing with rage, belied the plaintive passivity of his tone. "We been running no skin. Wy d'ye say we gotter give up our own money? You gotter prove it was a skin. We risked our money fair."

"Prove it! Come up here, Eph Watts. Friends," the editor turned to the crowd, smiling, "friends, here's a man we ran out of town once, because he knew too much about things of this sort. He's come back to us again and he's here to stay. He'll give us an object-lesson on the shell game."

"It's pretty simple," remarked Mr. Watts. "The best way is to pick up the ball with your second finger and the back part of your thumb as you pretend to lay the shell down over it: this way." He illustrated, and showed several methods of manipulation, with professional sang-froid; and as he made plain the easy swindle by which many had been duped that morning, there arose an angry and threatening murmur.

"You all see," said Harkless, raising his voice a little, "what a simple cheat it is--and old as Pharaoh. Yet a lot of you stood around and lost your own money, and stared like idiots, and let Hartley Bowlder lose eighty-odd dollars on a shell racket, and not one of you lifted a hand. How hard did you work for what these two cheap crooks took from you? Ah!" he cried, "it is because you were greedy that they robbed you so easily. You know it's true. It's when you want to get something for nothing that the 'confidence men' steal the money you sweat for and make the farmer a laughing stock. And _you_, Jim Bardlock, Town Marshal!--you, who confess that you 'went in the game sixty cents' worth, yourself--" His eyes were lit with wrath as he raised his accusing hand and levelled it at the unhappy municipal.

The Town Marshal smiled uneasily and deprecatingly about him, and, meeting only angry glances, hearing only words of condemnation, he passed his hand unsteadily over his fat mustache, shifted from one leg to the other and back again, looked up, looked down, and then, an amiable and pleasure-loving man, beholding nothing but accusation and anger in heaven and earth, and wishing nothing more than to sink into the waters under the earth, but having no way of reaching them, finding his troubles quite unbearable, and unable to meet the manifold eye of man, he sought relief after the unsagacious fashion of a larger bird than he. His burly form underwent a series of convulsions not unlike sobs, and he shut his eyes tightly and held them so, presenting a picture of misery unequalled in the memory of any spectator. Harkless's outstretched hand began to shake. "You!" he tried to continue--"you, a man elected to----"

There came from the crowd the sound of a sad, high-keyed voice, drawling: "That's a nice vest Jim's got on, but it ain't hardly the feathers fitten for an ostrich, is it?"

The editor's gravity gave way; he broke into a ringing laugh and turned again to the shell-men. "Give up the boy's money. Hurry."

"Step down here and git it," said the one who had spoken.

There was a turbulent motion in the crowd, and a cry arose, "Run 'em out! Ride 'em on a rail! Tar and feathers! Run 'em out o' town!"

"I wouldn't dilly-dally long if I were you," said Harkless, and his advice seemed good to the shell-men. A roll of bills, which he counted and turned over to the elder Bowlder, was sullenly placed in his hand. The fellow who had not yet spoken clutched the journalist's sleeve with his dirty hand.

"We hain't done wit' youse," he said, hoarsely. "Don't belief it, not fer a minute, see?"

The Town Marshal opened his eyes briskly, and placing a hand on each of the gamblers, said: "I hereby do arrest your said persons, .and declare you my prisoners." The cry rose again, louder: "Run 'em out! String 'em up! Hang them! Hang them!" and a forward rush was made.

"This way, Jim. Be quick," said Harkless, quietly, bending down and jerking one of the gamblers half-way up the steps. "Get through the hall to the other side and then run them to the lock-up. No one will stop you that way. Watts and I will hold this door." Bardlock hustled his prisoners through the doorway, and the crowd pushed up the steps, while Harkless struggled to keep the vestibule clear until Watts got the double doors closed. "Stand back, here!" he cried; "it's all over. Don't be foolish. The law is good enough for us. Stand back, will you!"

He was laughing a little, shoving them back with open hand and elbow, when a small, compact group of men suddenly dashed up the steps together, and a heavy stick swung out over their heads. A straw hat with a gay ribbon sailed through the air. The journalist's long arms went out swiftly from his body in several directions, the hands not open, but clenched and hard. The next instant he and Mr. Watts stood alone on the steps, and a man with a bleeding, blaspheming mouth dropped his stick and tried to lose himself in the crowd. Mr. Watts was returning something he had not used to his hip-pocket.

"Prophets of Israel!" exclaimed William Todd, ruefully, "it wasn't Eph Watts's pistol. Did you see Mr. Harkless? I was up on them steps when he begun. I don't believe he needs as much takin' care of as we think."

"Wasn't it one of them Cross-Roads devils that knocked his hat off?" asked Judd Bennett. "I thought I see Bob Skillett run up with a club."

Harkless threw open the doors behind him; the hall was empty. "You may come in now," he said. "This isn't my court-house."

CHAPTER VIII

GLAD AFTERNOON: THE GIRL BY THE BLUE TENT-POLE

They walked slowly back along the pike toward the brick house. The white-ruffed fennel reached up its dusty yellow heads to touch her skirts as she passed, and then drooped, satisfied, against the purple iron-weed at the roadside. In the noonday silence no cricket chirped nor locust raised its lorn monotone; the tree shadows mottled the road with blue, and the level fields seemed to pant out a dazzling breath, the transparent "heat-waves" that danced above the low corn and green wheat.

He was stooping very much as they walked; he wanted to be told that he could look at her for a thousand years. Her face was rarely and exquisitely modelled, but, perhaps, just now the salient characteristic of her beauty (for the salient characteristic seemed to be a different thing at different times) was the coloring, a delicate glow under the white skin, that bewitched him in its seeming a reflection of the rich benediction of the noonday sun that blazed overhead.

Once he had thought the way to the Briscoe homestead rather a long walk; but now the distance sped malignantly; and strolled they never so slow, it was less than a "young bird's flutter from a wood." With her acquiescence he rolled a cigarette, and she began to hum lightly the air of a song, a song of an ineffably gentle, slow movement.

That, and a reference of the morning, and, perhaps, the smell of his tobacco mingling with the fragrance of her roses, awoke again the keen reminiscence of the previous night within him. Clearly outlined before him rose the high, green slopes and cool cliff-walls of the coast of Maine, while his old self lazily watched the sharp little waves through half-closed lids, the pale smoke of his cigarette blowing out under the rail of a waxen deck where he lay cushioned. And again a woman pelted his face with handfuls of rose-petals and cried: "Up lad and at 'em! Yonder is Winter Harbor." Again he sat in the oak-raftered Casino, breathless with pleasure, and heard a young girl sing the "Angel's Serenade," a young girl who looked so bravely unconscious of the big, hushed crowd that listened, looked so pure and bright and gentle and good, that he had spoken of her as "Sir Galahad's little sister." He recollected he had been much taken with this child; but he had not thought of her from that time to this, he supposed; had almost forgotten her. No! Her face suddenly stood out to his view as though he saw her with his physical eye--a sweet and vivacious child's face with light-brown hair and gray eyes and a short upper lip. . . . And the voice. . . .

He stopped short and struck his palms together. "You are Tom Meredith's little cousin!"

"The Great Harkless!" she answered, and stretched out her hand to him.

"I remember you!"

"Isn't it time?"

"Ah, but I never forgot you," he cried. "I thought I had. I didn't know who it was I was remembering. I thought it was fancy, and it was memory. I never forgot your voice, singing--and I remembered your face too; though I thought I didn't." He drew a deep breath. "_That_ was why----"

"Tom Meredith has not forgotten you," she said, as he paused.

"Would you mind shaking hands once more?" he asked. She gave him her hand again. "With all my heart. Why?"

"I'm making a record at it. Thank you."

"They called me 'Sir Galahad's little sister' all one summer because the Great John Harkless called me that. You danced with me in the evening."

"Did I?"

"Ah," she said, shaking her head, "you were too busy being in love with Mrs. Van Skuyt to remember a waltz with only me! I was allowed to meet you as a reward for singing my very best, and you--you bowed with the indulgence of a grandfather, and asked me to dance."

"Like a grandfather? How young I was then! How time changes us!"

"I'm afraid my conversation did not make a great impression upon you," she continued.

"But it did. I am remembering very fast. If you will wait a moment, I will tell you some of the things you said."

The girl laughed merrily. Whenever she laughed he realized that it was becoming terribly difficult not to tell her how adorable she was. "I wouldn't risk it, if I were you," she warned him, "because I didn't speak to you at all. I shut my lips tight and trembled all over every bit of the time I was dancing with you. I did not sleep that night, because I was so unhappy, wondering what the Great Harkless would think of me. I knew he thought me unutterably stupid because I couldn't talk to him. I wanted to send him word that I knew I had bored him. I couldn't bear for him not to know that I knew I had. But he was not thinking of me in any way. He had gone to sea again in a big boat, the ungrateful pirate, cruising with Mrs. Van Skuyt."

"How time _does_ change us!" said John. "You are wrong, though; I did think of you; I have al----"

"Yes," she interrupted, tossing her head in airy travesty of the stage coquette, "you think so--I mean you say so--now. Away with you and your blarneying!"

And so they went through the warm noontide, and little he cared for the heat that wilted the fat mullein leaves and made the barefoot boy, who passed by, skip gingerly through the burning dust with anguished mouth and watery eye. Little he knew of the locust that suddenly whirred his mills of shrillness in the maple-tree, and sounded so hot, hot, hot; or those others that railed at the country quiet from the dim shade around the brick house; or even the rain-crow that sat on the fence and swore to them in the face of a sunny sky that they should see rain ere the day were done.

Little the young man recked of what he ate at Judge Briscoe's good noon dinner: chicken wing and young roas'n'-ear; hot rolls as light as the fluff of a summer cloudlet; and honey and milk; and apple-butter flavored like spices of Arabia; and fragrant, flaky cherry-pie; and cool, rich, yellow cream. Lige Willetts was a lover, yet he said he asked no better than to Just go on eating that cherry-pie till a sweet death overtook him; but railroad sandwiches and restaurant chops might have been set before Harkless for all the difference it would have made to him.

At no other time is a man's feeling of companionship with a woman so strong as when he sits at table with her-not at a "decorated" and becatered and bewaitered table, but at a homely, appetizing, wholesome home table like old Judge Briscoe's. The very essence of the thing is domesticity, and the implication is utter confidence and liking. There are few greater dangers for a bachelor. An insinuating imp perches on his

shoulder, and, softly tickling the bachelor's ear with the feathers of an arrow-shaft, whispers: "Pretty nice, isn't it, eh? Rather pleasant to have that girl sitting there, don't you think? Enjoy having her notice your butter-plate was empty? Think it exhilarating to hand her those rolls? Looks nice, doesn't she? Says 'Thank you' rather prettily? Makes your lonely breakfast seem mighty dull, doesn't it? How would you like to have her pour your coffee for you to-morrow, my boy? How would it seem to have such pleasant company all the rest of your life? Pretty cheerful, eh?"

When Miss Sherwood passed the editor the apple-butter, the casual, matter-of-course way she did it entranced him in a strange, exquisite wonderment. He did not set the dish down when she put it in his hand, but held it straight out before him, just looking at it, until Mr. Willetts had a dangerous choking fit, for which Minnie was very proud of Lige; no one could have suspected that it was the veil of laughter. When Helen told John he really must squeeze a lemon into his iced tea, he felt that his one need in life was to catch her up in his arms and run away with her, not anywhere in particular, but just run and run and run away.

After dinner they went out to the veranda and the gentlemen smoked. The judge set his chair down on the ground, tilted back in it with his feet on the steps, and blew a wavery domed city up in the air. He called it solid comfort. He liked to sit out from under the porch roof, he said; he wanted to see more of the sky. The others moved their chairs down to join him in the celestial vision. There had blown across the heaven a feathery, thin cloud or two, but save for these, there was nothing but glorious and tender, brilliant blue. It seemed so clear and close one marvelled the little church spire in the distance did not pierce it; yet, at the same time, the eye ascended miles and miles into warm, shimmering ether. Far away two buzzards swung slowly at anchor, half-way to the sun.

"'O bright, translucent, cerulean hue,
Let my wide wings drift on in you,'"

said Harkless, pointing them out to Helen.

"You seem to get a good deal of fun out of this kind of weather," observed Lige, as he wiped his brow and shifted his chair out of the sun.

"I expect you don't get such skies as this up in Rouen," said the judge, looking at the girl from between half-closed eyelids.

"It's the same Indiana sky, I think," she answered.

"I guess maybe in the city you don't see as much of it, or think as much about it. Yes, they're the Indiana skies," the old man went on.

Skies as blue
As the eyes of children when they smile at you.'

"There aren't any others anywhere that ever seemed much like them to me. They've been company for me all my life. I don't think there are any others half as beautiful, and I know there aren't any as sociable. They were always so." He sighed gently, and Miss Sherwood fancied his wife must have found the Indiana skies as lovely as he had, in the days of long ago. "Seems to me they _are_ the softest and bluest and kindest in the world."

"I think they are," said Helen, "and they are more beautiful than the 'Italian skies,' though I doubt if many of us Hoosiers realize it; and--

certainly no one else does."

The old man leaned over and patted her hand. Harkless gasped. "'Us Hoosiers!'" chuckled the judge. "You're a great Hoosier, young lady! How much of your life have you spent in the State? 'Us Hoosiers!'"

"But I'm going to be a good one," she answered, gaily, "and if I'm good enough, when I grow up maybe I'll be a great one."

The buckboard had been brought around, and the four young people climbed in, Harkless driving. Before they started, the judge, standing on the horse-block in front of the gate, leaned over and patted Miss Sherwood's hand again. Harkless gathered up the reins.

"You'll make a great Hoosier, all right," said the old man, beaming upon the girl. "You needn't worry about that, I guess, my dear."

When he said "my dear," Harkless spoke to the horses.

"Wait," said the judge, still holding the girl's hand. "You'll make a great Hoosier, some day; don't fret. You're already a very beautiful one." Then he bent his white head and kissed her, gallantly. John said: "Good afternoon, judge"; the whip cracked like a pistol-shot, and the buckboard dashed off in a cloud of dust.

"Every once in a while, Harkless," the old fellow called after them, "you must remember to look at the team."

The enormous white tent was filled with a hazy yellow light, the warm, dusty, mellow light that thrills the rejoicing heart because it is found nowhere in the world except in the tents of a circus--the canvas-filtered sunshine and sawdust atmosphere of show day. Through the entrance the crowd poured steadily, coming from the absorptions of the wild-animal tent to feast upon greater wonders; passing around the sawdust ellipse that contained two soul-cloying rings, to find seats whence they might behold the splendors so soon to be unfolded. Every one who was not buying the eternal lemonade was eating something; and the faces of children shone with gourmand rapture; indeed, very often the eyes of them were all you saw, half-closed in palate-gloating over a huge apple, or a bulky oblong of popcorn, partly unwrapped from its blue tissue-paper cover; or else it might be a luscious pink crescent of watermelon, that left its ravisher stained and dripping to the brow.

Here, as in the morning, the hawkers raised their cries in unintermittent shrillness, offering to the musically inclined the Happy Evenings Song-book, alleged to contain those treasures, all the latest songs of the day, or presented for the consideration of the humorous the Lawrence Lapearl Joke-book, setting forth in full the art of comical entertainment and repartee. (Schofields' Henry bought two of these--no doubt on the principle that two were twice as instructive as one--intending to bury himself in study and do battle with Tom Martin on his own ground.)

Here swayed the myriad palm-leaf fans; here paraded blushing youth and rosy maiden, more relentlessly arm-in-arm than ever; here crept the octogenarian, Mr. Bodeffer, shaking on cane and the shoulder of posterity; here waddled Mr. Snoddy, who had hurried through the animal tent for fear of meeting the elephant; here marched sturdy yeomen and stout wives; here came William Todd and his Anna Belle, the good William hushed with the embarrassments of love, but looking out warily with the white of his eye

for Mr. Martin, and determined not to sit within a hundred yards of him; here rolled in the orbit of habit the bacchanal, Mr. Wilkerson, who politely answered in kind all the uncouth roarings and guttural ejaculations of jungle and fen that came from the animal tent; in brief, here came with lightest hearts the population of Carlow and part of Amo.

Helen had found a true word: it was a big family. Jim Bardlock, broadly smiling and rejuvenated, shorn of depression, paused in front of the "reserve" seats, with Mrs. Bardlock on his arm, and called loudly to a gentleman on a tier about the level of Jim's head: "How are ye? I reckon we were a _little_ too smart fer 'em, this morning, huh?" Five or six hundred people--every one within hearing--fumed to look at Jim; but the gentleman addressed was engaged in conversation with a lady and did not notice.

"Hi! Hi, there! _Say_! Mr. Harkless!" bellowed Jim, informally. The people turned to look at Harkless. His attention was arrested and his cheek grew red.

"_What is it_?" he asked, a little confused and a good deal annoyed.

"I don't hear what ye say," shouted Jim, putting his hand to his ear.

"_What is it_?" repeated the young man. "I'll kill that fellow to-night," he added to Lige Willetts. "Some one ought to have done it long ago."

"What?"

"I _say_, WHAT IS IT?"

"I only wanted to say me and you certainly did fool these here Hoosiers this morning, huh? Hustled them two fellers through the court-house, and nobody never thought to slip round to the other door and head us off. Ha, ha! We were jest a _leetle_ too many fer 'em, huh?"

From an upper tier of seats the rusty length of Mr. Martin erected itself joint by joint, like an extension ladder, and he peered down over the gaping faces at the Town Marshal. "Excuse me," he said sadly to those behind him, but his dry voice penetrated everywhere, "I got up to hear Jim say 'We' again."

Mr. Bardlock joined in the laugh against himself, and proceeded with his wife to some seats, forty or fifty feet distant. When he had settled himself comfortably, he shouted over cheerfully to the unhappy editor: "Them shell-men got it in fer you, Mr. Harkless."

"Ain't that fool shet up _yit_?" snarled the aged Mr. Bodeffer, indignantly. He was sitting near the young couple, and the expression of his sympathy was distinctly audible to them and many others. "Got no more regards than a brazing calf-disturbin' a feller with his sweetheart!"

"The both of 'em says they're goin' to do fer you," bleated Mr. Bardlock. "Swear they'll git their evens with ye."

Mr. Martin rose again. "Don't git scared and leave town, Mr. Harkless," he called out; "Jim'll protect you."

Vastly to the young man's relief the band began to play, and the equestrians and equestriennes capered out from the dressing-tent for the

"Grand Entrance," and the performance commenced. Through the long summer afternoon it went on: wonders of horsemanship and horsewomanship; hair-raising exploits on wires, tight and slack; giddy tricks on the high trapeze; feats of leaping and tumbling in the rings; while the tireless musicians blatted inspiringly through it all, only pausing long enough to allow that uproarious jester, the clown, to ask the ring-master what he would do if a young lady came up and kissed him on the street, and to exploit his hilarities during the short intervals of rest for the athletes.

When it was over, John and Helen found themselves in the midst of a densely packed crowd, and separated from Miss Briscoe and Lige. People were pushing and shoving, and he saw her face grow pale. He realized with a pang of sympathy how helpless he would feel if he were as small as she, and at his utmost height could only see big, suffocating backs and huge shoulders pressing down from above. He was keeping them from crowding heavily upon her with all his strength, and a royal feeling of protectiveness came over him. She was so little. And yet, without the remotest hint of hardness, she gave him such a distinct impression of poise and equilibrium, she seemed so able to meet anything that might come, to understand it--even to laugh at it--so Americanly capable and sure of the event, that in spite of her pale cheek he could not feel quite so protective as he wished to feel.

He managed to get her to one of the tent-poles, and placed her with her back to it. Then he set one of his own hands against it over her head, braced himself and stood, keeping a little space about her, ruggedly letting the crowd surge against him as it would; no one should touch her in rough carelessness.

"Thank you. It was rather trying in there," she said, and looked up into his eyes with a divine gratitude.

"Please don't do that," he answered in a low voice.

"Do what?"

"Look like that."

She not only looked like that, but more so. "Young man, young man," she said, "I fear you're wishful of turning a girl's head."

The throng was thick around them, garrulous and noisy, but they two were more richly alone together, to his appreciation, than if they stood on some far satellite of Mars. He was not to forget that moment, and he kept the picture of her, as she leaned against the big blue tent-pole, there, in his heart: the clear gray eyes lifted to his, the delicate face with the color stealing back to her cheeks, and the brave little figure that had run so straight to him out of the night shadows. There was something about her, and in the moment, that suddenly touched him with a saddening sweetness too keen to be borne; the forget-me-not finger of the flying hour that could not come again was laid on his soul, and he felt the tears start from his heart on their journey to his eyes. He knew that he should always remember that moment. She knew it, too. She put her hand to her cheek and turned away from him a little tremulously. Both were silent.

They had been together since early morning. Plattville was proud of him. Many a friendly glance from the folk who jostled about them favored his

suit and wished both of them well, and many lips, opening to speak to Harkless in passing, closed when their owners (more tactful than Mr. Bardlock) looked a second time.

Old Tom Martin, still perched alone On his high seat, saw them standing by the tent-pole, and watched them from under his rusty hat brim. "I reckon it's be'n three or four thousand years since I was young," he sighed to himself; then, pushing his hat still further down over his eyes: "I don't believe I'd ort to rightly look on at that." He sighed again as he rose, and gently spoke the name of his dead wife: "Marjie,--it's be'n lonesome, sometimes. I reckon you're mighty tired waitin' for me, ever since sixty-four--yet maybe not; Ulysses S. Grant's over on your side now, and perhaps you've got acquainted with him; you always thought a good deal more of him than you did of me."

"Do you see that tall old man up there?" said Helen, nodding her head toward Martin. "I think I should like to know him. I'm sure I like him."

"That is old Tom Martin."

"I know."

"I was sorry and ashamed about all that conspicuousness and shouting. It must have been very unpleasant for you; it must have been so, for a stranger. Please try to forgive me for letting you in for it."

"But I liked it. It was 'all in the family,' and it was so jolly and good-natured, and that dear old man was so bright. Do you know," she said softly, "I don't think I'm such a stranger--I--I think I love all these people a great deal--in spite of having known them only two days."

At that a wild exhilaration possessed him. He wanted to shake hands with everybody in the tent, to tell them all that he loved them with his whole heart, but, what was vastly more important, _she_ loved them a great deal --in spite of having known them only two days!

He made the horses prance on the homeward drive, and once, when she told him that she had read a good many of his political columns in the "Herald," he ran them into a fence. After this it occurred to him that they were nearing their destination and had come at a perversely sharp gait; so he held the roans down to a snail's pace (if it be true that a snail's natural gait is not a trot) for the rest of the way, while they talked of Tom Meredith and books and music, and discovered that they differed widely about Ibsen.

They found Mr. Fisbee in the yard, talking to Judge Briscoe. As they drove up, and before the horses had quite stopped, Helen leaped to the ground and ran to the old scholar with both her hands outstretched to him. He looked timidly at her, and took the hands she gave him; then he produced from his pocket a yellow telegraph envelope, watching her anxiously as she received it. However, she seemed to attach no particular importance to it, and, instead of opening it, leaned toward him, still holding one of his hands.

"These awful old men!" Harkless groaned inwardly as he handed the horses over to the judge. "I dare say _he_'ll kiss her, too." But, when the editor and Mr. Willetts had gone, it was Helen who kissed Fisbee.

"They're coming out to spend the evening, aren't they?" asked Briscoe,

nodding to the young men as they set off down the road.

"Lige has to come whether he wants to or not," Minnie laughed, rather consciously; "It's his turn to-night to look after Mr. Harkless."

"I guess he won't mind coming," said the judge.

"Well," returned his daughter, glancing at Helen, who stood apart, reading the telegram to Fisbee, "I know if he follows Mr. Harkless he'll get here pretty soon after supper--as soon as the moon comes up, anyway."

The editor of the "Herald" was late to his supper that evening. It was dusk when he reached the hotel, and, for the first time in history, a gentleman sat down to meat in that house of entertainment in evening dress. There was no one in the diningroom when he went in; the other boarders had finished, and it was Cynthia's "evening out," but the landlord came and attended to his guests' wants himself, and chatted with him while he ate.

"There's a picture of Henry Clay," remarked Landis, in obvious relevancy to his companion's attire, "there's a picture of Henry Clay somewheres about the house in a swallow-tail coat. Governor Ray spoke here in one in early times, Bodeffer says, except it was higher built up 'n yourn about the collar, and had brass buttons, I think. Ole man Wimby was here to-night," the landlord continued, changing the subject. "He waited around fer ye a good while. He's be'n mighty wrought up sence the trouble this morning, an' wanted to see ye bad. I don't know 'f you seen it, but that feller 't knocked your hat off was mighty near tore to pieces in the crowd before he got away. 'Seems some the boys re-_cog_-nized him as one the Cross-Roads Skillets, and sicked the dogs on him, and he had a pretty mean time of it. Wimby says the Cross-Roads folks'll be worse 'n ever, and, says he, 'Tell him to stick close to town,' says he. 'They'll do anything to git him now,' says he, 'and _resk_ anything.' I told him you wouldn't take no stock in it, but, see here, don't you put nothin' too mean fer them folks. I tell you, Mr. Harkless, plenty of us are scared fer ye."

The good fellow was so earnest that when the editor's meal was finished and he would have departed, Landis detained him almost by force until the arrival of Mr. Willetts, who, the landlord knew, was his allotted escort' for the evening. When Lige came (wearing a new tie, a pink one he had hastened to buy as soon as his engagements had allowed him the opportunity), Mr. Landis hissed a savage word of reproach for his tardiness in his ear, and whisperingly bade him not let the other out of reach that night, to which Willetts replied with a nod implying his trustworthiness; and the young men set off in the darkness.

Harkless wondered if his costume were not an injustice to his companion, but he did not regret it; he would wear his best court suit, his laces and velvets, for deference to that lady. It was a painful thing to remember his dusty rustiness of the night before, the awful Carlow cut of his coat, and his formless black cravat; the same felt hat he wore again to-night, perforce, but it was brushed--brushed almost to holes in spots, and somehow he had added a touch of shape to it. His dress-coat was an antique; fashions had changed, no doubt; he did not know; possibly she would recognize its vintage--but it was a dress-coat.

Lige walked along talking; Harkless answering "Yes" and "No" at random. The woodland-spiced air was like champagne to him; the road under foot so elastic and springy that he felt like a thoroughbred before a race; he

wanted to lift his foot knee-high at every step, he had so much energy to spare. In the midst of a speech of Lige's about the look of the wheat he suddenly gave out a sigh so deep, so heartfelt, so vibrant, so profound, that Willetts turned with astonishment; but when his eye reached his companion's face, Harkless was smiling. The editor extended his hand.

"Shake hands, Lige," he cried.

The moon peeped over the shoulder of an eastern wood, and the young men suddenly descried their long shadows stretching in front of them. Harkless turned to look at the silhouetted town, the tree-tops and roofs and the Methodist church spire, silvered at the edges.

"Do you see that town, Willetts?" he asked, laying his fingers on his companion's sleeve. "That's the best town in the United States!"

"I always kind of thought you didn't much like it," said the other, puzzled. "Seemed to me you always sort of wished you hadn't settled here."

A little further on they passed Mr. Fisbee. He was walking into the village with his head thrown back, a strange thing for him. They gave him a friendly greeting and passed on.

"Well, it beats me!" observed Lige, when the old man was out of hearing. "He's be'n there to supper again. He was there all day yesterday, and with 'em at the lecture, and at the deepo day before and he looks like another man, and dressed up--for him--to beat thunder----What do you expect makes him so thick out there all of a sudden?"

"I hadn't thought about it. The judge and he have been friends a good while, haven't they?"

"Yes, three or four years; but not like this. It beats _me_! He's all upset over Miss Sherwood, I think. Old enough to be her grandfather, too, the old----"

His companion stopped him, dropping a hand on his shoulder.

"Listen!"

They were at the corner of the Briscoe picket fence, and a sound lilted through the stillness--a touch on the keys that Harkless knew. "Listen," he whispered.

It was the "Moonlight Sonata" that Helen was playing. "It's a pretty piece," observed Lige after a time. John could have choked him, but he answered: "Yes, it is seraphic."

"Who made it up?" pursued Mr. Willetts.

"Beethoven."

"Foreigner, I expect. Yet in some way or another makes me think of fishing down on the Wabash bend in Vigo, and camping out nights like this; it's a mighty pretty country around there--especially at night."

The sonata was finished, and then she sang--sang the "Angel's Serenade." As the soft soprano lifted and fell in the modulations of that song there was in its timbre, apart from the pure, amber music of it, a questing,

seeking pathos, and Willetts felt the hand on his shoulder tighten and then relax; and, as the song ended, he saw that his companion's eyes were shining and moist.

CHAPTER IX

NIGHT: IT IS BAD LUCK TO SING BEFORE BREAKFAST

There was a lace of faint mists along the creek and beyond, when John and Helen reached their bench (of course they went back there), and broken roundelays were croaking from a bayou up the stream, where rakish frogs held carnival in resentment of the lonesomeness. The air was still and close. Hundreds of fire-flies coquetted with the darkness amongst the trees across the water, glinting from unexpected spots, shading their little lanterns for a second to glow again from other shadows. The sky was a wonderful olive green; a lazy cloud drifted in it and lapped itself athwart the moon.

"The dead painters design the skies for us each day and night, I think," Helen said, as she dropped a little scarf from her shoulders and leaned back on the bench. "It must be the only way to keep them happy and busy 'up there.' They let them take turns, and those not on duty, probably float around and criticise."

"They've given a good man his turn to-night," said John; "some quiet colorist, a poetic, friendly soul, no Turner--though I think I've seen a Turner sunset or two in Plattville."

"It was a sculptor's sunset this evening. Did you see it?--great massy clouds piled heap on heap, almost with violence. I'm sure it was Michelangelo. The judge didn't think it meant Michelangelo; he thought it meant rain."

"Michelangelo gets a chance rather often, doesn't he, considering the number of art people there must be over there? I believe I've seen a good many sunsets of his, and a few dawns, too; the dawns not for a long time--I used to see them more frequently toward the close of senior year, when we sat up all night talking, knowing we'd lose one another soon, and trying to hold on as long as we could."

She turned to him with a little frown. "Why have you never let Tom Meredith know you were living so near him, less than a hundred miles, when he has always liked and admired you above all the rest of mankind? I know that he has tried time and again to hear of you, but the other men wrote that they knew nothing--that it was thought you had gone abroad. I had heard of you, and so must he have seen your name in the Rouen papers--about the 'White-Caps,' and in politics--but he would never dream of connecting the Plattville Mr. Harkless with _his_ Mr. Harkless, though _I_ did, just a little, and rather vaguely. I knew, of course, when you came into the lecture. But why haven't you written to my cousin?"

"Rouen seems a long way from here," he answered quietly. "I've only been there once--half a day on business. Except that, I've never been further away than Amo or Gainesville, for a convention or to make a speech, since I came here."

"Wicked!" she exclaimed, "To shut yourself up like this! I said it was fine to drop out of the world; but why have you cut off your old friends from you? Why haven't you had a relapse, now and then, and come over to hear Ysaye play and Melba sing, or to see Mansfield or Henry Irving, when we have had them? And do you think you've been quite fair to Tom? What right had you to assume that he had forgotten you?"

"Oh, I didn't exactly mean forgotten," he said, pulling a blade of grass to and fro between his fingers, staring at it absently. "It's only that I have dropped out of the world, you know. I kept track of every one, saw most of my friends, or corresponded, now and then, for a year or so after I left college; but people don't miss you much after a while. They rather expected me to do a lot of things, in a way, you know, and I wasn't doing them. I was glad to get away. I always had an itch for newspaper work, and I went on a New York paper. Maybe it was the wrong paper; at least, I wasn't fit for it. There was something in the side of life I saw, too, not only on the paper, that made me heart-sick; and then the rush and fight and scramble to be first, to beat the other man. Probably I am too squeamish. I saw classmates and college friends diving into it, bound to come out ahead, dear old, honest, frank fellows, who had been so happy-go-lucky and kind and gay, growing too busy to meet and be good to any man who couldn't be good to them, asking (more delicately) the eternal question, 'What does it get me?' You might think I bad-met with unkindness; but it was not so; it was the other way more than I deserved. But the cruel competition, the thousands fighting for places, the multitude scrambling for each ginger-bread baton, the cold faces on the streets--perhaps it's all right and good; of course it has to _be_--but I wanted to get out of it, though I didn't want to come _here_. That was chance. A new man bought the paper I was working for, and its policy changed. Many of the same men still wrote for it, facing cheerfully about and advocating a tricky theory, vehement champions of a set of personal schemers and waxy images."

He spoke with feeling; but now, as though a trifle ashamed of too much seriousness, and justifiably afraid of talking like one of his own editorials, he took a lighter tone. "I had been taken on the paper through a friend and not through merit, and by the same undeserved, kindly influence, after a month or so I was set to writing short political editorials, and was at it nearly two years. When the paper changed hands the new proprietor indicated that he would be willing to have me stay and write the other way. I refused; and it became somewhat plain to me that I was beginning to be a failure.

"A cousin of mine, the only relative I had, died in Chicago, and I went to his funeral. I happened to hear of the Carlow 'Herald' through an agent there, the most eloquent gentleman I ever met. I was younger, and even more thoughtless than now, and I had a little money and I handed it over for the 'Herald.' I wanted to run a paper myself, and to build up a power! And then, though I only lived here the first few years of my life and all the rest of it had been spent in the East, I was born in Indiana, and, in a way, the thought of coming back to a life-work in my native State appealed to me. I always had a dim sort of feeling that the people out in these parts knew more--had more sense and were less artificial, I mean--and were kinder, and tried less to be somebody else, than almost any other people anywhere. And I believe it's so. It's dull, here in Carlow, of course--that is, it used to be. The agent explained that I could make the paper a daily at once, with an enormous circulation in the country. I was very, very young. Then I came here and saw what I had got. Possibly it is

because I am sensitive that I never let Tom know. They expected me to amount to something; but I don't believe his welcome would be less hearty to a failure--he is a good heart."

"Failure!" she cried, and clapped her hands and laughed.

"I'm really not very tragic about it, though I must seem consumed with self-pity," he returned, smiling. "It is only that I have dropped out of the world while Tom is still in it."

"Dropped out of the world!'" she echoed, impatiently. "Can't you see you've dropped into it? That you----"

"Last night I was honored by your praise of my graceful mode of quitting it!"

"And so you wish me to be consistent!" she retorted scornfully. "What becomes of your gallantry when _we_ abide by reason?"

"True enough; equality is a denial of privilege."

"And privilege is a denial of equality. I don't like that at all." She turned a serious, suddenly illuminated face upon him and spoke earnestly. "It's my hobby, I should tell you, and I'm very tired of that nonsense about 'women always sounding the personal note.' It _should_ be sounded as we would sound it. And I think we could bear the loss of 'privilege'--"

He laughed and raised a protesting hand. "But _we_ couldn't."

"No, you couldn't; it's the ribbon of superiority in your buttonhole. I know several women who manage to live without men to open doors for them, and I think I could bear to let a man pass before me now and then, or wear his hat in an office where I happened to be; and I could get my own ice at a dance, I think, possibly with even less fuss and scramble than I've sometimes observed in the young men who have done it for me. But you know you would never let us do things for ourselves, no matter what legal equality might be declared, even when we get representation for our taxation. You will never be able to deny yourselves giving us our 'privilege.' I hate being waited on. I'd rather do things for myself."

She was so earnest in her satire, so full of scorn and so serious in her meaning, and there was such a contrast between what she said and her person; she looked so preeminently the pretty marquise, all silks and softness, the little exquisite, so essentially to be waited on and helped, to have cloaks thrown over the dampness for her to tread upon, to be run about for--he could see half a dozen youths rushing about for her ices, for her carriage, for her chaperone, for her wrap, at dances--that to save his life he could not repress a chuckle. He managed to make it inaudible, however; and it was as well that he did.

"I understand your love of newspaper work," she went on, less vehemently, but not less earnestly. "I have always wanted to do it myself, wanted to immensely. I can't think of any more fascinating way of earning one's living. And I know I could do it. Why don't you make the 'Herald' a daily?"

To hear her speak of "earning one's living" was too much for him. She gave the impression of riches, not only for the fine texture and fashioning of her garments, but one felt that luxuries had wrapped her from her birth.

He had not had much time to wonder what she did in Plattville; it had occurred to him that it was a little odd that she could plan to spend any extent of time there, even if she had liked Minnie Briscoe at school. He felt that she must have been sheltered and petted and waited on all her life; one could not help yearning to wait on her.

He answered inarticulately, "Oh, some day," in reply to her question, and then burst into outright laughter.

"I might have known you wouldn't take me seriously," she said with no indignation, only a sad wistfulness. "I am well used to it. I think it is because I am not tall; people take big girls with more gravity. Big people are nearly always listened to."

"Listened to?" he said, and felt that he must throw himself on his knees before her. "You oughtn't to mind being Titania. She was listened to, you----"

She sprang to her feet and her eyes flashed. "Do you think personal comment is ever in good taste?" she cried fiercely, and in his surprise he almost fell off the bench. "If there is one thing I cannot bear, it is to be told that I am '_small_' I am not! Every one who isn't a giantess isn't '_small_'. I _hate_ personalities! I am a great deal over five feet, a great deal more than that. I----"

"Please, _please_," he said, "I didn't----"

"Don't say you are sorry," she interrupted, and in spite of his contrition he found her angry voice delicious, it was still so sweet, hot with indignation, but ringing, not harsh. "Don't say you didn't mean it; because you did! You can't unsay it, you cannot alter it! Ah!" She drew in her breath with a sharp sigh, and covering her face with her hands, sank back upon the bench. "I will not cry," she said, not so firmly as she thought she did.

"My blessed child!" he cried, in great distress and perturbation, "What have I done? I--I----"

"Call me 'small' all you like!" she answered. "I don't care. It isn't that. You mustn't think me such an imbecile." She dropped her hands from her face and shook the tears from her eyes with a mournful laugh. He saw that her hands were clenched tightly and her lip trembled. "I will not cry!" she said in a low voice.

"Somebody ought to murder me; I ought to have thought--personalities _are_ hideous----"

"Don't! It wasn't that."

"I ought to be shot----"

"Ah, please don't say that," she said, shuddering; "please don't, not even as a joke--after last night."

"But I ought to be for hurting you, indeed----"

She laughed sadly, again. "It wasn't that. I don't care what you call me. I am small. You'll try to forgive me for being such a baby? I didn't mean anything I said. I haven't acted so badly since I was a child."

"It's my fault, all of it. I've tired you out. And I let you get into that crush at the circus--" he was going on, remorsefully.

"_That_!" she interrupted. "I don't think I would have missed the circus." He had a thrilling hope that she meant the tent-pole; she looked as if she meant that, but he dared not let himself believe it.

"No," he continued; "I have been so madly happy in being with you that I've fairly worn out your patience. I've haunted you all day, and I have----"

"All that has nothing to do with it," she said, slowly. "Just after you left, this afternoon, I found that I could not stay here. My people are going abroad, to Dresden, at once, and I must go with them. That's what almost made me cry. I leave to-morrow morning."

He felt something strike at his heart. In the sudden sense of dearth he had no astonishment that she should betray such agitation over her departure from a place she had known so little, and friends who certainly were not part of her life. He rose to his feet, and, resting his arm against a sycamore, stood staring away from her at nothing.

She did not move. There was a long silence.

He had wakened suddenly; the skies had been sapphire, the sward emerald, Plattville a Camelot of romance; to be there, enchantment--and now, like a meteor burned out in a breath, the necromancy fell away and he gazed into desolate years. The thought of the Square, his dusty office, the bleak length of Main Street, as they should appear to-morrow, gave him a faint physical sickness. To-day it had all been touched to beauty; he had felt fit to live and work there a thousand years--a fool's dream, and the waking was to emptiness. He should die now of hunger and thirst in that Sahara; he hoped the Fates would let it be soon--but he knew they would not; knew that this was hysteria, that in his endurance he should plod on, plod, plod dustily on, through dingy, lonely years.

There was a rumble of thunder far out on the western prairie. A cold breath stole through the hot stillness, and an arm of vapor reached out between the moon and the quiet earth. Darkness fell. The man and the girl kept silence between them. They might have been two sad guardians of the black little stream that splashed unseen at their feet. Now and then an echo of far away lightning faintly illumined them with a green light. Thunder rolled nearer, ominously; the gods were driving their chariots over the bridge. The chill breath passed, leaving the air again to its hot inertia.

"I did not want to go," she said, at last, with tears just below the surface of her voice. "I wanted to stay here, but he--they wouldn't--I can't."

"Wanted to stay here?" he said, huskily, not turning. "Here?"

"Yes."

"In Rouen, you mean?"

"In Plattville."

"In Plattville?" He turned now, astounded.

"Yes; wouldn't you have taken me on the 'Herald'?" She rose and came toward him. "I could have supported myself here if you would--and I've studied how newspapers are made; I know I could have earned a wage. We could have made it a daily." He searched in vain for a trace of raillery in her voice; there was none; she seemed to intend her words to be taken literally.

"I don't understand," he said. "I don't know what you mean."

"I mean that I want to stay here; that I ought to stay here; that my conscience tells me I should--but I can't and it makes me very unhappy. That was why I acted so badly."

"Your conscience!" he cried.

"Oh, I know what a jumble and puzzle it must seem to you."

"I only know one thing; that you are going away to-morrow morning, and that I shall never see you again."

The darkness had grown heavy. They could not see each other; but a wan glimmer gave him a fleeting, misty view of her; she stood half-turned away from him, her hand to her cheek in the uncertain fashion of his great moment of the afternoon; her eyes-he saw in the flying picture that he caught--were adorably troubled and her hand trembled. She had been irresistible in her gaiety; but now that a mysterious distress assailed her, the reason for which he had no guess, she was so divinely pathetic; and seemed such a rich and lovely and sad and happy thing to have come into his life only to go out of it; and he was so full of the prophetic sense of loss of her--it seemed so much like losing everything--that he found too much to say to be able to say anything.

He tried to speak, and choked a little. A big drop of rain fell on his bare head. Neither of them noticed the weather or cared for it. They stood with the renewed blackness hanging like a thick drapery between them.

"Can--can you--tell me why you think you ought not to go?" he whispered, finally, with a great effort.

"No; not now. But I know you would think I am right in wanting to stay," she cried, impulsively. "I know you would, if you knew about it--but I can't, I can't. I must go in the morning."

"I should always think you right," he answered in an unsteady tone, "Always!" He went over to the bench, fumbled about for his hat, and picked it up.

"Come," he said, gently, "I am going now."

She stood quite motionless for a full minute or longer; then, without a word, she moved toward the house. He went to her with hands extended to find her, and his fingers touched her sleeve. Then together and silently they found the garden-path; and followed its dim length. In the orchard he touched her sleeve again and led the way.

As they came out behind the house she detained him. Stopping short, she shook his hand from her arm. She spoke in a single breath, as if it were

all one word:

"Will you tell me why you go? It is not late. Why do you wish to leave me, when I shall not see you again?"

"The Lord be good to me!" he broke out, all his long-pent passion of dreams rushing to his lips, now that the barrier fell. "Don't you see it is because I can't bear to let you go? I hoped to get away without saying it. I want to be alone. I want to be with myself and try to realize. I didn't want to make a babbling idiot of myself--but I am! It is because I don't want another second of your sweetness to leave an added pain when you've gone. It is because I don't want to hear your voice again, to have it haunt me in the loneliness you will leave--but it's useless, useless! I shall hear it always, just as I shall always see your face, just as I have heard your voice and seen your face these seven years--ever since I first saw you, a child at Winter Harbor. I forgot for a while; I thought it was a girl I had made up out of my own heart, but it was you--you always! The impression I thought nothing of at the time, just the merest touch on my heart, light as it was, grew and grew deeper until it was there forever. You've known me twenty-four hours, and I understand what you think of me for speaking to you like this. If I had known you for years and had waited and had the right to speak and keep your respect, what have I to offer you? I, couldn't even take care of you if you went mad as I and listened. I've no excuse for this raving. Yes, I have!"

He saw her in another second of lightning, a sudden, bright one. Her back was turned to him; she had taken a few startled steps from him.

"Ah," he cried, "you are glad enough, now, to see me go! I knew it. I wanted to spare myself that. I tried not to be a hysterical fool in your eyes." He turned aside and his head fell on his breast. "God help me," he said, "what will this place be to me now?"

The breeze had risen; it gathered force; it was a chill wind, and there rose a wailing on the prairie. Drops of rain began to fall.

"You will not think a question implied in this," he said more composedly, and with an unhappy laugh at himself. "I believe you will not think me capable of asking you if you care----"

"No," she answered; "I--I do not love you."

"Ah! Was it a question, after all? I--you read me better than I do, perhaps--but if I asked, I knew the answer."

She made as if to speak again, but words refused her.

After a moment, "Good-by," he said, very steadily. "I thank you for the charity that has given me this little time with you--it will always be--precious to me--I shall always be your servant." His steadiness did not carry him to the end of his sentence. "Good-by."

She started toward him and stopped, without his seeing her. She answered nothing; but stretched out her hand to him and then let it fall quickly.

"Good-by," he said again. "I shall go out the orchard gate. Please tell them good-night for me. Won't you speak to me? Good-by."

He stood waiting while the rising wind blew their garments about them. She

leaned against the wall of the house. "Won't you say good-by and tell me you can forget my----"

She did not speak.

"No!" he cried, wildly. "Since you don't forget it! I have spoiled what might have been a pleasant memory for you, and I know it. You were already troubled, and I have added, and you won't forget it, nor shall I--nor shall I! Don't say good-by--I can say it for both of us. God bless you--and good-by, good-by, good-by!"

He crushed his hat down over his eyes and ran toward the orchard gate. For a moment lightning flashed repeatedly; she saw him go out the gate and disappear into sudden darkness. He ran through the field and came out on the road. Heaven and earth were revealed again for a dazzling white second. From horizon to horizon rolled clouds contorted like an illimitable field of inverted haystacks, and beneath them enormous volumes of pale vapor were tumbling in the west, advancing eastward with sinister swiftness. She ran to a little knoll at the corner of the house and saw him set his face to the storm. She cried aloud to him with all her strength and would have followed, but the wind took the words out of her mouth and drove her back cowering to the shelter of the house.

Out on the road the dust came lashing and stinging him like a thousand nettles; it smothered him, and beat upon him so that he covered his face with his sleeve and fought into the storm shoulder foremost, dimly glad of its rage, scarcely conscious of it, keeping westward on his way to nowhere. West or east, south or north--it was all one to him. The few heavy drops that fell boiling into the dust ceased to come; the rain withheld while the wind-kings rode on earth. On he went in spite of them. On and on, running blindly when he could run at all. At least, the wind-kings were company. He had been so long alone. He could remember no home that had ever been his since he was a little child, neither father nor mother, no one who belonged to him or to whom he belonged, except one cousin, an old man who was dead. For a day his dreams had found in a girl's eyes the precious thing that is called home--oh, the wild fancy! He laughed aloud.

There was a startling answer; a lance of living fire hurled from the sky, riving the fields before his eyes, while crash on crash of artillery numbed his ears. With that his common-sense awoke and he looked about him. He was almost two miles from town; the nearest house was the Briscoes' far down the road. He knew the rain would come now. There was a big oak near him at the roadside. He stepped under its sheltering branches and leaned against the great trunk, wiping the perspiration and dust from his face. A moment of stunned quiet had succeeded the peal of thunder. It was followed by several moments of incessant lightning that played along the road and danced in the fields. From that intolerable brightness he turned his head and saw, standing against the fence, five feet away, a man, leaning over the top rail and looking at him.

The same flash staggered brilliantly before Helen's eyes as she crouched against the back steps of the brick house. It scarred a picture like a marine of big waves: the tossing tops of the orchard trees; for in the same second the full fury of the storm was loosed, wind and rain and hail. It drove her against the kitchen door with cruel force; the latch lifted, the door blew open violently, and she struggled to close it in vain. The

house seemed to rock. A lamp flickered toward her from the inner doorway and was blown out.

"Helen! Helen!" came Minnie's voice, anxiously. "Is that you? We were coming to look for you. Did you get wet?"

Mr. Willetts threw his weight against the door and managed to close it. Then Minnie found her friend's hand and led her through the dark hall to the parlor where the judge sat, placidly reading by a student-lamp.

Lige chuckled as they left the kitchen. "I guess you didn't try too hard to shut that door, Harkless," he said, and then, when they came into the lighted room, "Why, where _is_ Harkless?" he asked. "Didn't he come with us from the kitchen?"

"No," answered Helen, faintly; "he's gone." She sank upon the sofa and drew her hand across her eyes as if to shade them from too sudden light.

"Gone!" The judge dropped his book and stared across the table at the girl. "Gone! When?"

"Ten minutes--five--half an hour--I don't know. Before the storm commenced."

"Oh!" The old gentleman appeared to be reassured. "Probably he had work to do and wanted to get in before the rain."

But Lige Willetts was turning pale. He swallowed several times with difficulty. "Which way did he go? He didn't come around the house; we were out there till the storm broke."

"He went by the orchard gate. When he got to the road he turned that way." She pointed to the west.

"He must have been crazy!" exclaimed the judge. "What possessed the fellow?"

"I couldn't stop him. I didn't know how." She looked at her three companions, slowly and with growing terror, from one face to another. Minnie's eyes were wide and she had unconsciously grasped Lige's arm; the young man was looking straight before him; the judge got up and walked nervously back and forth. Helen rose to her feet swiftly and went toward the old man, her hands pressed to her bosom.

"Ah!" she cried out, sharply, "I had forgotten _that_! You don't think they--you don't think----"

"I know what I think," Lige broke in; "I think I'd ought to be hanged for letting him out of my sight. Maybe it's all right; maybe he turned and started right back for town--and got there. But I had no business to leave him, and if I can I'll catch up with him yet." He went to the front door, and, opening it, let in a tornado of wind and flood of water that beat him back; sheets of rain blew in horizontally, in spite of the porch beyond.

Briscoe followed him. "Don't be a fool, Lige," he said. "You hardly expect to go out in that." Lige shook his head; it needed them both to get the door closed. The young man leaned against it and passed his sleeve across his wet brow. "I hadn't ought to have left him."

"Don't scare the girls," whispered the other; then in a louder tone: "All I'm afraid of is that he'll get blown to pieces or catch his death of cold. That's all there is to worry about. Those scalawags wouldn't try it again so soon after last night. I'm not bothering about that; not at all. That needn't worry anybody."

"But this morning----"

"Pshaw! He's likely home and dry by this time--all foolishness; don't be an old woman." The two men reentered the room and found Helen clinging to Minnie's hand on the sofa. She looked up at them quickly.

"Do you think--do you--what do you--" Her voice shook so that she could not go on.

The judge pinched her cheek and patted it. "I think he's home and dry, but I think he got wet first; that's what I think. Never you fear, he's a good hand at taking care of himself. Sit down, Lige. You can't go for a while." Nor could he. It was long before he could venture out; the storm raged and roared without abatement; it was Carlow's worst since 'Fifty-one, the old gentleman said. They heard the great limbs crack and break outside, while the thunder boomed and the wind ripped at the eaves till it seemed the roof must go. Meanwhile the judge, after some apology, lit his pipe and told long stories of the storms of early days and of odd freaks of the wind. He talked on calmly, the picture of repose, and blew rings above his head, but Helen saw that one of his big slippers beat an unceasing little tattoo on the carpet. She sat with fixed eyes, in silence, holding Minnie's hand tightly; and her face was colorless, and grew whiter as the slow hours dragged by.

Every moment Mr. Willetts became more restless, though assuring the ladies he had no anxiety regarding Mr. Harkless; it was only his own dereliction of duty that he regretted; the boys would have the laugh on him, he said. But he visibly chafed more and more under the judge's stories; and constantly rose to peer out of the window into the wrack and turmoil, or uneasily shifted in his chair. Once or twice he struck his hands together with muttered ejaculations. At last there was a lull in the fury without, and, as soon as it was perceptible, he declared his intention of making his way into town; he had ought to have went before, he declared, apprehensively; and then, with immediate amendment, of course he would find the editor at work in the "Herald" office; there wasn't the slightest doubt of that; he agreed with the judge, but he better see about it. He would return early in the morning to bid Miss Sherwood good-by; hoped she'd come back, some day; hoped it wasn't her last visit to Plattville. They gave him an umbrella and he plunged out into the night, and as they stood watching him for a moment from the door, the old man calling after him cheery good-nights and laughing messages to Harkless, they could hear his feet slosh into the puddles and see him fight with his umbrella when he got out into the road.

Helen's room was over the porch, the windows facing north, looking out upon the pike and across the fields beyond. "Please don't light the lamp, Minnie," she said, when they had gone upstairs. "I don't need a light." Miss Briscoe was flitting about the room, hunting for matches. In the darkness she came to her friend, and laid a kind, large hand on Helen's eyes, and the hand became wet. She drew Helen's head down on her shoulder and sat beside her on the bed.

"Sweetheart, you mustn't fret," she soothed, in motherly fashion. "Don't

you worry, dear. He's all right. It isn't your fault, dear. They wouldn't come on a night like this."

But Helen drew away and went to the window, flattening her arm against the pane, her forehead pressed against her arm. She had let him go; she had let him go alone. She had forgotten the danger that always beset him. She had been so crazy, she had seen nothing, thought of nothing. She had let him go into that, and into the storm, alone. Who knew better than she how cruel they were? She had seen the fire leap from the white blossom and heard the ball whistle, the ball they had meant for his heart, that good, great heart. She had run to him the night before--why had she let him go into the unknown and the storm to-night? But how could she have stopped him? How could she have kept him, after what he had said? She peered into the night through distorting tears.

The wind had gone down a little, but only a little, and the electrical flashes danced all around the horizon in magnificent display, sometimes far away, sometimes dazingly near, the darkness trebly deep between the intervals when the long sweep of flat lands lay in dazzling clearness, clean-cut in the washed air to the finest detail of stricken field and heaving woodland. A staggering flame clove earth and sky; sheets of light came following it, and a frightful uproar shook the house and rattled the casements, but over the crash of thunder Minnie heard her friend's loud scream and saw her spring back from the window with both hands, palm outward, pressed to her face. She leaped to her and threw her arms about her.

"What is it?"

"Look!" Helen dragged her to the window. "At the next flash--the fence beyond the meadow----"

"What was it? What was it like?" The lightning flashed incessantly. Helen tried to point; her hand only jerked from side to side.

"_Look_!" she cried.

"I see nothing but the lightning," Minnie answered, breathlessly.

"Oh, the _fence_! The fence--and in the field!"

"_Helen_! What was it _like_?"

"Ah-ah!" she panted, "a long line of white--horrible white----"

"What _like_?" Minnie turned from the window and caught the other's wrist in a fluttering clasp.

"Minnie, Minnie! Like long white gowns and cowls crossing the fence." Helen released her wrist, and put both hands on Minnie's cheeks, forcing her around to face the pane. "You must look--you must look," she cried.

"They wouldn't do it, they wouldn't--it _isn't_!" Minnie cried. "They couldn't come in the storm. They wouldn't do it in the pouring rain!"

"Yes! Such things would mind the rain!" She burst into hysterical laughter, and Minnie, almost as unnerved, caught her about the waist. "They would mind the rain. They would fear a storm! Ha, ha, ha! Yes--yes! And I let him go--I let him go!"

Pressing close together, shuddering, clasping each other's waists, the two girls peered out at the flickering landscape.

"_Look_!"

Up from the distant fence that bordered the northern side of Jones's field, a pale, pelted, flapping thing reared itself, poised, and seemed, just as the blackness came again, to drop to the ground.

"Did you _see_?"

But Minnie had thrown herself into a chair with a laugh of wild relief. "My darling girl!" she cried. "Not a line of white things--just one--Mr. Jones's old scarecrow! And we saw it blown down!"

"No, no, no! I saw the others; they were in the field beyond. I saw them! When I looked the first time they were nearly all on the fence. This time we saw the last man crossing. Ah! I let him go alone!"

Minnie sprang up and enfolded her. "No; you dear, imagining child, you're upset and nervous--that's all the matter in the world. Don't worry; don't, child, it's all right. Mr. Harkless is home and safe in bed long ago. I know that old scarecrow on the fence like a book; you're so unstrung you fancied the rest. He's all right; don't you bother, dear."

The big, motherly girl took her companion in her arms and rocked her back and forth soothingly, and petted and reassured her, and then cried a little with her, as a good-hearted girl always will with a friend. Then she left her for the night with many a cheering word and tender caress. "Get to sleep, dear," she called through the door when she had closed it behind her. "You must, if you have to go in the morning--it just breaks my heart. I don't know how we'll bear it without you. Father will miss you almost as much as I will. Good-night. Don't bother about that old white scarecrow. That's all it was. Good-night, dear, good-night."

"Good-night, dear," answered a plaintive little voice. Helen's hot cheek pressed the pillow and tossed from side to side. By and by she turned the pillow over; it had grown wet. The wind blew about the eaves and blew itself out; she hardly heard it. Sleep would not come. She got up and laved her burning eyes. Then she sat by the window. The storm's strength was spent at last; the rain grew lighter and lighter, until there was but the sound of running water and the drip, drip on the tin roof of the porch. Only the thunder rumbling in the distance marked the storm's course; the chariots of the gods rolling further and further away, till they finally ceased to be heard altogether. The clouds parted majestically, and then, between great curtains of mist, the day-star was seen shining in the east.

The night was hushed, and the peace that falls before dawn was upon the wet, flat lands. Somewhere in the sodden grass a swamped cricket chirped. From an outlying flange of the village a dog's howl rose mournfully; was answered by another, far away, and by another and another. The sonorous chorus rose above the village, died away, and quiet fell again.

Helen sat by the window, no comfort touching her heart. Tears coursed her cheeks no longer, but her eyes were wide and staring, and her lips parted, for the hush was broken by the far clamor of the court-house bell ringing in the night. It rang, and rang, and rang, and rang. She could not

breathe. She threw open the window. The bell stopped. All was quiet once more. The east was growing gray.

Suddenly out of the stillness there came the sound of a horse galloping over a wet road. He was coming like mad. Some one for a doctor? No; the horse-hoofs grew louder, coming out from the town, coming this way, coming faster and faster, coming _here_. There was a splashing and trampling in front of the house and a sharp "Whoa!" In the dim gray of first dawn she made out a man on a foam-flecked horse. He drew up at the gate.

A window to the right of hers went screeching up. She heard the judge clear his throat before he spoke.

"What is it? That's you, isn't it, Wiley? What is it?" He took a good deal of time and coughed between the sentences. His voice was more than ordinarily quiet, and it sounded husky. "What is it, Wiley?"

"Judge, what time did Mr. Harkless leave here last night and which way did he go?"

There was a silence. The judge turned away from the window. Minnie was standing just outside his door. "It must have been about half-past nine, wasn't it, father?" she called in a shaking voice. "And, you know, Helen thought he went west."

"Wiley!" The old man leaned from the sill again.

"Yes!" answered the man on horseback.

"Wiley, he left about half-past nine--just before the storm. They think he went west."

"Much obliged. Willetts is so upset he isn't sure of anything."

"Wiley!" The old man's voice shook; Minnie began to cry aloud. The horseman wheeled about and turned his animal's head toward town. "Wiley!"

"Yes."

"Wiley, they haven't--you don't think they've got him?"

"By God, judge," said the man on horseback, "I'm afraid they have!"

CHAPTER X

THE COURT-HOUSE BELL

The court-house bell ringing in the night! No hesitating stroke of Schofields' Henry, no uncertain touch, was on the rope. A loud, wild, hurried clamor pealing out to wake the country-side, a rapid _clang! clang! clang!_ that struck clear in to the spine.

The court-house bell had tolled for the death of Morton, of Garfield, of Hendricks; had rung joy-peals of peace after the war and after political

campaigns; but it had rung as it was ringing now only three times; once when Hibbard's mill burned, once when Webb Landis killed Sep Bardlock and intrenched himself in the lumber-yard and would not be taken till he was shot through and through, and once when the Rouen accommodation was wrecked within twenty yards of the station.

Why was the bell ringing now? Men and women, startled into wide wakefulness, groped to windows--no red mist hung over town or country. What was it? The bell rang on. Its loud alarm beat increasingly into men's hearts and quickened their throbbing to the rapid measure of its own. Vague forms loomed in the gloaming. A horse, wildly ridden, splashed through the town. There were shouts; voices called hoarsely. Lamps began to gleam in the windows. Half-clad people emerged from their houses, men slapping their braces on their shoulders as they ran out of doors. Questions were shouted into the dimness.

Then the news went over the town.

It was cried from yard to yard, from group to group, from gate to gate, and reached the furthermost confines. Runners shouted it as they sped by; boys panted it, breathless; women with loosened hair stumbled into darkling chambers and faltered it out to new-wakened sleepers; pale girls clutching wraps at their throats whispered it across fences; the sick, tossing on their hard beds, heard it. The bell clamored it far and near; it spread over the country-side; it flew over the wires to distant cities. The White-Caps had got Mr. Harkless!

Lige Willetts had lost track of him out near Briscoes', it was said, and had come in at midnight seeking him. He had found Parker, the "Herald" foreman, and Ross Schofield, the typesetter, and Bud Tipworthy, the devil, at work in the printing-room, but no sign of Harkless, there or in the cottage. Together these had sought for him and had roused others, who had inquired at every house where he might have gone for shelter, and they had heard nothing. They had watched for his coming during the slackening of the storm and he had not come, and there was nowhere he could have gone. He was missing; only one thing could have happened.

They had roused up Warren Smith, the prosecutor, the missing editor's most intimate friend in Carlow, and Homer, the sheriff, and Jared Wiley, the deputy. William Todd had rung the alarm. The first thing to do was to find him. After that there would be trouble--if not before. It looked as if there would be trouble before. The men tramping up to the muddy Square in their shirt-sleeves were bulgy about the right hips; and when Homer Tibbs joined Lum Landis at the hotel corner, and Landis saw that Homer was carrying a shot-gun, Landis went back for his. A hastily sworn posse galloped out Main Street. Women and children ran into neighbors' yards and began to cry. Day was coming; and, as the light grew, men swore and savagely kicked at the palings of fences that they passed.

In the foreglow of dawn they gathered in the Square and listened to Warren Smith, who made a speech from the court-house fence and warned them to go slow. They answered him with angry shouts and hootings, but he made his big voice heard, and bade them do nothing rash; no facts were known, he said; it was far from certain that harm had been done, and no one knew that the Six-Cross-Roads people had done it--even if something had happened to Mr. Harkless. He declared that he spoke in Harkless's name. Nothing could distress _him_ so much as for them to defy the law, to take it out of the proper hands. Justice would be done.

"Yes it will!" shouted a man below him, brandishing the butt of a raw-hide whip above his head. "And while you jaw on about it here, he may be tied up like a dog in the woods, shot full of holes by the men you never lifted a finger to hender, because you want their votes when you run for circuit judge. What are we doin' _here_? What's the good of listening to you?"

There was a yell at this, and those who heard the speaker would probably have started for the Cross-Roads without further parley, had not a rumor sprung up, which passed so rapidly from man to man that within five minutes it was being turbulently discussed in every portion of the crowd. The news came that the two shell-gamblers had wrenched a bar out of a window under cover of the storm, had broken jail, and were at large. Their threats of the day before were remembered now, with convincing vividness. They had sworn repeatedly to Bardlock and to the sheriff, and in the hearing of others, that they would "do" for the man who took their money from them and had them arrested. The prosecuting attorney, quickly perceiving the value of this complication in holding back the mob that was already forming, called Homer from the crowd and made him get up on the fence and confess that his prisoners had escaped--at what time he did not know, probably toward the beginning of the storm, when it was noisiest.

"You see," cried the attorney, "there is nothing as yet of which we can accuse the Cross-Roads. If our friend has been hurt, it is much more likely that these crooks did it. They escaped in time to do it, and we all know they were laying for him. You want to be mighty careful, fellow-citizens. Homer is already in telegraphic communication with every town around here, and we'll have those men before night. All you've got to do is to control yourselves a little and go home quietly." He could see that his words (except those in reference to returning home--no one was going home) made an impression. There rose a babble of shouting and argument and swearing that grew continually louder, and the faces the lawyer looked down on were creased with perplexity, and shadowed with an anger that settled darker and darker.

Mr. Ephraim Watts, in spite of all confusion, clad as carefully as upon the preceding day, deliberately climbed the fence and stood by the lawyer and made a single steady gesture with his hand. He was listened to at once, as his respect for the law was less notorious than his irreverence for it, and he had been known in Carlow as a customarily reckless man. They wanted illegal and desperate advice, and quieted down to hear it. He spoke in his professionally calm voice.

"Gentlemen, it seems to me that Mr. Smith and Mr. Ribshaw" (nodding to the man with the rawhide whip) "are both right. What good are we doing here? What we want to know is what's happened to Mr. Harkless. It looks just now like the shell-men might have done it. Let's find out what they done. Scatter and hunt for him. 'Soon as anything is known for certain, Hibbard's mill whistle will blow three times. Keep on looking till it does. _Then_" he finished, with a barely perceptible scornful smile at the attorney, "_then_ we can decide on what had ought to be done."

Six-Cross-Roads lay dark and steaming in the sun that morning. The forge was silent, the saloon locked up, the roadway deserted, even by the pigs. The broken old buggy stood rotting in the mud without a single lean, little old man or woman--such were the children of the Cross-Roads--to play about it. The fields were empty, and the rag-stuffed windows blank, under the baleful glance of the horsemen who galloped by at intervals, muttering curses, not always confining themselves to muttering them. Once, when the deputy sheriff rode through alone, a tattered black hound, more

wolf than dog, half-emerged, growling, from beneath one of the tumble-down barns, and was jerked back into the darkness by his tail, with a snarl fiercer than his own, while a gun-barrel shone for a second as it swung for a stroke on the brute's head. The hound did not yelp or whine when the blow fell. He shut his eyes twice, and slunk sullenly back to his place.

The shanties might have received a volley or two from some of the mounted bands, exasperated by futile searching, had not the escape of Homer's prisoners made the guilt of the Cross-Roads appear doubtful in the minds of many. As the morning waned, the advocates of the theory that the gamblers had made away with Harkless grew in number. There came a telegram from the Rouen chief of police that he had a clew to their whereabouts; he thought they had succeeded in reaching Rouen, and it began to be generally believed that they had escaped by the one-o'clock freight, which had stopped to take on some empty cars at a side-track a mile northwest of the town, across the fields from the Briscoe house. Toward noon a party went out to examine the railroad embankment.

Men began to come back into the village for breakfast by twos and threes, though many kept on searching the woods, not feeling the need of food, or caring if they did. Every grove and clump of underbrush, every thicket, was ransacked; the waters of the creek, shallow for the most part, but swollen overnight, were dragged at every pool. Nothing was found; there was not a sign.

The bar of the hotel was thronged all morning as the returning citizens rapidly made their way thither, and those who had breakfasted and were going out again paused for internal, as well as external, reinforcement. The landlord, himself returned from a long hunt, set up his whiskey with a lavish hand.

"He was the best man we had, boys," said Landis, as he poured the little glasses full. "We'd ort of sent him to the legislative halls of Washington long ago. He'd of done us honor there; but we never thought of doin' anything fer him; jest set 'round and let him build up the town and give him empty thankyes. Drink hearty, gentlemen," he finished, gloomily, "I don't grudge no liquor to-day--except to Lige Willetts."

"He was a good man," said young William Todd, whose nose was red, not from the whiskey. "I've about give up."

Schofields' Henry drew his sleeve across his eyes. "He was the only man in this whole city that didn't jab and nag at me when I done my best," he exclaimed, with an increasing break in his utterance. "Many a good word I've had from him when nobody in town done nothin' but laugh an' rile an' badger me about my--my bell." And Schofields' Henry began to cry openly.

"He was a great hand with the chuldern," said one man. "Always have something to say to 'em to make 'em laugh when he went by. 'Talk more to them 'n he would to grown folks. Yes, sir."

"They knowed _him_ all right," added another. "I reckon all of us did, little and big."

"It's goin' to seem mighty empty around here," said Ross Schofield. "What's goin' to become o' the 'Herald' and the party in this district? Where's the man to run either of 'em now. Like as not," he concluded desperately, "the election'll go against us in the fall."

Dibb Zane choked over his four fingers. "We might's well bust up this dab-dusted ole town ef he's gone."

"I don't know what's come over that Cynthy Tipworthy," said the landlord. "She's waited table on him last two year, and her brother Bud works at the 'Herald' office. She didn't say a word--only looked and looked and looked --like a crazy woman; then her and Bud went off together to hunt in the woods. They just tuck hold of each other's hands like----"

"That ain't nothin'," Homer Tibbs broke in. "You'd ort to've saw old Miz Hathaway, that widder woman next door to us, when she heard it. He had helped her to git her pension; and she tuck on worse 'n' anything I ever hear--lot worse 'n' when Hathaway died."

"I reckon there ain't many crazier than them two Bowlders, father and son," said the postmaster, wiping the drops from his beard as he set his glass on the bar. "They rid into town like a couple of wild Indians, the old man beatin' that gray mare o' theirn till she was one big welt, and he ain't natcherly no cruel man, either. I reckon Lige Willetts better keep out of Hartley's way."

"I keep out of no man's way," cried a voice behind him. Turning, they saw Lige standing on the threshold of the door that led to the street. In his hand he held the bridle of the horse he had ridden across the sidewalk, and that now stood panting, with lowered head, half through the doorway, beside his master. Lige was hatless, splashed with mud from head to foot; his jaw was set, his teeth ground together; his eyes burned under red lids, and his hair lay tossed and damp on his brow. "I keep out of no man's way," he repeated, hoarsely.

"I heard you, Mr. Tibbs, but I've got too much to do, while you loaf and gas and drink over Lum Landis's bar--I've got other business than keeping out of Hartley Bowlder's way. I'm looking for John Harkless. He was the best man we had in this ornery hole, and he was too good for us, and so we've maybe let him get killed, and maybe I'm to blame. But I'm going to find him, and if he's hurt--damn _me_! I'm going to have a hand on the rope that lifts the men that did it, if I have to go to Rouen to put it there! After that I'll answer for my fault, not before!"

He threw himself on his horse and was gone. Soon the room was emptied, as the patrons of the bar returned to the search, and only Mr. Wilkerson and the landlord remained, the bar being the professional office, so to speak, of both.

Wilkerson had a chair in a corner, where he sat chanting a funeral march in a sepulchral murmur, allowing a parenthetical _hic_ to punctuate the dirge in place of the drum. Whenever a batch of newcomers entered, he rose to drink with them; and, at such times, after pouring off his liquor with a rich melancholy, shedding tears after every swallow, he would make an exploring tour of the room on his way back to his corner, stopping to look under each chair inquiringly and ejaculate: "Why, where kin he be!" Then, shaking his head, he would observe sadly: "Fine young man, he was, too; fine young man. Pore fellow! I reckon we hain't a-goin' to git him."

At eleven o'clock. Judge Briscoe dropped wearily from his horse at his own gate, and said to a wan girl who came running down the walk to meet him: "There is nothing, yet. I sent the telegram to your mother--to Mrs. Sherwood."

Helen turned away without answering. Her face was very white and looked pinched about the mouth. She went back to where old Fisbee sat on the porch, his white head held between his two hands; he was rocking himself to and fro. She touched him gently, but he did not look up. She spoke to him.

"There isn't anything--yet. He sent the telegram to mamma. I shall stay with you, now, no matter what you say." She sat beside him and put her head down on his shoulder, and though for a moment he appeared not to notice it, when Minnie came out on the porch, hearing her father at the door, the old scholar had put his arm about the girl and was stroking her fair hair softly.

Briscoe glanced at them, and raised a warning finger to his daughter, and they went tiptoeing into the house, where the judge dropped heavily upon a sofa with an asthmatic sigh; he was worn and tired. Minnie stood before him with a look of pale inquiry, and he shook his head.

"No use to tell _them_; but I can't see any hope," he answered her, biting nervously at the end of a cigar. "I expect you better bring me some coffee in here; I couldn't take another step to save me. I'm too old to tear around the country horseback before breakfast, like I have to-day."

"Did you send her telegram?" Minnie asked, as he drank the coffee she brought him. She had interpreted "coffee" liberally, and, with the assistance of Mildy Upton (whose subdued nose was frankly red and who shed tears on the raspberries), had prepared an appetizing table at his elbow.

"Yes," responded the judge, "and I'm glad she sent it. I talked the other way yesterday, what little I said--it isn't any of our business--but I don't think any too much of those people, somehow. She thinks she belongs with Fisbee, and I guess she's right. That young fellow must have got along with her pretty well, and I'm afraid when she gives up she'll be pretty bad over it; but I guess we all will. It's terribly sudden, somehow, though it's only what everybody half expected would come; only we thought it would come from over yonder." He nodded toward the west. "But she's got to stay here with us. Boarding at Sol Tibbs's with that old man won't do; and she's no girl to live in two rooms. You fix it up with her--you make her stay."

"She must," answered his daughter as she knelt beside him and patted his coat and handed him several things to eat at the same time. "Mr. Fisbee will help me persuade her, now that she's bound to stay in spite of him and the Sherwoods, too. I think she is perfectly grand to do it. I've always thought she was grand--ever since she took me under her wing at school when I was terribly 'country' and frightened; but she was so sweet and kind she made me forget. She was the pet of the school, too, always doing things for the other girls, for everybody; looking out for people simply heads and heads bigger than herself, and so recklessly generous and so funny about it; and always thoughtful and--and--pleasant----"

Minnie was speaking sadly, mechanically; but suddenly she broke off with a quick sob, sprang up and went to the window; then, turning, cried out:

"I don't believe it! He knew how to take care of himself too well. He'd have got away from them."

Her father shook his head. "Then why hasn't he turned up? He'd have gone home after the storm if something bad wasn't the matter."

"But nothing--nothing _that_ bad could have happened. They haven't found--any--anything."

"But why hasn't he come back, child?"

"Well, he's lying hurt somewhere, that's all."

"Then why haven't they found him?"

"I don't care!" she cried, and choked with the words and tossed her dishevelled hair from her temples; "it isn't true. Helen won't believe it --why should I? It's only a few hours since he was right here in our yard, talking to us all. I won't believe it till they've searched every stick and stone of Six-Cross-Roads and found him."

"It wasn't the Cross-Roads," said the old gentleman, pushing the table away and relaxing his limbs on the sofa. "They probably didn't have anything to do with it. We thought they had at first, but everybody's about come to believe it was those two devils that he had arrested yesterday."

"Not the Cross-Roads!" echoed Minnie, and she began to tremble violently. "Haven't they been out there yet?"

"What use? They are out of it, and they can thank God they are!"

"They are not!" she cried excitedly. "They did it. It was the White-Caps. We saw them, Helen and I."

The judge got upon his feet with an oath. He had not sworn for years until that morning. "What's this?" he said sharply.

"I ought to have told you before, but we were so frightened, and--and you went off in such a rush after Mr. Wiley was here. I never dreamed everybody wouldn't know it was the Cross-Roads; that they would _think_ of any one else. And I looked for the scarecrow as soon as it was light and it was 'way off from where we saw them, and wasn't blown down at all, and Helen saw them in the field besides--saw all of them----"

He interrupted her. "What do you mean? Try to tell me about it quietly, child." He laid his hand on her shoulder.

She told him breathlessly (while he grew more and more visibly perturbed and uneasy, biting his cigar to pieces and groaning at intervals) what she and Helen had seen in the storm. When she finished he took a few quick turns about the room with his hands thrust deep in his coat pockets, and then, charging her to repeat the story to no one, left the house, and, forgetting his fatigue, rapidly crossed the fields to the point where the bizarre figures of the night had shown themselves to the two girls at the window.

The soft ground had been trampled by many feet. The boot-prints pointed to the northeast. He traced them backward to the southwest through the field, and saw where they had come from near the road, going northeast. Then, returning, he climbed the fence and followed them northward through the next field. From there, the next, beyond the road that was a continuation of Main Street, stretched to the railroad embankment. The track, raggedly defined in trampled loam and muddy furrow, bent in a direction which

indicated that its terminus might be the switch where the empty cars had stood last night, waiting for the one-o'clock freight. Though the fields had been trampled down in many places by the searching parties, he felt sure of the direction taken by the Cross-Roads men, and he perceived that the searchers had mistaken the tracks he followed for those of earlier parties in the hunt. On the embankment he saw a number of men, walking west and examining the ground on each side, and a long line of people following them out from town. He stopped. He held the fate of Six-Cross-Roads in his hand and he knew it.

He knew that if he spoke, his evidence would damn the Cross-Roads, and that it meant that more than the White-Caps would be hurt, for the Cross-Roads would fight. If he had believed that the dissemination of his knowledge could have helped Harkless, he would have called to the men near him at once; but he had no hope that the young man was alive. They would not have dragged him out to their shanties wounded, or as a prisoner; such a proceeding would have courted detection, and, also, they were not that kind; they had been "looking for him" a long time, and their one idea was to kill him.

And Harkless, for all his gentleness, was the sort of man, Briscoe believed, who would have to be killed before he could be touched. Of one thing the old gentleman was sure; the editor had not been tied up and whipped while yet alive. In spite of his easy manners and geniality, there was a dignity in him that would have made him kill and be killed before the dirty fingers of a Cross-Roads "White-Cap" could have been laid upon him in chastisement. A great many good Americans of Carlow who knew him well always Mistered him as they would have Mistered only an untitled Morton or Hendricks who might have lived amongst them. He was the only man the old darky, Uncle Xenophon, had ever addressed as "Marse" since he came to Plattville, thirty years ago.

Briscoe considered it probable that a few people were wearing bandages, in the closed shanties over to the west to-day. A thought of the number they had brought against one man; a picture of the unequal struggle, of the young fellow he had liked so well, unarmed and fighting hopelessly in a trap, and a sense of the cruelty of it, made the hot anger surge up in his breast, and he started on again. Then he stopped once more. Though long retired from faithful service on the bench, he had been all his life a serious exponent of the law, and what he went to tell meant lawlessness that no one could hope to check. He knew the temper of the people; their long suffering was at an end, and they would go over at last and wipe out the Cross-Roads. It depended on him. If the mob could be held off over to-day, if men's minds could cool over night, the law could strike and the innocent and the hotheaded be spared from suffering. He would wait; he would lay his information before the sheriff; and Horner would go quietly with a strong posse, for he would need a strong one. He began to retrace his steps.

The men on the embankment were walking slowly, bending far over, their eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly one of them stood erect and tossed his arms in the air and shouted loudly. Other men ran to him, and another far down the track repeated the shout and the gesture to another far in his rear; this man took it up, and shouted and waved to a fourth man, and so they passed the signal back to town. There came, almost immediately three long, loud whistles from a mill near the station, and the embankment grew black with people pouring out from town, while the searchers came running from the fields and woods and underbrush on both sides of the railway.

Briscoe paused for the last time; then he began to walk slowly toward the embankment.

The track lay level and straight, not dimming in the middle distances, the rails converging to points, both northwest and southeast, in the clean-washed air, like examples of perspective in a child's drawing-book. About seventy miles to the west and north lay Rouen; and, in the same direction, nearly six miles from where the signal was given, the track was crossed by a road leading directly south to Six-Cross-Roads.

The embankment had been newly ballasted with sand. What had been discovered was a broad brown stain on the south slope near the top. There were smaller stains above and below; none beyond it to left or right; and there were deep boot-prints in the sand. Men were examining the place excitedly, talking and gesticulating. It was Lige Willetts who had found it. His horse was tethered to a fence near by, at the end of a lane through a cornfield. Jared Wiley, the deputy, was talking to a group near the stain, explaining.

"You see them two must have knowed about the one-o'clock freight, and that it was to stop here to take on the empty lumber cars. I don't know how they knowed it, but they did. It was this way: when they dropped from the window, they beat through the storm, straight for this side-track. At the same time Mr. Harkless leaves Briscoes' goin' west. It begins to rain. He cuts across to the railroad to have a sure footing, and strikin' for the deepo for shelter--near place as any except Briscoes' where he'd said good-night already and prob'ly don't wish to go back, 'fear of givin' trouble or keepin' 'em up--anybody can understand that. He comes along, and gets to where we are precisely at the time _they_ do, them comin' from town, him strikin' for it. They run right into each other. That's what happened. They re-_cog_-nized him and raised up on him and let him have it. What they done it with, I don't know; we took everything in that line off of 'em; prob'ly used railroad iron; and what they done with him afterwards we don't know; but we will by night. They'll sweat it out of 'em up at Rouen when they get 'em."

"I reckon maybe some of us might help," remarked Mr. Watts, reflectively.

Jim Bardlock swore a violent oath. "That's the talk!" he shouted. "Ef I ain't the first man of this crowd to set my foot in Roowun, an' first to beat in that jail door, an' take 'em out an' hang 'em by the neck till they're dead, dead, dead, I'm not Town Marshal of Plattville, County of Carlow, State of Indiana, and the Lord have mercy on our souls!"

Tom Martin looked at the brown stain and quickly turned away; then he went back slowly to the village. On the way he passed Warren Smith.

"Is it so?" asked the lawyer.

Martin answered with a dry throat. He looked out dimly over the sunlit fields, and swallowed once or twice. "Yes, it's so. There's a good deal of it there. Little more than a boy he was." The old fellow passed his seamy hand over his eyes without concealment. "Peter ain't very bright, sometimes, it seems to me," he added, brokenly; "overlook Bodeffer and Fisbee and me and all of us old husks, and--and--" he gulped suddenly, then finished--"and act the fool and take a boy that's the best we had. I wish the Almighty would take Peter off the gate; he ain't fit fer it."

When the attorney reached the spot where the crowd was thickest, way was

made for him. The old colored man, Xenophon, approached at the same time, leaning on a hickory stick and bent very far over, one hand resting on his hip as if to ease a rusty joint. The negro's age was an incentive to fable; from his appearance he might have known the prophets, and he wore that hoary look of unearthly wisdom many decades of superstitious experience sometimes give to members of his race. His face, so tortured with wrinkles that it might have been made of innumerable black threads woven together, was a living mask of the mystery of his blood. Harkless had once said that Uncle Xenophon had visited heaven before Swedenborg and hell before Dante. To-day, as he slowly limped over the ties, his eyes were bright and dry under the solemn lids, and, though his heavy nostrils were unusually distended in the effort for regular breathing, the deeply puckered lips beneath them were set firmly.

He stopped and looked at the faces before him. When he spoke his voice was gentle, and though the tremulousness of age harped on the vocal strings, it was rigidly controlled. "Kin some kine gelmun," he asked, "please t'be so good ez t' show de ole main whuh de W'ite-Caips is done shoot Marse Hawkliss?"

"Here was where it happened, Uncle Zen," answered Wiley, leaning him forward. "Here is the stain."

Xenophon bent over the spot on the sand, making little odd noises in his throat. Then he painfully resumed his former position. "Dass his blood," he said, in the same gentle, quavering tone. "Dass my bes' frien' whut lay on de groun' whuh yo staind, gelmun."

There was a pause, and no one spoke.

"Dass whuh day laid 'im an' dass whuh he lie," the old negro continued. "Dey shot 'im in de fiels. Dey ain' shot 'im hear-yondeh dey drugged 'im, but dis whuh he lie." He bent over again, then knelt, groaningly, and placed his hand on the stain, one would have said, as a man might place his hand over a heart to see if it still beat. He was motionless, with the air of hearkening.

"Marse, honey, is you gone?" He raised his voice as if calling, "Is you gone, suh?--Marse?"

He looked up at the circle about him, and, still kneeling, not taking his hand from the sand, seeming to wait for a sign, to listen for a voice, he said: "Whafo' you gelmun think de good Lawd summon Marse Hawkliss? Kaze he de mos' fittes'? You know dat man he ketch me in de cole night, wintuh 'to' lais', stealin' 'is wood. You know whut he done t'de ole thief? Tek an' bull' up big fiah een ole Zen' shainty; say, 'He'p yo'se'f an' welcome. Reckon you hongry, too, ain' you, Xenophon?' Tek an' feed me. Tek an' tek keer o' me ev' since. Ah pump de baith full in de mawin'; mek 'is bed; pull de weeds out'n of de front walk--dass all. He tek me in. When Ah aisk 'im ain' he fraid keep ole thief he say, jesso: 'Dass all my fault, Xenophon; ought look you up long 'go; ought know long 'go you be cole dese baid nights. Reckon Ahm de thievenest one us two, Xenophon, keepin' all dis wood stock' up when you got none,' he say, jesso. Tek me in; say he _lahk_ a thief. Pay me sala'y. Feed me. Dass de main whut de Caips gone shot lais' night." He raised his head sharply, and the mystery in his gloomy eyes intensified as they opened wide and stared at the sky, unseeingly.

"Ise bawn wid a cawl!" he exclaimed, loudly. His twisted frame was braced

to an extreme tension. "Ise bawn wid a cawl! De blood anssuh!"

"It wasn't the Cross-Roads, Uncle Xenophon," said Warren Smith, laying his hand on the old man's shoulder.

Xenophon rose to his feet. He stretched a long, bony arm straight to the west, where the Cross-Roads lay; stood rigid and silent, like a seer; then spoke:

"De men whut shot Marse Hawkliss lies yondeh, hidin' f'um de light o' day. An' _him_"--he swerved his whole rigid body till the arm pointed northwest--"he lies yondeh. You won't find him heah. Dey fought 'im een de fiel's an' dey druggen 'im heah. Dis whim dey lay 'im down. Ise bawn wid a cawl!"

There were exclamations from the listeners, for Xenophon spoke as one having authority. Suddenly he turned and pointed his outstretched hand full at Judge Briscoe.

"An' dass de main," he cried, "dass de main kin tell you Ah speak de trufe."

Before he was answered, Eph Watts looked at Briscoe keenly and then turned to Lige Willetts and whispered: "Get on your horse, ride in, and ring the court-house bell like the devil. Do as I say!"

Tears stood in the judge's eyes. "It is so," he said, solemnly. "He speaks the truth. I didn't mean to tell it to-day, but somehow--" He paused. "The hounds!" he cried. "They deserve it! My daughter saw them crossing the fields in the night--saw them climb the fence, hoods, gowns, and all, a big crowd of them. She and the lady who is visiting us saw them, saw them plainly. The lady saw them several times, clear as day, by the flashes of lightning--the scoundrels were coming this way. They must have been dragging him with them then. He couldn't have had a show for his life amongst them. Do what you like--maybe they've got him at the Cross-Roads. If there's a chance of it--dead or alive--bring him back!"

A voice rang out above the clamor that followed the judge's speech.

"'Bring him back!' God could, maybe, but He won't. Who's travelling my way? I go west!" Hartley Bowlder had ridden his sorrel up the embankment, and the horse stood between the rails. There was an angry roar from the crowd; the prosecutor pleaded and threatened unheeded; and as for the deputy sheriff, he declared his intention of taking with him all who wished to go as his posse. Eph Watts succeeded in making himself heard above the tumult.

"The Square!" he shouted. "Start from the Square. We want everybody, and we'll need them. We want every one in Carlow to be implicated in this posse."

"They will be!" shouted a farmer. "Don't you worry about that."

"We want to get into some sort of shape," cried Eph.

"Shape, hell!" said Hartley Bowlder.

There was a hiss and clang and rattle behind him, and a steam whistle shrieked. The crowd divided, and Hartley's sorrel jumped just in time as

the westbound accommodation rushed through on its way to Rouen. From the rear platform leaned the sheriff, Horner, waving his hands frantically as he flew by, but no one understood--or cared--what he said, or, in the general excitement, even wondered why he was leaving the scene of his duty at such a time. When the train had dwindled to a dot and disappeared, and the noise of its rush grew faint, the court-house bell was heard ringing, and the mob was piling pell-mell into the village to form on the Square. The judge stood alone on the embankment.

"That settles it," he said aloud, gloomily, watching the last figures. He took off his hat and pushed back the thick, white hair from his forehead. "Nothing to do but wait. Might as well go home for that. Blast it!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "I don't want to go there. It's too hard on the little girl. If she hadn't come till next week she'd never have known John Harkless."

CHAPTER XI

JOHN BROWN'S BODY

All morning horsemen had been galloping through Six-Cross-Roads, sometimes singly, oftener in company. At one-o'clock the last posse passed through on its return to the county-seat, and after that there was a long, complete silence, while the miry corners were undisturbed by a single hoof-beat. No unkempt colt nickered from his musty stall; the sparse young corn that was used to rasp and chuckle greenly stood rigid in the fields. Up the Plattville pike despairingly cackled one old hen, with her wabbling sailor run, smit with a superstitious horror of nothing, in the stillness; she hid herself in the shadow underneath a rickety barn, and her shrieking ceased.

Only on the Wimby farm were there signs of life. The old lady who had sent Harkless roses sat by the window all morning and wiped her eyes, watching the horsemen ride by; sometimes they would hail her and tell her there was nothing yet. About two-o'clock, her husband rattled up in a buckboard, and got out the late, and more authentic, Mr. Wimby's shot-gun, which he carefully cleaned and oiled, in spite of its hammerless and quite useless condition, sitting, meanwhile, by the window opposite his wife, and often looking up from his work to shake his weak fist at his neighbors' domiciles and creak decrepit curses and denunciations.

But the Cross-Roads was ready. It knew what was coming now. Frightened, desperate, sullen, it was ready.

The afternoon wore on, and lengthening shadows fell upon a peaceful--one would have said, a sleeping--country. The sun-dried pike, already dusty, stretched its serene length between green borders flecked with purple and yellow and white weedflowers; and the tree shadows were not shade, but warm blue and lavender glows in the general pervasion of still, bright light, the sky curving its deep, unburnished, penetrable blue over all, with no single drift of fleece upon it to be reflected in the creek that wound along past willow and sycamore. A woodpecker's telegraphy broke the quiet like a volley of pistol shots.

But far eastward on the pike there slowly developed a soft, white haze. It

grew denser and larger. Gradually it rolled nearer. Dimly behind it could be discerned a darker, moving nucleus that extended far back upon the road. A heavy tremor began to stir the air--faint manifold sounds, a waxing, increasing, multitudinous rumor.

The pike ascended a long, slight slope leading west up to the Cross-Roads. From a thicket of iron-weed at the foot of this slope was thrust the hard, lean visage of an undersized girl of fourteen. Her fierce eyes examined the approaching cloud of dust intently. A redness rose under the burnt yellow skin and colored the wizened cheeks.

They were coming.

She stepped quickly out of the tangle, and darted up the road, running with the speed of a fleet little terrier, not opening her lips, not calling out, but holding her two thin hands high above her head. That was all. But Birnam wood was come to Dunsinane at last, and the messenger sped. Out of the weeds in the corners of the snake fence, in the upper part of the rise, silently lifted the heads of men whose sallowness became a sickish white as the child flew by.

The mob was carefully organized. They had taken their time and had prepared everything deliberately, knowing that nothing could stop them. No one had any thought of concealment; it was all as open as the light of day, all done in the broad sunshine. Nothing had been determined as to what was to be done at the Cross-Roads more definite than that the place was to be wiped out. That was comprehensive enough; the details were quite certain to occur. They were all on foot, marching in fairly regular ranks. In front walked Mr. Watts, the man Harkless had abhorred in a public spirit and befriended in private--to-day he was a hero and a leader, marching to avenge his professional oppressor and personal brother. Cool, unruffled, and, to outward vision, unarmed, marching the miles in his brown frock coat and generous linen, his carefully creased trousers neatly turned up out of the dust, he led the way. On one side of him were the two Bowlders, on the other was Lige Willetts, Mr. Watts preserving peace between the two young men with perfect tact and sang-froid.

They kept good order and a similitude of quiet for so many, except far to the rear, where old Wilkerson was bringing up the tail of the procession, dragging a wretched yellow dog by a slip-noose fastened around the poor cur's protesting neck, the knot carefully arranged under his right ear. In spite of every command and protest, Wilkerson had marched the whole way uproariously singing, "John Brown's Body."

The sun was in the west when they came in sight of the Cross-Roads, and the cabins on the low slope stood out angularly against the radiance beyond. As they beheld the hated settlement, the heretofore orderly ranks showed a disposition to depart from the steady advance and rush the shanties. Willetts, the Bowlders, Parker, Ross, Schofield, and fifty others did, in fact, break away and set a sharp pace up the slope.

Watts tried to call them back. "What's the use your gettin' killed?" he shouted.

"Why not?" answered Lige, who, like the others, was increasing his speed when old "Wimby" rose up suddenly from the roadside ahead of them, and motioned them frantically to go back. "They're laid out along the fence, waitin' fer ye," he warned them. "Git out the road. Come by the fields. Per the Lord's sake, spread!" Then, as suddenly as he had appeared, he

dropped down into the weeds again. Lige and those with him paused, and the whole body came to a halt while the leaders consulted. There was a sound of metallic clicking and a thin rattle of steel. From far to the rear came the voice of old Wilkerson:

"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground,
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground--"

A few near him, as they stood waiting, began to take up the burden of the song, singing in slow time like a dirge; then those further away took it up; it spread, reached the leaders; they, too, began to sing, taking off their hats as they joined in; and soon the whole concourse, solemn, earnest, and uncovered, was singing--a thunderous requiem for John Harkless.

The sun was swinging lower and the edges of the world were embroidered with gold while that deep volume of sound shook the air, the song of a stern, savage, just cause--sung, perhaps, as some of the ancestors of these men sang with Hampden before the bristling walls of a hostile city. It had iron and steel in it. The men lying on their guns in the ambuscade along the fence heard the dirge rise and grow to its mighty fulness, and they shivered. One of them, posted nearest the advance, had his rifle carefully levelled at Lige Willetts, a fair target in the road. When he heard the singing, he turned to the man next behind him and laughed harshly: "I reckon we'll see a big jamboree in hell to-night, huh?"

The huge murmur of the chorus expanded, and gathered in rhythmic strength, and swelled to power, and rolled and thundered across the plain.

"John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground,
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground,
John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the ground,
His soul goes marching on!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
His soul goes marching on!"

A gun spat from the higher ground, and Willetts dropped where he stood, but was up again in a second, with a red line across his forehead where the ball had grazed his temple. Then the mob spread out like a fan, hundreds of men climbing the fence and beginning the advance through the fields, dosing on the ambuscade from both sides. Mr. Watts, wading through the high grass in the field north of the road, perceived the barrel of a gun shining from a bush some distance in front of him, and, although in the same second no weapon was seen in his hand, discharged a revolver at the bush behind the gun. Instantly ten or twelve men leaped from their hiding-places along the fences of both fields, and, firing hurriedly and harmlessly into the scattered ranks of the oncoming mob, broke for the shelter of the houses, where their fellows were posted. Taken on the flanks and from the rear, there was but one thing for them to do to keep from being hemmed in and shot or captured. (They excessively preferred being shot.) With a wild, high, joyous yell, sounding like the bay of young hounds breaking into view of their quarry, the Plattville men followed.

The most eastward of the debilitated edifices of Six-Cross-Roads was the saloon, which bore the painted legends: on the west wall, "Last Chance"; on the east wall, "First Chance." Next to this, and separated by two or

three acres of weedy vacancy from the corners where the population centred thickest, stood-if one may so predicate of a building which leaned in seven directions-the house of Mr. Robert Skillett, the proprietor of the saloon. Both buildings were shut up as tight as their state of repair permitted. As they were furthest to the east, they formed the nearest shelter, and to them the Cross-Roaders bent their flight, though they stopped not here, but disappeared behind Skillett's shanty, putting it between them and their pursuers, whose guns were beginning to speak. The fugitives had a good start, and, being the picked runners of the Cross-Roads, they crossed the open, weedy acres in safety and made for their homes. Every house had become a fort, and the defenders would have to be fought and torn out one by one. As the guns sounded, a woman in a shanty near the forge began to scream, and kept on screaming.

On came the farmers and the men of Plattville. They took the saloon at a run; battered down the crazy doors with a fence-rail, and swarmed inside like busy insects, making the place hum like a hive, but with the hotter industries of destruction. It was empty of life as a tomb, but they beat and tore and battered and broke and hammered and shattered like madmen; they reduced the tawdry interior to a mere chaos, and came pouring forth laden with trophies of ruin. And then there was a charry smell in the air, and a slender feather of smoke floated up from a second-story window.

At the same time Watts led an assault on the adjoining house--an assault which came to a sudden pause, for, from cracks in the front wall, a squirrel-rifle and a shot-gun snapped and banged, and the crowd fell back in disorder. Homer Tibbs had a hat blown away, full of buck-shot holes, while Mr. Watts solicitously examined a small aperture in the skirts of his brown coat. The house commanded the road, and the rush of the mob into the village was checked, but only for the instant.

A rickety woodshed, which formed a portion of the Skillett mansion, closely joined the "Last Chance" side of the family place of business. Scarcely had the guns of the defenders sounded, when, with a loud shout, Lige Willetts leaped from an upper window on that side of the burning saloon and landed on the woodshed, and, immediately climbing the roof of the house itself, applied a fiery brand to the time-worn clapboards. Ross Schofield dropped on the shed, close behind him, his arm lovingly enfolding a gallon jug of whiskey, which he emptied (not without evident regret) upon the clapboards as Lige fired them. Flames burst forth almost instantly, and the smoke, uniting with that now rolling out of every window of the saloon, went up to heaven in a cumbrous, gray column.

As the flames began to spread, there was a rapid

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