

The Boss of Little Arcady

Harry Leon Wilson

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Title: The Boss of Little Arcady

Author: Harry Leon Wilson

Release Date: December 1, 2003 [EBook #10358]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

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[Illustration: THE BOSS OF LITTLE ARCADY]

[Illustration: "A-CHESTIN' OUT HIS CHEST LAHK A OLE MA'ASH FRAWG."]

THE BOSS OF LITTLE ARCADY

BY

HARRY LEON WILSON

1905

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MY MOTHER

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"A chestin' out his chest lahk a ole ma'ash
frawg"

"And yet I have been pestered by cheap flings
at my personal bearing"

"We might get him to make a barrel of it for
the Sunday-school picnic"

"That will do," I said severely. "Remember
there is a gentleman present"

The Book of
COLONEL POTTS

CHAPTER I

HOW THE BOSS WON HIS TITLE

=Late last Thursday evening one Jonas Rodney Potts, better known to this community as "Upright" Potts, stumbled into the mill-race, where it had providentially been left open just north of Cady's mill. Everything was going along finely until two hopeless busybodies were attracted to the spot by his screams, and fished him out. It is feared that he will recover. We withhold the names of his rescuers, although under strong temptation to publish them broadcast.--_Little Arcady Argus_ of May 21st.=

Looking back to that time from a happier present, I am filled by a genuine awe of J. Rodney Potts. Reflecting upon those benign ends which the gods chose to make him serve, I can but marvel how lightly each of us may meet and scorn a casual Potts, unrecking his gracious and predestined office in the play of Fate.

Of the present--to me--supreme drama of the Little Country, I can only say that the gods had selected their agent with a cunning so flawless that suspicion of his portents could not well have been aroused in one lacking discernment like unto the gods' very own. So trivially, so utterly, so pitiably casual, to eyes of the flesh, was this Potts of Little Arcady, from his immortal soul to the least item of his inferior raiment!

Thus craftily are we fooled by the Lords of Destiny, whose caprice it is to affect remoteness from us and a lofty unconcern for our poor little doings.

There is bitterness in the lines of that Argus paragraph, and a flippant incivility might be read between them by the least discerning.

Arcady of the Little Country, however, knows there is neither bitterness nor real cynicism in Solon Denney, founder, editor, and proprietor of the Little Arcady Argus; motto, "Hew to the Line, Let the Chips Fall Where they May!" Indeed, we do know Solon. Often enough has the Argus hewn inexorably to the line, when that line led straight through the heart of its guiding genius and through the hearts of us all. One who had seen him, as I did, stand uncovered in the presence of his new Washington hand-press, the day that dynamo of Light was erected in the Argus office, could never suppose him to lack humanity or the just reverence demanded by his craft.

We may concede without disloyalty that Solon is peculiar unto himself. In his presence you are cursed with an unquiet suspicion that he may become frivolous with you at any moment,--may, indeed, be so at that moment, despite a due facial gravity and tones of weight,--for he will not infrequently seem to be both trivial and serious in the same breath. Again, he is amazingly sensitive for one not devoid of humor. In a pleasant sense he is acutely aware of himself, and he does not dislike to know that you feel his quality. Still again, he is bound to spice his writing. Were it his lot to report events on the Day of Judgment, I believe the Argus account would be thought too highly colored by many persons of good taste.

But Little Arcady knows that Solon is loyal to its welfare--knows that he is fit to wield the mightiest lever of Civilization in its behalf on Wednesday of each week.

We know now, moreover, that an undercurrent of circumstance existed which did not even ripple the surface of that apparently facetious brutality hurled at J. Rodney Potts.

The truth may not be told in a word. But it was in this affair that Solon Denney won his title of "Boss of Little Arcady," a title first rendered unto him somewhat in derision, I regret to say, by a number of our leading citizens, who sought, as it were, to make sport of him.

It began in a jest, as do all the choicest tragedies of the gods,--a few

lines of idle badinage, meant to spice Solon's column of business locals with a readable sprightliness. The thing was printed, in fact, between "Let Harpin Cust shine your face with his new razors" and "See that line of clocks at Chislett's for sixty cents. They look like cuckoos and keep good time."

"Not much news this week," the item blithely ran, "so we hereby start the rumor that 'Upright' Potts is going to leave town. We would incite no community to lawless endeavor, but--may the Colonel encounter swiftly in his new environment that warm reception to which his qualities of mind, no less than his qualities of heart, so richly entitle him,--that reception, in short, which our own debilitated public spirit has timidly refused him. We claim the right to start any rumor of this sort that will cheer the souls of an admiring constituency. Now is the time to pay up that subscription."

The intention, of course, was openly playful--a not subtle sally meant to be read and forgotten. Yet--will it be credited?--more than one of us read it so hurriedly, perhaps with so passionate a longing to have it the truth, as not to perceive its satirical indirections. The rumor actually lived for a day that Potts was to disembarass the town of his presence.

And then, from the fictitious stuff of this rumor was spawned a veritable inspiration. Several of our most public-spirited citizens seemed to father it simultaneously.

"Why should Potts not leave town--why should he not seek out a new field of effort?"

"Field of effort" was a rank bit of poesy, it being certain that Potts would never make an effort worthy of the name in any field whatsoever; but the sense of it was plain.

Increasingly with the years had plans been devised to alleviate the condition of Potts's residence among us. Some of these had required a too definite and artificial abruptness in the mechanics of his removal; others, like Eustace Eubanks's plot for having all our best people refuse to notice him, depended upon a sensitiveness in the person aimed at which he did not possess. Besides, there had been talk of disbaring him from the practice of his profession, and I, as a lawyer, had been urged to instigate that proceeding. Unquestionably there was ground for it.

But now this random pleasantry of Solon Denney's set our minds to working in another direction.

In the broad, pleasant window of the post-office, under the "NO LOAFING HERE!" sign, half a dozen of us discussed it while we waited for the noon mail. There seemed to be a half-formed belief that Potts might adroitly be made to perceive advantages in leaving us.

"It's a whole lot better to manipulate and be subtle in a case like this," suggested the editor of the Argus. "Threats of violence, forcible expulsion, disbarment proceedings--all crude--and besides they won't move Potts. Jonas Rodney may not be gifted with a giant intellect, but he is cunning."

"The cunning of a precocious boy," prompted Eustace Eubanks, who was one

of us. "He is well aware that we would not dare attempt lawless violence."

"Exactly, Eustace," answered Solon. "I tell you, gentlemen, this thriving little town needs a canning factory, as we all know; but more than a canning factory it needs a Boss,--one of those strong characters that make tools of their fellow-men, who rule our cities with an iron hand but take care to keep the hand in a velvet glove,--a Boss that is diplomatic, yet an autocrat."

That careless use of the term "Boss" was afterward seen to be unfortunate for Solon. They remembered it against him.

"That's right," said Westley Keyts. "Let's be diplomatic with him."

"How would you begin, Westley, if you don't mind telling us?" Solon had already begun to shape a scheme of his own.

"Why," answered Westley, looking very earnest, "just go up to him in a quiet, refined manner--no blustering, understand--and say in a low tone, kind of off-hand but serious, 'Now, look a' here, Potts, old boy, let's talk this thing over like a couple of gentlemen had ought to.' 'Well, all right,' says Potts, 'that's fair--I couldn't refuse that as from one gentleman to another gentleman.' Well, then, say to him, 'Now, Potts, you know as well as any man in this town that you're an all-round no-good--you're a human Not--and a darn scalawag into the bargain. So what's the use? Will you go, or won't you?' Then if he'd begin to hem and haw and try to put it off with one thing or another, why, just hint in a roundabout way--perfectly genteel, you understand--that there'd be doings with a kittle of tar and feathers that same night at eight-thirty sharp, rain or shine, with a free ride right afterward to the town line and mebbe a bit beyond, without no cushions. Up about the Narrows would be a good place to say farewell," he concluded thoughtfully.

We had listened patiently enough, but this was too summary. Westley Keyts is our butcher, a good, honest, energetic, downright business man with a square forehead and a blunt jaw and red hair that bristles with challenges. But he seems compelled to say too nearly what he means to render him useful in negotiations requiring any considerable finesse.

"We were speaking, Westley, of the gentle functions of diplomacy," remarked Solon, cuttingly. "Of course, we could waylay Potts and kill him with one of your cleavers and have his noble head stuffed and mounted to hang up over Barney Skeyhan's bar, but it wouldn't be subtle--it would not be what the newspapers call 'a triumph of diplomacy'! And then, again, reports of it might be carried to other towns, and talk would be caused."

"Now, say," retorted Westley, somewhat abashed, "I was thinking I answered all that by winding up the way like I did, asking him,--not mad-like, you understand,--'Now will you go or won't you?' just like that. All I can say is, if that ain't diplomacy, then I don't know what in Time diplomacy is!"

I think we conceded this, in silence, be it understood, for Westley is respected. But we looked to Solon for a more tenuous subtlety. Nor did he fail us. Two days later Potts upon the public street actually announced his early departure from Little Arcady.

To know how pleasing an excitement this created one should know more about Potts. It will have been inferred that he was objectionable. For the fact, he was objectionable in every way: as a human being, a man, a citizen, a member of the Slocum County bar, and a veteran of our late civil conflict. He was shiftless, untidy, a borrower, a pompous braggart, a trouble-maker, forever driving some poor devil into senseless litigation. Moreover, he was blithely unscrupulous in his dealings with the Court, his clients, his brother-attorneys, and his fellow-men at large. When I add that he was given to spells of hard drinking, during which he became obnoxious beyond the wildest possible dreams of that quality, it will be seen that we of Little Arcady were not without reason for wishing him away.

He had drifted casually in upon us after the war, accompanied somewhat elegantly by one John Randolph Clement Tuckerman, an ex-slave. He came with much talk of his regiment,--a fat-cheeked, florid man of forty-five or so, with shifty blue eyes and an address moderately insinuating. Very tall he was, and so erect that he seemed to lean a little backward. This physical trait, combining with a fancy for referring to himself freely as "an upright citizen of this reunited and glorious republic, sir!" had speedily made him known as "Upright" Potts. He was of a slender build and a bony frame, except in front. His long, single-breasted frock-coat hung loosely enough about his shoulders, yet buttoned tightly over a stomach that was so incongruous as to seem artificial. The sleeves of the coat were glossy from much desk rubbing, and its front advertised a rather inattentive behavior at table. The Colonel's dress was completed by drab overgaiters and poorly draped trousers of the same once-delicate hue. Upon his bald head, which was high and peaked, like Sir Walter Scott's, he carried a silk hat in an inferior state of preservation. When he began to drink it was his custom to repair at once to a barber and submit to having his side-whiskers trimmed fastidiously. Sober, he seemed to feel little pride of person, and his whiskers at such a time merely called attention somewhat unprettily to his lack of a chin. His other possessions were an ebony walking stick with a gold head and what he referred to in moments of expansion as his "library." This consisted of a copy of the Revised Statutes, a directory of Cincinnati, Ohio, for the year 1867, and two volumes of Patent Office reports.

At the time of which I speak the Colonel had long been sober, and the day that Solon Denney completed those mysterious negotiations with him he was as far from conventional standards of the beautiful as I remember to have seen him.

The guise of Solon's subtlety, the touch of his iron hand in a glove of softest velvet, had been in this wise: he had pointed out to the Colonel that there were richer fields of endeavor to the west of us; newer, larger towns, fitter abodes for a man of his parts; communities which had honors and emoluments to lavish upon the worthy,--prizes which it would doubtless never be in our poor power to bestow.

Potts was stirred by all this, but he was not blinded to certain disadvantages,--"a stranger in a strange land," etc., while in Little Arcady he had already "made himself known."

But, suggested Solon, with a ready wit, if the stranger were to go fortified with certificates of character from the leading citizens of his late home?

This was a thing to consider. Potts reflected more favorably; but still he hesitated. He was unable to believe that these certificates of his excellence might be obtained. The bar and the commercial element of Little Arcady had been cold, not to say suspicious, toward him. It was an unpleasant thing to mention, but a cabal had undeniably been formed.

Solon was politely incredulous. He pledged his word of honor as a gentleman to provide the letters,--a laudatory, an uplifting letter, from every citizen in town whose testimony would be of weight; also a half-column of fit praise in the next issue of the *Argus*, twelve copies of which Potts should freely carry off with him for judicious scattering about the fortunate town in which his journey should end.

Then Potts spoke openly of the expenses of travel. Solon, royally promising a purse of gold to take him on his way, clenched the winning of a neat and bloodless victory.

No one has ever denied that Denney must have employed a faultless, an incomparable tact, to bring J. Rodney Potts to this agreement. By tact alone had he achieved that which open sneers, covert insult, abuse, ridicule, contumely, and forthright threats had failed to consummate, and in the first flush of the news we all felt much as Westley Keyts said he did.

"Solon Denney is some subtler than me," said Westley, in a winning spirit of concession; "I can see that, now. He's the Boss of Little Arcady after this, all right, so far as *I* know."

Nevertheless, there was misgiving about the letters for Potts. Old Asa Bundy, our banker, wanted to know, somewhat peevishly, if it seemed quite honest to send Potts to another town with a satchel full of letters certifying to his rare values as a man and a citizen. What would that town think of us two or three days later?

"This is no time to split hairs, Bundy," said Solon; and I believe I added, "Don't be quixotic, Mr. Bundy!"

Hereupon Westley Keyts broke in brightly.

"Why, now, they'll see in a minute that the whole thing was meant as a joke. They'll see that the laugh is on *them*, and they'll have a lot of fun out of it, and then send the old cuss along to another town with some more funny letters to fool the next ones." "That's all very *well*, but it isn't high conduct," insisted Bundy.

Westley Keyts now achieved the nearest approach to diplomacy I have ever known of him.

"Oh, well, Asa, after all, this is a world of give and take. 'Live and let live' is my motto."

"We must use common sense in these matters, you know, Bundy," observed Solon, judicially.

And that sophistry prevailed, for we were weak unto faintness from our burden.

We gave letters setting forth that J. Rodney Potts was the ideal inhabitant of a city larger than our own. We glowed in describing the

virtues of our departing townsman; his honesty of purpose, his integrity of character, his learning in the law, his wide range of achievement, civic and military,--all those attributes that fitted him to become a stately ornament and a tower of strength to any community larger in the least degree than our own modest town.

And there was the purse. Fifty dollars was suggested by Eustace Eubanks, but Asa Bundy said that this would not take Potts far enough. Eustace said that a man could travel an immense distance for fifty dollars. Bundy retorted that an ordinary man might perhaps go far enough on that sum, but not Potts.

"If we are to perpetrate this outrage at all," insisted Bundy, pulling in calculation at his little chin-whisker, "let us do it thoroughly. A hundred dollars can't take Potts any too far. We must see that he keeps going until he could never get back--" We all nodded to this.

"--and another thing, the farther away from this town those letters are read,--why, the better for our reputations."

A hundred dollars it was. Purse and letters were turned over to Solon Denney to deliver to Potts. The Argus came out with its promised eulogy, a thing so fulsome that any human being but J. Rodney Potts would have sickened to read it of himself.

But our little town was elated. One could observe that last day a subdued but confident gaiety along its streets as citizens greeted one another.

On every hand were good fellowship and kind words, the light-hearted salute, the joyous mien. It was an occasion that came near to being festal, and Solon Denney was its hero. He sought to bear his honors with the modesty that is native to him, but in his heart he knew that we now spoke of him glibly as the Boss of Little Arcady, and the consciousness of it bubbled in his manner in spite of him.

When it was all over,--though I had not once raised my voice in protest, and had frankly connived with the others,--I confess that I felt shame for us and pity for the friendless man we were sending out into the world. Something childlike in his acceptance of the proposal, a few phrases of naive enthusiasm for his new prospects, repeated to me by Solon, touched me strangely. It was, therefore, with real embarrassment that I read the Argus notice. "With profound regret," it began, "we are obliged to announce to our readers the determination of our distinguished fellow-townsmen, Colonel J. Rodney Potts, to shake the dust of Little Arcady from his feet. Deaf to entreaties from our leading citizens, the gallant Colonel has resolved that in simple justice to himself he must remove to some larger field of action, where his native genius, his flawless probity, and his profound learning in the law may secure for him those richer rewards which a man of his unusual caliber commendably craves and so abundantly merits."

There followed an overflowing half-column of warmest praise, embodying felicitations to the unnamed city so fortunate as to secure this "peerless pleader and Prince of Gentlemen." It ended with the assurance that Colonel Potts would take with him the cordial good-will of every member of a community to which he had endeared himself, no less by his sterling civic virtues than by his splendid qualities of mind and heart.

The thing filled me with an indignant pity. I tried in vain to sleep. In the darkness of night our plan came to seem like an atrocious outrage upon a guileless, defenceless ne'er-do-well. For my share of the guilt, I resolved to convey to Potts privately on the morrow a more than perfunctory promise of aid, should he find himself distressed at any time in what he would doubtless term his new field of endeavor.

CHAPTER II

THE GOLDEN DAY OF COLONEL POTTS

I awoke the next morning under most vivid portents of calamity. I believe I am neither notional, nor given to small, vulgar superstitions, but I have learned that this peculiar sensation is never without significance. I remember that I felt it the night our wagon bridge went out by high water. I tried to read the presentiment as I dressed. But not until I was shaving did it relate itself to the going out of Potts. Then the illumination came with a speed so electric that I gashed my chin under the shock of it. Instantly I seemed to know, as well as I know to-day, that the Potts affair had, in some manner, been botched.

So apprehensive was I that I lingered an hour on my little riverside porch, dreading the events that I felt the day must unfold. Inevitably, however, I was drawn to the centre of things. Turning down Main Street at the City Hotel corner, on the way to my office, I had to pass the barber-shop of Harpin Cust, in front of which I found myself impelled to stop. Looking over the row of potted geraniums in the window, I beheld Colonel Potts in the chair, swathed to the chin in the barber's white cloth, a gaze of dignified admiration riveted upon his counterpart in the mirror. Seen thus, he was not without a similarity to pictures of the Matterhorn, his bare, rugged peak rising fearsomely above his snow-draped bulk. Harpin appeared to be putting the last snipping touches to the Colonel's too-long neglected side-whiskers. On the table lay his hat and gold-headed cane, and close at hand stood his bulging valise.

I walked hastily on. The thing was ominous. Yet, might it not merely denote that Potts wished to enter upon his new life well barbered? The bulging bag supported this possibility, and yet I was ill at ease.

Reaching my office, I sought to engage myself with the papers of an approaching suit, but it was impossible to ignore the darkling cloud of disaster which impended. I returned to the street anxiously.

On my way to the City Hotel, where I had resolved to await like a man what calamity there might be, I again passed the barber-shop.

Harpin Cust now leaned, gracefully attentive, on the back of the empty chair, absently swishing his little whisk broom. Before him was planted Potts, his left foot advanced, his head thrown back, reading to Harpin from a spread page of the Argus. I divined that he was reading Solon's comment upon himself, and I shuddered.

As I paused at the door of the hotel Potts emerged from the barber-shop. In one hand he carried his bag, in the other his cane and the Little

Arcady Argus_. His hat was a bit to one side, and it seemed to me that he was leaning back farther than usual. He had started briskly down the street in the opposite direction from me, but halted on meeting Eustace Eubanks. The Colonel put down his bag and they shook hands. Eustace seemed eager to pass on, but the Colonel detained him and began reading from the Argus. His voice carried well on the morning air, and various phrases, to which he gave the full meed of emphasis, floated to me on the gentle breeze. "That peerless pleader and Prince of Gentlemen," came crisply to my ears. Eustace appeared to be restive, but the Colonel, through caution, or, perhaps, mere friendliness, had moored him by a coat lapel.

The reading done, I saw that Eustace declined some urgent request of the Colonel's, drawing away the moment his coat was released. As they parted, my worst fears were confirmed, for I saw the Colonel progress flourishingly to the corner and turn in under the sign, "Barney Skeyhan; Choice Wines, Liquors, and Cigars."

"What did he say?" I asked of Eustace as he came up.

"It was exceedingly distasteful, Major." Eustace was not a little perturbed by the encounter. "He read every word of that disgusting article in the Argus and then he begged me to go into that Skeyhan's drinking-place with him and have a glass of liquor. I said very sharply, 'Colonel Potts, I have never known the taste of liquor in my whole life nor used tobacco in any form.' At that he looked at me in the utmost astonishment and said: 'Bless my soul! Really? Young man, don't you put it off another day--life is awful uncertain.' 'Why, Colonel,' I said, 'that isn't any way to talk,' but he simply tore down the street, saying that I was taking great chances."

"And now he is reading his piece to Barney Skeyhan!" I groaned.

"Rum is the scourge of our American civilization," remarked Eustace, warmly.

"Barney Skeyhan's rum would scourge anybody's civilization," I said.

"Of course I meant all civilization," suggested Eustace, in polite help to my lame understanding.

Precisely at nine o'clock Potts issued from Skeyhan's, bearing his bag, cane, and Argus as before. He looked up and down the quiet street interestedly, then crossed over to Hermann Hoffmuller's, another establishment in which our civilization was especially menaced. He was followed cordially by five of Little Arcady's lesser citizens, who had obviously sustained the relation of guests to him at Skeyhan's. In company with Westley Keyts and Eubanks, I watched this procession from the windows of the City Hotel. Solon Denney chanced to pass at the moment, and we hailed him.

"Oh, I'll soon fix that," said Solon, confidently. "Don't you worry!"

And forthwith he sent Billy Durgin, who works in the City Hotel, to Hoffmuller's. He was to remind Colonel Potts that his train left at eleven-eight.

Billy returned with news. Potts was reading the piece to Hoffmuller and a number of his patrons. Further, he had bought, and the crowd was then

consuming, the two fly-specked bottles of champagne which Hoffmuller had kept back of his bar, one on either side of a stuffed owl, since the day he began business eleven years before.

Billy also brought two messages to Solon: one from Potts that he had been mistaken about the attitude of Little Arcady toward himself--that he was seeing this more clearly every minute. The other was from Hoffmuller. Solon Denney was to know that some people might be just as good as other people who thought themselves a lot better, and would he please not take some shingles off a man's roof?

Solon, ever the incorrigible optimist, said, "Of course I might have waited till he was on the train to give him the money; but don't worry, he'll be ready enough to go when the 'bus starts."

I felt unable to share his confidence. That presentiment had for the moment corrupted my natural hopefulness.

It was a few moments after ten when Potts next appeared to our group of anxious watchers. This time he had more friends. They swarmed respectfully but enthusiastically after him out of Hoffmuller's place, a dozen at least of our ne'er-do-wells. One of these, "Big Joe" Kestril, a genial lout of a section-hand, ostentatiously carried the bag and had an arm locked tenderly through one of the Colonel's. These two led the procession. It halted at the corner, where the Colonel began to read his Argus notice to Bela Bedford, our druggist, who had been on the point of entering his store. But the newspaper had suffered. It was damp from being laid on bars, and parts of it were in tatters. The reader paused, midway of the first paragraph, to piece a tear across the column, and Bedford escaped by dashing into his store. The Colonel, suddenly discovering that he could recite the thing from memory, did so with considerable dramatic effect, seeming not to notice the defection of Bedford. The crowd cheered madly when he had finished, and followed him across the street to the bar of the City Hotel.

We could now observe better. The bar of the City Hotel is next the office. A door is open between them with a wooden screen standing before it. Inside the carouse raged, while we, who had thought to set Potts at large, listened and wondered. The taller among us could overlook the screen. We beheld Potts, one elbow resting on the bar, his other hand with the cane in it waving forward his unreluctant train, while he loudly inquired if there were drink to be had suitable for a gentleman who was prepared to spend his money like a lord.

"None of that cooking whiskey, mind--nothing but the best bottled goods, if you please!" was the next suggestion.

Again the crowd cheered. New faces were constantly appearing. The news had gone out with an incredible rapidity. Honest men, inflamed by the report, were leaving their works and speeding to the front from as far north as the fair-grounds and as far south as the depot.

"Soon," said Potts, after the first drink, "ah, too soon, I shall be miles away from your thriving little hamlet,--as pretty a spot, by the way, as God ever made,--seeing none but strange faces, longing for the old hearty hand-clasps, seeking, perhaps, in vain, for one kindly look which--which is now to be observed on every hand. But, friends, Colonel J. Rodney will not forget you. I have rare prospects, but no matter. To this little spot, the fairest in all Nature,--here among your simple,

heartfelt faces, where I first got my start,--here my feelings will ever and anon return; for--why should I conceal it?--it is you, my friends, who have made me the man I am."

Here Potts put an arm over the shoulder of Big Joe and urged pleadingly: "Another verse of that sweet old song, boys. I tell you that has the true heart-stuff in it--now--"

They roared out a verse of "Auld Lang Syne," with execrable attempts at part-singing, little Dan Lefferts, a dissolute house-painter, contributing a tenor that was simply maniacal.

Potts ordered more drinks. This done, he leaned heavily upon the bar and burst into tears. The varlets crowded about him with tender, soothing words, while we in the other room anxiously watched them and the clock.

He was overcome, it seemed, by the affection which it now transpired that Little Arcady bore for him. Presently he half dried his tears and drew from an inner pocket of his coat the package of our letters.

With eyes again streaming, in a sob-riven voice, he read them all to the pleased crowd. At the end, he regained control of himself.

"Gentlemen, believe it or not, nothing has touched me like this since I bade farewell to my regiment in '65. You are getting under the heart of Jonas Rodney this time--I can't deny that."

He began on the letters again, selecting the choicest, and not forgetting at intervals to rebuke the bar-tender for alleged inactivity.

At last the clock marked ten-forty, and we heard the welcome rumble of the 'bus wheels. There was a hurried consultation with Amos Deane, the driver. He was to enter the bar in a brisk, businesslike way, seize the bag, and hustle the Colonel out before he had time to reflect. We peered over the screen, knowing the fateful moment was come.

We saw the Colonel resist the attack on his bag and listen with marked astonishment to the assertion of Amos that there was just time to catch the train.

"Time was made for slaves," said Potts.

"That there train ain't goin' to wait a minute," reminded Amos, civilly. The Colonel turned upon him with a large sweetness of manner.

"Ah, yes, my friend, but trains will be passing through your pretty little hamlet for years--I hope for ages--yet. They pass every day, but you can't have Jonas Rodney Potts every day."

Here, with a gesture, he directed the crowd's attention to Amos.

"Look at him, gentlemen. Speak to him for me--for I cannot. I ask you to note the condition he's in." Here, again, the Colonel burst into tears. "And, oh, my God!" he sobbed, "could they ask me to trust myself to a drunken rowdy of a driver, even if I was going?" Amos was not only sober, he was a shrewd observer of events, a seasoned judge of men. He turned away without further parley. Big Joe told him he ought to be in better business than trying to break up a pleasant party.

As the 'bus started, the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" floated to us again, and we knew the day was lost.

"A hand of iron in a cunning little velvet glove," said Westley Keyts, in deep disgust as he left us. "It looks to me a darned sight more like a hand of mush in a glove of the _same!_"

I have often been brought to realize that the latent nobility in our human nature is never so effectually aroused as at the second stage of alcoholic dementia. The victim sustains a shock of illumination hardly less than divine. On a sudden he is vividly cognizant of his overwhelming spiritual worth. Dazed in the first moment of this flooding consciousness, he is presently to be heard recalling instances of his noble conduct under difficulty, of righteous fortitude under strain. Especially does he find himself endowed with the antique virtues--with courage and a rugged fidelity, a stainless purity of motive, a fond and measureless generosity.

To this stage the libations of Potts had now brought him. He began to refresh the crowd with comments upon his own worth, interspersed with kindly but hurt appreciations of the great world's lack of discernment. He besought and defied each gentleman present to recall an occasion, however trivial, when his conduct had fallen short of the loftiest standards. Especially were they begged to cite an instance when he had deviated in the least degree from a line of strictest loyalty to any friend. Big Joe Kestrel was overcome at this. He broke down and wept out upon the shoulder of Potts his hopeless inability to comply with that outrageous request. The entire crowd became emotional, and a dozen lighted matches were thrust forward toward an apparently incombustible cigar with which Potts had long striven.

Recovering from these first ravages of his self-analysis, the Colonel became just a bit critical.

"But you see, boys, a man of my attributes is hampered and kept down in a one-horse place like this. Remarks have been passed about me here that I should blush to repeat. I say it in confidence, but I have again and again been made the sport of a wayward and wanton ridicule. I say, gentlemen, I have always conducted myself as only a Potts knows how to conduct himself--and yet I have been pestered by cheap flings at my personal bearing. Is this courtesy, is it common fairness, is it the boasted civilization of our nineteenth century?"

[Illustration: "AND YET I HAVE BEEN PESTERED BY CHEAP FLINGS AT MY PERSONAL BEARING."]

Hoarse expressions of incredulity, of execration, of disgust, came from the crowd as it raised glasses once more. The Colonel glared down the sloppy length of the bar, then gazed aloft into the smoky heights. The crowd waited for him to say something.

"This is a beautiful day, gentlemen. A fine, balmy spring day. Let us be out and away to mossy dells. Why stay in this low drinking-place when all Nature beckons? Come on back to Hoffmuller's. Besides,"--he cast a reproachful look at the bar-tender,"--"the hospitality of this place is not what an upright citizen of this great republic has a right to expect when he's throwing his good money right and left."

He marched out in hurt dignity, followed by his train, many of whom, in

loyalty to their host, sneered openly at the bar-tender as they passed.

Outside the Colonel poised himself in gala attitude, and benignantly surveyed our quiet little Main Street in both directions. Across the way in the door of the First National Bank stood Asa Bundy, a look of interest on his face.

The Colonel's sweeping glance halted upon Bundy. With a glad cry he started across to him, but Bundy, beholding the move, fled actively inside. The Colonel reached the door of the bank and tried the knob, but the key had been turned in the lock, and the next moment the curtains of the door were swiftly drawn. "Bank Closed" was printed upon them in large gold letters.

Potts stepped aside to look into the window, and the curtain of that descended relentlessly. The bank had suddenly taken on an aspect of Sabbath blankness. Once more the Colonel rattled the knob, then he turned to his gathering followers.

"Gentlemen, I came here to press the hand of one of Nature's noblemen, my tried friend, the Honorable Asa Bundy, whom we have just seen retreating to his precincts, as I might say, with a modesty that is rarely beautiful. But no matter." Here the Colonel mounted the top step and glowed out upon his faithful and ever enlarging band.

"Instead, my friends, allow me to read you this splendid tribute from Bundy, and I trust that after this I shall never hear one of you utter a word in his disparagement."

Rapidly fluttering the packet of letters, he drew out one bearing the imprint of the First National Bank of Little Arcady. The crowd, pressing closer, was cheerfully animated. From down the street on both sides anxious looks were bent upon the scene by many of our leading citizens.

"To Whom it May Concern," began the Colonel, in a voice that carried to the confines of our business centre; "The determination of our esteemed citizen, Colonel J. Rodney Potts, to remove from our town makes it fitting that I record my high appreciation of his character as a man and his unusual attainments as a lawyer. His going will be a grievous loss to our community, atoned for only by the knowledge that he will better himself in a field of richer opportunities. He has proved himself to possess in full measure those qualities which go to the making of the best American citizenship, and these, as exercised in our behalf during his all too-short sojourn among us, entitle him to be cordially commended as worthy of all trust in any position to which he may aspire. Very sincerely, A. Bundy, President."

Again and again the crowd cheered, and there were encouraging calls for Bundy; but the First National Bank stolidly preserved its Sabbath front.

A moment later the Colonel was leading his steadfast cohort across the street again. Marvin Chislett had unwarily peeped from inside the door of his mercantile establishment. There was but time to turn the key and draw the curtains before the procession halted. Such behavior may have perplexed Potts, but daunt him it could not. From Chislett's top step he read Chislett's letter to the delighted throng, a letter in which Potts was said to bear an unblemished reputation, and to be a gentleman and a scholar, amply meriting any trust that might be reposed in him.

From Chislett's they moved on to the foot of the stairs leading to the _Argus_ office. Potts sent Big Joe up for twenty-five copies of the latest number, and, standing on the coal box, he gallantly distributed these to the crowd as it filed before him, intoning from memory, meantime, snatches of the eulogy, while the crowd flourished the papers and gurgled noisily.

A brief plunge into the lethal flood at Skeyhan's, and they came once more abroad, this time closing the Boston Cash Store most expeditiously. Potts, enthroned upon a big box in front, among bolts of muslin, straw hats, and bunches of innocent early lettuce, read the splendid tribute of the store's proprietor to his capacity as an expert in jurisprudence and his fitness for a seat of judicial honor. The bank and Chislett's being still closed, the little street, except in the near vicinity of Potts, began to sleep in a strange calm.

There were other doors to conquer, however, and Potts, at the head of his _Argus_-waving crowd of degenerates, vanquished them all.

Up and down he wandered busily, doors closing and curtains falling swiftly at his approach. Then would he turn majestically, and say, with a hand raised, "My friends, a moment's silence, while I read you this magnificent tribute from one who is unfortunately not among us."

He was so impressive with this that at last the crowd would remove hats at each reading, to the Colonel's manifest approval. The doffed hat and the clutched _Argus_ became the mark of his drink-bought serfs. By four o'clock the only hospitable doorways on the street were those of the three saloons. Our leading business men were departing from their establishments by back doors and the secrecy of gracious alleys.

From Skeyhan's to Hoffmuller's, from Hoffmuller's to the City Hotel, the crowd sang and shouted its irregular progress, the air being "Auld Lang Syne."

It was about this time that the Colonel unhappily caught a glimpse of myself through the window of the hotel. A glad light came into his eyes, and at once he searched among the letters, crying, meanwhile: "My brother in arms! A younger brother, but a gallant officer, none the less--"

I knew that he sought my letter. Egress from the City Hotel may be achieved, when desirable, by a side door, and I saw no more of Potts that day. I believe my letter spoke of him as an able and graceful pleader, meriting judicial honors, or something of that sort. I had forgotten its exact words, but I did not wish to hear Potts read them. So I fled to spend the remainder of that eventful day quietly among rosebushes and tender, budding hyacinths, unspotted of the world, receiving, however, occasional bulletins of the orgy from passers-by. From these and sundry narratives gleaned the following day, I was able to trace the later hours of this scandalous saturnalia.

By six o'clock Potts had spent all his money. By six-fifteen this fact could no longer be concealed, and such of his following as had not already fallen by the wayside crept, one by one, to rest. They left the Colonel dreamily, murmuringly happy in a chair at the end of the City Hotel bar.

Here, he was discovered about six-thirty by Eustace Eubanks, who had

incautiously thought to rebuke him.

"For shame, Colonel Potts!" began Eustace, seeking to fix the uncertain eyes with his finger of scorn. "For shame to have squandered all that money for rum. Don't you know, sir, that a hundred and sixty thousand men die yearly in our land from the effects of rum?"

"Hundred sixty thousand!" mused the Colonel, in polite amazement. "Well, well, figures can't lie! What of it?"

"You have dishonestly spent that money given to you in sacred trust."

This seemed to arouse Potts, and he surveyed Eubanks with more curiosity than delight. He arose, buttoned his coat, fixed his hat firmly upon his head, and took up his stick and bag. He put upon Eustace a glance of dignified urbanity, as he spoke.

"I don't know who you are, sir,--never saw you before in my life,--but I have done what every good citizen should do. I have spent my money at home. This is a cheap place, full of cheap men. What the town needs, sir, is capital--capital to develop its attributes and industries. It needs more men with the public spirit of J. Rodney, sir. I bid you good evening! Ah, this has been indeed a beautiful day!"

He walked out. Those who watched him until he turned out of Main Street into Fourth, and so toward the river, aver--marvelling duly at his powers of resistance--that the head of Potts was erect, his gaze bent aloft, and his gait one of perfect directness save that he stepped a little high.

I like to think of him in that last walk. I like to bring up as nearly as I can his intense exaltation. It had been a beautiful day. And now, as he looked aloft, walking with an automatic precision, his eyes must have beheld glorious vistas, in which he rode a chariot of triumph at the head of a splendid procession, while his ears rang with chaste tributes to his worth trumpeted by outriding heralds. And the good earth was firm beneath his tread, stretching broadly off for him to walk upon and behold his apotheosis.

I cannot wonder that he stepped high, nor can I find it in my heart to begrudge him his day. Cunningly had he clutched a few golden moments from the hoard that Fate, the niggard, guards from us so jealously. To myself I acclaimed him as one to be envied.

I have always liked to believe that the splendors of that last walk endured to the end--that there was no uncertainty, no hesitation, above all, no vulgar stumbling; but that the last high step, which plunged him into the chill waters of the race, was lifted in the same exulting serenity as the first.

I stood in my garden that evening, charmed by the wild, sweet, gusty-gentle music of the spring night.

Northward, in the gathering dusk, came a solitary figure walking rapidly--a slight, nervous figure, a soft hat drawn well over the face, the skirts of its coat streaming to the breeze. As it passed me, I recognized Solon Denney. He was gesticulating with some violence, and I could see his expressive face work as if he uttered words to himself. I thought it possible that he might be composing a piece for his

newspaper. Instantly there came to my mind that rather coarse paraphrase of Westley Keyts--"A hand of mush in a glove of the _same!_"

I did not intrude upon my friend as he passed.

CHAPTER III

THE PERFECT LOVER

To the crime of being Potts the wretched Colonel had now added malversation of a trust fund. But I crave surcease, while it may be mine, from the immediately troubling waters of Potts. Let me turn more broadly to our town and its good people for that needed recreation which they never fail to afford me.

"Arcady of the Little Country," we often say. On maps it is Little Arcady, county seat of Slocum County, an isle and haven in the dreary land sea that flattens away from it on every side,--north to the big woods, south to the swamp counties, and east and west, one might almost say, a thousand miles to the mountains. Our point is one from which to say either "back East" or "out West." It is neither, of itself, though it touches both.

We are so ancient that plenty of us remember the stone fireplace in the log-cabin, with its dusters for the hearth of buffalo tail and wild-turkey wing, with iron pot hung by a chain from the chimney hook, with pewter or wooden plates from which to eat with horn-handled knives and iron spoons. But yet are we so modern that we have fine new houses with bay windows, ornamental cupolas, and porches raving woodenly in that fretful fever which the infamous scroll-saw put upon fifty years of our land's domestic architecture. And these houses are furnished with splendid modern furniture, even with black walnut, gold touched and upholstered in blue plush and maroon, fresh from the best factories. Our fairly old people remember when they hunted deer and were hunted by the red Indian on our town site, while their grandchildren have only the memories of the town-born, of the cottage-organ, the novel railroad, and the two-story brick block with ornamental false front. In short, we round an epoch within ourselves, historically and socially.

The country, however, keeps its first purity of charm, a country of little hills and little valleys lined with little quick rivers. These beauties, indeed, have not gone unsung. Years ago a woman poet eased her heart of ecstasies about this Little Country.

"Here swells the river in its boldest course," she wrote, "interspersed by halcyon isles on which Nature has lavished all her prodigality in tree, vine, and flower, banked by noble bluffs three hundred feet high, their sharp ridges as exquisitely definite as the edge of a shell; their summits adorned with those same beautiful trees and with buttresses of rich rock, crested with old hemlocks that wear a touching and antique grace amid the softer and more luxuriant vegetation."

Not spectacular, this--not sensational--not even unusual. Common enough little hills, as the world goes, with the usual ragged-edged village between them and the river, peopled by human beings entirely usual both

in their outer and inner lives. It seems to be, indeed, not a place in which events could occur with any romantic fitness.

Perhaps I have grown to love this Little Country because I am a usual man. Perhaps I would have felt as much for it even had I not been held to it by a memory that would bind me to any spot howsoever unlovely. But I rejoiced always in its beauty, and more than ever when it made easier for me the only life it once appeared that I should live. I quote again from our visiting poet: "The aspect of this country was to me enchanting beyond any I have ever seen, from its fulness of expression, its bold and impassioned sweetness. Here the flood has passed over and marked everywhere its course by a smile. The fragments of rock touch it with a mildness and liberality which give just the needed relief. I should never be tired here, though I have elsewhere seen country of more secret and alluring charms, better calculated to stimulate and suggest. Here the eye and heart are filled."

Here, too, my eye and heart were filled--emptied--and wondrously filled yet again, for which last I hold Potts to be curiously--but I wander.

Enough to say that I stored a harvest of memories in a secret place here years ago. And I went to this on days when I was downhearted. Your boy of fifteen, I think, is the only perfect lover--giving all, demanding nothing, save, indeed, the right to his secret cherishings.

Tremors, born within me that day when old gray, bristling Leggett, our Principal, opened the schoolroom door upon Lucy Tait, are as poignant, as sweetly terrible, now as in that far time when the light of her wondrous presence first fell upon me.

An instant she hesitated timidly in the sombre frame of the doorway, looking far over our heads. Then old Leggett came in front of her. There was a word of presentation to Miss Berham, our teacher, the vision was escorted to a seat at my left front, and I was bade to continue the reading lesson if I ever expected to learn anything. As a matter of truth I did not expect to learn anything more. I thought I must suddenly have learned all there is to know. The page of the ancient reader over which I then mumbled is now before me. "A Good Investment" was the title of the day's lesson, and I had been called upon to render the first paragraph. With lightness, unrecking the great moment so perilously at hand, I had begun: "'Will you lend me two thousand dollars to establish myself in a small retail business?' inquired a young man, not yet out of his teens of a middle-aged gentleman who was poring over his ledger in the counting room of one of the largest establishments in Boston."

The iron latch rattled, the door swung fatefully back, our heads were raised, our eyes bored her through and through.

Then swung a new world for me out of primeval chaos, and for aeons of centuries I dizzied myself gazing upon the pyrotechnic marvel.

"_Continue, Calvin!_--if you ever expect to learn anything."

The fabric of my vision crumbled. Awake, I glared upon a page where the words ran crazily about like a disrupted colony of ants. I stammered at the thing, feeling my cheeks blaze, but no two words would stay still long enough to be related. I glanced a piteous appeal to authority, while old Leggett, still standing by, crumpled his shaven upper lip into a professional sneer that I did not like.

"That will _do_, Calvin. Sit down! Solon Denney, you may go on."

With careless confidence, brushing the long brown lock from his fair brow, came Solon Denney to his feet. With flawless self-possession he read, and I, disgraced, cowering in my seat, heard words that burned little inconsequential brands forever into my memory. Well do I recall that the middle-aged gentleman regarded the young man with a look of surprise, and inquired, "What security can you give me?" to which the latter answered, "Nothing but my note."

"Which I fear would be below par in the market,' replied the merchant, smiling.

"Perhaps so,' said the young man, 'but, Mr. Barton, remember that the boy is not the man; the time may come when Hiram Strosser's note will be as readily accepted as that of any other man.'

"True, very true,' replied Mr. Barton, thoughtfully, 'but you know business men seldom lend money without adequate security; otherwise they might soon be reduced to penury.'"

"Benny Jeliffe, you may go on!"

During this break I stole my second look at her. The small head was sweetly bent with an air of studious absorption--a head with two long plaits of braided gold, a scarlet satin bow at the end of each.

It seems to me now that these bows were like the touch of frosted woodbine in a yellowing elm, though at the moment I must have been unequal to this fancy. I saw, too, the tiny chain that clasped her fair throat, her dress of pale blue, and, most wonderful of all, two tassels that danced from the tops of her trim little boots. The air was indeed too heavy with beauty. But the reading lesson continued.

The years that stretch between that time and this have not bereaved me of the knowledge that Mr. Barton graciously accommodated Hiram Strosser, after vainly seeking to induce "Mr. Hawley, a wealthy merchant of Milk Street," to share half the risk.

At this point a row of stars on the page indicated a lapse of ten years. Mr. Barton, "pale and agitated," examines with deepening despair, "page after page of his ponderous ledger." At last he exclaims, "I am ruined, utterly ruined!" "How so?" inquires Hiram Strosser, who enters the room just in time to hear the cry. Mr. Barton explains,--the failure of Perleg, Jackson & Co. of London--news brought on last steamer--creditors pressing him.

"What amount would tide you over this crisis?' asks Hiram Strosser, respectfully.

"Seventy-five thousand dollars!"

"Then, sir, you shall have it,' replied Hiram, and stepping to the desk he drew a check for the full amount."

Nor can I ever forget the stroke of poetic justice with which the anecdote concluded. Mr. Hawley of Milk Street was also embarrassed by the failure of Perleg, Jackson & Co., but, for want of a trustful friend

in funds, was thrown into bankruptcy. Mr. Barton had the chastened pleasure of telling Mr. Hawley about Hiram's loan, and of reminding him that he had neglected a fair opportunity to become a co-benefactor of that upright and open-handed youth; whereupon the ruined Hawley--deservedly ruined, the tale implied--"moved on, dejected and sad, while Mr. Barton returned to his establishment cheered and animated."

The gross, the immoral romanticism of this tale was not then, of course, apparent to me. Children are so defenceless! Child that I was, I believed it would be entirely practicable for a lad in his teens to borrow two thousand dollars from a Boston merchant, by reminding him that the boy is not the man. So readily is the young mind poisoned. During the latter part of the lesson, between looks stolen fearfully at her profile, I was mentally engaged in borrowing two thousand dollars from a convenient Mr. Barton with which to establish myself in a small retail business--preferably a candy store with an ice-cream parlor in the rear. Then I took her to wife, not forgetting to reward Mr. Barton handsomely in the day of his ruin. Dimly, in the background of this hasty dramatization, the distrustful Mr. Hawley, who refused to share the loan with Mr. Barton, figured as a rival for my love's hand; and lived to hear her say that she hated, loathed, and despised him.

At recess the others crowded about her, girls at the centre, within a straggling circumference of young males, who dissembled their gallantry under a pretence of being mere brutal marauders.

But I, solitary, moped and gloomed in a far grassy corner of the school yard. I could not be of that crowd, and it was then I perceived for the first time that the world was too densely populated. I saw how much better it would be if every one but she and I were dead. Thereupon, in a breath, I dispeopled the earth of all but us two, and with the courage gained of this solitude, I saw myself approach her there at the corner of the old brick schoolhouse, greeting her with assurances that everything was all right,--and then, after she understood what I had done, and how fine it was, we came into our own. Alas, how bitter the crude truth! Instead of this, those wondrous tassels now danced from her boot tops as she gave chase to Solon Denney, who had pulled one of the scarlet bows from its yellow braid. Grimly I was aware that he should be the first to go out of the world, and I called upon a just heaven to slay him as he fled with his trophy. But nothing sweet and fitting happened. He went unblasted.

She came back to the group of girls, flushed and lovely beyond compare, holding up the ravished end of that golden braid with a comic dismay, while her despoiler laughed coarsely from a distance and pinned the trophy to his coat lapel. I now saw that blasting was too merciful. He should be removed by a slower process if the thing could as easily be arranged.

That was a bitter recess, even though I learned her wonderful name and the enchanted state "back East" from which she had come. A still more bitter experience awaited me when we were again in the schoolroom. Miss Berham, fastening a steely gaze upon Solon Denney, launched heaven upon him from tightly drawn lips, without in the least meaning to do so.

"Solon Denney, you may return that ribbon at once to its owner!"

With a conscious smirk, amid the titters of the room and the sharp raps

of the ruler on Miss Berham's desk, Solon swaggered offensively to the seat that enshrined my idol, and flung down the scarlet treasure before her. She merely pushed the thing away, bending her head lower above her book--pushed it away with a blind little hand, and with undiminished bravado her despoiler returned, scathless of heaven's vengeance, to his seat.

"And you may remain half an hour after school. The A-class, ready for geography!"

Thus, lightly did our ruler turn from tragedy to comedy. For tragedy, there was the look my queen lavished upon Solon when she heard his sentence; a look of blushing merriment, with a maddening dash of pity in it,--he was to suffer because of her.

"'Twas your beauty that made me do it," he might have quoted, with the old result. How I longed for the jaunty lightness that would have let me do a thing like that, tossing me fairly to the pinnacle of a public association with her! But I, instead, moped alone, knowing well that the gifts of graceful brigandage were not mine. Had I snatched that ribbon, there would have been tears and a mad outcry at my brutal roughness.

Now came the lesson in geography. I had known it, had studied it faithfully that morning. It treated of the state from which she had so lately come. But, now, all knowledge of it fled me, save that on the map it was a large, clumsy state, though yellow, the color of her hair. Was it to be bounded like any cheaper state? Did it have principal products, like Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and other ordinary states? Its color was rightly golden; had it not produced her? But other products,--iron, coal, wheat,--these were stuffs too base to fellow in the same mind with her. Had it principal industries, like any red, or green, or blue state on that pedantic map? I could no longer recall them. Formally confronted with this problem, I muttered shamefully again that day in the valley of Humiliation. There was, I knew, a picture at the top of the page in which strong, rugged men toiled at various tasks; but the natures of these had escaped me. Were they mining coal or building ships, catching fish or ploughing furrows in God's green earth? Out of my darkness I stammered, "Principal industries, agriculture and fish-building--"

"That will do, Calvin! You may remain after school to-night." I had never less liked the way she said this, as if it were a boon at which I would snatch, instead of a penalty imposed.

Solon Denney followed me, glibly enumerating the industries of a great and busy state. But I could not listen. Phantom-like in my poor mind floated a wordless conviction that, however it might once have been, the state would immediately abandon its industries now that she had come away from it. I beheld its considerable area desolated, the forges cold, the hammers stilled, the fields overgrown, the ships rotting at their docks, the stalwart mechanics drooping idly above their unfinished tasks. It was not possible to suppose that any one could feel, in a state which she had left, that interest which good work demands.

My disgrace brought me respite for fresh adventure. I was let alone. The world could still be peopled; even Solon Denney might survive a little time, for another picture in the same geography now reproduced itself in my inflamed mind--the picture of a South Sea island, a sandy beach with a few indolent natives lolling, negligent of tasks, in the shade of

cocoanut palms. Here, on the outer reef, I wrecked an excellent steamship. Over the rail sprang a stalwart lad, not out of his teens, with a lovely golden-haired girl in his arms. With strong, swift strokes, he struck out for the beach, notwithstanding his burden. The other passengers, a hazy and quite uninteresting lot, quickly went down; all save one, a coarse, swaggering youth with too much self-possession whom I need not name. He, too, sprang over the rail, but, nearing the beach, a justly enraged providence intervened and he was bitten neatly in two by a famished and adroit shark.

With some interest I watched his blood stain the lucid green waters, but it was soon over. Then I bore my fainting burden to the dry sands and revived her with cocoanut milk and breadfruit, while the natives crowded respectfully about and made us their king and queen on the spot. We lived there forever. How flat of sound were it to say that we lived happily!

And yet I doubt if Solon Denney ever suspected me of aspiring to be his rival. She, I think, knew it full well, in the way her sex knows matters not communicated by act or word of mouth. And once, on the afternoon of that day, a Friday, when we spoke pieces, I feared that Solon had found me out. He was a fiery orator, and I felt on this occasion that he delivered himself straight at me, with a very poorly veiled malignance. Surely, it must be I that he meant, literally, when he thundered out, "Sir, you are much mistaken if you think your talents have been as great as your life has been reprehensible!" Fall upon me and upon me alone seemed to flash his gaze.

"After a rank and clamorous opposition you became--all of a sudden--silent; you were silent for seven years; you were silent on the greatest questions--and you were silent _for money!_"

There could be no doubt, I thought, that he singled me from the multitude of his auditors. It was I who had supported the unparalleled profusion and jobbing of Lord Harcourt's scandalous ministry; I who had manufactured stage thunder against Mr. Eden for his anti-American principles--"You, sir, whom it pleases to chant a hymn to the immortal Hampden--you, sir, approved of the tyranny exercised against America, and you, sir, voted four thousand Irish troops to cut the throats of the Americans."

Under the burden of this imputed ignominy, was it remarkable that I faltered in my own piece immediately following?

"The Warrior bowed his crested head, and tamed his heart of fire,
And sued the haughty King to free his long imprisoned sire."

Not more foully was the blameless Don Sancho done to death than I upon this Friday murdered the ballad that recounts his fate. And she, who had hung breathless on Solon's denunciations of me, whispered chattily with Eva McIntyre during my rendition of "Bernardo del Carpio."

Later events, however, convinced me that I swam never in Solon's ken as a rival for her smiles. His own triumph was too easy, too widely heralded. In the second week of her coming, was there not a rhyme shouted on the playground, full in the hearing of both?

"First the post and then the gate,
Solon Denney and Lucy Tait."

Was not this followed by one more subtle, more pointed, more ribald?

"Solon's mad and I'm glad,
and I know what will please him;
a bottle of wine to make him shine
and Lucy Tait to tease him!"

I thought there was an inhuman, devilish deftness in the rhymes. The mighty mechanism of English verse had been employed to proclaim my remoteness from my love.

And yet the gods were once graciously good to me. One wondrous evening before hope died utterly I survived the ordeal of walking home with her from church.

She came with her aunt, uncle, and I present by the god's permission, surmised that she might leave them and go to her own home alone when church was out. Through that service I worshipped her golden braids and the pink roses on her leghorn hat. And when they sang, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" my voice soared fervently in the words, for I had satisfied myself by much craning of the neck that Solon Denney was not present. Even now the Doxology revives within me that mixed emotion of relief at his absence and apprehension for the approaching encounter with her.

She passed me at the portals of the house of a double worship, said good night to aunt and uncle--and I was at her side.

"May I have the pleasure of seeing you home?"

She managed a timid "Certainly." her hand fluttered within my arm, and my heart bounded forward like a freed race-horse. We walked!

Now it had been my occupation at quiet moments to devise conversation against the time of this precise miracle. I had dreamt that it might come to pass, even as it did, and I knew that talk for it should be stored safely away. This talk had been the coinage of my leisure. As we walked I would say, lightly,--"Do you like it here as well as you did back East?"--or, still better, as sounding more chatty,--"How do you like it here?"--an easy, masterful pause--"as well as you did back East?" A thousand times had I rehearsed the inflections until they were perfect. And now the time was come.

Whether I spoke at all or not until we reached her gate I have never known. Dimly in my memory is a suggestion that when we passed Uncle Jerry Honeycutt, I confided to her that he sent to Chicago for his ear-trumpet and that it cost twelve dollars. If I did this, she must have made a suitable response, though I retain nothing of it.

I only know that the sky was full of flaming meteors, that golden star dust rained upon us from an applauding heaven, that the earth rocked gently as we trod upon it.

Down the wonderful street we went, a strange street shimmering in mystic light--and then I was opening her gate. I, afterward, decided that surely at this moment, with the gate between us, I would have

remembered--superbly would I have said, "How do you like it here?--as well as you did back East?"

But, two staring boys passed us, and one of them spoke thus:--

"There's Horsehead Blake--hello, Horsehead!"

"That ain't old Horsehead," said the other.

"'Tis, too--ain't that you, Horsehead?"

"How do you do, boys!" I answered loftily, and they passed on appeased.

"Do they call you Horsehead?" she asked.

"Oh, yes!" I replied brightly. "It's a funny name, isn't it?" and I laughed murderously.

"Yes, it's very funny."

"Well, I'll have to be going now. Good night!"

"Good night!"

And she left me staring after her, the whole big world and its starry heavens crying madly within me to be said to her.

CHAPTER IV

DREAMS AND WAKINGS

The incomparable Lucy Tait was still but a star to be adored in her distant heaven when I went away from Little Arcady to learn some things not taught in the faded brick schoolhouse. It was six years before I came back; six years that I lived in a crowded place where people had no easy ways nor front yards with geranium beds, nor knew enough of their neighbors either to love or to hate them.

I came back to the Little Country a mannish being, learned in the law, and with the right sort of laugh in my heart for the old school days, for the simplicity of my boy's love.

But, there and then, with her old sweet want of pity, did she smite me again. Through and through she smote the man as she had smitten the boy. Treacherously it was, within my own citadel, at the very moment of my coming. Gayly up the remembered path I went, under the flowering horse-chestnut, to the little house standing back from the street, only to find that, as of old, she blocked my way. She stood where the pink-blossomed climber streamed up the columns of the little porch, and her arm was twined among the strands to draw them to her face. She was leaving,--but she had stayed too long; not the child with yellow braids, humorously preserved in my memory, but a blossomed, a fruiting Eve, with whilom braids massed high in a coronet, their gold a little tarnished. Later it came to me to think that she was Spring, and had filched a crown from Autumn. In that first glance, however, I could only wonder

instinctively if the tassels yet danced from her boot tops. I saw at once that this might not any longer be known. One could only surmise pleasantly. But straightway was I Atlas, stooping a little, rounding my shoulders under the earth she deigned to walk upon.

And the disconcerting strangeness of it was in this: that though she was no longer the woman child, yet with one flash of her gold-curtained eyes had she reduced me to my ancient schoolboy clumsiness. She was a woman, but, I was again an awkward, stammering boy, rebelliously declining to believe that a state she had come away from could retain any significance, industrial or otherwise. Nor, in the little time left to us, did I ever achieve a condition higher than this.

Consciously I was a prince of lofty origin in her presence, but ever unable to make known my excellencies of rank. It was as in a dream when we must see evil approach without power to raise an averting hand.

She was Spring with a stolen crown of Autumn; and again, she was a sherbet--sweet, fragrant, cold, and about to melt--but not for me. I knew that.

I heard presently that she spoke well of me. She spoke of my having a kind face--even the kindest face in the world.

"The _kindest, plainest_ face in the world," was her fashion of putting it. And of course that made it hopeless, since, surely, no woman has ever loved the kindest face she knew.

Only a fool would have hoped after this--and at least I never gave her ground to call me that. Not even did I commit the folly of revealing my need. She alone ever knew it, and she only in the way that the child had known the schoolboy to gloom and rage afar in his passion for her. She had no word of mine for it then, nor had she now, and I believe she felt rather certain there never would be any. She seemed to be grateful for this and doubly kind, with only now and then the flash of a knowing look, or the trifle of a deep, swiftly questioning glance, born, I dare say, of that curiosity which the devil contrives to kindle in God's most angelic women.

Doubtless she had a little speech of refusal patted into kindness for me. Perhaps she would not have been wholly anguished to have me hear this--to be able to assure me tenderly, graciously, of the depth and pureness of her friendship for me. Who knows? I am older now, and things once hidden are revealed. Sometimes I think that a certain new respect for me grew within her as the days tried the metal of my silence--a respect, but nothing more. Her appreciation of my face was too palpably without those reservations that so often cry louder than words.

So we sealed our secret, she and I, in an unspoken pledge, and not even Solon Denney, so keen of scent for rivals, ever divined it.

He called me out with the old boyish whistle the day he confided to me the tremendous news of his engagement. He laughed, foolish with joy as he told it, and I felt tingling in my arms that old boyish, brute impulse to slay him for the wretched ease of his victory. But we were men, so I thrust one of those rebellious arms in among the strands of the creeper, where her own arm had once been, and laid the other on his shoulder in all friendliness. This, while he rambled on of the bigness of life, the great future before Arcady of the Little Country, the

importance of the Argus, which he had just founded, and the supreme excellence of that splendid mechanism, the new Washington hand-press, installed the week before.

His life was builded of these many interests, of her and himself and his country and his town. In the fulness of his heart he even brought out the latest Argus and read parts from his obituary of Douglas, while I stood stupidly striving to realize what I had long known must be true.

"A great man has fallen," he read, declaiming a little, as in our school days. "Stephen A. Douglas is dead. The voice that so lately and eloquently appealed to his countrymen is hushed in--"

How long he read is uncertain. But from moment to moment his tones would call me back from visions, and I would vaguely hear that one was gone who had warned his fellows against the pitfalls of political jealousy, and bade all who loved their country band against those who would seek to pluck a laurel from the wreath of our glorious confederacy.

But under visions I had made my resolve. Douglas was dead, but others were living.

Two months before in a gray dawn, the walls of a fort in Charleston Harbor had crumbled under fire from a score of rebel batteries. Now the shots echoed in my ears with a new volume.

"Good luck, Solon--and good-by--I'm going 'on to Richmond."

"Oh, that!" said he, easily, "that will be over before you can get to the front."

But I went, forthwith, and, triumphant lover though he was, the editor of the Little Arcady Argus was less than a prophet.

I went to the "little" war; and of her I carried, as I marched, an ambrotype in a closed case, which I had obtained deviously. She smiled in it, a little questioning, inciting smile, that seemed to lurk back in her eyes rather than along her lips. It was the smile that had availed to keep me firm in my vows of silence.

It was another picture I brought back five years later--the picture of a young girl, not smiling but grave, even fearful, as if she had faced the camera full of apprehension. But I knew her not; the thing had come to me by chance, and I threw it aside to be forgotten.

It is best to tell quickly that those years were swift and full. Early in the second a letter from Solon, read at a random camp-fire, told me of my namesake's coming. For the other years I pleased myself prodigiously by remembering that she must speak my name openly to her first-born. And I lusted for battle, then. I was an early Norseman, and I would escape the prosaic bed-death, since, for those dying thus, Held waited in her chill prison-house below, with hunger her dish, starvation her knife, care her bed, and anguish her curtains. To survive for easy death, long deferred, perhaps, I should have my empty dish and bed of care at once. Lacking the battle death, I could at least mimic it, as they did of old, that Odin's choosers of the slain might lead me to Valhalla. There should I forever fight at dawn and be healed at noon, if wounded, to be ready for the feast and song. The world was not big enough for us two if we must stay apart. Life was not to be lived in a

beggarly and ignoble compromise. War was its business, bravery its duty, and cowardice its greatest crime--above all, that ultimate, puling cowardice of accepting life empty for its own barren sake.

At the last I lay on a cot in a field hospital, entertained for the moment by the novelty of that vacant, spacious feeling on my left side--wondering if I could shave now with one arm--without another hand to pull my face into hard little hummocks for the razor.

I heard the soft quick tread of a hospital steward, and standing before me, he took from its envelope the letter Solon Denney had sent me to say that she was dead. I handed it back, told him to burn it, and I shut my eyes to the sickening shapes of life. My fever came up again, and in the night I felt inch by inch over ground wet with blood for a picture I had relinquished in a Quixotic moment. I must have been troublesome, for they gave me the drug of dreams and I awakened peacefully. I watched the field surgeons gather about a young line officer brought in with a shot through his neck. For the better probing of the wound they removed his head and gave it to me to hold. Seeing that it was Solon Denney's head, I was seized with a mood of jest--I would hide it and make Solon search. I advanced craftily down an endless corridor, but came to the edge of a wood, where there was a wicked spitting of shots. I cried out again, and once more they gave me the drug. Then I dreamed more quietly. I saw that the soul of my dead arm searched for her soul--that it would soon be drawn to her and offer itself to comfort her and never, never leave her. It would say, "At least take the arm, since you may have it without the face." It seemed that my other arm should go to her, too. This side of her there could be nothing for either to close upon. It appeared to me that I fell asleep on this fancy and dreamt that I awoke painfully to a poor, one-sided life, effortless, barren, forbidding.

A year later I went back to the Little Country to be counsellor at law to its people in time of need, and a father to Solon Denney and his two children. Solon could direct large affairs acceptably, but he and his babes were as thistle-down in a prairie wind.

He brought the children to visit me the first day that I came home--to a home where I was now to live alone.

I sat on the little porch above the river bank, by the wall of blossoming creeper whose tendrils she had once embraced, bringing her cheek intrepidly against the blossoms of that year, and saw him come slowly up the path. He seemed so sadly alone because of the two little creatures that followed him.

I placed a chair for Solon and was confronted by my namesake.

"Did they shoot your arm off in the war?" he asked.

"Yes, in the war."

He patted the empty sleeve, and his eyes beamed with discovery.

"What did you have your sleeve rolled up for when your arm was shot?"

I made plain to him the mystery of the whole sleeve.

"She often spoke of you," said Solon. "She seemed to think you would like to be a help to us if you could."

I turned to greet the woman child, but she had strayed into the house. I heard her shouts from my bedroom. Then she came running to us, cooing in helpless joy.

"Candy--candy--Uncle Maje--lovely candy--all pink and dusty."

Well over a face set with the mother's eyes was spilled that which she had clutched and eaten of,--a thing pink and dusty, in truth, but which was not candy.

"She does those things constantly," said the dejected father. "I don't see what I can do to her."

I saw, however, and did it, first wiping the tooth-powder from her face. She had called me Uncle Maje.

"She's a regular baddix," announced my namesake, gravely judicial. Then, as if with intention to indicate delicately that the family afforded striking contrasts, he added, "_I_ ain't a baddix--I can nearly sing."

The children fribbled about us while we talked away the afternoon. The woman child at last put me to thinking--to thinking that perhaps butterflies are not meant to be happily caught. With many shouts she had clumsily enough imprisoned one--a fairy thing of green and bronze--in a hand so plump that it seemed to have been quilted. A moment she held it, then set it free, perhaps for its lack of spirit. It crawled and fluttered up the vine, trailing a crumpled wing most sadly, and I took it for my lesson. Assuredly they were not to be caught with any profit--at least not brutally in an eager hand. Brush them ever so lightly and the bloom is off the wings. They are to be watched in their pretty flitting, loved only in their freedom and from afar, with no clumsy reachings. That was a good thing to know in any world.

The Argus announced my home-coming with a fine flourish of my title in Solon's best style. It said that I had come back to take up the practice of the law. Not even Solon knew that I had come back to the memory of her.

This is how it befell that I was presently engrossed to outward seeming with the affairs of Little Arcady--even to the extent of a casual Potts, and those blessed contingencies that were later to unfold from him. Thus I took my allotted place and the years began.

CHAPTER V

A MAD PRANK OF THE GODS

A week after the publication of that blithe bit of acrimony which opens this tale, Colonel J. Rodney Potts, recreated and natty in a new summer suit of alpaca, his hat freshly ironed, sued the town of Little Arcady for ten thousand dollar damages to his person and announced his candidacy at the ensuing election for the honorable office of Judge of Slocum County. He did this at the earnest solicitation of his many friends, in whose hands he had placed himself,--at least so read his

card of announcement in the Banner, our other paper. He did not name these solicitous friends; but it was an easy suspicion that they were the Democratic leaders, who thought by this means to draw votes from the Republican candidate to the advantage of their own, who, otherwise, was conceded to have no hope of election in a county overwhelmingly Republican.

It may be told with adequate confidence that Westley Keyts was not of their number. As to the damage suit, Westley found it unthinkable that Potts could deteriorate ten thousand dollars worth and still walk the earth. Indeed, he believed, and uttered a few rough words to express it, that ten dollars would be an excessive valuation even if Potts were utterly destroyed.

Being an earnest soul, Westley had taken the Potts affair very seriously. He made it a point to encounter the Colonel on an early day and to address him on Main Street in tones that lacked the least affectation of suavity or diplomatic guile. He had seen diplomacy tried and found wretchedly wanting. He would have no more of it ever. Like the straightaway man he was, he went to the meat of the matter.

"You squandered that hundred dollars we give you to git out of town on," he burst forth to Potts, breathing with an ominous difficulty.

"You just wait till you hear the worst of it," answered Potts, as he confidingly dusted the shoulder of Westley's coat. "The worst of it is I had over twelve dollars of my own money that I'd saved up--you know how hard it is to save money in these little towns--well, that went, too, every cent of it!"

It was admitted by witnesses competent to form an opinion that Westley's contorted face, his troubled breathing, his manner of stepping back, and the curious writhing of his stout arms, all encouraged a supposition that he might be contemplating immediate violence upon the person of Potts. At all events, this view was taken by the aggrieved and puzzled Colonel, who fled through the Boston Cash Store and, by means of a rear exit from that emporium, gained the office of Truman Baird, Justice of the Peace, where he swore to a legal document which averred that "the said Jonas R. Potts" was "in fear of immediate and great bodily harm, which he has reasonable cause to believe will be inflicted upon him by the said Westley Keyts."

The majesty of the law being thus invoked, Westley was put under a good and sufficient bond to refrain from "in any manner of attacking or molesting the said Potts, against the statutes therein made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the State of Illinois."

A proceeding so official somewhat dampened the fires of Mr. Keyts. He was a citizen, law-abiding by intention, with a patriot's esteem for government. It had merely not occurred to him that the summary extinction of Potts could be a performance at all incompatible with the peace and dignity of the great commonwealth to which he was at heart loyal. Being convinced otherwise, he abode grimly by the statutes therein made and provided. Nevertheless he returned to his shop and proceeded to cut up a quarter of beef with an energy of concentration and a ruthlessness of fury that caused Potts to shudder as he passed the door sometime later. By such demeanor, also, were the bondsmen of Westley--the first flush of their righteous enthusiasm faded--greatly disturbed. They agreed that he ought to be watched closely by day, and

they even debated the wisdom of sitting up nights with him for a time, turn by turn. But their charge dissuaded them from this precaution. He expended his first vicious fury usefully upon his stock in trade, with knife and saw and cleaver, and thereafter he was but petulant or sarcastic.

"I had the right of it," he insisted. "The only way to do with a person like him was to git your feathers and your kittle of tar cooked up all nice and gooey and git Potts on the ground and _make a believer of him_ right there and then!" This he followed by his pointed reflection upon the administrative talents of Solon Denney--"A hand of mush in a glove of the _same_!" When listeners were not by, he would mutter it to himself in sinister gutturals.

Nor was he alone in this spirit of dissatisfaction with Solon. The too-trustful editor of the _Argus_ was frankly derided. He was a Boss at whom they laughed openly. They waited, however, with interest for the subsequent issues of this paper.

The _Banner_ that week contained the following bit of news:--

=DASTARDLY ASSAULT IN BROAD DAYLIGHT=

=Early last Thursday evening, as Colonel J. Rodney Potts, dean of the Slocum County bar, was enjoying a quiet stroll along our beautiful river bank near Cady's mill, he was set upon by a gang of ruffians and would have been foully dealt with but for his vigorous resistance. Being a man of splendid proportions and a giant's strength, the Colonel was making gallant headway against the cowardly miscreants when his foot slipped and he was precipitated into the chilling waters of the mill-race at a point where the city fathers have allowed it to remain uncovered. Seeing their victim plunged into a watery grave, as they thought, the thugs took to their heels. The Colonel extricated himself from his perilous plight, by dint of herculean strength, and started to pursue them, but they had disappeared from sight in the vicinity of Crowder & Fancett's lumber yard. Things have come to a pretty pass, we must say, if such a dastardly outrage as this should be allowed to go unpunished. Now that Colonel Potts has brought suit against the city we suppose the council will have that mill-race covered. We have repeatedly warned them about this. We wonder if they ever heard a well-known saying about "locking the stable door after horse is stolen," etc.=

=The card of Colonel Potts, printed elsewhere in this issue, is a sufficient refutation of the malicious gossip that has been handed back and forth lately that he had planned to leave Little Arcady. It looks now like certain busybodies in this community had over-stepped themselves and been hoisted up by their own petard. The Colonel is a fine man for County Judge, and we bespeak for him the suffrages of every voter who wants an honest judiciary.=

Westley Keyts, reading this, wanted to know what a petard was. Inquiry disclosed that he hoped it might be something that could be used upon Potts to the advantage of almost every one concerned. But in the minds of others of us an agonized suspicion now took form. Had the letters been upon Potts when he went down? Had they been saved? Were they legible? And would he use them?

It was decided that Solon Denney should try to illuminate this point before taking the candidacy of Potts seriously. In the next issue of the

Argus, therefore, was this paragraph, meant to be provocative:--

=God's providence has been said to watch over fools and drunkards. We guess this is so; and that the pretensions of a certain individual in our midst to its watchfulness in the double capacity indicated can no longer be in doubt.=

These lines did their work. The next _Banner_ spoke of a foul conspiracy whose nefarious end it was to blacken the sterling character of a good man, of that Nestor of the Slocum County Bar, Colonel J. Rodney Potts. As testimony that the best citizens of the town were not involved with this infamous ring, it had extorted from Colonel Potts his consent to print certain letters from these gentlemen setting forth the Colonel's surpassing virtues in no uncertain terms--letters which his innate modesty had shrunk from making public, until goaded to desperation by the hell-hounds of a corrupt and subsidized opposition.

The letters followed in a terrific sequence--a series of laudations which the Chevalier Bayard need not have scorned to evoke.

Then we waited for Solon, but he was rather disappointing. Said the next _Argus_:--

=We have heretofore considered J.R. Potts to possess the anti-social instincts of a parasite without its moderate spirit of enterprise. But we were wrong. We now concede the spirit of enterprise. As for this candidacy of Potts, Horace Greeley once said, commenting, we think, on some action of Weed's, "I like cool things, of ordinary dimensions--an iceberg or a glacier; but this arctic circle of coagulation appalls credulity and paralyzes indignation. Hence my numbness!" Hence, also, our own numbness. But, though Speech lieth prone on a paralytic's couch, ACTION is hearty and stalketh willingly abroad. In this campaign it will speak louder than words. Yea! it will be heard high above Noah Webster's entire assemblage of such of them as are decent. That is all! J.R.P., _take notice!_ =

It was jaunty enough, but Potts had unquestionably gained a following. Indeed he had ably cemented the foundations of one by his magnificent hospitality on that day of days. His whilom serfs were men not easily offended by faults of taste, and they were voters. To a man they came out strongly for Potts.

He himself behaved with a faultless discretion. Above the slurs of the _Argus_ and the bickerings of faction he bore himself as one alienated from earth by the graces of his spirit; and he copiously promised deeds which should in the years to come be as a beauteous garment to his memory. The glaive of Justice should descend where erstwhile it had corruptly been stayed. Vice should surfer its meed of retribution, and Virtue come again into its glorious own.

Our letters of eulogy, printed at the _Banner_ office, were scattered among the voters, and with them went a letter from Potts saying that if his strenuous labors as an attorney in the interests of humanity, public morals, and common decency met with the voter's approval, he would be gratified to have his good-will and assistance. "It is such gentlemen as yourself," read the letter, "constituting the best element of our society, to whom I must look for the endorsement of my work. The criminal classes of this community, whose minions have so recently sought my life by mob violence, will leave no stone unturned to prevent

my sitting as Judge."

Our Democratic candidate, who had first felt but an academic interest in the campaign, began now to show elation. Old Cuthbert Mayne, the Republican candidate, who had been certain of success but for the accident of Potts, chewed his unlighted cigar viciously, and from the corner of his trap-like mouth spoke evil of Potts in a voice that was terrifying for its hoarseness. His own letter, among the others, told of Potts as one who sprang to arms at his country's call and was now richly deserving of political preferment. This had seemed to heighten the inflammation of his utterances. Daily he consulted with Solon, warning him that the town looked to the Argus to avert this calamity of Potts.

But Solon, if he had formed any plan for relief, refused to communicate it. Mayne and the rest of us were compelled to take what hope we could from his confident if secretive bearing.

Meantime the Banner was not reticent about "J. Rodney Potts, that gallant old war-horse." Across the top of its front page each week stood "POTTS FOREVER--POTTS THE COMING MAN!"

"Big Joe" Kestrel was the chief henchman of Potts, and his fidelity was like to have been fatal for him. He threw himself into the campaign with a single-heartedness that left him few sober moments. Upon the City Hotel corner, day after day, he buttonholed voters and whispered to them with alcoholic fervor that Potts was a gentleman of character, "as blotchless as the driftin' snow." Joe believed in Potts pathetically.

The campaign wore its way through the summer, and Solon Denney was still silent, still secretive, still confident, but, alas! still inactive so far as we could observe. I may say that we lost faith in him as the barren weeks came and went. We came to believe that his assured bearing was but a shield for his real despair.

Having given up hope, some of us reached a point where we could view the whole affair as a jest. It became a popular diversion to enter the establishment of the ever serious Westley Keyts and whisper secretly to him that Solon Denney had found a diplomatic way to rid the town of Potts, but this never moved Westley.

"Once bit--twice shy!" would be his response as he returned to slicing steaks.

CHAPTER VI

A MATTER OF PERSONAL PROPERTY

In deference to the wishes of J.R.C. Tuckerman, I had formed a habit of breakfasting in summer on the little back porch that overlooks the river. Less radical departures from orthodox custom, it is true, have caused adverse comment in our watchful little town; but the spot was secluded from casual censors. And it was pleasant to sit there on a summer morning over an omelette and bacon, coffee such as no other Little Arcadian ever drank, and beaten biscuit beyond the skill of any in our vale save the stout, short-statured, elderly black man who served

me with the grace of an Ambassador. Moreover, I was glad to please him, and please him it did to set the little table back against the wall of vines, to place my chair in the shaded corner, and to fetch the incomparable results of his cookery from the kitchen, couched and covered in snowy napkins against the morning breeze.

John Randolph Clement Tuckerman he was; Mr. Tuckerman to many simple souls of our town, and "Clem" to me, after our intimacy became such as to warrant this form of address. A little, tightly kinked, grizzled mustache gave a tone to his face. His hair, well retreated up his forehead, was of the same close-woven salt-and-pepper mixture. His eyes were wells of ink when the light fell into them,--sad, kind eyes, that gave his face a look of patient service long and toilsomely, but lovingly bestowed. It is a look telling of kindness that has endured and triumphed--a look of submission in which suffering has once burned, but has consumed itself. I have never seen it except in the eyes of certain old Negroes. The only colorable imitation is to be found in the eyes of my setter pup when he crouches at my feet and beseeches kindness after a punishment.

In bearing, as I have intimated, Clem was impressive. He was low-toned, easy of manner, with a flawless aplomb. As he served me those mornings in late summer, wearing a dress-coat of broadcloth, a choice relic of his splendid past, it was not difficult to see that he had been the associate of gentlemen.

As I ate of his cooking on a fair Sunday, I marvelled gratefully at the slender thread of chance that had drawn him to be my stay. Alone in that little house, with no one to make it a home for me, Clem was the barrier between me and the fare of the City Hotel. Apparently without suggestion from me he had taken me for his own to tend and watch over. And the marvel was assuredly not diminished by the circumstance that I was beholden to Potts for this black comfort.

Events were in train which were to intensify a thousand fold my amazement at the seeming inconsequence of really vital facts in this big life-plot of which we are the puppets--events so incredible that to dwell upon their relation to the minor accident of a mere Potts were to incur confusion and downright madness.

Apparently, fate had never made a wilder, more purposeless cast than when it brought Clem to Little Arcady with Potts.

True, the circumstance enabled Potts for a time to refer to his "body-servant," and to regale the chair-tilted loungers along the City Hotel front with a tale of picking the fellow up on a Southern battle-field, and of winning his dog-like devotion by subsequent valor upon other fields. "It was pathetic, and comical, too, gentlemen, to hear that nigger beg me on his bended knees to take better care of myself and not insist upon getting to the front of every charge. 'Stay back and let some of the others do a little fighting,' he would say, with tears rolling down his black cheeks. And I admit I was rash, but--"

Clem, not long after their arrival, confided to such of us as seemed worthy the less romantic tale that he had found the Colonel drunk on the streets of Cincinnati. He had gone there to seek a fortune for his "folks" and had found the Colonel instead; found him under circumstances which were typical of the Colonel's periods of relaxation.

"Yes, seh, anybody coulda had that man when Ah found him," averred Clem; "anybody could 'a' had him fo' th' askin'. A p'liceman offaseh neahly git him--yes, seh. But Ah seen him befo' that, an' Ah speaks his notice by sayin', 'This yeh ain' no good place to sleep, on this yeh hahd stone sidewalk. Yo' freeze yo'se'f, Mahstah,' an' of cose Ah appreciated th' infuhmities of a genaman, but Ah induced him to put on his coat an' his hat an' his boots, an' he sais, 'Ah am Cunnel Potts, an' Ah mus' have mah eight houahs sleep.' Ah sais to him, 'If yo' is a Cunnel, yo' is a genaman, an' Ah shall escoht yo' to yo' hotel.' Raght then a p'liceman offaseh come up, an' he sais, 'Yeh, yeh! what all this yeh row about?' an' Ah sais, 'Nothin' 'tall, Mahstah p'liceman offaseh, Ah's jes' takin' Mahstah Cunnel Potts to his hotel, seh, with yo' kindness,' an' he sais, 'Git him out a yeh an' go 'long with yo' then,' so Ah led th' Cunnel off, seh. An' eveh hotel he seen, he sais, 'Yes, tha' she is--tha's mah hotel,' but the Mahstahs in th' hotels they all talk ve'y shawtly eveh time. They sais, 'No--_no_--g'wan, tek him out a' yeh--he ain' b'long in this place, that man ain'.' So we walk an' walk an' ultimately he sais, 'If Ah'm go'n' a' git mah eight houahs sleep this naght, Ah mus' begin sometime,--why not now?' So th' Cunnel lay raght down on th' thu'faih an' Ah set mahse'f down beside him twell he wake up in th' mawnin', not knowin' what hahm maght come to him. An' he neveh _did_ have no hotel in that town, seh,--_no_, seh. He been talkin' reglah foolishness all that theah time. An' he sais: 'Yo' stay by me, boy. Ah's go'n' a' go West to mek mah fo'chun.' Well, seh, Ah was lookin' fo' a place to mek some fo'chun mahse'f fo mah folks, an' that theah Cincinnati didn't seem jes' th' raght place to set about it, so Ah sais, 'Thank yo' ve'y much, Mahstah Cunnel,' an' Ah stays by him fo' a consid'ble length of time."

But, little by little, after their coming to our town the Colonel had alienated his companion by a lack of those qualities which Clem had been accustomed to observe in those to whom he gave himself. Potts was at length speaking of him as an ungrateful black hound, and wondering if the nation might not have been injudicious in liberating the slave.

Clem, for his part, cut the Colonel dead on Main Street one day and never afterwards betrayed to him any consciousness of his existence. It was said that their final disagreement hinged upon a matter of thirty odd dollars earned by Clem in a Cincinnati restaurant and confided later to the Colonel's too thorough keeping.

Be as it may, Clem had formed other and more profitable connections. From a doer of odd jobs of wood-sawing, house-cleaning, and stove-polishing he had risen to the dignity of a market gardener. A small house and a large garden a block away from my place were now rented by him. Also he caught fish, snared rabbits, gathered the wild fruits in their seasons, and was janitor of the Methodist church; all this in addition to looking after my own home. It was not surprising that he had money in the bank. He worked unceasingly. The earliest risers in Little Arcady found him already busied, and those abroad latest at night would see or hear him about the little unpainted house in the big garden.

I suspect he had come out into the strange world of the North with large, loose notions that the fortune he needed might be speedily amassed. Such tales had been told him in his Southland, where he had not learned to question or doubt. If so, his disappointment was not to be seen in his bearing. That look of patient endurance may have eaten a little deeper the lines about his inky eyes, but I am sure his purpose had never wavered, nor his faith that he would win at last.

As I ate my breakfast that morning he told me of his good year. The early produce of his garden had sold well. Soon there would be half an acre of potatoes to dig, and now there was a fine crop of melons just coming ripe. These he would begin to sell on the morrow.

At this point, breakfast being done, the cloth brushed, and a light brought for my pipe, Clem came from the kitchen with a new pine board, upon which he had painted a sign with shoe polish.

"Yes, seh, Mahstah Majah,--Ah beg yo' t' see if hit's raght!" and he held it up to me. It read:--

Mellins on Sale
Mush & Water
Ask Mr. Tuckerman
at his House.

I gave the thing a critical survey under his grave regard, then applauded the workmanship and hoped him a prosperous season with the melons.

Then I beguiled him to talk of his land and his "folks," delighting in his low, soft speech, wherein the vowels languished and the r's fainted from sheer inertia.

"But, Clem, you are a free man now. Those people can't claim your services any longer."

I knew what he would say, but for the sake of hearing it once more, I had braved his quick look of commiseration for my shallowness of understanding.

"Yes, seh, Mahstah Majah, Ah knows 'bout that theah 'mancipation Procalmashum. But Ah was a ve'y diffunt matteh. Yo'-all see Ah was made oveh t' Miss Cahline pussenly by Ole Mahstah. Yes, seh, Ah been Miss Catiline's pussenal propity fo' a consid'able length of time, eveh sence she was Little Miss."

"But you are free, just the same, now."

He looked upon me with troubled, grave eyes.

"Well, seh, Mahstah Majah, Ah ain't eveh raghtly comp'ehended, but Ah've reckoned that theah wah business an' Procalmashum an' so fothe was fo' common niggehs an' fiel' han's an' sech what b'long to th' place. But Ah was diffunt. Ah ain't b'longed to th' place. Ah b'longed to Miss Cahline lak Ah endeaveh to explain. Ah was a house niggeh an' futhamoah an' notwithstandin' Ah was th' pussenal propity of Miss Cahline. Yes, seh, Ah b'long dreckly to huh--an' Ah bet them theah lawyehs at Wash'nt'n, seh, couldn't kentrive none a' they laws that woulda teched me, seh. No, seh--they cain't lay th' law to Miss Cahline's pussenalities. She ain't go'n a' stan' no nonsense lahk that, seh; she ain't go'n a' have no lawyeh mixin' up in huh private mattehs. Ah lahk t' see one try it--yes, seh."

He gazed vacantly into the distance, then laughed aloud as he beheld the discomfiture of the "lawyeh" in this suppositious proceeding.

"And you even let your wife go?--that must have been hard."

"Well, seh, not to say mah wife. Mah raght wife, she daid--an' then Ah mahied this yeh light-shaded gehl fum th' quahtahs, an' she's wild an' misled--yes, seh."

Again he was troubled, but I held him to it.

"You thought a good deal of her, didn't you, Clem?"

He studied a moment as he rearranged the roses in the bowl on the table, seeking a way to let me understand. Then he sighed hopelessly.

"Well, Mahstah Majah, Genevieve she cyahed a raght smaht fo' me, also, an' she mek it up fo' me t' come along t' town with huh. She sais Ah git a mewl an' a fahm an' thousan' dollehs money fum yo' Nawthen President an' we all live lahk th' quality. But, yo'-all see, th' ole Mahstah Cunnel say when he go off to th' wah, 'Clem, yo' black houn', ef Ah doan' eveh come back, these yeh ladies is lef in yo' pussenal chahge. Yo' unde'stan' that? Yo' go on an' do fo' 'em jes' lahk Ah was yeh.' An' young Mahstah Cap'n Bev'ly,--he's Little Miss's engaged-to-mahy genaman,--he sais, 'Clem, ef Ah doan' neveh come back, Ah pray an' entrus' yo'-all t' cyah fo' Miss Kate an' huh Maw jes' lahk Ah was yeh on th' spot.' An' Ah said, 'Yes, seh,' an' they ain't neithah one a' them eveh did come back. Mahstah Cunnel he daid by th' hand o' yo' Nawthen President at th' battle a' Seven Pines, an' Mahstah Cap'n Bev'ly Glentwo'th--yo' ole Mahstah Gen'al She'dan shoot him all t' pieces in his chest one day. So theah Ah is--Ah cain't leave--an' Genevieve comes a' repohtin' huhse'f to mek mah rediments, 'cause we all free an' go'n' a' go t' Richmond t' live high an' maghty, an' Ah sais, 'Ah'm Miss Cahline's pussenal propity--Ah ain't no fiel' niggeh!' She sais, 'Is yo' a' comin' aw is you ain't a-comin'?' Ah sais, 'Ole Cunnel daid, young Cap'n daid--yo' go 'long an' min' yo' own mindin's--'"

He paused to look out over the waters with shining eyes. After a bit he said slowly, "Ah neveh thought Genevieve would go--but she did."

"Then what?"

"Well, seh, Ah stayed on th' place twell we moved oveh to Miss Cahline's secon' cousin, Mahstah Cunnel Peavey, but they wa'n't nothin' theah, so Ah sais t' Miss Cahline that Ah's goin' Nawth wheah all th' money is, an' Ah send fo' huh. So she sais, 'Ve'y good, Clem--yo' all Ah got lef t' mah name,' an' so Ah come off. Then afteh while Little Miss she git resty an' tehible fractious an' she go off t' Baltimoah t' teach in th' young ladies' educational, an' Miss Cahline she still theah waitin' fo' me. Yes, seh, sh' ain't doin' nothin' but livin' on huh secon' cousin an' he ain't got nothin'--an' Ah lay Ah ain't go'n' a' have that kind a' doin's. No, seh--a-livin' on Cunnel Looshe Peavey. Ah'm go'n' a' git huh yeh whah she kin be independent--"

Again he stopped to see visions.

"An' then, afteh a tehible shawt while, Ah git Little Miss fum the educational an' they both be independent. Yes, seh, Ah'm gittin' th' money--reglah gole money--none a' this yeh Vaginyah papah-rags money. Ah ain't stahted good when Ah come, but Ah wagah ten hund'ed thousan' dollehs Ah finish up good!"

The last was a pointed reference to the Colonel.

"Have you seen Colonel Potts lately?" I asked. Clem sniffed.

"Yes, seh, on that tavehn cohnah, a-settin' on a cheer an' a-chestin' out his chest lahk a ole ma'ash frawg. 'Peahs like the man ain't got hawg sense, ack'in' that a-way."

A concluding sniff left it plain that Potts had been put beyond the pale of gentility by Clem.

He left me then to do his work in the kitchen--left me back on a battle-field, lying hurt beside an officer from his land who tried weakly to stanch a wound in his side as he addressed me.

"A hot charge, sir--but we rallied--hear that yell from our men behind the woods. You can't beat us. We needn't be told that. Whatever God is, he's at least a gentleman, above practical jokes of that sort." He groaned as the blood oozed anew from his side, then pleaded with me to help him find the picture--to look under him and all about on the ground. Long I mused upon this, but at last my pipe was out, and I awoke from that troubled spot where God's little creatures had clashed in their puny rage--awoke to know that this was my day to wander in another world--the dream world of children, where everything is true that ought to be true.

CHAPTER VII

"A WORLD OF FINE FABLING"

Solon Denney's home, in charge of Mrs. Delia Sullivan, late of Kerry, was four blocks up the shaded street from my own. Within one block of its gate as I approached it that morning, the Sabbath calm was riven by shouts that led me to the back of the house. In the yard next to Solon's, Tobin Crowder, of Crowder & Fancett, Lumber, Coal and Building Supplies, had left a magnificent green wagon-box flat upon the ground, a thing so fine that it was almost a game of itself. An imagination of even the second order could at once render it supremely fascinating. My two babes, collaborating with four small Sullivans, had by child magic, which is the only true magic, transformed this box into a splendid express train. The train now sped across country at such terrific speed that the small Sullivan at the throttle, an artist and a realist, crouched low, with eyes strained upon the track-head, with one hand tightly holding on his Sunday cap.

Another Sullivan was fireman, fiercely shovelling imaginary coal; still another at the side of the box grasped the handle of the brake as one ready to die at his post if need be. The last Sullivan paced the length of the wagon-box, being thrown from side to side with fine artistry by the train's jolting. He arrogantly demanded tickets from passengers supposedly both to relinquish these. And in his wake went the official most envied by all the others. With a horse's nose-bag upon his arm my namesake chanted in pleading tones above the din, "Peanuts--freshly buttered popcorn--Culver's celebrated double-X cough drops, cool and refreshing!"

But the tragic eminence of the game was occupied by my woman child. Perched in the middle of the high seat, her short legs impotently projecting into space, she was the only passenger on this train--and she, for whose sole behoof the ponderous machinery was operated, in whose exclusive service this crew of trained hirelings toiled--she sat aloft indignant, with tear-wet face, her soul revolted by the ignominy of it.

I knew the truth in a glance. There had been clamors for the positions of honor, and she, from weakness of sex, had been overborne. She, whose heart cried out for the distinction of train-boy, conductor, engineer, brakeman, or fireman, in the order named, had been forced into the only degrading post in the game--a mere passenger without voice or office in those delicate feats of administration. And she suffered--suffered with a pathetic loyalty, for she knew as well as they that some one had to be the passenger.

I held an accusing eye upon my namesake and the train came to a sudden halt, much embarrassed, though the brakeman, with artistic relish, made a vast ado with his brake and pretended that "she" might start off again any minute.

My namesake poised himself on the foot that had no stone-bruise and began:--

"Now, Uncle Maje, I told her she could be engineer after we got to the next station--"

His tones were those of benevolence that has been ill-required.

"That was las' station," broke in the aggrieved passenger, "an' they wouldn't stop the train there 'cause they said it was a 'spress train and mustn't stop at such little stations--"

"I tried awful hard to stop her," said the crafty Sullivan at the throttle, "but she got away from me. She did so, now!"

"And I said, 'First to be engineer,'" resumed the passenger, bitterly, "an' they wouldn't let me, an' I said, 'Secon' to be engineer,' an' they never let me, an' I said, 'Las' to be engineer,' an' they never let me."

"She wants to be everything," said my namesake, rendered a little sullen by this concise putting of her case.

"You come with me," I said to the passenger, "and we'll do something better than this--something fine!"

Her face brightened, for she knew that I never made idle promises as do so many grown-ups. She jumped from her seat, even though the first Sullivan tooted a throaty whistle and the second rattled his brake machinery in warning. I helped her over the side of the box, and as we walked away she shouted back to the bereaved express train a consolatory couplet:--

"First the worst, second the same,
Last the best of all the game!"

That superb machinery of travel was silent, and the mechanics and

officials, robbed of their passenger, eyed us with disfavor.

"They are terrapin-buzzards!" exclaimed my woman child, with deep conviction.

I shuddered fittingly at the violence of her speech.

Before we had gone far the train-boy deserted his post and came running after us.

"John B. Gough!" he exclaimed bitterly--profanely.

"He's swearing," warned his sister. "Look out, Uncle Maje, or he'll say 'Gamboge' next."

"I don't care," retorted the indignant follower; "you can't have a train without any passenger--it's silly. I don't care if I do say Gamboge. There! Gamboge it!"

I turned upon him. I had endured "terrapin-buzzards," hurled at the group by my woman child, perceiving need of relief for her pent-up passion. I had, moreover, for the same reason, permitted my namesake to roll under his tongue the formidable and satisfying expletive, "John B. Gough!" But I felt that the line must be drawn at Gamboge. Terrapin-buzzards was bad enough, though it was true that this might be used innocently, as in a moment of mild dismay, or as an exclamation of mere astonishment without sinister import. But Gamboge!--and ripped out brazenly as it had been?--No! A thousand times No!

"Calvin," I said sternly, "aren't you ashamed to use such language--before me--and before your little sister?"

But here the little sister sank beneath her true woman's level by saying:--

"I know worse than that--Dut!"

With a look of deadly coldness I sought to chill the pride that shone in her eyes as she achieved this new enormity.

"What is 'Dut'?" I asked severely.

"Dut is--is _a_ Dut," she answered, somewhat abashed by my want of enthusiasm.

"A Dut is a baddix--a regular baddix," volunteered her brother. Following a device familiar to philologists, he submitted concrete examples.

"Two of those Sullivans are Duts, and so's Mrs. Sullivan sometimes when she makes me split kindling and let the cat alone and--"

"That will do," I said; "that's enough of such talk. Come right into the house."

"It ain't a baddix to say 'O Crackers!'" he observed tentatively, as he followed us.

"It may not be for some people," I answered. "Nice people might say that

once in a great while, on week-days, if they never said any other baddixes; but it's just as bad as any of them if you say all the others--especially that horrible one--"

"Gamboge," he reminded me, brightly.

"Never mind saying it again!"

Then came a new uproar from the wagon-box. We perceived that the train had moved off again, manned now entirely by Sullivans. They sought, I detected, to produce in our minds an impression that the thing was going better than ever. The toots of the Sullivan-throated whistle were louder and more frequent, and the voice of the largest could be plainly heard. He had combined the two offices of train-boy and conductor. We heard him alternately demanding "Tickets!" and urging "Peanuts, cakes, and candies!" If the intention had been to lure us back to witness a Sullivan triumph, it failed. We shut our lips tightly and moved around to the front porch.

The foiled Sullivans presently followed us here. They made a group at the base of a maple on the lawn and, affecting not to notice us, talked in a large, loud way so that we must overhear and be made envious,--even awe-struck; for they had all secured jobs on the real railroad, it appeared. They would have to begin to-morrow, probably. They didn't know for sure, but they thought it would be to-morrow. It would be fine, riding off on the big train. Probably they would never come back to this town, but sleep on their big engine every night; and every day, from the toothsome dainties of the train-boy Sullivan's basket, they would "eat all they could hold." The elder Sullivan, aged eight, he of the artistic temperament, here soared dizzily into the farthest ether of romance. He had his uniform at home, at that very moment, and a cap with "gold reading" on it--it read "Conductor" on one side, and "Candy" on the other. Only--this veritably smacked of genius--the blue coat with the gold buttons had been made too small for him, and he'd have to wait until they sent him a larger size--"a No. 12," he said, with a careless, unseeing glance at our group. This was a stroke that had nearly done for one of us--but a moment's resistance and another of sober reflection saved him. He flashed to me a look of scorn for the clumsy fabrication.

There was still a brakeman needed, it appeared,--a good brakeman. The Sullivans consulted importantly, wondering if "a good man" could by any chance be found "around here." They named and rejected several possible candidates--other boys that we knew. And they wondered again. No--probably every one around here was afraid to leave home, or wouldn't be strong enough.

I held my breath, perceiving at once, the villany on foot. They were trying to lure one of us into a trap. They wished one of us to leap forward with a glad, eager, artless shout--"I'll be the other brakeman!" At once they would jeer coarsely, slapping one another's backs and affecting the utmost merriment that this one of us should have been equal to so monstrous a pretension. This would last a long time. They would take up other matters only for the sake of coming back to it with sudden explosions of contemptuous mirth.

Happily, the one of us most liable to this ignominy remained unbelieving to the bitter end; even did he pretend to a yawning sort of interest in a book carelessly picked up. The Sullivans had been foiled at every turn, and now we were relieved from the covert but not less pointed

insult of their presence.

Mrs. Delia, her morning's work done, came out dressed for church, bidding me a briskly sad little "Good mornin', _Major!_" I responded pleasantly, for in a way I liked Mrs. Sullivan, who came each day from her bare little house under the hill to make a home for Solon and our children. At least she was kind to them and kept them plump. That she remained dismal under circumstances that seemed to me not to warrant it was a detail of minor consequence. Terry Sullivan had been no good husband to her. Beating her and the lesser Sullivans had been his serious aim when in liquor and his diversion when out. But he fell from a gracious scaffolding with a bucket of azure paint one day and fractured his stout neck, a thing which in the general opinion of Little Arcady Heaven had meant to be consummated under more formal auspices.

But when they took Terry home and laid him on her bed, she had wailed absurdly for the lost lover in him. Through the night her cry had been, "Ah, Terry, Terry,--ye gev me manny a haird blow, darlin', but ye kep' th' hairdest til th' last!"

It was not possible to avoid being irritated a little by such a woman, but I always tried to conceal this from her. I suppose she had a right to her own play-world. She was dressed now in a limp black of many rusty ruffles that sagged close to her and glistened in spots through its rust. Both the dress and the spiritless silk bonnet that circled her keen little face seemed to have been cried over a long time--to be always damp with her tears.

With parting injunctions to my namesake to let the cat alone, not to "track up" the kitchen, and not to play with matches, the little woman lovingly cuffed the conspiring lesser Sullivans into a decorous line behind her and marched them off to church. There, I knew, she would give from her poor wage that the soul of dead Terry should be the sooner prayed out of a place, which, it would seem, might have been created with an eye single to his just needs.

Thinking of woman's love,--that, like the peace of God it passeth all understanding,--I officiated absently as one of two guests at a "tea-party." My fellow-guest was a large doll braced stiffly in its chair; a doll whose waxen face had been gouged by vandal nails. That was an old tragedy, though a sickening one at the time. The doll had been my Christmas offering to the woman child, and in the dusk of that joyous day my namesake had craved of its proud mother the boon of holding it a little while. Relinquished trustingly to him, he had sat with it by a cheerful fire--without evil intent, I do truly believe. Surely it was by chance that he found its waxen face softening under the stove's glow--and has Heaven affixed nails to any boy of seven that, in a dusky room at a quiet moment, would have behaved with more restraint? I trow not. One surprised dig and all was lost. Of that fair surface of rounded cheek, fattened chin, and noble brow not a square inch was left ungouged. It was indeed a face of evil suggestion that the unsuspecting mother took back.

That was the evening when the Crowders, living next door, had rushed over in the belief that my woman child was being murdered. The criminal had never been able to advance the shadow of a reason or excuse for his mad act. He seemed to be as honestly puzzled by it as the rest of us, though I rejoice to say that he was not left without reason to deplore it.

But the mother--the true mother--had thereafter loved the disfigured thing but the more. She promptly divested it of all its splendid garments, as a precaution against further vandalism, and the naked thing with its scarred face was ever an honored guest at our functions.

"You really must get some clothes for Irene," I said. "That's not quite the right thing, you know, having her sit there without any."

In much annoyance she rebuked me, whispering, for this thoughtless lapse from my role as guest. At our parties Irene was no longer Irene, but "Mrs. Judge Robinson," and justly sensitive about her faulty complexion and lack of clothes.

"Besides," came the whisper again, "I am going to make her some clothes--a lovely veil to go over her face."

Resuming her company voice, and with the aplomb of a perfect hostess who has rectified the gaucherie of an awkward guest, she pressed upon me another cup of the custard coffee, and tactfully inquired of the supposedly embarrassed Mrs. Judge Robinson if she did not think this was very warm weather for this time of year.

The proprieties being thus mended, our hostess raised her voice and bade Mrs. Sullivan, within doors, to hurry with the next course, which, I was charmed to learn, would be lemon soup and frosted cake. Mrs. Sullivan's response, though audible only to her mistress, who was compelled to cock an intent ear toward the kitchen, seemed to be in some manner shuffling or evasive.

"What's that?" she exclaimed sharply, listening again. Then, with dignity, "Well, if you don't hurry, I'll have to come right in there and see to you this minute!"

The threat happily availed, and the feast went forward, a phantom and duly apologetic Mrs. Sullivan serving us with every delicacy which our imaginations afforded. When we had eaten to repletion, of and from the checkers which were our plates and food as well, Mrs. Judge Robinson suddenly became Irene, who had eaten too much and had to be scolded and put to bed. The lights were out, the revelry done.

"Going walking now?" asked my namesake. He did not know how to behave at tea-parties, and, sitting at a little distance from us, he had been aiming an imaginary gun at every fat robin that mined the lawn for sustenance.

"Ask your father if you may go," I said. I had heard Solon pacing his room--forever cogitating the imminent Potts. I did not enter the house oftener than I could help, for always in those rooms I felt a troubled presence, a homesick thing that pushed two frail white hands against an intangible but sufficing curtain that held it from those it sickened for. I could not long be easy there.

It was a day poised and serene, with white brush-dabs of cloud on a wonderful canvas of blue--a day when I longed for the honeyed fragrance of the woods warming from the last night's rain.

But this was not to be my walk. Not for me the shaded arches of the wood where glad birds piped, nor the velvet hillsides tufted with green and

yellow and brown, nor eke the quiet lane running between walls of foliage, where simple rabbits scampered, amazed, but not yet taught their fullest fear.

The butterflies we must chase hovered rather along urban ways. That of the woman child was social. Ahead of us she flounced. Strangely, she was herself Mrs. Judge Robinson now. I understood that she was decked in a gown of royal purple, whose sweeping velvet train gave her no little trouble. But she paid her calls. At each gate she stopped, and it seemed that persons met her there, for she began:--

"Why, how do you _do?_ Yes, it's lovely weather we're having. Are your children got the scarlet fever? That's too bad. So has mine. I'm afraid they'll die. Well, I must be going now. _Good_ day!"

Sometimes she ran back to say, "Now do come over some day and bring your work!"

The butterflies pursued by my namesake were various, and some of them were more secret.

For one he made me stand with him while he gazed long into the drug-store window. I divined at last that those giant chalices, one of green and one of ruby liquor, were the objects of his worship. He could not have told me this, but I knew that in his mind these were compounds of unparalleled richness, potent with Heaven knows what wondrous charms. It was not that he dreamed ever of securing any of the stuff; the spell endured only while they must stand there, remote, splendid, inaccessible.

Then we strolled down the quiet street to a road that went close to the railway. And there, with beating hearts, we beheld the two-twenty Eastern freight rattle superbly by us. From the cab of its inspiring locomotive one of fortune's favorites rang a priceless gold bell with an air of indifference which we believed in our hearts was assumed to impress us. And notwithstanding our suspicion, we _were_ impressed, for did we not know that he could reach up his other hand and blow the splendid whistle if he happened to feel like it?

After the locomotive came the closed and mysterious box-cars, important with big numbers and initials in cabalistic sequence, indicating a wide and exciting range of travels. Then came stock cars, from between the slats of which strange and envied cattle looked out on their way to a wondrous city; and there was a car of squealing pigs, who seemed not to want to ride on a real train; and some cars of sheep that were stupidly indifferent about the whole thing. At the last was a palatial "caboose", and toward this, over the tops of the moving cars, a happy brakeman made his exciting progress, not having to hold on, or anything. He casually waved an arm at us, a salute that one of our number, in acknowledging, sought to imitate, for the cool, indifferent flourish of its arm, as if it were a common enough thing for us to be noticed by the mighty from their eminences.

This was my namesake's most beautiful of butterflies. Any one could understand that. As the train lost itself in smoke I knew well what he felt. I knew that that smoke of soft coal was so delicious, so wonderful of portent in his nostrils, that throughout his life it would bring up the wander-bidding in him--always a strange sweet passion of _starting_. Even now the journey-wonder was in his eyes. I knew that he saw himself

jauntily stepping the perilous tops of cars, clad in a coat of padded shoulders bound with wide braid, a lantern on his arm, coal dust smudging the back of his neck, and two fingers felicitously gone from his left hand.

I coughed, to recall him from visions. He looked up at me, a little shyly, debating--but why should it not be told?

"Uncle Maje--when I grow up, I'm going off to be a brakeman."

"I know it," I said quietly.

"Won't it be just fine!"

"It's the very finest life in all the world. I hoped for it myself once, but I was disappointed."

He gave me a quick look of sympathy.

"Wouldn't they let you?"

"Well, they were afraid I'd be hurt--only I knew I wouldn't be--anything to speak of--a couple of fingers, perhaps--"

"Off the left hand," he suggested understandingly.

"Of course,--off the left hand."

"That brakeman on No. 3 has got two off _his_ left hand," was the final comment.

We retraced our steps; but there was yet another butterfly of my namesake's. He led us to a by-path that followed the river bank up to the bridge, running far ahead of us. When we reached him he was seated, dumb with yearning, before a newly painted sign,

"GO TO BUDD'S FOR AN UP-TO-DATE 25 CT. DINNER."

He was obliged to limp that day, for his stone-bruise was coming on finely; but he had gone half a mile out of his way to worship at this wayside shrine. Again he was dreaming. In the days of his opulence he saw himself going to Budd's. Fortunately for his illusions the price was now prohibitive. I had been to Budd's myself.

"Have you ever been there?" I asked of the dreamer.

"I've been in his store, in the front part, where the candy is--and if you go 'round when he's freezing ice cream, he'll give you a whole ten-cent dish just for turning the freezer; but Pop won't let me stay out of school to do it, and Budd don't freeze Saturdays. But some day--" he paused. Then, with seemingly another idea:--

"He's got an awful funny sign up over the counter."

He would not tell me what the sign was, though, He shuffled and talked of other things. I entered Budd's on the morrow, purposely to read it, and I knew that my namesake had quailed before it. The sign was in white, frosted letters, on a blue ground, and it ran:--

TO TRUST IS TO BUST
TO BUST IS HELL
NO TRUST, NO BUST, NO HELL.

Its syllogistic hardness was repellent, but I dare say it preserved a gorgeous butterfly from utter extinction.

Home again at early twilight, we ate of a cold supper set out for us by Mrs. Sullivan. And here I reflected that good days often end badly, for my namesake betrayed extreme dissatisfaction with the food.

"Why don't we have that pudding oftener--with lather on top of it?" was his first outbreak. And at last he felt obliged to declare bitterly, "We don't have a thing that's fit to eat!"

"Calvin," said his father, "if I have to whip, it will hurt you worse than it does me."

Whereupon the complainer was wisely silent, but later I heard him asserting, between catches of his breath, and out of his father's hearing:--

"I don't care--(_a sniff_)--when I'm rich, I'll go to Budd's for an up-to-date dinner, you bet--(_a snuffle_)--I'll probably go there every day of my life--(_two snuffles_)--yes, sir--Sundays and all!"

I cheered him as best I could.

His sister had saved her day to a happy end, babbling off to bed with the distressing Irene, to whom she would show a book of pictures until sleep shut off her little eyelid.

A wise old man--I believe he was a bishop--once said he knew "that outside the real world is a world of fine fabling."

I had stolen a day from that world. Now I hurried through the gloom of the hall, past the poor striving hands, to sit with Solon Denney and tell him of a peculiar thing I had observed during the afternoon's walk.

CHAPTER VIII

ADVENTURE OF BILLY DURGIN, SLEUTH

I spoke to Solon of Billy Durgin, whose peculiar, not to say mysterious, behavior I had been compelled to notice. I had first observed him that afternoon as we passed the City Hotel. Through the window of the little wash-room, where I saw that he was polishing a pair of shoes, he had winked at me from over his task, and then erected himself to make a puzzling gesture with one hand. Again, while we stood dream-bound before the window of the corner drug store, he had sent me a low whistle from across the street, following this with another puzzling arm wave; whereat he had started toward us. But instead of accosting me, as I had thought he meant to, he rushed by, with eyes rigidly ahead and his thin jaws grimly set. Throughout the stroll he haunted us, adhering to this strange line of conduct. I would turn a corner, to find Billy apparently

waiting for me a block off. Then would follow a signal of no determinable import, after which he would walk swiftly past me as if unaware of my presence. Once I started to address him, but was met with "_Not a word_" hissed at me in his best style from between clenched teeth.

I decided at last that Billy was playing a game of his own. For Billy Durgin, though sixteen years old, had happy access to our world of fine fabling; and to this I knew he resorted at those times when his duties as porter at the City Hotel palled upon his romantic spirit.

Billy, in short, was a detective, well soaked in the plenteous literature of his craft and living in the dream that criminals would one day shudder at the bare mention of his name.

Nor was he unprovided with a badge of office. Upon his immature chest, concealed by his waist-coat, was an eight-pointed star emblazoned with an open eye. Billy had once proudly confided to me that the star was "pure German Silver." A year before he had answered an advertisement which made known that a trusty man was wanted in every community "to act for us in a confidential capacity. Address for particulars, with stamp."

The particulars were that you sent the International Detective Association five dollars for a badge. After that you were their confidential agent, and if a "case" occurred in your territory, you were the man they turned to.

Billy's five hard-earned dollars had gone to the great city, and back had come his star. He wore it secretly at first, but was moved at length to display it to a few chosen friends; not wisely chosen, it would appear, for now there were mockers of Billy among the irreverent of the town. As he sat aloft on his boot-blackening throne, waiting for crime to be done among us, conning meantime one of those romances in which his heroes did rare deeds, he would be subjected to intrusion. Some coarse town humorist would leer upon him from the doorway--a leer of furtive, devilish cunning--and whisper hoarsely, "Hist! Are we alone?"

Struck thus below the belt of his dignity, our hero could only respond:--

"Aw, that's all right! You g'wan out a' here now an' quit your foolin'!"

But criminals seemed to have conspired against Little Arcady, to cheat it of its rightful distinction. In vain had Billy waited for a "case" to be sent him by the International Detective Agency. In vain had he sought to develop one by his own ferreting genius. Each week he searched the columns of the police paper in Harpin Gust's barber-shop, fixing in his mind the lineaments of criminals there advertised as wanted in various corners of our land. These were counterfeiters, murderers, embezzlers, horse-thieves, confidence men, what not--criminals to satisfy a sleuth of the most catholic tastes; but they were all wanted elsewhere--at Altoona, Pennsylvania, or Deming, New Mexico; at Portland, Maine, or Dodge City, Kansas. In truth, the country elsewhere swarmed with Billy's lawful prey, and only Little Arcady seemed good.

Billy also gloated over the portraits of well-known deputy sheriffs and other officers of the law printed in the same charming police paper. It seemed not too much to hope that his own likeness might one day grace that radiant page--himself in a long, fashionable overcoat, carelessly

flung back to reveal the badge, with its never closing eye, and underneath, "William P. Durgin, the Dashing Young Detective, whose Coolness, Skill, and Daring have made his Name a Terror to Evil-Doers."

Famished for adventure, thirsting for danger, yearning for the perilous midnight encounter, avid of secrecy and disguises, Billy had been forced to toil prosaically, barrenly, unprofitably, about the sinless corridors of the City Hotel. All he had been able to do thus far was to regard every newcomer to the town with a steely eye of distrust; to watch each one furtively, to shadow him in his walks, and to believe during his sojourn that he might be "Red Mike, alias James K. Brown, wanted for safe-breaking at Muskegon, Michigan; reward, \$1000," or some like desperado.

As such did he view them all--from the ornately garbed young man who came among us purveying windmills to the portly, broadclothed, gray-whiskered and forbiddingly respectable colporteur of the American Bible Society. Some day would his keen gray eye penetrate the cunning disguise; some day would he step quietly up to his man and say in low but deadly tones: "Come with me, now. Make no trouble or it will be the worse for you." Whereupon the guilty wretch would blanch and say in shaking voice: "My God, it's Billy Durgin, the famous detective! Don't shoot--I'll come!"

Billy had faith that this dramatic episode would occur in the very office of the City Hotel, and he believed that some of those who had joked him about his life passion would thereafter treat him in a very different manner.

Though I had long won these facts from Billy, I had never known him to play his game so openly before. But when I mentioned the thing to Solon, thinking to beguile him from his trouble, I found him more interested than I had thought he could be; for Solon knew Billy as well as I did,

"Did Billy follow you here?" he asked. "Perhaps he has a clew."

"A clew to what?"

"A clew to Potts. Billy volunteered to work up the Potts case, and I told him to go ahead."

"Was that fair, Solon, to pit a sleuth as relentless as Billy against poor Potts?"

"All's fair in love and war."

"Is it really war?"

"You ask Westley Keyts if he thinks it's love."

I think I noticed for the first time then that the Potts affair was etching lines into Solon's face.

"Of course it's war," he went on. "You know the fix I'm in. I had the plan to get Potts out. It was a good plan, too. The more I think of it the better I like it. With any man in the world but Potts that plan would have been a stroke of genius. But I don't mind telling you that this thing has robbed me of sleep for three months. Potts has got me talking to myself. I wake up talking of him, out of the little sleep I

do get. I'll tell you the fact--if Potts is here six weeks longer, and let to finish this canvas, my influence in Slocum County is gone. I might as well give up and move on to another town myself, where my dreadful secret is unknown."

"Nonsense! But what can Billy Durgin do?"

"Well, I'm desperate, that's all. And one night Billy had me meet him up by the cemetery--he came disguised in long black whiskers--and he told me that Potts was James Carruthers, better known to the police of two continents as 'Smooth Jim,' wanted for robbing the post-office at Lima, Ohio. Of course that's nonsense. Potts hasn't the wit to rob a post-office. But I didn't have the heart to tell Billy so. I told him, instead, that this was the chance of his life; to fasten to Potts like an enraged leech, and draw out every secret of his dark past. You can't tell--Billy might find something to pry him into the next county with, anyway."

"He certainly looked charged with information this afternoon. He was fizzing like an impatient soda fountain. But why did he follow me?"

"Well, that might be Billy's roundabout way of getting to me. The other time he shadowed Marvin Chislett to get a message to me. If you're a detective, you can't do things the usual way, or all may be lost."

At that instant a low whistle sounded in our ears, a small missile was thrown over the evergreen hedge, bounding almost to our feet, and a slight but muscular figure was seen retreating swiftly into the dusk.

Solon sprang for the mysterious object. It was a stone, about which was wrapped a sheet of paper. This he took off and smoothed out. By the fading light we made out to read: "Meet me at graveyard steps at midnight. You know who."

We looked at each other. "Why didn't he come in here?" I asked.

"That wouldn't have been detective-like."

"But the graveyard at midnight!"

"Well, perhaps he won't hold out for midnight--Billy is merely poetic at times--and maybe if we hurry along, we can catch up with him and have it out by the marble works there instead of going clear on to the cemetery. Perhaps that will be near enough in the right spirit for Billy."

Quickly we made ready for the desperate assignation, pulling our hats well down, in a way that we thought Billy would approve.

Four blocks along the street, by rapid walking, we came within hail of the intrepid young detective. We were also opposite the marble yard of Cornelius Lawson, who wrought monuments for the dead of Little Arcady. In front of the shop were a dozen finished and half-finished stones, ghostly white in the dusk. It seemed indeed to be a spot impressive enough to meet even Billy's captious requirements, but we had underrated the demands of his artist's conscience. Solon called to him.

"Won't this do, Billy?"

Billy stopped dramatically, turned back upon us, and then exploded:--

"Fools! Would you ruin all? You must not be seen addressing me. Now I must disguise myself."

Turning stealthily from us, he swiftly adjusted a beard that swept its sable flow down his youthful chest. Then he addressed us again, still in tense, hoarse accents.

"Are you armed?"

"To the teeth!" answered Solon, with deadly grimness, and with a presence of mind which I envied.

"Then follow me, but at a distance!"

Meekly we obeyed. While our hero stalked ahead, stroking his luxuriant whiskers ever and anon, we pursued him at an interval so great that not the most alert citizen of Little Arcady could have suspected this sinister undercurrent to his simple life.

It is a long walk to the cemetery, but we reached it to find Billy seated on the steps that lead over the fence, still shielded by his hairy envelope.

"A tough case!" he whispered as we sat by him. "Our man has his spies out, and my every step is dogged both night and day."

"Indeed?" we asked.

"You know that slim little duck that got in last night, purtendin' he's a shoe-drummer? Well, he's a detective hired by Potts to shadow me. You know that big fat one, lettin' on he's agent for the Nonesuch Duplex Washin' Machine? He's another. You know that slick-lookin' cuss--like a minister--been here all week, makin' out he was canvassin' for 'The Scenic Wonders of Our Land' at a dollar a part, thirty-six parts and a portfolyo to pack 'em away in? Well, he's an--"

"Hold on, Billy, let's get down to business," reminded Solon.

"But I've throwed 'em all off for the nonce," continued Billy, looking closely, I thought, to see if we were rightly affected by "nonce."

"Yes, sir, it's been the toughest darned case in my whole experience as an inside man."

He waited for this to move us.

"What have you found out?" asked Solon; "and say, can't you take off those whiskers, now that we are alone and unobserved? You know they kind of scramble your voice."

With cautious looks all about him, Billy bared his tender young face to the night. A weak wind fretted in the cedars back of us, and an owl hooted. It was not an occasion that he would permit to glide by him too swiftly.

"Well, first I had to git my skeleton keys made."

"I thought you said his door was never locked," interrupted Solon.

"That might be only a ruse," suggested our hero. "Well, I got my keys made, and then I begun to search his room. That's always a delicate job. You got to know just how. First I looked under the aidges of the carpet, clear around. Nothing rewarded my masterly search. Then I examines the bed and mattress inch by inch, with the same discouragin' results." Billy had now drifted fairly into the exciting manner of his favorite authors.

"Baffled, but not beaten, I nex' turns my attention to the pictures, examinin' with a trained eye the backs of same, where might be cunningly concealed the old will--uh--I mean the incriminatin' dockaments that would bring the craven wretch to bay and land him safely behind the bars of jestic. But it seemed like I had the cunning of a fiend to contend with. No objekts of interest was revealed to my swift but thorough examination. Thence I directed my attentions to the wall-paper, well knowin' the desperate tricks to which the higher class of criminal will ofttimes resort to. Once I thought the game was up and all was lost. That new Swede chambermaid walks right in an' ketches me at my delicate tasks.

"Always retainin' my calm presence of mind and coolness in emergencies, quick to think an' as ready to act, with an undaunted bravery I sprang at the girl's throat and hissed, 'How much will it take to silence your accursed tongue?' She draws her slight girlish figure up to its full height--'Ten thousand dollars!' she hissed back at me. 'Ten thousand devils!' I cried, hoarse with rage--"

Too palpably our hero had been overwhelmed by his passion for fictitious prose narrative.

"Hold on, Billy!--back up," broke in Solon. "This is business, you know--this isn't an Old Cap' Collyer tale."

"Well, anyway," resumed Billy, a little abashed, "I silenced the girl. I threatened to have her transported for life if she breathed a word. Mebbe she didn't suspect anything after all. Tilly ain't so very bright. So at length I continues my researches into every nook and cranny of the den, and jest as I was about to abandon the trail, baffled and beaten at every turn, what should I git but an idee to look at some papers lyin' in plain sight on the table at the head of the bed."

"Well, out with it!" I thought Solon was growing a little impatient. But Billy controlled the situation with a firm hand.

"It's an old trick," he continued, "one that's fooled many a better man than Billy Durgin--leavin' the dockaments carelessly exposed like they didn't amount to anything; but havin' the well-known tenacity of a bloodhound, I was not to be thwarted. Well--to make a long story short--"

Solon brightened wonderfully.

"I have to admit that my first suspicion was incorrect. He ain't the one that done that Lima, Ohio, job and carried off them eight hundred dollars' worth of stamps--"

"But what _did_ he do?"

"Well, I got a clew to another past of his--"

"What is it? Let's have it!"

Billy was still not to be driven faster than a detective story should move.

We heard, and dimly saw, him engaged with a metallic object which he drew from under his coat. We were silent. Then we heard him say:--

"My lamp's went out--_darn_ these matches!"

At last he seemed to light something. He unfolded a bit of paper before us and triumphantly across its surface he directed the rays of a bull's-eye lantern. This was his climax. We studied the paper.

"Billy," said Solon, after a pause, "this looks like a good night's work. True, it may come to naught. We may still be baffled, foiled, thwarted at every turn--and yet something tells me that the man is in our power--that by this precious paper we may yet bring the scoundrel to his knees in prayers for our mercy, craven with fear at our knowledge."

"Say," said Billy, stung to admiration by this flow of the right sort of talk, "Mr. Denney, did you ever read 'Little Rosebud, or is Beauty a Curse to a Poor Girl?' That sounded just like the detective in that--you remember--where he's talkin' to Clarence Armytage just after he's overheard the old lawyer tell Mark Vinton, the villain, 'If this child lives, you are a beggar!' Remember that?"

"Why, no, Billy. I must get that, first thing in the morning. My tribute to your professional skill was wholly spontaneous, though perhaps a shade influenced by having listened to your own graphic style. But come, men! Let us separate and be off, ere we are discovered. And mind, not a word of this. One false step might ruin all! So have a care."

It must have been one of the few perfect moments in the life of Billy.

"You may rely upon William Durgin to the bitter end," said he, with a quiet dignity. "But there is work yet ahead for me to-night.

"I got to regain my hotel unobserved. My life is not safe a moment with my every step dogged by the hired assassins of that infamous scoundrel."

"If death or disaster come to you, Billy, you shall not be unavenged. We swear it here on this spot. _Swear_, Cal!"

"Say," Billy called back to us, after adjusting his beard, "if anything comes of this,--rewards or anything,--first thing I'm goin' a' do--git me a good forty-four Colts. You can't stop a man with this here little twenty-two, an' it's only a one-shot at that. I'd be in a _nice_ hole sometime, wouldn't I, with my back up against a wall an' six or seven of 'em comin' for me an' nothin' but _this_ in my jeans?"

"Point that the other way, Billy--we'll see about a bigger one later. We can't do anything to-night. And sell your life as dearly as possible if you have to sell it."

I fell asleep that night on a conviction that our taste for barren reality is our chief error. If we could only believe forever, what a

good world it could be--"a world of fine fabling," indeed! Also I wondered what J. Rodney Potts might have to apprehend from the leaven of fact in the fabling of Billy Durgin.

CHAPTER IX

HOW THE BOSS SAVED HIMSELF

He whom they had, with facetious intent, called "the Boss of Little Arcady" now began to wear a mien of defiance. From being confessedly distraught, he displayed, as the days went by, a spiritual uplift that fell but little short of arrogance. He did not permit any reason to be revealed for this marked change of demeanor. He was confident but secretive, serene but furtive, as one who has endured gibes for the sake of one brilliant coup.

This apparently causeless change permeated even to the columns of the Argus. It had been observed by more than one of us that these had of late suffered from the depression of their editor. Their general tone had been negative. Now they spoke in a lightsome tone of self-sufficiency. They were gay, even jaunty. It was in this very epoch that the verse was born which for many years sang blithely from the top of the first column--sang of Denney's public-spirited optimism as to Slocum County and the Little Country.

Keep your eye on Slocum,
She's all right!
Her skies are clear and full of cheer,
And all her prospects bright.

As pointing more specifically to the incubus of Potts, there was this:--

"Lots of people are saying that we have met our Waterloo. They forget that Waterloo was a victory as well as a defeat. Two men met it, and the name of one was Wellington. Look it up in your encyclopaedia."

But the faction of Potts, it should be noted, saw no reason to be impressed by a vaunting so vague. It had not tempered its hopefulness.

Its idol was jubilant, careless as a schoolboy, babbling but sober. The Banner still challenged the world with its page-wide line: "Potts Forever! Potts the Coming Man!"

Certain hopeful souls among the opposition had taken counsel how they might cause Potts to fall by means of strong drink. They had observed that the mill-race was still significantly uncovered. But to all invitations, all cunning incitements to indulgence, Potts was urbanely resistant. Conscious that a river of strong waters rippled at his feet, freely to be partaken of did he choose, it is true that his face showed lines of restraint, a serene restraint, like unto that which the great old painters limned so beautifully upon the face of the martyr. But the martyrs of old in their ecstasy were not more resolute than Potts. It is probable that he looked forward to a period of post-election refreshment; but pending the first Tuesday after the first Monday in

November, his determination was such that it stamped his face with something akin to dignity. Said Westley Keyts, "If it was raining whiskey, Potts wouldn't drink as much as he could ketch on a fork!" and to this the town agreed. For once Potts was firm.

His alpaca suit had visibly deteriorated during the campaign, and his tall hat again cried for the glossing ministry of a heated iron, but his virtue burgeoned under stress and flowered to beauty in the sight of men. It was understood at last that the mill-race might as well be covered for any adventitious relation it could sustain to Potts drunk.

Westley Keyts's suggestion that Potts be weighted with pig-iron and dumped into the healing waters, drunk or sober, was the mere playfulness of an excellent butcher unpractised in sarcasm. His offer to supply, free of cost, a quantity of pig-iron ample for the purpose left this hypothesis unavoidable, for Westley winked flagrantly and leered when he voiced it.

But a retribution subtler than mere drowning awaited the superfluous Potts; a retribution so simple of mechanism, so swift, so potent, and wrought with a talent so masterly, that the right of its instigator to the title of Boss of Little Arcady seemed to be unassailable for all future time.

At the very zenith of his heavenward flight Potts was brought low. At the very nethermost point of his downward swoop Solon Denney was raised to a height so dizzy that even the erstwhile sceptic spirit of Westley Keyts abased itself before him, frankly conceding that diplomacy's innocent and mush-like surface might conceal springs of a terrible potency.

Though Solon's public mien for a week or more had been hint enough of his secret to those who knew him well, I was, possibly, the first to whom he confided it in words.

He sent for me one crisp October morning, and I rushed over to the Argus office, knowing that he must have matters of importance to communicate.

I found him pacing the little sanctum, scanning a still damp sheet of proof. His brow was furrowed, but the lines were those of conscious power. In the broken chair by the littered desk sat Billy Durgin, his eyes ablaze with the lust of the chase. As I pushed into the dingy little room Solon halted in his walk and, with a flourish that did not entirely lack the dramatic, he handed me the narrow strip of paper. The item was brief.

"Mrs. J. Rodney Potts, the estimable wife of Colonel J. Rodney Potts of this town, will arrive here from the East next Thursday to make her home among us."

I looked up, to find them eager for my comment.

"Is it true?" I asked.

"It is," said Solon. "I shall meet the lady on the arrival of the eleven-eight train next Thursday."

"Well--what of it?"

"We are now about to see 'what of it.' My trusty and fearless young lieutenant here"--he indicated Billy, who coughed in his hand and looked modestly out the window--"is now about to beard Potts in his den and find out 'what of it.' I may say that we hope there will be a good deal of it. I gather as much from the correspondence of the last three weeks with the lady referred to in that simple galley proof, which I set up and pulled with my own hands. In this opinion I am not alone. It is shared by my able and dauntless young coadjutor, before whom I can see a future so brilliant that you need smoked glasses to look at it very long at a time."

The gallant young detective turned from the window.

"The hour has come to strike our blow," he remarked, his brow contracting to a scowl that boded no good to a certain upright citizen of this great republic.

"I have thought it best," resumed Solon, "to take Potts into our confidence at precisely this stage--giving him this exclusive news one day in advance of its publication. To-morrow, when every one knows it, Potts might be rash enough to stay and brave it out. Being advised to-day, privately, and thus afforded a chance to fade gracefully into the great bounding West, he may use his common sense. Now then, officer, do your duty!"

Our hero arose from his chair, buttoned his coat, passed a hand caressingly over his hip pocket, took the proof from me, and stalked grimly out.

"So the lady is really coming?" I asked, as Billy's footsteps died away down the wooden stairs.

"She is, the lady and her little son," said Solon, resuming his walk up and down the room. "She is coming all the way from Boston, Massachusetts. And I don't believe she quite knows what she's coming to. She speaks in a strange manner of her hope that she may be able to do good among us, and in her last letter she wants to know if I have ever seen a little book called 'One Hundred Common Errors in Speaking and Writing.' She seems to have the missionary instinct, as nearly as I can judge."

He paused in his walk and lowered his voice impressively.

"Between you and me, Cal,--you know I've had about six letters from her,--it's just possible that Potts had his reasons. I don't _say_ he did, mind you,--but strange things happen in this world.

"But that's neither here nor there," he went on more lightly. "Potts has brought it on himself."

In silence, then, we awaited the return of the messenger. The moment was tensely electric when at last we heard the clatter of his boots on the stairway. Breathless, he entered and stood before us, his coolness for once destroyed under the strain of his adventure. Solon helped him to a chair with soothing words.

"Take it easy now, Billy! Get your breath--there--that's good! Now tell us all about it--just what you said and just what he said and just what

talk there was back and forth."

"Gosh-all-Hemlock!" spluttered Billy, not yet equal to his best narrative style.

We waited. He drew a dozen long breaths before he was again the cold, self-possessed, steely-eyed avenger.

"Well," he began brightly, "I gains access to our man in his wretched den on the second floor of the Eubanks Block. As good luck would have it, he was alone by hisself, walkin' up and down, swingin' his arms like he was practisin' one o' them speeches of his.

"Well, I had it all fixed up fine how I was goin' to act, and what I was goin' to say to him, and how I'd back up a few paces against the wall and say, 'Not a word above a whisper, or I'll send this bullet through your craven heart!' and he'd fall down on his knees and beg me in vain for mercy and so on. But Gee! the minute I seen him I got all nervoused up and I jest says, 'Here, read that there piece--your wife's comin' next Thursday!'

"Well, sir, at those careless words of mine he gives a guilty start, his face blanched with horror, and he hissed through his set teeth, 'Which one?'--as quick as that.

"_Me_?--I couldn't git out a word for a minute, and he started for me. 'Which _one_?' he repeats, hoarse with rage, and that gives me an idee. 'Stand back!' I cried fearlessly, 'stand back, coward that you are--make no word of outcry, or it will go hard with you--they're _both_ comin',' I says,--'this one's comin' next week and the other one's comin' the week after, soon as she can git some sewin' done up.' _Me?_--I was leadin' him on, you understand--for we hadn't knowed there was more than one. Well, at that he read the piece over and set down in his chair with both hands up to his head and he says, 'I'm bein' hounded by a venal press, that's what's the matter; I'm bein' hounded from pillar to post.'

"At this I broke in with a sneer,--'Oh, we've only just began,' I says. 'We'll have the whole lot of 'em here inside of six weeks--children and all.' 'It's a lie,' he hissed at me. 'There ain't any more.'

"'Have a care, Colonel Potts,' I exclaimed, 'or first thing you know you will rue those there words bitterly! I will not brook your dastardly insults,' I says, 'and besides,' I added with a sudden idee, 'it looks like two wives will warm things up plenty for _you_.'

"At them words his craven face turned an ashen gray, and he fastened upon me a glare of baffled rage that might well have made a stouter heart quail before it, but I returned his glare fearlessly and backed swifly to the door, feelin' for the knob. When I found it, I got quickly out, without a blow bein' struck or a shot fired. Then I run here."

Early in the narrative Solon had begun to beam, identifying readily the slender but important vertebrae of fact upon which Billy had organized this drama of his fancy. At the close he shook hands warmly with our hero.

"This has been a splendid day's work, William Durgin!" and Billy beamed in his turn.

"I wasn't goin' to let him know we thought there was only one," he said.

"Precisely where your training showed, my boy. Any one could have handed Potts that proof, but it took you to handle the case after the scoundrel had said 'Which one?' Well, it's Potts's move now. If he doesn't move, we'll just add this to the item: 'Mrs. J. Rodney Potts, wife of Colonel J. Rodney Potts, will arrive again the following week. The ladies anticipate an interesting time in meeting their mutual husband.' How's that?"

Billy's eyes glistened--he was yearning for just that situation.

"But if Potts does move," added Solon, "not a word about the second lady. We won't take a mean advantage, even of Potts."

At six o'clock that evening, the following facts became known: that Colonel Potts had obtained a quart of whiskey from Barney Skeyhan; that he had borrowed twenty dollars from the same trustful tradesman; that, his cane in one hand and his oilcloth valise in the other, he had walked down Main Street late in the afternoon and boarded the five twenty-eight freight going West, ostensibly on a business trip into the next county.

Not until the next morning was it known that Potts had left us forever. This came from "Big Joe" Kestrel. The two had met at the depot and drunk fraternally from the bottle of Potts, discussing the thing frankly, meanwhile.

"They've hounded me out of town," said the Colonel.

"How?" said Big Joe.

"They sent for Mrs. Potts to come here--it's infamous, sir!"

It appeared that Potts had said further: "I can't understand the men of this town at all. It looks as if I have been trifled with, much as I dislike to think so. One minute they crowd letters on to me, praising me up to the skies, and print pieces in the paper saying that nothing is too good for me and my departure is a public loss, and why won't I remain and be a credit to the town and a lot more like that, good and strong. Then when I do consent to remain, why, what do they do? Do they grasp my hand and say, 'Ah, good old Potts--stanch Potts, loyal Potts--good for you--you won't desert the town!' Do they talk that way? No, they do not. Instead of talking like a body would think they'd talk after all those letters and things, why, they turn and fling abuse at me--and now--now they've gone and done this hellish thing! I won't say a word against any man, but in my opinion they're a passel of knaves and lunatics. Look at me, Joe. Yesterday I was a made man; to-day I'm all ruined up! I merely state facts and let you draw your own conclusions."

The conclusions which Big Joe drew, such as they were, he was unable to communicate intelligibly until the morrow, for the train was late and they drank of the liquor until the Colonel had time to lament his improvidence in bringing away so little of it. And by the time Big Joe's report was abroad, both the Banner and the Argus were out. The item in the latter concerning Mrs. Potts had been only a little altered.

"Mrs. J. Rodney Potts, wife of Colonel J. Rodney Potts, until yesterday

a resident of this town, will arrive here next Thursday from Boston, Massachusetts, to make her home among us. She is an estimable and cultured lady, and we bespeak for her a warm welcome to this garden-spot of the mid-West."

Across the top of the Banner's first page was its campaign slogan as usual:--

"POTTS FOREVER! POTTS THE COMING MAN!"

Across the top of the Argus in similar type ran the pregnant line:--

"POTTS FOREVER, BUT MAYNE FOR COUNTY JUDGE. THE TROUBLE WITH THE COMING MAN IS THAT HE'S GONE!"

CHAPTER X

A LADY OF POWERS

Superficially and distantly considered, the woman from whom even J. Rodney Potts must flee in terror would not be of a sort to excite the imagination pleasurably. A less impulsive man than Solon Denney might have found cause for misgiving in this circumstance of Potts's prompt exodus. In the immediate flush of his triumph, however, the editor of the Argus had no leisure for negative reflections, and when misgiving did at last find root in his mind, the time had come for him to receive the lady. But Solon Denney was not the man to betray it if a doubting heart beat within his breast. To the town that now lavished admiration upon him, dubbing him "Boss" without ulterior implications, he was confidence itself, and rife with prophecies of benefit to be derived by our public from the advent of Mrs. Aurelia Potts. With a gallant show of anticipation, a sprig of geranium in his lapel, he set out for the train on that fateful morning, while Little Arcady awaited his return with a cordial curiosity.

It was a gray day of damp air and a dull, thick sky bearing down upon the earth--a day conducive to forebodings. But Solon Denney's spirit, to the best of Little Arcady's belief, soared aloft to realms of pure sunlight.

My knowledge of subsequent events that day was gained partly by word of mouth and partly by observations which I was permitted to make.

To the hotel Solon conducted his charges, handing them from the 'bus with a flourish that seemed to confer upon them the freedom of the city. From shop doors and adjacent street corners the most curious among us beheld a tall, full-figured woman of majestic carriage, with a high, noble forehead and a face that seemed to register traces of some thirty-five earnest but not unprofitable years. Even in the quick glance she bestowed up and down Washington Street before the hotel swallowed her up, her quality was to be noted by the discerning,--the quality of a commander, of one born to prevail. The flash of her gray-green eye was interested but unconcerned. Complemented by the marked auburn of her plenteous hair, the eyes were masterful, advertising most legibly the

temperament of a capable ruler. The subdued, white-faced boy of twelve, with hair like his mother's, who trotted closely at her heels was, for the moment, a negligible factor.

An hour later I entered the sanctum of the _Argus_, to find its owner alone before his littered table. Upon his usually careless face was the most profoundly thoughtful look I had ever known him wear. Open before him was that week's _Argus_, but his eyes narrowed to its neat columns only at intervals. For the most part his gaze plunged far into virgin realms of meditation. It was only after several reminding coughs that I succeeded in recalling him from afield; and even then the deeply thoughtful look remained to estrange his face from me.

"Say, Cal, do you believe in _powers_?"

"What kind of powers?"

"Well, I don't know--every kind--just _powers_--mystic, occult powers."

"I don't care to commit myself without more details," I answered with a caution that seemed to be needed.

"Well, sir, that woman has 'em--she has _powers_--she certainly has. There is something in her eye that paralyzes the will; you look at her and you say yes to anything she suggests."

"For example--"

"Well, I've just agreed with her that the _Argus_ isn't what it ought to be."

I gasped. This indeed savored of the blackest magic.

"What did she _do_ to you?"

"Just looked at me, that's all,--and took it for granted."

"Heavens! You're shivering!"

"You _wait_--wait till she talks to you! She's promised to give me a little book," he went on dejectedly, "'One Hundred Common Errors in Writing and Speaking,' and she says the split infinitive is a crime in this nineteenth century. But, say, this paper would never get to press if I took time to unsplit all my infinitives."

"Well, put Billy Durgin to work on her case right away," I said to cheer him. "If the woman talks like that, I'll bet Billy can find some good reason why she ought to push on after the Colonel."

Again his deeply thoughtful gaze bore upon me.

"I'm puzzled," he said,--"honestly puzzled. I don't know whether she'll be good for this town or not. She may in a way--and in a way she may not. She will be disturbing,--I can see that already,--but she is stimulating. She may stir us up to nobler endeavors."

"Did she say so?"

"Well--uh--something of the sort. I believe that _was_ the expression

she used. I'll tell you what you do. You come along with me and see the lady right now. They've had dinner by this time."

Together we went and were presently climbing the stairs that led to the second floor of the City Hotel.

Mrs. Potts received us graciously. Upon me she bestowed a glance of friendly curiosity, as does a kind physician who waits to be told of symptoms before prescribing. Upon Solon she bent a more knowing look, as upon one whose frailties have already been revealed. She gave us chairs and she talked. Little Roscoe Potts writhed near by upon an ottoman and betrayed that he, too, could talk when circumstances were kindly. The detail of their personalities, salient in that first moment, was that Heaven had denied them both the gift of reticence.

"Yes--I've been telling Mr. Denney--I feel that there is a work here for me," she began briskly. "I felt it strongly when I perused the columns of the newspaper which Mr. Denney was thoughtful enough to send me."

Solon's eyes uneasily sought the cabbage-like flowers in the faded carpet of the room.

"And I feel it more strongly now that I have ventured among you," continued the lady, glowing upon us both.

"I have long suspected that it was a regrettable waste of energy to send missionaries into heathen parts of the globe when there remain so many unenlightened corners in our own land. It almost seems now as if I had been guided here. It is true that my husband has gone, but that shall not distress me. Rodney is a drifter--I may say a natural-born drifter, and I cannot undertake to follow him. I shall remain here. I have been guided--" determination gleamed in her gray-green eyes,--"I shall remain here and teach these poor people to make something of themselves."

Solon drew a long breath. My own echoed it. Hereupon little Roscoe broke into a high-pitched recitative.

"We are now in the great boundless West, a land of rough but kind-hearted and worthy folk, and abounding with instructive sights and scenes which are well calculated--"

"My son," interrupted his mother, "kindly tell the gentlemen what should be your aim in life."

"To strive to improve my natural gifts by reading and conversation," answered Roscoe, in one swift breath.

"Very good--_ver-ry_ good--but for the present you may _listen_. Now, Mr. Denney--" she turned to Solon with the latest _Argus_ in her hand,--"perusing your sheet, my eye lights upon this sentence:--"

"'Lige Brackett Sundayed in our midst. He reports a busy time of Fall ploughing over Bethel way.'

"Why 'Sundayed,' Mr. Denney?" She smiled brightly, almost archly, at Solon. "I dare say you would not employ 'Mondayed' or 'Tuesdayed' or 'Wednesdayed.' You _see_? The term is what we may call a vulgarism--you perceive that, do you not?--likewise 'in our midst,' which is not accurate, of course, and which would be indelicate if it were. Now I let

my eye descend the column to your account of a certain social function. You say, 'The table fairly groaned with the weight of good things, and a good time was had by all present.' Surely, Mr. Denney, you are a man not without culture and refinement. Had you but taken thought, you could as well have said that 'An elegant collation was served, the menu including many choice delicacies, and the affair was widely pronounced to be most enjoyable.'"

Solon's frightened eyes besought me, but I could not help him, and again he was forced to meet the kindly, almost whimsically accusing gaze of the censor, who was by no means done with him.

"Again I read here, 'The graveyard fence needs repairing badly.' Do you not see, Mr. Denney, how far more refined it were to say 'God's acre,' or 'the marbled city of the dead'? I now turn from mere solecisms to the broader question of taste. Under the heading 'Hanged in Carroll County,' I read an item beginning, 'At eight-thirty, A.M., last Friday the soul of Martin G. Buckley, dressed in a neat-fitting suit of black, with a low collar and black cravat, was ushered into the presence of his God.' Pardon me, but do we not find here, if we read closely, an attempt to blend the material with the spiritual with a result that we can only designate as infelicitous?"

Solon was writhing after the manner of uneasy little Roscoe. The bland but inexorable regard of his inquisitor had subdued him beyond retort.

"I might, again, call your attention to this item." And she did, reading with well-trained inflection:--

"'Kye Mayabb from south of town and Sym Pleydell, who rents the Clemison farm, met up in front of Barney Skeyhan's place last Saturday afternoon and started to settle an old grudge, while their respective better halves looked on from across the street. Kye had Sym down and was doing some good work with his right, when his wife called to him, "Now, Kye Mayabb, you come right away from there before you get into trouble." Whereupon the valiant better half of him who was being beaten to death called out cheerily, "Don't let him scare you, Sym!" The boys made it up afterward, but our little street was quite lively for a time.'

"Now as to that," went on Mrs. Potts, affecting to deliberate, "could we not better have described that as 'a disgraceful street brawl'? And yet I find no word of deprecation. It is told, indeed, with a regrettable flippancy. Flippancy, I may note again, mars the following item: 'They tell a good story of old Sarsius Lambert over at Bethel. His wife was drowned a couple of weeks ago, and Link Talbot went to break the news to the old man. "Uncle Sarsh," says Link, "your wife is drowned. She fell in at the ford, and an hour later they found her two miles down-stream." "Two miles an hour!" said Uncle Sarsius, in astonishment. "Well, well, she floated down quite lively, didn't she?"'

"You will pardon me, I trust," said Mrs. Potts, "if I say it would have been better to speak of the grief-stricken husband and to conclude with a fitting sentiment such as 'the proudest monuments to the sleeping dead are reared in the hearts of the living.'"

"I'll put it in next week," ventured Solon, meekly. "I didn't think of it at the time."

"Ah, but one should always think, should one not?" asked Mrs. Potts,

almost sweetly. "By thinking, for example, you could elevate your sheet by eliminating certain misapplied colloquialisms. Here I read: 'The rain last week left the streets in a frightful state. The mud simply won't jell.'"

Shame mantled the brow of Solon Denney.

"In short," concluded Mrs. Potts, "I regret to say that your paper is not yet one that I could wish to put into the hands of my little Roscoe."

Little Roscoe coughed sympathetically and remarked, before he lost his chance for a word: "The boy of to-day is the man of to-morrow. Parents cannot be too careful about what their little ones will read during the long winter evenings that will soon be upon us." He coughed again when he had finished.

"The press is a mighty lever of civilization," continued the mother, with an approving glance at her boy, "and you, Mr. Denney, should feel proud indeed of your sacred mission to instruct and elevate these poor people. Of course I shall have other duties to occupy my time--"

Solon had glanced up brightly, but gloom again overspread his face as she continued:--

"Yet I shall make it not the least of my works--if a poor weak woman may so presume--to help you in correcting certain faults of style and taste in your sheet, for it goes each week into many homes where the light must be sorely needed, and surely you and I would not be adequately sensible of our responsibilities if we continued to let it go as it is. _Would_ we?" And again she glowed upon Solon with the condescending sweetness of a Sabbath-school teacher to the littlest boy in her class.

But now we both breathed more freely, for she allowed the wretched _Argus_ to drop from her disapproving fingers, and began to ask us questions, as to a place of worship, a house suitable for residence purposes, a school for little Roscoe, and the nature of those clubs or societies for mental improvement that might exist among us. And she asked about Families. We were obliged to confess that there were no Families in Little Arcady, in the true sense of the term, though we did not divine its true sense until she favored us with the detail that her second cousin had married a relative of the Adams family. We said honestly that we were devoid of Families in that sense. None of us had ever been able to marry an Adams. No Adams with a consenting mind--not even a partial Adams--had ever come among us.

Still, Mrs. Potts wore her distinction gracefully, and was even a little apologetic.

"In Boston, you know, we rather like to know 'who's who,' as the saying is."

"Out here," said Solon, "we like to know what's what." He had revived wonderfully after his beloved _Argus_ was dropped. But at his retort the lady merely elevated her rather fine brows and remarked, "Really, Mr. Denney, you speak much as you write--you must not let me forget to give you that little book I spoke of."

As we went down the stairs Solon placed "One Hundred Common Errors in

Speaking and Writing" close under his arm, adroitly shielding the title from public scrutiny. We stood a moment in the autumn silence outside the hotel door, watching a maple across the street, the line of its boughs showing strong and black amid its airy yellow plumage. The still air was full of leaves that sailed to earth in leisurely sadness. We were both thoughtful.

"Mrs. Potts is a very alert and capable woman," I said at last, having decided that this would be the most suitable thing to say.

"I tell you she has _powers_," said Solon, in a tone almost of awe.

"She will teach you to make something of yourself," I hazarded.

"One minute she makes me want to fight, and the next I surrender," he answered pathetically.

We separated on this, Solon going toward the _Argus_ office with slow steps and bowed head, while I went thoughtfully abroad to ease my nerves by watching the splendid death of summer. Above the hills, now royally colored, as by great rugs of brown and crimson velvet flung over their flanks, I seemed to hear the echoes of ironic laughter--the laughter of perverse gods who had chosen to avenge the slight put upon an inferior Potts.

CHAPTER XI

HOW LITTLE ARCADY WAS UPLIFTED

The winter that followed proved to be a season of unrest for our town. Mrs. Aurelia Potts was a leaven of yeast that fermented its social waters, erstwhile calm, not to say stagnant.

Early in November an evening affair was held in her honor at the Eubanks home. The Eubankses being our leading Presbyterians, and Mrs. Potts having allied herself with that church, it was felt that they were best fitted to give the lady her initial impression of Little Arcady's society. Not only were the three Eubanks girls talented, but the mother was a social leader, Eustace was travelled, having been one of an excursion party to the Holy Land, and the family had relatives living in Philadelphia. None of the girls had married, nor had Eustace. The girls, it was said, had not wished to marry. Eustace had earnestly wished to, it was known; but two of our young women who had successively found favor in his sight had failed to please his mother and sisters, and Eustace was said to be watching and waiting for one upon whom all could agree, though every one but Eustace himself knew this was an utterly hopeless vigil. Meantime the mother and sisters looked up to him, guarding him jealously from corrupting associations, saw that he wore his overshoes when clouds lowered, and knitted him chest protectors, gloves, and pulse warmers which he was not allowed to forget. He taught the Bible Class in the Presbyterian Sabbath school, sang bass in the choir, and, on occasion, gave an excellent entertainment with his magic lantern, with views of the Holy Land, which he explained with a running fire of comment both instructive and entertaining.

The Eubanks home that evening was said by a subsequent Argus to have been "ablaze with lights" and "its handsome and spacious parlors thronged with the elite of the town who had gathered to do honor to the noted guest of the evening."

There first occurred a piano duet, rendered expertly by the two younger Misses Eubanks, "Listen to the Mocking Bird," with some bewildering variations of an imitative value, done by the Miss Eubanks seated at the right.

Then the front parlor was darkened and, after the consequent tittering among the younger set had died away, Eustace threw his pictures upon a hanging sheet and delivered his agreeable lecture about them, beginning with the exciting trip from Jaffa to Jerusalem. Most of those present had enjoyed the privilege of this lecture enough times to know what picture was coming next and what Eustace would say about it. But it was thought graceful now, considering the presence of a stranger, to simulate the expectancy of the uninformed, and to emit little gasps of astonished delight when Eustace would say, "Passing from the city gates, we next come upon a view that is well worthy a moment of our attention."

With the lights up again, a small flask of water from the river Jordan was handed about, to be examined, by those who knew it too well, in the same loyal spirit of curiosity. A guest would hold it reverently a moment, then glance up in search of some one to whom it might be heartily extended.

This over, the elder Miss Eubanks--Marcella of the severe mien--sang interestingly, "I gathered Shells upon the Shore," and for an encore, in response to eager demands, "Comin' thro' the Rye." Not coyly did she give this, with inciting, blushing implications, but rather with an unbending, disapproving sternness, as if with intent to divert the minds of her listeners from the song's frank ribaldry to its purely musical values.

Eustace followed with a solo:--

"Nigh to a grave that was newly made,
Leaned a sexton old on his earth-worn spade."

In the very low parts, where the sexton old is required to say, "I gather them in," he was most effective, and many of his more susceptible hearers shuddered. For an encore he sang, "I am the old Turnkey," which goes lower and lower with deliberate steps until it descends to incredible depths of bassness.

It was a rare comfort to the Eubanks ladies that Eustace was a bass instead of a tenor. They had observed that most tenor songs are of a suggestive and meretricious character. Arthur Updyke, for example, who clerked in the city drug store, was a tenor, and nearly all of his songs were distressingly sentimental; indeed, fairly indelicate at times in their lack of reserve about kisses and embraces and sighs and ecstasies. Glad indeed were the guardians of Eustace that his voice had lowered to a salutary depth, and that bass songs in general were pure and innocent,--songs of death, of dungeons, of honest war, or of diving beneath the deep blue sea--down, down, down, as far as the singer's chest tones permitted. With "Euty" a tenor, warbling those pernicious boudoir chansons of moonlight and longing of sighing love and anguished passion, they suspected that he would have been harder to

manage. Even as it was, he had once brought home a most dreadful thing called "A Bedouin Love Song," for a bass voice, truly enough, but so fearfully outspoken about matters far better left unmentioned among nice people that the three girls had fled horrified from the room after that first verse:--

"From the desert I come to thee,
On a stallion shod with fire,
And the wind is left behind
In the speed of my desire."

The mother sped to her daughters' appeal for help and required her son to sing "The Lost Chord" as a febrifuge. The other song was confiscated after the mother had read the words so unblushingly penned by an author whom she ever afterward deemed an abandoned profligate. She considered that Bedouins must be unspeakable creatures--but how much lower the mind that could portray their depravity, and send it out into the world for innocent young men to carol in the homes of our best people!

Thereafter Eustace sang only songs that had been censored by his family, and his repertoire was now stainless, containing no song in which a romantic attachment was even hinted at; but only those reciting wholesome adventures, military and marine, pastoral scenes and occupations, or the religious experience of the singer.

In the words of the Argus, "his powerful singing was highly enjoyed by all present."

There followed the feature of the evening,--a paper read by Mrs. Potts; subject, "The Message of Emerson." With an agreeable public manner the lady erected herself at one corner of a square piano, placed her manuscripts under the shaded lamp, and began. The subject, aforesaid, made known among us, had been talked about and perhaps a little wondered at. It is certain, at least, that Westley Keyts had yielded to the urging of his good wife to be present in the belief that a man named Emerson had sent Mrs. Potts a telegram to be read to us. This was what "the message of Emerson" meant to Westley, and the novelty of it had seemed to justify what he called "togging up," after a hard day's work at the slaughter-house.

If, then, he listened to Mrs. Potts at first with wonder-widening eyes, amazed at Mr. Emerson's recklessness in the matter of telegrams, and if at last he fell into gentle slumber, perhaps it was only that he had been less hardened than others present to the rigors of social nicety. No one else fell asleep, but it was noticed that the guests, when the paper was done, praised it to one another in swift generalities and with averted face, as if they sought to evade specific or pointed inquiry as to its import. But the impression made by the reader was all that she could have wished, and the gathering was presently engrossed with refreshments. The Argus stated that "a dainty collation was served to all present, the menu comprising the choicest delicacies of the season," which I took to mean that Solon was trying to profit by instruction; and that never again would he permit a table in the Argus to groan with its weight of good things.

Westley Keyts, being skilfully awakened without scandal by his wife, drank a cup of strong coffee to clear his brain, and cordially consumed as many segments of cake as he was able to glean from passing trays, speculating comfortably, meanwhile, about the message of

Emerson,--chiefly as to why Emerson had not sent it by mail, thus saving--he estimated--at least a hundred and twenty dollars in telegraph tolls.

Mrs. Potts, thus auspiciously launched upon the social sea of Little Arcady, was henceforth to occupy herself prominently with the regulation of its ebb and flow. Already she had organized a "Ladies' Literary and Home Study Club," and had promised to read a paper on "The Lesson of Greek Art" at its first meeting a week hence. As the Argus observed, "it was certainly a gala occasion, and one and all felt that it was indeed good to be there."

In addition to elevating the tone of our intellectual life, however, Mrs. Potts found it necessary to support herself and her son. That she could devise a way to merge these important duties will perhaps be surmised. Comfortably installed in a cottage at the south end of town with her household belongings, including a chair once sat in by the Adams-husband of her heaven-favored second cousin, she lost no time in prosecuting her double mission. The title of the work with which she began her task of uplifting our masses was "Gaskell's Compendium of Forms," a meritorious production of amazing and quite infinite scope, elegantly illustrated. The book weighed five pounds and cost three dollars, which was sixty cents a pound, as Westley Keyts took the trouble to ascertain. But it was indeed a work admirably calculated for a community of diversified interests. While Solon Denney might occupy himself with the "Aid to English Composition," including "common errors corrected, good taste, figures of speech, and sentence building," the Eubanks ladies could further inform themselves upon grave affairs of "The Home and Family,--Life, Health, Happiness, Human Love," etc., or upon more frivolous concerns, such as "Introductions and Salutations, Carriage and Horseback Riding, Croquet, Archery, and Matinee parties, and the Art of Conversation." While Asa Bundy interested himself in "History of Banking, Forms of Notes, Checks and Drafts, Interest and Usury Tables, etc.," Truman Baird, who meant some day to go to Congress, might perfect himself in Parliamentary law and oratory, an exposition of the latter art being illumined by wood-cuts of a bearded and handsome gentleman in evening dress who assumed the various positions of emotion or passion, as, in "Figure 8.--This gesture is used in concession, submission, humility," or, in Figure 9, which diagrams reproach, scorn, and contempt. While Truman sought to copy these attitudes, to place the feet aright for Earnest Appeal or Bold Assertion, or to clasp the hands as directed for Supplication and Earnest Entreaty, the ladies of the Literary and Home Study Club conned the chapter on American literature, "containing choice proverbs and literary selections and quotations from the poets of the old and new worlds." Our merchants found information as to "Jobbing, Importing and Other Business," and our young ladies could observe the correct forms for "Letters of Love and Courtship," "Apology for a Broken Engagement," "French Terms used in Dancing," "Rights of Married Women," "The Necessity and Sweetness of Home," and "Marriage--Happiness or Woe may come of It."

Again, Westley Keyts could read how to cut up meats. He knew already, but this chapter, illustrated with neat carcasses marked off into numbered squares, convinced him that the book was not so light as some of its other chapters indicated, and determined him to its purchase.

And there were letters for every conceivable emergency. "To a Young Man who has quarrelled with his Master," "Dismissing a Teacher," "Inquiry for Lost Baggage," "With a Basket of Fruit to an Invalid," and "To a

Gentleman elected to Congress." Rare indeed, in our earth life, would be the crisis unmet by this treasury of knowledge. Not only was there an elevation of tone in our correspondence that winter, resulting from the persuasive activities of Mrs. Potts, but our writing became decorative with flourishes in "the muscular" and "whole-arm" movements. We learned to draw flying birds and bounding deer and floating swans with scrolls in their beaks, all without lifting pen from paper. Some of us learned to do it almost as well as the accomplished Mr. Gaskell himself, and almost all of us showed marked improvement in penmanship. Doubtless Truman Baird did not, he being engrossed with oratory, striving to reproduce, "Hate--the right foot advanced, the face turned to the sky, the gaze directed upward with a fierce expression, the eyes full of a baleful light," or other phases of passion duly set down. Not for Truman was the ornate full-arm flourish; he had observed that all Congressmen write very badly.

But my namesake may be said to have laid the foundations that winter for an excellent running chirography, under the combined stimuli of Mr. Gaskell's curves and a hopeless passion for his school-teacher.

As my own teacher had been my own first love, I knew all that he suffered in voiceless longing for his fair one, throned afar in his languishing gaze. I knew that he plucked flowers meant to be given to her, only to lay them carelessly on the floor beside his seat when school "took in," lacking the courage to bestow them brazenly upon his idol as others did. I knew, too, his thrill when she came straight down the aisle, took up the flowers with a glance of sweet reproof for him, and nested them in the largest vase on her desk. But my poor affair had been in an earlier day, and my namesake wove novelty into the woof of his. For in that wonder-book of the fertile-minded Gaskell was a form of letter which Calvin Blake Denney began to copy early in December, and which by the following spring he could write in a style that already put my own poor penning to the blush. Did he write it a hundred times or five hundred, moved anew each time by its sweet potencies, its rarest of suggestions? I know not, but it must have been very many times, for I would find the copies in his school books, growing in beauty of flourish day by day. As well as if he had confessed it I knew that this letter was intended for the father of his love--for old Sam Murdock, to be literal, who uncouthly performed for us the offices of drayman; but who, in my namesake's eyes, shone pure and splendid for his relationship. Doubtless the letter was never sent, but I am sure it was written each time with an iron resolve to send it. Its title in the excellent book was "From a Lover to a Father on his Attachment to the Daughter," and it ran:--

=DEAR SIR: As I scorn to act in any manner that may bring reproach upon myself and family, and hold clandestine proceedings unbecoming in any man of character, I take the liberty of distinctly avowing my love for your daughter and humbly request your permission to pay her my addresses, as I flatter myself my family and expectancies will be found not unworthy of your notice. I have some reason to imagine that I am not altogether disagreeable to your daughter, but I assure you that I have not as yet endeavored to win her affections, for fear it might be repugnant to a father's will. I am, etc.=

Under this was provided "A Favorable Answer," in which Sam Murdock might have said that he had long perceived this thing and applauded it, and would the young man "dine with us to-morrow at six if you are not engaged, and you will then have an opportunity to plead your own cause."

But chillingly after this graceful assent followed an "Unfavorable Answer," which Sam Murdock would also see when he opened the book at page 251; and still more portentously on the same page was a letter which Miss Selina Murdock herself might choose to write him, a sickening and dreadful thing entitled, "Unfavorable Reply on the Ground of Poverty."

"To say that I do not feel pleased and flattered at your proposal would be to tell a useless untruth," the thing began speciously. "But how are we situated, what hope of happiness with our unsettled prospects and worse than small means? Industry has doubtless never been and never will be wanting on your part, but--" and so to its dreadful end. It was almost base in its coldness and mercenary calculation. That phrase about the "useless untruth" implied even a dubious and considering morality; and the conclusion, "we must not entail misery upon others as well as ourselves by a too hasty step," argued a nature cautious in the extreme.

Yet Mr. Gaskell was too evidently a man of the world, knowing in his ripe experience that there existed a sufficient number of such cold natures to warrant the obtrusion of this heart-rending formula; and I doubt not that these negative specimens of the possible alone restrained my namesake from going beyond mere copies of that first letter.

It will be seen that the influence of Mrs. Potts pervaded our utmost social and commercial limits. And when the "Compendium" had become a centre-table ornament in the homes of the rich, and a bulky object of awe in humbler abodes, she went over the ground again with other volumes calculated to serve her double purpose, from "Dr. Chase's Receipt Book" to "Picturesque Italy, profusely Illustrated." She also purveyed a line of "art-pieces," including "Wide Awake and Fast Asleep," "The Monarch of the Glen," "Woman Gathering Fagots," and "Retreat from Moscow." Also, little Roscoe, out of school hours, took subscriptions for the Youth's Companion.

Yet the town long bore it with a gentle fortitude. I believe it was not until the following spring that murmurs were really noticeable. Naturally they were directed against Solon Denney. By that time Westley Keys was greeting Solon morosely, though without open cavil; but Asa Bundy no longer hesitated to speak out. He quoted Scripture to Solon about the house that was swept and garnished, and the seven other wicked spirits that entered it, making its last state worse than its first.

And of course Solon was much troubled by this, though he never failed to rally to the support of the lady thus maligned, dwelling upon the advantage her mere presence must always be to the town.

"If she'd only let it go at that--'her mere presence'--" rejoined Bundy. But Solon protested, defending the lady's activities. He became sensitive to any mention of her name, and fell to brooding. He believed her to be a model woman, and little Roscoe to be a model boy.

"Why don't you try to be more like Roscoe Potts?" I heard him ask his son in a moment of reproof.

My namesake took it meekly; but to me, privately, he said:--

"Hunh! I can lick Ginger Potts with one hand tied behind me!"

"How do you know?" I asked sternly.

He wriggled somewhat at this, but at length confided in me.

"Well, there's a sell, you know, Uncle Maje. You say, 'They're goin' to tear the schoolhouse down,' or something like that, and the other boy says, 'What fur?' and then you say, quick as you can, 'Cat-fur to make kitten britches of,' and then we all laugh and yell, and I caught Ginger Potts on it, and he got mad when we yelled and come at me, and they pushed him against me and they pushed me against him, and they said he dassent, and they said I dassent, and then it happened, only when I got him down, he begun to say, 'Oh, it's wrong to fight! I promised my mother I would never fight!' but I wouldn't 'a' stopped for _that_, because teacher says he's by far the brightest boy in school--only just then Eustace Eubanks come along, and he laid down the meat he was taking home to dinner and jumped into the crowd and says: 'Boys, boys, shame on you to act so like the brutes! _That_ isn't any way to act!' and he pulled me off'n Ginger, and--and that's all, but I had him licked fair."

"I shall not tell your father of this," I said sternly.

"He has enough to worry him," said my namesake.

"Exactly," I said. "But I advise you to cultivate a friendly feeling for Roscoe Potts. Boys should not fight."

"Well--now--I would--but he's a regular teacher's pet."

And remembering the letter that was not sent to Sam Murdock,--that the teacher was my namesake's love,--I perceived that this breach was not to be healed.

CHAPTER XII

TROUBLED WATERS ARE STILLED

It was spring again, a Sunday in early May, warm, humid, scented with blossoms that were bodied souls of the laughing air. They starred the bank that fell away from my porch to the clear-watered river, and they sang of the young spirit that lives in this old earth so deceptively, defacing it with false scars of age, and craftily permitting us to count years by the thousand, yet remaining always as fresh in itself as on the primal morning when the world was found good by that ill-fated but joyous first pair of lovers. I marvel that so many are fooled by the trick; how so few of us detect that the soul of it all is ageless--has never even wearied. The blossoms told this secret now in quiet triumph over the denials of ancient oaks that towered above them and murmured solemn falsities in their tops about the incredible oldness of things.

There was the star-shaped bloodroot, with its ten or a dozen petals of waxen white set with jewel-like precision about a centre of dead gold. There was the less formal phlox of a pinkish purple; deer's-tongue, white and yellow; frail anemones, both pink and white; small but stately violets, and the wake-robin with its wine-red centre among long green leaves. There was a dogwood in the act of unfolding its little green tents that would presently be snow-white, and a plum tree ruffled

with tiny flowers of a honied fragrance.

With a fine Japanese restraint, Clem had placed a single bough of these in a dull-colored vase on my out-of-doors breakfast table.

All these were to say that the soul of the world is ageless, and that time is but a cheap device to measure our infirmities. Above, the trees were hinting that life might still be lived acceptably, as in Eden days; though they seemed to suspect that the stage of it to which they were amazedly awakening must be at least the autumn, and timidly clothed themselves accordingly. The elm, the first big tree to stir in its sleep, showed tiny, curled leaflets of a doubting, yellowish green; and the later moving oaks were frankly sceptical, one glowing faintly brown and crimson, another silvery gray and pink. They would need at least ten more days to convince them into downright summer greenery, even though slender-throated doves already mated in their tops with a perfect confidence.

It was an early morning hour, when it was easy to believe in the perfect fitness of Little Arcady's name; an hour in a time when the Potts-troubled waters had been mercifully stilled by the hand of God; an hour when the spirit of each Little Arcadian might share to its own fulness in the large serenity of the ageless world-soul.

I recalled Mrs. Potts's paper on "The Lesson of Greek Art," which had enriched two columns of the Argus after its reading to the ladies of the Literary and Home Study Club. It seemed to me that the Greeks must have divined this important secret of the vegetable world--the secret of ageless time--and that therein lay the charm of them; that spirit of ever freshening joy which they chiselled and sang into tangible grace for us of a later and heavier age.

At the moment I was on the porch, waiting for my coffee, and my thought seemed to be shared by Jim, my bony young setter, who, being but a scant year old, had not yet forgotten the lesson of Greek art. Over the grassy stretch before the porch he chased robins tirelessly, though with indifferent success. His was a spirit truly Greek. I knew it by reason of his inexhaustible enthusiasm for this present sport after a year's proving that chased birds will rise strangely but expertly into air that no dog can climb by any device of whining, leaping, or straining.

Living on into the Renaissance, I saw that Jim would be taught the grievous thing called wisdom--would learn his limitations and to form habits tamely contrary to his natural Greek likings. Then would he honorably neglect rabbits and all fur, cease pointing droves of pigs, and quit the silly chase of robins. Under check-cord and spike-collar he would become a fast and stylish dog, clean-cut in his bird work, perhaps a field-trial winner. He would learn to take reproof amiably, to "heel" at a word, to respect the whistle at any distance, to be steady to shot and wing, to retrieve promptly from land or water, and never to bolt or range beyond control or be guilty of false pointing.

I knew that coercion, steadily and tactfully applied, would thus educate him, for was he not of champion ancestry, wearing his pedigree in his looks, with the narrow shoulders so desirable and so rarely found, with just the right number of hairs at the end of his tail, the forelegs properly feathered, the feet and ankles strong, the right amount of leather in his ear to the fraction of an inch,--a dog, in short, of beauty, style, speed, nose, and brains?

But in this full moment of a glad morning I resolved that Jim should never know the Renaissance; he should never emerge from what Mrs. Potts had gracefully described as "the golden age of Pericles."

To the end of his days he should be blithely, naively Greek; a dog of wretched field manners, pointing cattle and quail impartially, shamefully gun-shy, inconsequent, volatile, ignorant, forever paganly joyous without due cause. For him I should do what no one had been able to do for me--detain him in that "world of fine fabling" where everything is true that ought to be; where the earth is a running course, fascinating in its surprises of open road and tangled hedgerow; where mere indiscriminate smelling is keenest ecstasy; and where the fact that robins have eluded one's fleetest rush to-day, by an amazing and unfair trick of levitation, is not the slightest promise that they can escape our interested mouthing on the morrow.

Doubtless he would be a remarkably foolish dog in his old age; but I, growing old beside him, would learn wisely foolish things from his excellent folly. I knew we should both be happier for it; knew it was best for us both to prove that my thin white friend had been born chiefly to display the acute elegance of his bones and the beauty of hopeful effort.

It was this last that kept him thin. When I took to the road, he travelled five miles to my every one, circling me widely, ranging far over the hills in mad dashes, or running straight and swiftly on the road, vanishing in a white fog of dust. Walking slowly to avoid this, I would only meet him emerging from a fresh cloud of it with a glad tongue thrown out to the breeze. Again, there were desperate plunges into wayside underbrush or down steep ravines, whence I would hear rapid splashing through a hidden stream and short, plaintive cries to tell that that wonderful, unseen wood-presence of a thousand provoking scents had once more cunningly evaded him.

Also did he love to swim stoutly across a field of growing wheat, his head alone showing above the green waves. And if the wheat were tall, he still braved it--lost to sight at the bottom. Then one might observe the mystery of a furrow ploughing itself swiftly across the billows without visible agency.

When I do not walk, to give countenance to his running, he has a game of his own. He plays it with an ancient fur cap that he keeps conveniently stored. The cap represents a prey of considerable dignity which must be sprung upon and shaken again and again until it is finally disabled. Then it is to be seized by implacable jaws and swiftly run with about the yard in a feverish pretence that enemies wish to ravish it from its captor. Any chance observer is implored to humor this pretence, and upon his compliance he is fled from madly, or perhaps turned upon and growled at most directly, if he show signs of losing interest in the game.

This ceaseless motion, with its attendant nervous strains, has prevented any accumulation of flesh, and explains the name of Slim Jim affixed to him by my namesake.

Jim consented now to rest for a moment at my feet, though at a loss to know how I could be calm amid so many exciting smells. I promised him as he lay there that he should never be compelled to learn any but the fewest facts necessary to make him as harmless as he was happy; chiefly

not to bark at old ladies and babies, no matter how threatening their aspect, as they passed our house. A few things he had already learned--to avoid fences of the barbed wire, to respect the big cat from across the way who sometimes called and treated him with watchful disdain, and not to chew a baby robin if by any chance he caught one. This last had been a hard lesson, his first contact with a problem only a few days younger than Eden itself. It came to his understanding, however, that if you mouth a helpless baby robin, a hand or a stick falls upon you hurtfully, even if you evade it for the moment and seclude yourself under a porch until it would seem that so trifling an occurrence must have been utterly forgotten. This was the one big sin--sin, to the best of our knowledge, being obedience to any natural desire, the satisfaction of which is unaccountably followed by pain.

I told him this would probably be all that he need ever know; and he looked up at me in a fashion he has, the silky brown ears falling either side of the white face. It is a look of languishing, melting adoration, and if I face him steadily, he must always turn away as if to avoid being overcome--as if the sight of beauty so great as mine could be borne full in the eyes only for the briefest of moments.

But Clem came now, ranging my breakfast dishes about the bowl of plum flowers, and I approached the table with all the ardor he could have wished at his softly spoken, "Yo' is suhved, Mahstah Majah."

The sight of Clem, however, inevitably suggests the person to whom I am indebted for his sustaining ministrations. Potts had been a necessary instrument in one of those complications which the gods devise among us human ephemera for their mild amusement on a day of *_ennui_*. And Potts, having served his purpose, had been neatly removed. I have said that the Potts-troubled waters of Little Arcady were for the moment stilled. By the hands of the gods had they been mercifully stilled so that not for a month had any citizen been asked to subscribe for any improving book or patented device of culture.

A month before, in a far-off place, J. Rodney Potts had suffered extinction through the apparently casual agency of a moving railway train, the intervention of the gods in all such matters being discreetly veiled so that the denser of us shall suspect nothing but that they were the merest of accidents.

One could only surmise that the widow viewed this happening with a kind of trustful resignation, sweetened perhaps by certain ancient memories attuned to a gentle melancholy. I know that she placed on view in her parlor for the first time a crayon portrait of Potts in his early manhood, one made ere life had broken so many of its promises to him, the portrait of one who might conceivably have enchained the fancy of even a superior woman. But the widow was not publicly anguished. She donned a gown and bonnet of black in testimony of her bereavement, but there was no unnecessary flaunt of crape in her decently symbolic garb. As Aunt Delia McCormick phrased it, she was not in "heavy mourning,"--merely "in light distress."

The town was content to let it go at that, especially after the adjustment of certain formalities which enabled the widow for a time to suspend her work of ministering to its higher wants.

The railway company had at first, it appeared, been disposed to view its removal of Potts very lightly indeed; not only because of his

unimposing appearance, but by reason of his well-attested mental condition at the time of the occurrence--a condition clearly self-induced, and one that placed him beyond those measures of safety which a common carrier is obliged to exercise in behalf of its patrons.

But a package of letters had been discovered among the meagre belongings of the unfortunate man, and these had placed the matter in a very different light. They showed conclusively that the victim had been of importance, a citizen of rare values in any community that he might choose to favor with his presence.

Truman Baird settled the case and, after these letters had been appraised by the corporation's attorney, he succeeded in extorting the sum of eight hundred dollars from the railway as recompense to the widow for the loss of her husband's services. I considered that the company would have given up at least five hundred more to avoid being sued for the death of a man who had been able to evoke those letters; but I did not say so, for the case was Truman's and eight hundred dollars were many. Westley Keyts thought they were, indeed, a great many, and outrageously excessive as a cold money valuation of Potts. "She only got eight hundred dollars, but there's them that thinks she skinned the company at _that!_" said Westley.

But there was no disposition to begrudge the widow a single dollar of this modest sum. A jury of Little Arcadians would have multiplied it tenfold without a blush; for, while that little hoard endured, any citizen, however public spirited, could flavor with a certain grace his refusal to subscribe for a book.

To Solon Denney the thing came as a deep and divine relief. In the satisfaction induced by it, he penned an obituary of Potts in which he employed the phrase "grim messenger of death" very cleverly indeed. For matters had been going from bad to worse. Murmurs at the demands of Mrs. Potts--likened by Asa Bundy to a daughter of the horse leech--had become passionately loud as our masses toiled expensively up that Potts-defined path of enlightenment. The old sneer at Solon's Boss-ship was again to be observed on every hand, that attitude of doubting ridicule, half-playful, half-contemptuous, which your public man finds more dangerous to his influence than downright hostility would be.

But the murmurs were again stilled, and Solon might breathe the peace of a golden age when as yet no Potts, male or female, had come unto us.

It was not felt at all that Solon's genius for the discretion of public affairs had availed him in this latest crisis. But the benefit was substantial, none the less, and the columns of the Argus were again buoyant as of yore. It was at this time, I remember, that the Argus first spoke of our town as "a gem at beauty's throat," and, touching the rare enterprise of our citizens, declared that, "If you put a Slocum County man astride a streak of lightning, he'd call for a pair of spurs."

For myself, I frankly mourned Potts. For I saw now that he had been truly and finely of that Greek spirit--one accepting gifts from the gods with a joyous young faith in their continuance. I felt that he had divined more of the lesson of Greek art than his one-time love could write down in papers unending. I should not have wished him back in Little Arcady, but I did breathe a prayer that he might in some early Greek elysium be indeed "Potts forever." Might it not be? Had not that

other paper on "the message of Emerson" hinted of "compensation" in a jargon that sounded authoritative?

And now, as I breakfasted, my attention was invited anew to that fateful, never ending extension of the Potts-made ripples in our little pool. I was threatened with the loss of my domestic stay; again might I be forced to the City Hotel's refectory of a thousand blended smells and spotty table-linen; or even to irksome adventure at the board of the self-lauded Budd.

There was selfish wonder in my heart as I listened to Clem, who, now that my second cup of coffee competed with the May blossoms, stood by to tell me of his worldly advancement and the nearing of a time when Miss Caroline should come among us to be independent.

His stubborn industry had counted. The vegetable and melon crop of the year before had been abundant and well sold, despite sundry raids upon the latter by nameless boys, who, he assured me, "hain't had no raght raisin'." And he had further swelled that hoard of "reglah gole money" in Bundy's bank by his performances of house-cleaning, catering, and his work as janitor; not a little, too, by sales of the fish he caught. He was believed to possess a secret charm that made his fish-bait irresistible. Certainly his fortune in this matter was superior to that of any other frequenter of the bass nooks below the dam.

And now he had waxed so heavy of purse that a woman could come between us,--a selfish woman, I made no doubt, pampered survival of a pernicious and now happily destroyed system, who would not only unsettle my domestic tranquillity, but would, in all likelihood, fetch another alien ferment into our already sorely tried existence as a town needing elevation. It seemed, indeed, that we were never to be done with these consequences.

Separated from my house by a stretch of weedy lawn was a shambling structure built years before by one Azariah Prouse, who believed among other strange matters that the earth is flat and that houses are built higher than one story only at great peril, because of the earth's proneness to tip if overbalanced. Prouse had compromised with this belief, however, and made his house a story and a half high, in what I conceive to have been a dare-devil spirit. The reckless upper rooms were thus cut off untimely by ceilings of sudden slope, and might not be walked in uprightly save by persons of an inconsiderable stature.

In a fulness of years Azariah had died and been chested, like Joseph of old, his soul to be gathered, as he believed, to another horizontal plane, exalted far above this, as would befit an abode for spirits of the departed good.

His earthly home, now long vacant, had been rented by Clem for a monthly sum not particularly cheap in view of its surprising limitations above stairs. It was of this new home that he chiefly talked to me, of the persistence required to have it newly painted by the inheriting Prouse, and repairs made to doors, windows, and the blinds that hung awry from them.

"An' Ah been cleanin'--yes, seh, Mahstah Majah--fum celleh to gahet. Them floahs do shine an' them windows is jes' so clean they look lahk they ain't theah at all. Miss Cahline an' Little Miss, they reside on th' lowah floah, an' Ah tek mahse'f up to that theh gahet. Yes, seh, Ah

haf to scrooge aw Ah git mah haid knocked off, but Ah reckon Ah sho' will luhn to remembah in Gawd's own time. An' they's a tehible grand hen-house. Ah'm go'n' a' raise a hund'ed thousan' yellow-laiged pullets; an' theh's a staihway down to th' watah whah Ah kin tie up mah ole catfish boat, an' a monst'ous big gyahden whah Ah kin keep mah fie'ce look on them mush an' watah melons. Ah don' want t' git into any mo' alterations with them boys, but Ah suttinly will weah 'em out if they don't mind theah cautions. Yes, seh,--we all go'n' a' have a raght tolabable homeplace."

Then my grievance prompted me.

"Yes, and who's going to get my breakfast and dinner for me, then?" I asked with a dark look, but he beamed upon me placatingly.

"Oh, Ah's still go'n' a' do fo yo', Mahstah Majah. Ah steddied huh all out twell she's plumb systemous. Miss Cahline sh' ain't wantin' huh breakfus' twell yo's done, an' she'll tek huh dinneh uhliah. Ah manage, Mahstah Majah. Ah mek all mah reddiments, yes, seh--yo's go'n' a' be jes' lahk mah own folks."

I affected to be made more cheerful by this, but I knew that no man can serve two masters, especially when he is the "pussenal propity" of one; but I forbore to warn the deluded African of the tribulations ahead of him.

The Book of MISS CAROLINE

CHAPTER XIII

A CATASTROPHE IN FURNITURE

"Miss Cahline comin' this yeh time a' yeah so's 't'll seem mo' soft an' homelike. Ah gaiss she go'n' a' sprigten raght up when she see th' summeh time all pleasant."

Thus Clem said to me a few weeks later, and I praised his thoughtfulness. But I nursed misgivings both for Miss Caroline and for Little Arcady. How would they take each other? I conceived Miss Caroline to be a formidable person whom Little Miss resembled, Clem said, "as aigs look lahk aigs." No further detail could I elicit from him save that his Mistress was "not fleshily inclahned," and that Little Miss was "sweetah'n honey on a rag!"

They would find our summer acceptable, even after a Southern summer heavy-sweet with magnolia and jasmine, honeysuckle and mimosa; with spirea and bridal-wreath and white-blossomed sloe trees. And the house as put to rights by Clem would be found at least endurable. It had not the solid grace nor the columned front of the houses I had somewhat hurriedly admired in the Southland some years before, but its lower rooms were wide, its windows abundant, and outwardly it had escaped the blight of the scroll saw.

But the civilization of Little Arcady would be alien to the newcomers, and I was apprehensive that it would also be difficult.

Further, I suspected that J.R.C. Tuckerman, with all his genius for hard work, lacked the administrative gifts of a true financier. He said a hundred thousand pullets when he should have said twenty-five, and he seemed to consider his banked hoard of gold money to be inexhaustible when it was in fact merely a sum slightly greater than he was wont to juggle with in his darkened mind.

I was not surprised, therefore, when I found him rather dejectedly sunk in figures one afternoon about a week after Miss Caroline's "home-fixin's" had begun to arrive.

These were all about him at the front door, in the hall, and extending far into the rooms, a truly depressing chaos of packing boxes, swathed tables, chairs, bureaus, and barrels of china. Nor was this all; for even as I loitered up to the door the dray of Sam Murdock halted in front with another huge load.

Clem raised his head from a sheet of sprawled figures and regarded this fresh trouble with something like consternation. In one hand he fluttered a packet of receipted freight bills, and he spoke as one in an evil dream.

"Yes, seh, Mahstah Majah, it suttinly do seem lahk them railroad genamen would git monst'ous rich a-runnin' them freight trains about th' kentry th' way lahk they do. Ah allus think them ole freight cyahs look maghty cheap an' common a-rattlin' around, but Ah teks mah ole hat off to um yehafteh. Yes, seh, Ah lays Ah will! Them engineahs an' fiahmen an' them Cunnels with gole on they hats, Ah gaissthey go'n' a' have all th' money in th' world maghty shawtly. They looks highly awdinahy an' unpetentious, but they suttinly p'duces th' revenue. Ah sho'ly go'n' a' repohrt mahse'f to um ve'y honably when they pass me by yehafteh. Yo' don't gaissthey made a errah, Mahstah Majah?"

He searched my face with a sudden hope:--

"Yo' don't reckon they git a idy them funichas an' home-fixin's ain't been paid foh in th' fust place?"

I took the packet from his hands and glanced over it.

"No, these seem to be all right, Clem--only freight is charged for. But you must remember Virginia is a long way off."

"Yes, seh--it ain't neveh raghtly come upon me befoh."

"And freights are high, of course?"

"Yes, seh, th' freight p'fession does look lahk it ort a' be maghty gainful. Ah gaissthem engineahs go'n' a' do raght well in it, with evabody movin' 'round considable."

"Well, how many more loads do you expect?"

"Well, seh, Ah don't raghtly know. Ah tell that drivah yestaday Ah already got a gret abundance to mek evabody comf'table, an' a little bit

oveh, but he jes' sais, 'Oh, tha's all raght,' an' so fothe, an' he still is _a-bringin_' it. Lohks ve'y strongly lahk he ain't go'n' a' stop at _mah_ implications. Mahstah Majah, maght happen lahk he'd ack mo' reasonin' ef yo' was t' have a good long talk with him."

"Oh, he hasn't anything to do with it. He only brings what your Miss Caroline has shipped. She shouldn't have sent so much, that's all."

He took the troubling bills again.

"Yo' _sounds_ raght, Mahstah Majah--you suttinly do sound _raght_! Ah gaiss Ah got a' raise ten hund'ed thousan' pulletts an mo'."

For three more days the juggernaut of Sam Murdock's dray hauled heavy furniture over the prostrate spirit of Clem. Faster than he could unpack the stuff was it unplied at his door. And it was poor stuff, moreover, in the opinion of Little Arcady. Clem's history was known, of course, and during these busy days the town made it a point to pass his door in friendly curiosity about the belongings of his mistress. When these could not be satisfactorily appraised from the yard, they sauntered up to the porch and surveyed Clem in the front room at his work of unpacking and cleaning. Often, indeed, some kindly disposed observer with time to spare would lend a hand in freeing some heavy bit of mahogany from its crate or wrappings.

The public opinion, thus advantageously formed, was for once unanimous. The house overflowed with worthless and unbeautiful junk. To Little Arcady this was a grievous disappointment. It had expected elegance, for Clem had been wont to enlarge upon the splendors of his former home. When it was finally known that the long-vaunted furnishings were coming, the town had prepared to be dazzled by sets of black walnut, ornate with gilt lines, by patent rockers done in plush, by fashionable sofas, gay with upholstery of flowered ingrain, by bedroom sets of ash, stencilled adroitly with pink-and-blue flowers, or set with veneered panels of burl; by writing-desks of maple and music-stands of cherry with many spindles and frettings, by sideboards of finest new oak with brass handles and mirrors in the backs.

The town had anticipated, in short, up to its own high and difficult standards. And along had come a ruck of stuff that was dark and dingy and old-fashioned; awkward articles with a vast dull expanse of mahogany, ending in clumsy claw feet; spindle-legged tables inlaid with white wood; old-fashioned mirrors in scarred gilt frames; awkward-looking highboys and the plainest of sofas and lounges. The chief sideboard boasted not the tiniest bit of brass; even the handles were of cheap glass, and Clem had set candle-sticks upon it that were nothing but pewter.

Where Little Arcady had looked for the best Brussels carpets, there came only dull-colored rugs of a most aged and depressing lack of gayety. As for silver, we knew the worst when Aunt Delia McCormick declared, "They haven't even a swinging ice-pitcher--nothing but thin battered old stuff that was made in the year one!"

Aunt Delia had quite the newest and most fashionable furniture in town; her parlor was a feast of color for any eye, and her fine hardwood sideboard alone had cost twenty-two dollars, so she spoke as one having authority.

By the time that Clem's ancient treasures were all unpacked, Little Arcady felt a genuine if patronizing sympathy for his mistress. If that were the boasted elegance of the ante-bellum South, then Tradition had reported falsely. No plush rockers of the newest patent; no chenille curtains; no art chromos; no hat-racks, not even an imitation bronze mantle clock guarded by its mailed warrior. Such clocks as there were left only honest distress in the mind of the beholder,--tall, outlandish old things in wooden cases.

It was believed that Clem had wasted money in paying freight on this stuff. Certainly no one in Little Arcady would have paid those bills to possess the furniture. As to the folly of those who had originally purchased it, the town was likewise a unit.

If Clem was made aware of this public sentiment, he still did not waver in his loyalty to the old pieces. Day after day he unpacked and dusted and polished them with loving devotion. They spoke to him of other days, and when he was quite sure that the last freight bill had been paid, he seemed really to enjoy them. The unexpected drain had reduced his savings to a pittance, but were not the pullets which he could raise absolutely without number?

It was true that Miss Caroline would have to come alone now, leaving Little Miss still to teach in the school at Baltimore until a day of renewed surplus. This much Clem confided to me in sorrow. I sympathized with him, truly, but I felt it was a fortunate circumstance. I thought that one of the ladies at a time would be as much as Little Arcady could assimilate.

Slowly the house grew into a home awaiting its mistress, a home whose furnished rooms overflowed into others not furnished but merely crowded.

I foresaw, not without a certain wicked cheerfulness, that, even after the coming of Miss Caroline, Clem would be forced to pander to my breakfast appetites for the slight betterment it made in his fortunes, even must this be done surreptitiously. And at least one dinner was secured to me beyond the coming of this mistress; for Clem had conveyed to me, with appropriate ceremony, an invitation, which I promptly accepted, to dine with Mrs. Caroline Lansdale at six-thirty on the evening of her arrival, she having gleaned from his letters, it appeared, that I had been a rather friendly adviser of her servant.

In the days that followed I saw that Clem was regarding me with an embarrassed, troubled look. Something of weight lay upon his mind. Nor was it easy, to make him speak, but I achieved this at last.

"Well, seh, Mahstah Majah, yo'-all see, Ah ain't eveh told Miss Cahline that yo's a Majah in th' Nawthun ahmy."

"No?" I said.

"No, seh; Ah ain't even said yo's been a common soljah."

"Well?"

"'Cause Miss Cahline's tehible heahfelt 'bout some mattehs. Th' Lansdales sho'ly kin ca'y a grudge powful long. An' so--seh--Ah ain't neveh tole on yo'."

"But she'll find it out."

"Yes, seh, an' she maght fuhgit it, but--Ah crave yo' pahdon, seh--theh's yo' ahm what's gone."

"It's too late to help that, Clem."

"Well, seh--now Ah was steddin'--if yo' kin'ly grant yo' grace of pahdon, seh--lahkly 'twould compliment Miss Cahline ef yo' was to git yo'se'f fitted to one a' them unnatchel limbs, seh. Yo' sho'ly go'n' a' pesteh huh rec'lections with that theh saggin' sleeve, Mahstah Majah."

But this kindly meant proposal I felt compelled to reject.

"No, Clem, you'll have to fix it up with Miss Caroline the best you can."

"Ve'y well, seh, thank yo', seh--Ah do mah ve'y best fo' yo'."

But I saw that he had little hope of ever winning for me the favor of his captious owner.

CHAPTER XIV

THE COMING OF MISS CAROLINE

She came to us auspiciously on a day in the first week of June.

Mistress Caroline Lansdale, a one-time belle of the Old Dominion, relict of the late Colonel Jere Lansdale, C.S.A., legislator and duellist, whose devotion to her in the days of their courtship had been the talk of two states. Not less notable than his eloquence in the forum, his skill in the duello, had been the determined fervor with which he knelt at her feet. And I waited no more than a hundred seconds in her presence to applaud his discernment.

I had pictured an old woman--some aged trifle of an elder day, sad, withered, devitalized, intemperately reminiscent--steeped in traditions that would leave her formidable, and impracticable as a friend to me. I had fancied her thus, from Clem's fragmentary and chance descriptions and my own knowledge of what she should be by all laws of the probable; and she was not as I had evolved her.

The day she came was one of Little Arcady's best; quite all that her anxious servitor could have wished,--a day of summer's first abundance, when our green-bordered streets basked in a tempered sunlight, and our trim white cottages nestled coolly back of their flower gardens. Harried alien as she was, she would be welcomed with smiles, and I was glad for her sake and Clem's when I hurried home to dress for that first dinner with her.

On my way across the lawn at six-thirty I picked a bunch of the newly opened yellow roses as a peace offering, should one be needed. Clem, in his most formal dress, received me ceremoniously at the door, his look betraying only the faintest, formalest acknowledgment of having ever

encountered mine before. With a superb bow toward the drawing-room and in tones stiffly magnificent, he announced, "Mistah Calvin Blake." It was excellently done, but I knew he had rehearsed the "Mistah."

Then a woman rose from one of the deep old chairs to offer me her hand, and a soft quick laugh came as she perceived my difficulty, for my one hand held the roses. These she gathered gracefully into her left hand, while her right fell into mine with a swift little pressure as she bade me welcome.

"Clem has told me of you, Mr. Blake. I feel that you are one of us. Let me thank you at once for the consideration you have shown him."

In the half light I hesitated awkwardly enough to speak her name, for I felt that this could not be the mother of Little Miss. Rather was it the daughter herself. I stammered words that must have revealed my uncertainty, for again she laughed, and then she ordered lights.

Clem came soft-footedly with a branching candelabra, which he placed on the round-topped old table by which she had been sitting. She moved a step to where the soft lights glowed up into her face, and with mock seriousness stood to be surveyed fairly.

"There, Mr. Blake! You see I confess all my years."

And I saw the truth, that she loitered gracefully among the vague and pleasant fifties. But then she did a thing which would have been injudicious in most women of her years. Her hand, still holding my roses, went up to her face, and her cheek glowed dusky and pink against the yellow petals. I saw that she rightly appraised her own daring and felt free to say:--

"You see! My confusion was inevitable. Not one of those candles can be spared if I am to believe you are Miss Caroline."

Again she laughed, revealing now a girlish freshness in the small mouth, that had somehow lingered to belie the deeper, graver lines about her dark eyes. As she still regarded me with that smiling, waiting lift of the short upper lip, I called out:--

"More lights, Clem! I need all you have."

Whereat Miss Caroline fell into her chair with a marvellous blush, an undeniable darkening of the pink on cheeks that were in texture like the finest, sheerest lawn.

Never thereafter could I refuse credence to tales, of which many came to me, exposing Miss Caroline as an able and relentless coquette. Nor could I fail to understand how the late Colonel Jere Lansdale would have found need to be a duellist after he became her lover, even had he aforetime been unskilled in that difficult art.

As she chatted, chiefly of her journey, I falsely pretended to listen, whereas I only stared and in spirit was prostrate before her. Mere kneeling at her feet savored too nearly of arrogance. I felt the need to be a spread rug in her presence. She sat back in the chair that embraced her loosely, a slight figure with a small head, on which the heavy strands of whitening hair seemed only a powdered lie above the curiously girlish face. A tiny black patch or two on the face, I thought, would

have made this illusion perfect. And yet when she did not laugh, or in some little silence of recollection, the deeper lines stood out, and I could see that sorrow had long known its way to her face. It even lurked now back of her eyes, and I knew that she tried to keep her face lighted for me so that I should not detect it. She succeeded admirably, but the smile could not always be there, and ghosts of her dead years came stealthily to haunt her face as surely as the smile went.

When Clem, with an air of having had word from a numerous kitchen crew, stood before us and bowed out, "Miss Cahline, dinneh is suhved!" I gave her my arm with a feeling of vast relief. Not only was Miss Caroline an abiding joy, but apprehension as to my modest complicity in her late distress had, too, evidently been groundless. She had once, with what seemed to be an almost artificial politeness, asked me about our timber supply and the state of the lumber market; queries to which I had replied with an assumption of interest equally artificial, for I was ignorant of both topics, and not even remotely concerned about either.

Seated at the table, which Clem had arrayed with a faultless artistry, I promptly demanded the removal of a tall piece of cut glass and its burden of carnations, asserting that both glass and flowers might be well enough in their way, but that I could regard them only as a blank wall of exasperating ugliness while they interrupted a view of my hostess. Whereat I was again regaled with that incomparable blush.

Clem served a soup that had been two days in the making and was worth the time. But even ere the stain had faded from the cheeks of my hostess, cheeks of slightly crumpled roseleaf, another look flashed the smile from her eyes--a quick, firm, woman look of suffering and defiance.

She had raised her glass, and I mechanically did the same.

"Mr. Blake, let us drink standing!--we women earned the right to stand with you."

A little puzzled, I stood up to face her, as Clem pulled back her chair. One hand on the table, the other reaching her slender stemmed glass aloft, she leaned toward me with a look of singular vehemence.

"To our murdered brothers and husbands and sons, Mr. Blake! To our lost leaders and our deathless lost cause! To Jefferson Davis and Robert Edmund Lee! To the Confederate States of America!"

A black wind seemed to blow across the face of her servitor's fluttering eyelids. But I drank loyally to Mrs. Caroline Lansdale and whatsoever that woman would. I could see that Clem exhaled a deep breath. How long he had held it I know not.

We resumed our seats, and the dinner went forward with my hostess again herself. It was a dinner not heavy but choice, a repast upon which Clem had magically worked all his spells. There was a bass that had nosed the river's current that morning, two pullets cut off in the very dawn of adolescence, and a mysteriously perfect pastry whose secret I had never been able to wring from him beyond the uninforming and obvious enough data that it contained "some sugah an' a little spicin's."

Having for my luncheon that day suffered an up-to-date dinner at Budds's, I felt a genuine craving for food; yet the spell of my hostess

was such that I left her table ahungred.

Again there was an inexplicable reference from her to the timber and sawed-lumber interests of the Little Country, and the circumstance that another black wind seemed to shiver the eyelids of Clem lent no light to the mystery of it. But then, as if some recondite duty to me had been safely performed, she talked to me of herself, of days when the youth of the Old Dominion had been covetous of her smiles, of nightly triumphs in ball and rout, of gay seasons at the nation's capital, amid the fashion and beauty and wit of Pierce's administration and of Buchanan's, of rounds of calls made in her calash, of bewitching gowns she had worn, of theatres and musicales and teas and embassy receptions, in a day when Harriet Lane was mistress of the White House.

For my pleasing she laughed her sprightly way through memories of that romantic past, when she danced and chattered in the fulness of her bellehood, bringing out a multitude of treasured mementoes, compliments she had compelled, witticisms she had prompted, pranks she had played, delectable repasts she had eaten at Lady Napier's or another's, the splendor of pageants she had witnessed. And though she was back in an elder day, she glowed young as she talked, whether recalling official solemnities or a once-cherished gown of embroidered tulle, caught up with bunches of grapes. The girl's mouth was her's--fresh and full, unlined by care.

It was not until she talked of later, younger days that her face took on an old look.

"When our federated states rose up in their might," was a phrase that brought the change. Thereafter she spoke in subdued tones of a time more eventful than romantic, but still absorbing.

She remembered the words in which she felicitated General Pope Walker for having issued the order to fire on Sumter. She gave details of the privation that Richmond on her seven hills had suffered in the latter days, and she made plain why their women should rise with their men to drink certain toasts; how they, too, had sacrificed and toiled and suffered with the same loyal tenacity. She mentioned "the present government" casually, as the affair of a day; and spoke of "Mr. Lincoln, their Northern President," in a tone implying confidence that I shared her feeling for him.

As we went back to the drawing-room for coffee, she summed up herself to me, though she thought to sum up more than herself.

"They swept us with the besom of war, Mr. Blake, and they overwhelmed--but they could not subjugate us."

As she spoke, my eyes caught for the first time a portrait that hung on the wall back of her. It was the portrait of one dark but fair, with shoulders of a girlish slenderness all but thin, with eyes of glowing dusk and a half-smile upon her lips. It was like my hostess in a fashion of line and color, and yet enough unlike her so that I knew it must be the daughter. The face was a shade narrower of chin, a bit longer, and in some obscure differing of the features there was an effect of more poise, almost of a maturer dignity, so that while I divined it was the face of her daughter, it would seem to have been better planned for the face of her mother.

She followed my eyes to the picture, and her face was still almost stern from her last speech, though it is true that the sternness was a dimpled sternness, for the chin of my hostess was rounded.

"They overwhelmed us, Mr. Blake,--my daughter there, and me, and God alone has counted how many other wretched women. Her they struck a double blow--they killed the two men she loved. One was her father, but she flew to the other. She found her picture in his dead hands. Our young men were apt to die in that fashion; and when she put it back to be buried with him, her eyes were dry. Even under her double blow, she was stronger than I. She has been stronger ever since, but she suffered more than I was made to. Oh, it was a fine thing for them to do!"

Her voice rose at the last into a little trembling gust of passion, and I saw again the spirit that gave those women the right to stand with the men. She recovered herself quickly, and the girl in her smiled upon me again.

"You must overlook my forgetfulness. I shall not forget often, especially now that I am among these murderous fanatics. But I was tired to-night, and I was so glad when I knew I could talk to you freely."

Her eyes were upon me in friendly unreserve, in confident appeal.

In the face of what I should have felt, I was ashamed at that moment, and in the nervousness of hidden guilt I handled the minute coffee cup awkwardly. Clem, who must have been equally nervous, stepped to right the thing in its saucer, with "Yes, seh, Mahstah Majah!"

From across the table I knew, without raising my eyes, that his mistress glanced up at Clem in quick astonishment, then that her eyes were fastened upon my face. I still regarded the coffee interestedly, but I knew that I myself blushed now and I suspected that my hostess was pale.

"Major?" she began questioningly, then more decidedly, "_Major_ Blake?"

I raised my eyes to hers and nodded idiotically.

She laughed a little laugh that was icy in its politeness.

"How stupid of me, and now I must ask your pardon for all my tirade, for my blasphemies, and for that monstrous toast I--really--"

She shot a look at Clem, under which he blanched visibly, then her eyes were again upon me and she smiled with a rare art.

"Really, you will overlook an old woman's weakness."

It was the inimical, remote, icy superiority of her tone that nettled me--perhaps her implied assumption that I would not know it for such. But also I felt curiously stricken by that swift withdrawal of her confidence, for Mrs. Caroline Lansdale had won me by her laugh and blush of ancient girlishness. Further, I would not now be hurt by any woman, though she were ten times my years, without a show of defence.

I arose as Clem hastily fled from the room.

"Miss Caroline--" I waited for the fine little brows to go up at that. I had not long to wait.

"I shall positively never call you anything else but Miss Caroline while you permit me to address you at all--understand it--I've associated with your boy too long. Well, I did do four years of fighting, and I was mustered out with the rank of Major. You might as well know it now as later. You'll have longer to forget it. I wish I could forget it myself. Not the fact, for I should fight again as long and try to fight harder in the same cause, but the hellishness of it--the damnable, inhuman obscenity of it--I should like to forget. I never said so before, Miss Caroline,--there was no one to say it to,--but it made me old before my time. Why, I could almost be a son of yours, if you will pardon that minor brutality, and the thing is aging me to this day. I helped to kill your young men and your old men, but you ought to know that I didn't do it for holiday sport. The first one of your men I saw dead lay alone by the roadside, a boy, foolishly young, with a tired face that was still smiling. He'd fallen there as if sleep had overtaken him on the march. Our column had halted, and I went to him. It must have taken a full minute for me to realize that this was dignified war and not the murder of a boy in a homely gray uniform. When I did realize it, I was so weakened that I broke down and cried. I was a private then. I covered his face, and got up strong enough to assault two other privates who had found my snivelling funny. One of them went to the field hospital, and I went under arrest when I'd finished with the other. You ought to know, Miss Caroline, that the sight of thousands of your other dead never moved me to any merriment. I tried to be a good soldier, but I felt the death pains of every fallen man I saw. I didn't stop to note the color of his uniform. Miss Caroline--"

I waited until I had made her look at me.

"The war is over, you know. Suppose you forget me as a soldier and take me as a man. Really, I believe we ought to know each other better."

Clem had once found occasion to say, "When Miss Cahline tek th' notion to shine huh eyes up, she sho' is a highly illuminous puhsonality."

I saw then what he meant, for Miss Caroline had "shined" her eyes, and they flooded me with a distracting medley of lights. I thought she struggled very uncertainly with herself. Her eyes shifted from my face to the empty sleeve. Twice before that evening--I remembered it had been when she spoke so enigmatically of the lumber industry--her eyes had rested there briefly, discreetly, but in all sympathy. Now the look was different. It wavered. At one instant I seemed to read regret that I had come off so well--her eyes flickered suggestively to my remaining arm.

"Be fair," I said; "did I not drink your toast?"

I thought she wavered at this, for a blush deeper than all the others suffused her.

"Besides," I continued warningly, "you are within the enemy's lines now, and you may find me a help. Come!" and I held out my hand.

Very slowly she put her own within it. I noticed that it was still plump, the fine skin not yet withered.

"You are very kind, Major Blake. I had been misinformed, or you should have had no occasion to think me rude."

It was then that I wished definitely to shake Miss Caroline.

"Come, come," I said, "you are not giving me what you gave at first. I'm not to be put off that way, you know. If I call you Miss Caroline,--and I've sworn to call you nothing else,--you must be Miss Caroline."

She searched my face eagerly,--then--

"You _shall_ call me Miss Caroline--but remember, sir, it makes you my servant." She smiled again, without the icy reserve this time, whereat I was glad--but back of the smile I could see that she felt a bitter homesickness of the new place.

"Your most obedient servant," I said. "You have another slave, Miss Caroline, another that refuses manumission--another bit of personal property, clumsy but willing."

"Thank you, Major, I need your kindness more than I might seem to need it. Good night!" and even then she gave me a rose, with the same coquetry, I doubt not, that had once made Colonel Jere Lansdale quick to think of his pistols when another evoked it. Only now it masked her weariness, her sense of desperate desolation. I took the rose and kissed her hand. I left her wilting in the big chair, staring hard into the fireplace that Clem had rilled with summer green things.

When my fellow-chattel appeared next morning with my coffee, he was embarrassed. With guile he strove to be talkative about matters of no consequence. But this availed him not.

"Clem," I said frigidly, "tell me just what you said to Mrs. Lansdale about me."

He paltered, shifting on his feet, his brow contracted in perplexity, as if I had propounded some intricate trifle of the higher mathematics.

"Huh! Wha--what's that yo'-all is a-sayin', Mahstah Majah?"

"Stop that, now! I needn't tell you twice what I said. Out with it!"

"Well, seh, Mahstah Majah, of co'se, yo'-all tole me to fix it man own way, an' Ah lay Ah'd do it raghtly--an' so Miss Cahline is ve'y busy goin' th'oo th' rooms an' spressin' huhse'f how grand evehthing suttinly do look an' so fothe an' so on, an' sh' ain't payin' much attention--Ah reckon sh' ain't huhd raghtly--"

"Clem--the Bible says, 'How forceful are right words!'"

He stopped at my look, despaired, and became succinct.

"Well, seh, Ah jes' think Ah brek it to huh easy-lahk, by degrees, so Ah sais yo' is a genaman of wahm South'n lahkings. Ah sais yo' been so hot fo' th' South all th'oo that theh wah that evehbody yeh'bouts despised an' reviled you. An' she sais why ain't yo' gone faght fo' th' South ef yo'-all so hot about it, an' Ah sais yo' was eageh to go, but yo' been in the timbeh business, an' one day yo' got rash about yo' saw-mill, an' th' ole buzz-saw jes' natchelly tuk off yo' ahm, so's yo' couldn't go to th' wah. Yes, seh, Mahstah Majah--Ah laid Ah'd brek it grajally--an' Ah suttinly did have that lady a-thinkin' ve'y highly of yo' at th' time of yo' entrance, seh,--yes, seh!"

CHAPTER XV

LITTLE ARCADY VIEWS A PARADE

And so began the time of Miss Caroline among us,--one effect the more of Fate's mad trickery. It was my privilege to be more intimately aware of her concerns than was the town at large. And even to me in those days she carried off the difficulties of her lot with a manner so plausible that it clenched my admiration if it did not win my belief. I knew that she daily bore a burden of ruin and faced a future of perilous uncertainty. I knew that she must have journeyed into our strange land with a real terror, nerved to that course only by a resolve to be no longer a burden upon her impoverished kinsman. Surely it had been like dying a death for her to leave the land of her own people, devastated though it was and vacant of those who had made the world easy for her.

And I was not a little puzzled by the tie that bound her to her one remaining stay. Both she and Clem, I saw, considered her coming to him to be a thing so natural that it should excite no wonder, a thing familiar in the thought and as little to be puzzled about as their own breathing. I saw that her perplexities lay not at all in this black fellow's unthinking adherence to his life of service, but rather in the circumstance of her spirit-grieving exile and in the necessary doubts of her chattel's competence for the feat he had undertaken.

I despaired very soon of ever comprehending the intricate strands of their relationship. When I understood, as I was not long in doing, that each was in certain ways genuinely afraid of the other, I knew that the problem must always be far beyond my own little powers.

As to Little Arcady at large, some aspects of this complication were simpler than they appeared to me; others were more obscure. Of the tragedy of Miss Caroline's mere coming to us they could suspect nothing, save it might be the humiliation her old-fashioned furniture must put upon her in a prosperous town where so much of the furniture was elegant to the point of extravagance.

In the much-discussed matter of mistress and slave, the town agreed simply that Clem was stupid and had been deluded by Miss Caroline into believing that a certain proclamation had stopped short of her personal property. It was believed that she had terrorized him by threatening to put bloodhounds on his trail if he ever tried to run off--for the town knew its "Uncle Tom's Cabin" as well as it knew "Gaskell's Compendium." It was thought that if Clem proved to be disobedient or rebellious, his mistress would try to hire "Big Joe" Kestrel or some equally strong person to whip him with a "black-snake." Also it was said that she had sold his wife away from him, and might try to sell Clem himself if ever she got "hard up," though it was felt that she would be wise not to go too far in that matter.

For the rest, Little Arcady rather rejoiced in the novelty of Miss Caroline's establishment. There was a flavor of much-needed romance in this survival at our very doors of an ante-bellum unrighteousness. The

town cherished a hope that Clem would try to run off some time, or that Miss Caroline would have his back cut to ribbons, or try to sell or mortgage him or something, thus creating entertainment of an agreeable and exciting character.

If the town could have overheard Clem scolding the lady with frank irritation in his voice,--as I chanced to do once or twice,--had it beheld his scowl as he raged, "Miss Cahline, yo' sho'ly gittin' old 'nuff to know betteh'n _that_. I suttinly do wish yo' Paw was alive an' yeh'bouts. Ah git him affeh yo' maghty quick. Now yo' jes' remembh Ah ain't go'n' a' _have_ no sech doin's!"--if it could have noted the quailing consternation of the mistress at these moments, it might have been puzzled; but of such phenomena it never knew. It was aware only that Miss Caroline treated Clem with a despotic severity, issuing commands to him as from a throne of power and in tones of acrid authority that were the envy of all housekeepers among us who kept "hired girls."

Even Mrs. Potts, long before the arrival of Miss Caroline, had despaired of teaching Clem to make something of himself. He had refused to subscribe for a "Compendium," and her cordial assurance that he was, by the law of the land, both a man and a brother, did not even mildly elate him. Mrs. Potts was soon in a like despair regarding Miss Caroline, whom she regarded as too frivolous ever to make anything of herself. These two ladies, indeed, were widely apart. Perhaps I can intimate the extent of their unlikeness by revealing that Mrs. Potts, early in our acquaintance, had observed of me that I was not serious enough; whereas Miss Caroline was presently averring to my face that I was entirely too serious. These judgments of myself seemed to contrast the ladies informingly.

The impression that Miss Caroline was frivolous--or even worse--became current the day after her arrival in Little Arcady. Arrayed in a lavender silk dress of many flounces, with bonnet beribboned gayly beyond her years, shod in low walking shoes of heel iniquitously high, a toe minute and shining and an instep ornate to an unholy degree, bearing a slender gold-tipped staff of polished ebony to assist theatrically in her progress, and bestowing placid, patronizing looks to right and left, she had flounced into Main Street, followed ceremoniously by her black chattel, himself set up with a palpable and shameless pride in his degradation, saluting stiffly and with an artificial grandeur those whom he would otherwise have greeted with the unstudied ease of long association.

This procession regaled both Main and Washington streets, where Miss Caroline visited our shops to make inconsiderable purchases and many friends. It was a function the pleasant data whereof I was not long in collecting.

Her first conquest was Chester Pierce, our excellent hardware merchant, whom she commissioned to make a needed repair to her range. It was a simple business matter, and Chester Pierce is a simple business person of plain manners. But as he slouched comfortably upon his counter and listened to Miss Caroline's condescending exposition of her needs, he became sensible of a strange influence stealing upon him. By degrees he brought himself erect and slowly, dazedly performed an act which had never before been perpetrated within his establishment. It was not that he deliberated, nor that his reason dictated it; but instinctively, almost from a purely reflex muscular action, he removed his hat while

Miss Caroline talked, feeling himself thrill with a foreign and most suave deference. It was customary in our town to raise your hat to a lady on the street; but for a merchant, and a solid citizen at that, to do this thing in his own establishment, was a thing unheard of--and a thing of pretentious and sickening foppery when it _was_ heard of, for that matter, though this need not now concern us.

"And be sure to tell my servant to give you a glass of wine when your work is done," concluded Miss Caroline, as she turned to rustle silkily out. Whereat Chester Pierce, charter member and President of our Sons of Temperance, a man primed with all statistics of the woe resulting traditionally from that first careless glass, murmured words unintelligible but of gratified import, and bowed low after the retreating vision. A moment later he was staring with mystified absorption at the hat in his hands, quite as if the hat were a stranger's--and then he brushed it around and around with the cuff of his coat sleeve as if the stranger had not been careful enough of it.

Thence paraded Miss Caroline to the City Drug Store, to be bowed well out to the sidewalk by young Arthur Updyke when her errand within had been done. But Arthur had attended a college of pharmacy far away from Slocum County, and it was not unnatural that he should exhibit an alien grace in times of emergency.

With Westley Keyts again, to whose shop Miss Caroline next progressed, it was as with Chester Pierce, a phenomenon of instinctive muscular reaction--that of his hat coming off as he greeted the stately little lady at his threshold and apologized for the sawdust on his floor which was compelling her to raise a froth of skirts above the tops of those sinful-looking shoes. I suspect that Miss Caroline was rather taken with Westley. She called him "my good man," which made him feel that he had been distinguished uncommonly, and she chatted with him at some length, asking cordially about cuts of meat and his family, two matters in which Westley was much absorbed. He declared later that she was "a grand little woman."

There followed pilgrimages that June morning to the First National Bank and to several of our lesser establishments; pilgrimages rarely diverting to Little Arcady and which invariably provoked bows under strangely lifted hats.

But there were Little Arcadians of Miss Caroline's own sex to whom she might not so swiftly fetch confusion. Aunt Delia McCormick devoted a chance view of the newcomer to discovering that the gown of lavender satin had been turned and made over, none too expertly, from one originally built some years before the war. Later she found what our ladies agreed was its primal design, after much turning of the leaves of ancient Godey's magazines.

Mrs. Judge Robinson, from one sidelong glance, brought off detailed intelligence of the bonnet's checkered past.

The elder Miss Eubanks decried the mannishness of cane-bearing; and Mrs. Westley Keyts, entering the shop as Miss Caroline was bowed out, declared that her silk stockings were of a hue hardly respectable, and that she wore shoes "twice too small for her."

The eyes of the suddenly urbane Westley glistened when he overheard this, but he fell to dissecting a beef without further sign.

For better or worse, Miss Caroline and Little Arcady had exchanged impressions of each other.

I met her by chance that morning and was charmed by her flattering implication of reliance upon myself. She made me feel that our understanding was secret and our attachment romantic. To complete her round of our commercial centre I escorted her to the Argus office. Her greeting of Solon Denney was a thing to behold with unalloyed delight. They seemed to understand each other at once. Two minutes after Solon had looked up in some astonishment from his dusty, over-piled desk, they were arrayed as North and South in a combat of blithest raillery.

Miss Caroline sat in Solon's battered chair with the missing castor, surveyed his exchange-laden desk with a humorous eye, and seized the last Argus, skimming its local columns with a lively interest and professing to be enthralled by its word-magic. She read stray items that commended themselves to her critical judgment, such as, "A wind blew last week that you could lean up against like the side of the house;" or "Westley Keyts has a bran-new 'No Admittance!' sign over the door of his slaughter-house. We don't see why. He could put up a 'Come one, come all!' sign and still not get us into the place. They're messy."

Further she read, "Some fiend with sub-human instincts ravaged our secret hoard of eating-apples while we were out meeting the farmers last Saturday afternoon. We wish they had been of no value to any one except the owner." And then, in her sprightliest manner, and with every sign of enjoyment, she went on to an item during the reading of which I think we both flushed a little, Solon and I:--

"The United States is

"Some grammar sharp down East says you must say 'The United States are.' But we guess not. Opinions to that effect prevailed widely to the south of us some years ago, but the contrary was proved, we believe. The United States is, brother, ever since Appomattox, and even the grammar book should testify to its is-ness--to its everlasting and indivisible oneness."

She carried it off so finely that I knew Miss Caroline had recovered from the fatigues of her journey.

"I shall write you an item myself," she exclaimed, and seizing a stubby pencil, she wrote rapidly:--

"A battered and ungrammatical old woman from the valley of Virginia has settled in our midst. She will always believe that the United States are, but she is harmless and otherwise sane."

"Have I caught the style?--have I used 'in our midst' correctly?" she asked Solon. And he protested that her style was faultless but that her matter was grossly misleading.

From this she was presently assuring him, in all pleasantness, that the seed of Cain, descended through Ham, would, by reason of the curse of God, be a "servant of servants" unto the end; while Solon was assuring her, with equal good nature, that this scriptural law had been repealed by President Lincoln.

Her retort, "I dare say your Mr. Lincoln was capable of wishing to repeal the Bible," was her nearest approach to asperity.

"A battered old woman!" said Solon to me later. "She looks more like a candy saint, if they make such things,--one that a child has been careless with." We agreed that she was an addition to Little Arcady.

The editor of the Argus sighed at this point, and I thought he might be wishing that all feminine newcomers could be like the latest. For Mrs. Aurelia Potts, whose leisure Heaven had increased, was now redoubling her efforts to make the Argus a well of English undefiled--undefiled by what she called "journalisms." Solon must not, he confided to me, say "enthuse" nor "we opine" nor "disremember." He might not say that the pastor "was given" a donation party when he really meant that the party was given,--not that the pastor was given. Further, he must be cautious in the uses of "who" and "whom," and try to break himself of the "a good time was enjoyed by all present" habit.

"And she always says 'diddy-you' instead of 'dij-you,'" broke in my namesake, who, loitering near us, had overheard the name of Mrs. Potts.

"That will do, Calvin!" said his father, shortly. It seemed to me that the still young life of Solon was fast being blighted.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SPECTRE OF SCANDAL IS RAISED

A graver charge than frivolity was soon to be brought against the widow of the late Colonel Jere Lansdale. Not with her antiquated gown, her assisting staff, the gay bonnet, nor yet with the showy small slippers and silken hose tinted unseasonably to her years did scandal engage itself; but rather with the circumstance that she drank.

To "drink" meant in Little Arcady to get drunk, as "Big Joe" Kestrel did every pay-day. Clarence Stull, polishing a stove in the rear of Pierce's hardware store, was swift to divulge that Mrs. Lansdale had "asked Chet Pierce to have a glass of wine,--and him a-bowin' and a-scrapin' like you'd think he was goin' to fly off the handle!"

It was enough for the town. The unfortunate woman had not yet reeled through its streets, but Little Arcady would give her time, and it knew there could be but one result. That sort of thing might be done in tales of vicious high life to point a moral, but in the real world it could not compatibly exist with good conduct. Even Aunt Delia McCormick, good Methodist as she was, who "put up" a little elderberry wine each year for communion purposes, was thought by more than one to strain near to the breaking point the third branch of that concise behest to "Touch not, taste not, handle not!"

The ladies were at once dismayed about Miss Caroline, from Aunt Delia herself, to Marcella Eubanks, who kept conspicuous upon her dressing-table a bedizened motto of the Daughters of Rebecca,--"The lips that touch wine shall never touch mine." It is true that this legend appeared to Marcella to be a bit licentious in its implications as to

lips _not_ touched by wine. It had, indeed, first been hung in the parlor; but one Creston Fancett, in the course of an evening call upon Miss Eubanks, had read the thing aloud, twice over, and then observed with a sinister significance that wine had never touched his own lips. Whereupon, in a coarsely conceived spirit of humor, he proceeded to act as if he had forgotten that he was a gentleman.

Hence the card's seclusion in Marcella's boudoir. Hence, likewise, Marcella's subsequent preference, in her temperance propaganda, for straightforward means which no gentleman could affect to misunderstand. She relied chiefly thereafter upon some highly colored charts depicting the interior of the human stomach in varying stages of alcoholic degeneration. According to these, "a single glass of wine or a measure of ale," taken daily for a year, suffices to produce some startling effects in color; while the result of "unrestrained indulgence for five years" is spectacular in the extreme.

Besides these disconcerting color effects Marcella enacted a brief but pithy drama in which she touched a lighted match to a tablespoonful of alcohol, to show the true nature of the stuff and to symbolize the fate of its votaries.

With charts and with blazing spirit, with tracts and with figures to prove that we spend "more for the staff of death than for the staff of life," Marcella was prepared to move upon the unsuspecting Miss Caroline. Nor was she alone in such readiness for a good work. The ladies all felt that their profligate sister should be brought to sign the pledge.

And they called upon Miss Caroline with precisely this end in view--called singly, and by twos and threes. But for some reason they seemed always to find obstacles in the way of bringing forward this most vital topic. If they had only discovered Miss Caroline in her cups, or if her shaded rooms had been littered with empty rum bottles and pervaded by the fumes of strong drink, or if she had audaciously offered them wine, doubtless the thing would have been easy. But none of these helpful phenomena could be observed, and Miss Caroline had a way of leading the talk which would have made any reference to her unfortunate habits seem ungraceful. It would be far too much to say that she charmed them, but all of her callers were interested, many of them were entertained, and a few became her warm defenders. Aunt Delia McCormick surprised every one by aligning herself with this latter minority. She declared, after her first call, that Miss Caroline was "a dear"; and after the second call, that she was "a poor dear," and she forthwith became of service to the newcomer in a thousand ways known only to the masonry of housekeeping.

And since none of the ladies, for one reason or another, had found a way to say those things that Mrs. Lansdale sorely needed to hear, it was agreed among them that the minister must say them.

"The minister" in Little Arcady meant him of the Methodist church, the two other clergymen being so young and unimportant as to need identification by name.

Of the official and inspired visit of this good man to Miss Caroline, the version that reached the public was one thing: its secret and true history was another. The latter has never been told until now. It was known abroad only that the minister had called on a warm afternoon in

July; that Miss Caroline had received him out of doors, on the shaded east side of the house, where the heat had driven her to await a cooling breeze from the river. One of the dingy rugs had been spread upon the grass close to the lilac clump, and by an unfashionable little table Miss Caroline sat, in a chair sadly out of date, reading of Childe Harold. It was understood that the minister had there sat in another antiquated chair of capacious arms and upholstered in faded green velvet, a chair brought by Clem; and that he had weakly chatted away a pleasant hour or two without ever once daring to bring Miss Caroline's evil state to that attention which it merited from her. His difficulty seemed to have been similar to that experienced by the calling ladies. He could observe no opening that promised anything but an ungracious plunge or an awkward stumble, and the ladies had been wrong in suspecting that his authority as a cleric would nerve him to either of these things.

There was despair next day when it was known that he had come away even lavisher in praise of Miss Caroline than Aunt Delia had become; that he refused with a gentle but unbreakable stubbornness, a thing he was known to be cursed with latently, ever again to approach the lady with a concealed purpose or with aught in his heart but a warm and flagrant esteem.

So much for the public's knowledge; and doubtless the public in every case knows all that it ought to know. But these are the facts as they came to my privileged ears, and to what, I believe, are gifts of interpretation not below the average.

When Clem brought the chair for the minister, Miss Caroline gave him a brief, low-toned order, which he hurried away to execute. Within ten minutes, and before Miss Caroline had finished telling how altogether beautiful she found Arcady of the Little Country, Clem returned, bearing breast-high a napkin-covered tray, from which towered twin pillars of glass, topped with fragrant leafage and pierced each by a yellow straw. This tray he placed upon the table beside the poems of Lord Byron, and the minister permitted himself an oblique look thereat, even though this involved deserting the eyes of his agreeable hostess. The ice in the glasses tinkled a brief phrase of music, the tops burgeoned with a luxuriant summer green, and the straws were of a sweetly pastoral suggestiveness. The fragrance moved one to the heart of some spice-scented dell where a brooklet purred down a pebbled course. The ensemble was indeed overwhelming in its message of a refreshment joyous, satisfying, timely, and of a consummate innocence.

"The day is warm," said Miss Caroline, receiving one of the glasses from her servant, and with a bright look at her guest.

"It is intensely warm, and quite unusually so for this time of year," said the minister, absently taking the other glass now proffered him.

"We shall combat it," said Miss Caroline with some vivacity. She delicately applied her lips to the straw, and a slight depression appeared in each of her acceptable cheeks.

"A cooling beverage at this hour is most grateful," said the minister, rejoicing in the icy feel of the glass, and falling hopefully to his own straw.

"Clem makes them perfectly," said Miss Caroline.

"What do you call them?" asked the minister. He had relinquished his straw, and his kind face shone with a pleased surprise.

"Why, mint juleps," replied Miss Caroline, glancing quickly up.

"Ah, mint! that explains it," said the minister with satisfaction, his broad face clearing of a slight bewilderment.

"Clem found a beautiful patch of it by a spring half a mile up the river," volunteered Miss Caroline, between dainty pulls at her straw.

"It is a lovely plant--a lovely plant, indeed!" rejoined the minister, for a moment setting down his glass to wipe his brow. "I remember now detecting the same fragrance when I watered my horse at that spring. But I did not dream that it--I wonder--" he broke off, taking up his glass--"that its virtues are not more widely apprehended. I have never heard that an acceptable beverage might be made from it."

"Not every one can make a mint julep as Clem can," said his hostess.

A moist and futile splutter from the bottom of the minister's glass was his only reply.

He set the glass back on the table with a pleasant speculation showing in his eyes. The talk became again animated. Chiefly the minister talked, and his hostess found him most companionable.

"Let me offer you another julep," she said, after a little, noting that his eyes had swept the empty glass with a chastened blankness. The minister let her.

"If it would not be troubling you--really? The heat is excessive, and I find that the mint, simple herb though it be, is strangely salutary."

The minister was a man of years and weight and worth. He possessed a reliant simplicity that put him at once close to those he met. Of these, by his manner, he asked all: confidence without reserve, troubles, doubts, distresses, material or otherwise. And this manner of his prevailed. The hearts of his people opened to him as freely as his own opened to receive them. He was a good man and, partly by reason of this ingenuous, unsuspecting mind, an invaluable instrument of grace.

When he had talked to Miss Caroline through the second julep,--digressing only to marvel briefly again that the properties of mint should so long have been Nature's own secret in Little Arcady,--telling her his joys, his griefs, his interests, which were but the joys and griefs and interests of his people, he wrought a spell upon her so that she in turn became confiding.

She was an Episcopalian. Her line had been born Episcopalian since a time whereof no data were obtainable; and this was, of course, not a condition to meddle with in late life, even if one's mind should grow consenting. For that matter, Miss Caroline would be frank and pretend to no change of mind. She was an old woman and fixed. She could not at this day free herself of a doubtless incorrect notion that the outside churches--meaning those not Episcopal--had been intended for people other than her own family and its offshoots. Clem had once been a Baptist, and it was true that he was now a Methodist. He had told her

that his new religion was distinguished from the old by being "dry religion". But these were intricacies with which a woman of Miss Caroline's years could not be expected to entangle herself. This she would say, however, that during her residence in Little Arcady she would fling aside the prejudice of a lifetime and worship each Sabbath at the minister's Methodist church.

It did not seem to the minister that she said it as might an explorer who consents for a time to adopt the manner and customs of the tribe among which a spirit of adventure has led him. He accepted her implied tribute modestly and with unaffected gratification, again wiping his brow and his broad, good face.

When I joined them at four o'clock, having been moved by hope of a cooling chat with Miss Caroline, the minister was slightly more flushed, I thought, than the day could warrant. He was about to leave, was, in fact, concluding his choicest anecdote of "Big Joe" Kestrel--for he was a man who met all our kinds. "Big Joe," six feet, five, a tower of muscled brawn, standing on a corner, pleasantly inebriated, had watched go feebly by the tottering, palsied form of little old Bolivar Kent, our most aged and richest man. The minister, also passing, had observed Kestrel's humorous stare.

"The big fellow called to me," he was saying to Miss Caroline as I came up. "'Parson,' said he--they all know me familiarly, madam--'Parson,' said he, 'I wish I could take all I'm worth and all old Kent is worth and put it in a bunch on the sidewalk there and then fight the old cuss for it!'"

It was a favorite anecdote of the minister's, but I had never known him before to tell it to a lady on the occasion of his first call. Miss Caroline laughed joyously as she turned to greet me.

"I can't tell you how finely I've been entertained," she said to me.

"Nor can I tell him for myself, madam," retorted the minister. I thought indeed he spoke with an effort that made this gallantry seem not altogether baseless in fact.

"I was on the point of leaving," said the minister.

"Are you returning home, or have you more calls in the neighborhood?" I asked, feeling just a tinge of uneasiness about his expansive manner.

"No more calls, no. I had planned, instead, a pleasant walk up along the riverside to a spring some distance above. I mean to procure a supply of this delicious mint--for mint juleps," he added affably.

"Come with me," I urged. I was about to walk out myself. Together we bade adieu to Miss Caroline.

But the minister's walk ended at my own door. In the cool gloom of my little library I asked him if he would be good enough to excuse me a moment, indicating the broad couch beneath the window.

"With pleasure, Major!" and he sank among the restful pillows. "I am ashamed to say that the heat has rendered me a trifle indolent".

When I came softly back five minutes later, he lay in deep slumber, his

face cherubically innocent, his breathing soft as a babe's. He awoke freshly two hours later. He apologized for his rudeness and expressed a wish for a glass of cool water. Three of these he drank with evidences of profound relish. Then he drew his large silver watch from his pocket.

"On my word, Major, it's after six, and I shall be late for tea! I have trespassed shamefully upon you!"

"The heat was very trying," I said.

"Quite enervating, indeed! I seem only now to be feeling its effects."

As he walked briskly down the now cooling street, he bared his brow to the gentle breeze of evening.

To the ladies, solicitous about Miss Caroline, who called upon him a few days later, he said, "She is a most admirable and lovely woman--not at all a person one could bring one's self to address on the painful subject of intoxicants. Had she offered me a glass of wine or other stimulant, a way might have been opened, but I am delighted to say that her hospitality went no farther than this innocent beverage." The minister indicated on his study table a glass containing sweetened ice-water in which some leaves of mint had been submerged.

"It is called a mint julep," he added, "though I confess I do not get the same delicate tang from the herb that her black fellow does. As he prepared the decoction I assure you its flavor was capital!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRUTH ABOUT SHAKSPERE AT LAST

Miss Caroline dutifully returned the calls that were paid her, with never a suspicion that her slavery to strong drink had been the secret inspiration of them. She was not yet awake to our sentiments in this matter. She had given strong waters to the minister with a heart as innocent as their disguise of ice and leafage had made them actually appear to that good man. And I, who was well informed, hesitated to warn her, hoping weakly that she would come to understand. For I had seen there were many things that Miss Caroline had not to be told in order to know.

For one, she had quickly divined that the ladies of Little Arcady considered her furniture to be unfortunate. She knew that they scorned it for its unstylishness; that some of them sympathized in the humiliation that such impossible stuff must be to her; while others believed that she was too unsophisticated to have any proper shame in the matter. These latter strove by every device to have her note the right thing in furniture and thus be moved to contrast it instructively with her own: as when Mrs. Judge Robinson borrowed for an afternoon Aunt Delia McCormick's best blue plush rocker, Mrs. Westley Keyts's new sofa, upholstered with gorgeous ingrain, and Mrs. Eubanks's new black walnut combination desk and bookcase with brass trimmings and little spindled balconies, in which could be elegantly placed the mineral specimens picked up along the river bank, and the twin statuettes of the fluting

shepherd and his inamorata. As Mrs. Judge Robinson herself possessed new and high-priced furniture, including a gold-and-onyx stand to occupy the bay window and uphold the Rogers group, "Going for the Parson," as well as two fragile gilt chairs, which considerate guests would not sit in but leave exposed to view, and a complete new set of black walnut, the effect that day--which included a grand smell of varnish--was nothing less than sumptuous.

The occasion was a semi-monthly meeting of the Ladies' Home Study and Culture Club, at which Miss Caroline was to be present. There had been a suspension of the Club's meetings while Mrs. Potts was in abeyance, but on this day she was to enter the world again and preside over the meeting as "Madam President," though the ladies sometimes forgot to call her that.

The paper read by Mrs. Potts--who was not at all ineffective in her black--was on "The Lake Poets," with a few pointed selections from Wordsworth and others.

Whether or not Miss Caroline was rightly impressed by the furniture exhibit was a question not easy to determine. True, she stared at it with something in her eyes beyond a mere perception of its lines; but whether this was the longing passion of an awakened soul or the simple awe of the unenlightened was not to be ascertained at the moment.

Testimony as to her enjoyment of the President's paper was more circumstantial. In the midst of this, as the listeners were besought to "dwell a moment on this exquisite delineation of Nature,"--expertly pronounced "Nate-your" by Mrs. Potts,--Miss Caroline turned her head aside as one deeply moved by the poet's magic. But Marcella Eubanks, glancing at that moment into a mirror on the opposite wall,--a mirror in a plush frame on which pansies had been painted,--caught the full and frank exposure of a yawn. It was a thorough yawn. Miss Caroline had surrendered abjectly to it, in the belief--unrecking the mirror--that she could not be detected.

The discussion that followed the paper--as was customary at the meetings--proved to be a bit livelier. Each lady said something she had thought up to say, beginning, "Does it not seem--" or "Are we not forced to conclude--"

I suspect that Miss Caroline was sleepy. Perhaps she was nettled by the boredom she had been made to endure without just provocation; perhaps the fashionable fumes of varnish had been toxic to her unaccustomed senses. At any rate she now compromised herself regrettably.

Mrs. Westley Keyts had been thinking up something to say, something choice that should yet be sufficiently vague not to incriminate her. It had seemed that these requirements would be met if she said, in a tone of easy patronage, "Mr. Wordsworth is certainly a very bright writer of poetry, but as for me--give me Shakspeare!"

She had thought of saying "the Bard of Avon," a polished phrase coined for his "Compendium" by the ingenious Mr. Gaskell; but, hearing her own voice strangely break the silence, Mrs. Keyts became timid at the last moment and let it go at "Shakspeare."

"Oh, Shakspeare--of course!" said most of the ladies at once, and those not quick enough to utter it concertedly looked it almost reprovingly at

the speaker.

A silence fell, as if every one must have time to recover from this trivial platitude. But it was a silence outrageously shattered by Miss Caroline, who said:--

"O dear! I've always considered Shakspeare such an overrated man!"

The silence grew more intense, only Mrs. Potts emitting a slight but audible gasp. But swift looks flashed from each lady to her horrified sisters. Was it possible that the unfortunate woman had been in no condition to come among them?

"Oh, a greatly overrated man!" repeated Miss Caroline, terribly, "far too wordy--too fond of wretched puns--so much of his humor coarse and tiresome. By the way, have you ladies taken up Byron?"

The moment was charged, almost to explosion. A crisis impended, out of the very speechlessness of the gathering. Mrs. Potts was aghast in behalf of William Shakspeare, and Marcella Eubanks was crimsoning at the blunt query about Byron, well knowing that he could be taken up by a lady only with the wariest caution, and that he would much better be let alone. The others were torn demoralizingly between these two extremes of distress.

But the situation was saved by the ready wit of Mrs. Judge Robinson.

"I think the hour has come for refreshments, Madam President!" she said urbanely, and the meeting was nervously adjourned. Under the animation thus induced an approximate equilibrium was restored. The ladies gulped down chicken salad, many of them using forks with black thread tied about them to show they were borrowed from Mrs. Eubanks. They drank lemonade from a fine glass pitcher that had come as a gratuitous mark of esteem from the tea merchant patronized by the hostess; and they congealed themselves pleasantly with vanilla ice-cream eaten from dishes of excellent pressed glass that had come one by one as the Robinson family consumed its baking powder.

But Miss Caroline would have been dense indeed had she not divined, even amid that informal babbling, that she was being viewed by the ladies of the Club with a shocked stupefaction.

Precisely what emotion this knowledge left with her I have never known. But I do know that before the meeting broke up, it had been agreed to hold the next one at the house of Miss Caroline herself. It may be that she suggested and urged this in pure desperation, wishing to regain a favor which she had felt unaccountably withdrawn; and it may be that the ladies accepted in a similar desperation, knowing not how to inform her that she was grossly ineligible for membership in a Home Study Club.

The intervening two weeks were filled with tales and talks of Miss Caroline's heresy. Excitement and adverse criticism were almost universally aroused. It was a scandal of proportions almost equal to that of her love for strong drink. About most writers one could be permitted to have an opinion. But it was not thought that one could properly have an opinion about Shakspeare, and, so far as we knew, no one had ever before subjected him to this indignity. One might as well have an opinion about Virtue or the law of gravitation. An opinion of any sort was impossible. One favorable would be puny, futile, immodestly

patronizing. An unfavorable opinion had heretofore not been within realms of the idlest speculation.

There were but two of us, I believe, who did not promptly condemn Miss Caroline's violence of speech--two men of varying parts. Westley Keys frankly said he had never been able to "get into" Shakspeare, and considered it, as a book for reading purposes, inferior to "Cudjo's Cave," which he had read three times. The minister, whose church Miss Caroline now patronized,--that term being chosen after some deliberation,--held up both his hands at the news and mildly exclaimed, "Well!" Then, after a pause, "Well, well!" And still again, after another pause, "Well, well, well!"

This was thought to be shifty and evasive--certainly not so outspoken as the town had a right to expect.

Solon Denney, though in his heart true to Shakspeare, affected to be gleeful. A paragraph, mysterious to many, including Miss Caroline, appeared in the ensuing Argus:--

"An encounter long supposed by scientists to be a mere metaphysical abstraction of almost playful import has at last occurred in sober physics. The irresistible force has met up with the immovable body. We look for results next week."

I knew that Solon considered Miss Caroline to be an irresistible force. I was uncertain whether Shakspeare or Mrs. Potts was meant by the immovable body. I knew that he held them in equal awe, and I knew that Mrs. Potts felt, in a way, responsible for Shakspeare this far west of Boston, regarding any attack upon him as a personal affront to herself.

On the day of the next meeting the ladies of the Club gathered in the dingy and inelegant drawing-room of Miss Caroline. No vividly flowered carpet decked the floor; only a time-toned rug that left the outer edge of the floor untidily exposing its dull stain; no gilt and onyx table bore its sculptured fantasy by the busy Rogers. The mantel and shelves were bare of those fixed ornaments that should decorate the waste places of all true homes; there were no flint arrow-heads, no "specimens," no varnished pine cones, no "Rock of Ages," no waxen lilies, not even a china cup goldenly emblazoned with "Love the Giver," in German script. And there were no beautiful chairs with delicate gilded spindles--not an elegant and impracticable chair in the whole big room--not one chair which could not be occupied as comfortably as any common kitchen rocker. It was indeed a poor place; obviously the woman's best room, yet showing careless traces of almost daily use. To ladies who never opened their best rooms save to dust and air them on days when company was expected, and who would as soon have lounged in them informally as they would have desecrated a church, this laxity was heinous.

And ordinarily, in the best rooms of one another, the ladies became spontaneously, rigidly formal as they assembled, speaking in tones suitably stiff of the day's paper, or viewing with hushed esteem those art treasures that surrounded them.

But so difficult was it to attain this formality amid the homely surroundings of Miss Caroline that to-day they not only lounged with negligent ease in the big chairs and on the poor, broad sofas, but they talked familiarly of their household concerns quite as if they had been in one of their own second-best rooms on any common day.

On a table in one cool corner was a huge bowl of thin silver, whence issued a baffling fragrance. Discreet observation, as the throng gathered, revealed this to contain a large block of ice and a colored liquid in which floated cherries with slices of lemon and orange. A ladle of generous lines reposed in the bowl, and circling it on the table were many small cups.

There was a feeling of relief when these details had been ascertained. Fear had been felt that Miss Caroline might forget herself and offer them a glass of wine, or something worse, from a large black bottle; for Little Arcady believed, in its innocent remoteness, that the devil's stuff came in no other way than large black bottles. Miss Eubanks had made sure that the ladies wore their white ribbons. Marcella's own satin bow was larger than common, so that no one might mistake the principles of the heart beating beneath it.

But the cool big bowl with its harmless fruit restored confidence at once, and when Miss Caroline urged them to try Clem's punch they refrained not. The walk to the north end of town on a sultry afternoon had qualified them to receive its consolations, and they gathered gratefully about.

Marcella Eubanks quaffed the first beaker, a trifle timorously, it is true, for the word "punch" had stirred within her a vague memory of sinister associations. Sometime she had read a tale in which one Howard Melville had gone to the great city and wrecked a career of much promise by accepting a glass of something from the hands of a beautiful but thoughtless girl, pampered child of the banker with whom he had secured a position. For a dread moment Marcella seemed to recall that the fatal draught was named "punch." But after a tentative sip of the compound at hand, she decided that it must have been something else--doubtless "a glass of sparkling wine." For this punch before her was palpably of a babe's innocence. Indeed it tasted rather like an inferior lemonade. But it was cold, and Marcella tossed off a second cup of it. She could make better lemonade herself, and she murmured slightly of the stuff to Aunt Delia McCormick.

"It wants more lemons and more sugar," said Marcella, firmly. Aunt Delia pressed back the white satin bow on her bosom in order to manage her second glass with entire safety.

"I don't know, Marcella," she said in a dreamy undertone, after draining the cup to its cherry. "I don't know--it does seem to take hold, for all it tastes so trifling."

As each lady arrived she was led to the punch-bowl. When the last one had been taught the way to that cool nook, there was a pleasant hum of voices in the room. There was still an undercurrent of difference as to the punch's merit--other than mere coolness; though Miss Eubanks now agreed with Aunt Delia that it possessed virtues not to be discerned in the first careless draught. The conversation continued to be general, to the immense delight of the hostess, for she had dreaded the ordeal of that formal opening, with its minutes of the last meeting; and she had dared even to hope that the day's paper might, by tactful management, be averted.

She waxed more daringly hopeful when Clem came to refill the punch-bowl. She felt that she owed much to the heat of the day, which was insuring

the thirst of the arrivals. The punch and general conversation seemed to suffice them even after their first thirst had been allayed. She began to wonder if the ladies were not a more unbending and genial lot than she had once suspected.

A considerable group of them now chatted vivaciously about the replenished bowl, including Madam the President, who had arrived very thirsty indeed, and who was now, between sips, accounting for the singular favor which the Adams family had always found in the sight of God and the people of Massachusetts. She seemed to be prevailed over, not without difficulty, by Aunt Delia, who related her failure to learn from Clem the ingredients of his acceptable punch. This was not surprising, for Clem was either never able or never willing to tell how he made anything whatever. Of this punch Aunt Delia had been able to wheedle from him only that it contained "some little fixin's." Insistent questioning did develop, further, that "cold tea" was one of these; but cold tea did not make plain its recondite potencies--did not explain why a beverage so unassuming to the taste should inspire one with a wish to partake of it continuously.

"We might get him to make a barrel of it for the Sunday-school picnic," said Marcella, brightly, over her fourth cup. "If it contains only a little tea, perhaps the effect upon the children would not be deleterious."

"We'll try it," said Aunt Delia, reaching for the ladle at sight of empty cups in the hands of Mrs. Judge Robinson and Mrs. Westley Keys. "_I'll_ furnish the cherries and the sugar and the tea."

How it came about was never quite understood by the ladies, but the true and formal note of a Ladies' Home Study Club was never once struck that afternoon. Madam the President did not call the meeting to order, the minutes of the last meeting are unread to this day, and a motion to adjourn never became necessary.

It had been thought wisest to keep entirely away from poetry at this meeting, and the paper for the day, to have been read by Marcella Eubanks, was "The Pathos of Charles Dickens." Marcella had taken unusual pains in its preparation, bringing with her two volumes of the author from which to read at the right moment the deaths of Little Nell and Paul Dombey. She had practised these until she could make her voice quaver effectively, and she had looked forward to a genuine ovation when she sat down.

[Illustration: "WE MIGHT GET HIM TO MAKE A BARREL OF IT FOR THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL PICNIC."]

If it is clearly understood, then, that no one thought of calling for the paper, that even its proud author felt the hours gliding by without any poignant regret, it should be seen that the occasion had strangely come to be one of pure and joyous relaxation, with never an instructive or cultured or studious moment.

There was talk of domestic concerns, sprightly town gossip, mirth, wit, and anecdotes. Aunt Delia McCormick told her parrot story, which was risque, even when no gentlemen were present, for the parrot said "damn it!" in the course of his surprisingly human repartee under difficulties.

Mrs. Westley Keyts, the bars being down, thereupon began another parrot story. But Miss Eubanks, who had observed that all parrot stories have "damn" in them, suddenly conceived that matters had gone far enough in that direction. Affecting not to have heard Mrs. Keyts's opening of "A returned missionary made a gift of a parrot to two elderly maiden ladies--" Marcella led the would-be anecdotist to the punch-bowl, and, under the cover of operations there, spoke to her in an undertone. Mrs. Keyts said that the thing had been printed right out on the funny page of "Hearth and Home," but over the cup of punch that Marcella pressed upon her, she consented to forego it on account of the minister's wife being present.

There were other anecdotes, however; not of a parrot character, but chiefly of funny sayings of the little ones at home. Mrs. Judge Robinson, with the artistic mendacity of your true raconteur, accredited to her own four-year-old a speech about the stars being holes in the floor of heaven, although it was said of this gem in "Harper's Drawer," where she had read it, that "the following good one comes to us from a lady subscriber in the well-known city of X----."

It could not be recalled afterwards how, from this harmless exchange, they had come to be listening to passages from the adventurous life of Childe Harold, read crisply by their hostess. Still less could the ladies later comprehend how some of their number had been guilty of innuendos--or worse--against the well-known Bard of Avon. Yet, so it was.

Miss Caroline herself had refrained from abusing him--had seemed to have forgotten him, indeed; but, as she read Byron to them, their hearts opened to her--rushed out, indeed, with a friendly wholeness that demanded something more than mere cordial applause of her favorite poet. Some intimation of a sympathy with her view of the other poet came to seem not ungraceful. During one of the reader's pauses to impress upon them the splendors of the Byronic imagery, and eke its human heart-warmth, good Aunt Delia, with defiant looks about the circle, broke in with:--

"I shouldn't wonder if Shakspeare has been made too much over."

Mrs. Keyts stepped loyally into the breach thus effected.

"Westley thinks Shakspeare isn't such an awful good book," she said, feeling her way, "though it seems to me it has some very interesting and excellent pieces in it."

"Shakspeare is ver-ry uneven," remarked Mrs. Judge Robinson, in a tone of dignified concession.

"There is always a word to be said on either side of these matters--there is undeniably room for controversy." Thus Mrs. Potts, in her best manner of authority, from the punch-bowl.

"Let the dead rest!" gently murmured Miss Eubanks, from her dreamy corner of the biggest sofa. Her inflection was archly significant. One had to suspect that Shakspeare, alive and a fair target for dispraise, might have learned something to his advantage if not to his delight.

Miss Caroline was both surprised and gratified. At the previous meeting she had detected no sign of this concurring sentiment. She plunged again

into Byron with renewed enthusiasm.

The afternoon came to a glorious end, and the ladies departed with many expressions of rejoicing. They had found Miss Caroline so charming that several of them were torn with fresh pity and brought to the verge of tears when they thought of her furniture.

Marcella Eubanks did cry on the way home and had to put down her green barege veil. But that was for thinking of poor little Paul Dombey. She was mourning him as a personal loss. Also must she have adored the genius of a master who could thus move her from a calm that was constitutional with every known Eubanks.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN WHICH THE GAME WAS PLAYED

The next Argus said of Miss Caroline's afternoon that "the ladies present one and all report a most enjoyable time." There was another mysterious paragraph, too, farther down the column of "locals," which proclaimed that "The immovable body has at last been struck by the irresistible force and has failed to live up to its reputation. It moved and moved so you could see it move. Another bubble exploded! We live in a sensational age."

Now, while it is true that the ladies, "one and all," had spoken with entire enthusiasm of their afternoon at the unpretentious home of my neighbor, I, nevertheless, deemed it vital to hold plain speech with that impulsive woman immediately. I saw, indeed, that I should have acted after the incident of the mint juleps.

Solon Denney, who had experienced the hospitality of Miss Caroline, and who could speak from a wider knowledge than our minister or the ladies of the town, had once said:--

"Those mint juleps are simple, honest things. They taste injurious from the start. But that punch--it's hypocritical. It steals into your brain as a little child steals its rosebud hand into yours, beguiling you with prattle; but afterwards--well, if I had the choice, I'd rather be chloroformed and struck sharply with an axe. I'd be my old self again sooner." Whereupon he would have written a guarded piece for the paper about this had I not dissuaded him. But I saw that I must at once have with Miss Caroline what in a later day came to be called "a heart-to-heart talk"; and I forthwith summoned what valor I could for the ordeal.

"I never dreamed--I never suspected--how should I?" she murmured pathetically, after my opening speech of a few simple but telling phrases. She listened in genuine horror while I gave the reasons why she might justly regard the call of our minister and her entertainment of the Club as nothing short of adventures--adventures which she had survived scathless not but by the favor of an indulgent Providence.

"So that is what those little white satin bows mean?" she asked, and I said that it most emphatically was.

"I suspected it might be some kind of mourning for babies--a local custom, you know, though it did seem queer. What can they think of me?"

"They don't know what to think now," I said, "and if you are wise, you will never let them know."

"The Colonel was proud of that punch," she mused.

"I dare say he had reasons," I answered grimly.

"Especially after Cousin Looshe Peavey came to spend Christmas with us one time. The Colonel had always considered Cousin Looshe rather arrogant about this punch, and it may have been a special brew. I know that Cousin had an immense respect for it after he was able--that is--afterwards--"

"I can easily believe it."

"Cherry brandy--Jamaica rum--pint of Madeira--gill of port--a bit of cordial--some sherry--I forget if there's anything else."

I grasped the chair in which I sat.

"Heaven forbid!" I cried; "and don't tell me, anyway--I'm reeling now."

"But of course there are lemons and oranges and cherries and tea and _quantities_ of ice to weaken it--"

"The whole frozen polar sea itself couldn't weaken that mixture of elemental forces. See to it," I went on sternly, "that you remember only the innocent parts of it if you are ever asked for the recipe." She actually cowered.

"Also as to mint juleps--remember that you have forgotten, if you ever knew how they are made."

"Dear, _dear_--and our Bishop did enjoy his mint julep so!"

"That's different," I said; "they were probably raised together."

"And that afternoon, I thought something of the sort was necessary; do you know, they seemed rather cold to me at that other meeting--and of course there wasn't enough of it to hurt them."

"Your intentions were amiable, I concede, but your carelessness was criminal--nothing short of it. You laid the train for a scandal that would have shaken Slocum County to its remotest outlying cornfield, and even made itself felt over this whole sovereign state."

I was gratified to see that she shuddered.

"I shall never learn," she pleaded; "their life is so different."

"Let them at least live it out to its natural end, such as it is," I urged.

Hereupon, confessing herself unnerved, Miss Caroline led me to the dining room, and in a glass of Madeira from a cask forwarded by

Second-cousin Colonel Lucius Quintus Peavey, C.S.A., she pledged herself to preserve the decencies as these had been codified in Little Arcady by the Sons and Daughters of Temperance. For my part I drank to her continuance in the wondrous favor of Heaven.

Thereafter, I am bound to say, Miss Caroline conducted herself with a discretion that was admirable. Upon more than one occasion I was made to notice this. One of them was at an evening entertainment at the Eubanks home that autumn, to which it was my privilege to escort her. "A large and brilliant company was present," to quote from a competent authority, and the refreshments were "recherche," to quote again, this being, I believe, the first of our social functions at which Japanese paper napkins were handed around. Eustace Eubanks entertained "one and all" by exhibiting and describing lantern views of important scenes in the Holy Land; Marcella sang "Comin' Thro' the Rye" with such iron restraint that the most fastidious among us could have found no cause for offence, and Eustace sang an innocent song of war and bloodshed and death. All went well until Eustace, being pressed for more, ventured a drinking song. Whether this had been censored by his household I have never learned. Perhaps there had been demurs--there were almost certain to have been; and possibly Eustace had held out for the thing because of the rare opportunity it afforded for the exercise of his lowest tones. Perhaps it had been deemed wise to indulge him in this, lest in rebellion he break all bonds of propriety and revert to the "Bedouin Love Song." At any rate he sang "Drinking," a song that lauds the wine-cup as chiefest of godless joys, and terminating in "drinking" thrice reiterated, of which each individual one finishes so much lower than it begins that the last one seems to expire in the bottomless pit.

Many of those present appeared to enjoy this song. Even Marcella Eubanks seemed for once to have soared above mere principle into the unmoral realm of "Art for Art's sake." But it falls to be said, and I say it with a pride which I think should not excite cavil, that Miss Caroline frowned splendidly from the first moment that the song's true character was revealed. She superbly evinced uneasiness, moreover, when the thing was done, as if to say, "One can't tell _what_ may occur in a place where _that_ is permitted!" And her performance was not observed by myself alone. Marcella saw it and sped to her brother, who, after listening to hurried words from her, dashed into "The Lost Chord" with a swift and desperate fervor, as if to allay all alarm in the mind of this sensitive guest. Eustace was at heart as earnestly well meaning as any Eubanks that ever lived, and his vagaries in song were attributable solely to a trusting nature capriciously endowed with a dash of the artistic temperament. It was only a dash, however. Beyond doubt, had his family but known, he could have sung the "Bedouin Love Song," and been none the worse for it.

If Miss Caroline's eloquent pantomime at this time aroused a suspicion that she had been maligned, as to her habits of drink, her behavior on a subsequent evening, when Mrs. Judge Robinson entertained, left no one to doubt it. There was music, too, on this occasion--described elsewhere as "a gala occasion"--after Eustace had concluded his part of the entertainment and gotten his lantern out of the way,--music by a quartet consisting of Messrs. Fancett and Eubanks, first and second bass, and Messrs. Updyke and G. Brown, first and second tenor. In excellent accord these tenors and basses, so blameless in their living, lifted up their voices and sang they "would that the wavelets of ocean were wavelets of sparkling champagne!" It was a blithe and rippling morceau if one could forget the well-nigh cosmic depravity of it; but Miss Caroline, it

appeared, was not able to forget. She confided as much to Marcella Eubanks and Aunt Delia McCormick, intimating that while she was doubly desirous to be pleased because of her position as an outsider, she was, nevertheless, a silly old woman, encrusted with prejudice, and she could not deny that she found this song _suggestive_. Her eyes glistened when she said it, and Marcella felt like pinning a white ribbon to her then and there.

Escorting Miss Caroline to her home that night, I listened to her account of this colloquy and found myself wishing that matters had been different. It seemed to me that I must ultimately become the victim of a romantic passion for her, and I told her as much when we parted.

Gossip, the yellow-tongued dragon, had been tracked to its lair and done to death, or at least that one of its heads had been smitten off which babbled slander of Miss Caroline.

Thenceforth she and I were free to think upon other matters. And there were these other matters in both our lives.

As to most of them we did not hold speech together. Our intimacy as yet lay quite within a circle so charmed that it might not be entered by things too personal to either of us. By a kind of tacit treaty we brought thither none but those affairs which invited a not too serious tone. Our late common life had provided an abundance of these, and they had been hailed by my friend with an unflinching levity which the widow of J. Rodney Potts, for one, would have found it impossible to condone. "I am a light old woman," she had said to me; "I laugh at the world even when I fear it most." There was a desperate sprightliness of banter in her eye when she made this confession, a sprightliness that leaped forth to be gay when I shivered her. But, though we sacredly observed all mirthful conventions in our dallying, I knew that Miss Caroline had more than enough to ponder of matters weighty. I knew that she was likely to have regretted a too-ready sharing of Clem's easy enthusiasm over industrial conditions in the North.

Clem believed by instinct not only that the evil thereof is sufficient unto the day, but that the incidental good sufficeth also. His quality of faith would have seemed a pointed rebuke to the common run of believers in a Providence that watches and sends. Confronted by the spectre of present want he could exorcise it neatly by the device of beholding, in a contrary vision, future limitless pullets of a marketable immaturity, or endless acres of garden produce ripe and ready to sell. Moreover, his experience with "gold money" was as yet insufficient to acquaint him with its truly volatile character. All sums greater than a hundred dollars were blessedly alike to him--equally prodigious. Two hundred, or thousands, or tens of thousands sent the same rays of light through the spectrum of his poetic mind, and a bank was an institution of such abiding grace that, having once established a connection with it, one possessed forever a stout prop in time of need. I was sure indeed that Miss Caroline had defined these limitations of Clem as a financier. It was one of those enjoyable topics which we had been free to discuss. That she had discovered how lamentably his resources had been reduced by freight tolls on her furniture I could only infer. But I knew, at least, that she was aware of the blistering, rainless summer that had laid Clem's high hopes of a garden in dust and cut off half his revenue. Plainly, Miss Caroline had more than enough of matters fit to engage her graver moments.

For my own part I, too, had matters to dwell upon of an equal gravity in their own poor way; though perhaps, too, I could not have defined them as understandingly as I did the perplexities of my neighbor.

Happily the feat need not be attempted; I had the game, in which troubles may be played away at least beyond the necessity for analyzing them--the game which requires two decks and is to be played alone--the most efficacious of those devices for the solitary which cards afford.

I had been made acquainted with its scheme and with some of its cruder virtues by a certain illustrious soldier whom I was once much thrown with. He confessed to me that he played it before a battle to inspire him with coolness, and after a battle to learn wise behavior under victory or defeat, as it might have been.

I was persuaded to learn more of it. I played the thing at first, to be sure, as I have noticed that novices always do, with a mind so bent upon "getting it" that I was insensible of its curative and refining agencies.

"You haven't the secret yet," said my mentor, who watched me as I won for the first time, and was moved to warn me by my unconcealed pride in this achievement. "After you've played it a few years, you'll learn that the value of it lies chiefly in losing. You'll try like the devil to win, of course, but you'll learn not to wish for it. To win is nothing but an endless piling up of the right cards, beginning with the ace and ending with the king, and it only means more shuffling for next time. But every time you lose you will learn things about everything."

It was even as he said,--it took me years to learn this true merit of the game; and still, as he had said, I learned much from it of life.

There is a fine moment at the last shuffling of the cards, a moment when free will and fatalism are indistinguishably merged.

I am ready to lay down eight cards in a horizontal row off my double deck. Who will say that the precise number of shuffles I have given to it was preordained?

"I do," exclaimed an obliging fatalist. "The sequence of every one of those cards was determined when we were yet star-dust."

I bring confusion to him by performing half a dozen other shuffles. I am thus far the master of my unborn game--another last shuffle to prove it, though I shuffle clumsily enough.

I glance disdainfully at the fatalist whom I have refuted, and prepare again to lay down the first row of cards. But the fellow comes back with, "Those last shuffles were also determined, as was this challenge--"

"Very well!" and I prepare for still another rearrangement. But here I reflect that this could be endless and not at all interesting.

I dismiss the fatalist as a quibbler and play on. Now there is no dispute, unless there be other quibblers. Fixed is the order in which the cards shall fall, eight at a time. There is pure fatalism. But in the movings after each eight are dealt, I shall consciously choose and judge, which is pure free will--or an imitation of it sufficiently

colorable to satisfy any, but quibblers. There, for me, is the fatalism of body, the free will of soul. Of these I learn when I play the game.

Now my first eight cards are down in a horizontal row. There are two kings among them, which is auspicious, for kings must be placed sometime at the top. There is a red queen, also auspicious, to be placed on one of the black kings. There is an ace of diamonds and its deuce. Good, again! The ace is placed above the row, beginning a row of aces to be placed there as fast as they fall, and the deuce is placed atop of it, for in that row the suits will be built up, each in its kind. In the lower rows the suits are to be built down and crossed, as when I played the red queen on the black king, so that only the top of his crowned head can be seen. Then I play a red eight on a black nine and a black seven on the red eight. I am now left most fortunately with five spaces when I deal off my second row of eight,--five spaces into which, it may be, a king or two shall happily fall.

The game usually becomes intense after the third eight cards are played. By that time a choice must be made. Shall this black six or the other be played on the red seven? One must be wise, for either will release important cards.

The game has started so well that it promises to play out too easily--which is one of its tricks. Presently a deuce will be covered by a king for which no space is ready, a dark queen will be buried under a succession of smaller cards, crowding along with apparent carelessness, but relentlessly. Now a space is opened for the king that covers the deuce, but the king has meantime been covered by an insignificant but unmanageable four-spot, and cannot be reached. The game is not so absurdly easy as it promised to be. Still it may be won by clever playing. There follow eight cards that prove to be immovable, and the issue is almost in doubt. Now the last eight cards are down, and the game is suddenly seen to be lost. One small other shuffle might have won it; if that tray of spades had fallen one place to the right or left, the thing would now be easy; if it were a deuce or a four, the thing were easy. One spot on the card has brought ruin. The game has foiled us with its own peculiar cleverness.

But then, we learn to expect failure; and, most important of all, we learn to succeed while failing. We learn to see our cards fall wretchedly without a tremor. We learn to take small gains that offer, and to watch unmoved while splendid chances come to naught. We learn to live life and to waste no energy in vain wishing that we had shuffled differently. We learn even to marvel admiringly at the unobtrusive cunning which thwarts us of our dream's own--to wonder that cards ever should come right for any player in that maze of chances and faulty judgments. And we learn, above all, to brush the things together without loss of time and to play a new hand with the same old hope.

As I studied the cards, making sure of my defeat--one must be most careful to do that; a way is sometimes to be found--it was not strange that I fell to thinking of the face on my neighbor's wall.

I had mused often upon it since that first night. It seemed, curiously enough, to be a face that had long been mistily afloat in my shut eyes, a girl's face that had a trick of blending from time to time with the face of another I had better reason to know. Unaccountably they had come and gone, one followed by the other. Of that last new face in my vision I could make nothing, save that some one seemed to have painted it over

there in the other house. How I had come by my own mind copy of it was a mystery to me beyond solution.

I played the game again to still this perplexity which had a way of seizing me at odd moments. It is an especially good game for a man who has had to believe that life will always beat him.

CHAPTER XIX

A WORTHLESS BLACK HOUND

After an autumn speciously benign came our season of cold and snow. It proved to be a season of unwonted severity, every weather expert in town, from Uncle William McCormick, who had kept a diary record for thirty years, to Grandma Steck, who had foretold its coming from a goose-bone, agreeing that the cold was most unusual. The editor of the Argus not only spoke of "Nature's snowy mantle," but coined another happy phrase about Little Arcady being "locked in the icy embrace of winter." This was admitted to be accurately literal, in spite of its poetic daring.

Miss Caroline confessed homesickness to me after the first heavy snow. She spoke as lightly of it as she should have done, but I could see that her own land pulled at her heart with every blast that shook her casements. No longer, however, was there even a second-cousin whose hospitality she was free to claim, for Colonel Lucius Quintus Peavey, C.S.A., now slept with his fathers in far-off Virginia, leaving behind him only traditions and a little old sherry. The former Miss Caroline had always shared with him, and a cask of the latter he bequeathed to her with his love. And the valley being now void of her kin, she was doubly an exile.

Such new desolation as she must have felt was masked under jesting dispraise of our execrable Northern climate. Surely a land permitted to congeal so utterly had forfeited the grace of its Maker.

Clem's lack of executive genius also earned a meed of my neighbor's disparagement. He was a worthless, trifling "boy," an idling dreamer, an irresponsible, inconsequent visionary, in whose baseless fancies it was astounding that a woman of her years should fatuously place reliance.

I must confess that I was more than once guilty of irritation when Miss Caroline spoke thus slightingly of her "boy"--of one who had been unable to view himself as other than her personal property. Again and again it seemed to me that, fine little creature that she was, her tone toward Clem lacked the right feeling. I should not have demanded gratitude precisely; at least no bald expression of it. But a manner of speech denoting, if not wording, a recognition of his unswerving loyalty would have accorded better with the estimate I had otherwise formed of her character. The absence of any tone or word that even one so devoted as I could construe to her advantage was puzzling in the extreme.

Still, feeling toward her as I did, I was compelled to excuse her as best I might by attributing her hardness to an evil system now happily abolished. But the nerves in my lost arm seemed to tingle with a secret

satisfaction when I thought of Clem's empty reward for his life-work and remembered that I had helped, though ever so little, to free him and his kind from a bond so unfortunate for each of the parties to it.

The winter deepened about us, chill and bleak and ravaging. The smoke from our chimneys went up in tall columns that lost themselves in the gray sky. The snow shut us in, and presently the wind lay in wait to blast us when we dared the drifts.

Yet Miss Caroline thrived, despite her nostalgia. She was even jaunty in her recital of the weather's minor hardships. To its rigors she brought a front of resolute gaiety. A new stove graced the parlor, a stove with the proud nicked title of "Frost King"; a title seen to be deserved when Clem had it properly gorged with dry wood. Within its tropic radiations Miss Caroline bloomed and was hale of being, like some hardy perennial.

Of Clem, nothing but hardiness was to be anticipated. He had been toughened by four other of our winters, all said to have been unusual for severity. And yet it was Clem, curiously enough, and not Miss Caroline, who found the season most trying. True, he had to be abroad most of the time, procuring sustenance for the insatiable "Frost King," or performing labor for other people by which Miss Caroline should preserve her independence; but it was not supposed that a creature of his sort could be subject to weaknesses natural enough to a superior race.

I believe this was his own view of the matter; for when he admitted to me one morning that he had "took cold in the chest," his manner was one of deprecating confusion, and he swore me against betrayal of his lapse to Miss Caroline.

She discovered his guilt for herself, however, after a few days, from his very annoying cough. She taxed him with it so sturdily that efforts at deception availed him not. His tale that the snow sifted into his "bref-place" and "tickled it" was pitifully unconvincing, for his cough was deeper than Eustace Eubanks's proudest note in the drinking song.

"He's a worthless thing," said Miss Caroline, telling me of his fault, and I said he was indeed--that he hadn't served me four years without my finding that out. I added that he was undoubtedly shamming, but that at the same time it might be as well to take a few simple precautions. Miss Caroline said that of course he was shamming, in order to get out of work, and that she would soon drive that nonsense out of his head if she had to wear the black wretch out to do it. She added that she was about tired of his nonsense.

It may be known that I have heretofore lost no opportunity to foist all faults of understanding upon the heads of my fellow-townsmen. And I should have liked to keep my record clear in that matter; but it would be uncandid to pretend, even at this late day, that I have ever divined the precise relationship that exists between Miss Caroline and her slave. I may know a bit more of its intricacies than does Little Arcady at large, but not enough to permit that certain thrill of superior discernment which I have so often been able to enjoy in Slocum County.

Each of the two, considered alone, is fairly comprehensible. But taken together, there is something between them which must always baffle me--something which I cannot believe to have been at all typical of the

relation between owner and slave, else many of the facts noted by our discerning and impartial investigators were either imperfectly observed or unintelligently reported.

Up to a certain point my own studies of this slave-holder aligned perfectly with the information which we of the North had been at such pains to gather. And I tried to hold Miss Caroline blameless, remembering that she had been long schooled to the inhumanity of it.

I resolved, nevertheless, to take Clem under my own roof--there was a small unused room almost directly under it--the moment Miss Caroline's impatience with him should move her to the extremes foretold by her abusive fashion of speech. I would not see even a negro turned out in the coldest of winters for no better reason than that he was sick and useless, though I planned to intervene delicately, so as not to affront my neighbor. For my heart was still hers, despite this hardness, for which I saw that she must not be blamed.

As I had feared, Clem's cough became more obtrusive, and with this Miss Caroline's irritation deepened toward him. She declared that his trifling, no-account nature made him all but impossible.

Then one morning--one to be distinguished by its cold even among many unusual mornings--there was no Clem to light my fires and to scent my snug dining room with unparalleled coffee. This brought it definitely home to me that the situation had become grave. I dressed with what speed I could and hurried to Miss Caroline's door. The time had come when I should probably have to do something.

My neighbor met me and said that Clem had meanly decided to remain in bed for the day. I searched her face for some sign of consideration as she said this, but I was disappointed. She seemed to feel only a fierce disgust for his foolishness.

"But you may go up and look at the black good-for-nothing if you like," she said, grudgingly enough I thought.

I climbed the brief flight of stairs. I knew that Clem had not refused to get up without reasons that seemed sufficient to him. In a narrow bed in one of the doll-house rooms he lay coughing.

"So you can't get up this morning?" I asked.

"Yes, seh, Mahstah Majah, Ah was a-gittin' up, but Ah was fohced to cough raght smahtly an' Miss Cahline she yehs it an' she awdeh me back to baid, seh. Then Ah calls out to huh that Ah ain't go'n' a' have no sech foolishness in this yeh place, an' so she stahts to come up, which fohces me to retiah huhiedly. Then she stands theh at th' head of th' staih an' she faulted me--yes, seh--she threaten me, Mahstah Majah, an' she tek mah clothes away, an' so on an' so foth. Then Ah huhd huh a' mekin' th' fiah an' then she brung this yeh cawfee an' she done mek it that foolish that Ah can't tech it. Yes, seh, she plumb ruined that theh cawfee, that's what she done!"

His tone was peevish. Clem himself was not talking as I thought would have been becoming in him. And there was a definite issue of veracity between him and his mistress. I went down again, for the room was cold.

"He has some fever," I said.

"He is a lazy black hound," said Miss Caroline.

"He says you ordered him to stay in bed--threatened him and hid his clothes."

"Oh, never fear but what that fellow will always have an excuse!" she retorted shortly.

Observing that she had a day's supply of wood at hand, I left, not a little annoyed at both of them. I missed my coffee.

When I knocked at the door that evening, no one came to admit me. I went in, hearing Clem's voice in truculent protest from a large room on the first floor which had been called the room of Little Miss. I went to the door of this room.

Clem and his bed were there. We had two physicians in Little Arcady, Old Doc and Young Doc. Young Doc was now present measuring powders into little papers which he folded neatly, while Miss Caroline stood at hand, cowering but stubborn under Clem's violence.

"Miss Cahline, yo' suttinly old enough t' know betteh'n that. Ah do wish yo' Paw was about th' house--he maghty quickly put yo'-all in yo' place. Now Ah tole yo' Ah ain't go'n' a' have none o' this yeh Doctah foolishness. Yo' not go'n' a' stravagate all that theh gole money on sech crazy doin's an' mek us be indigent in ouah ole aige. What Ah _want_ with a Doctah? Hanh! Anseh me that! Yo'-all jes' git me a little bit calamus an' some catnip, an' Ah do all th' doctahin' tha's advisable." All this he brought out with difficulty, for his breathing was by no means free.

"He's up to his tricks," said Miss Caroline, contemptuously, to me. Then, to Clem, seeming to draw courage from my presence, "You be quiet, there, you lazy, black good-for-nothing, or I'll get some one here to wear you out!" And Clem was again the vanquished.

"Pneumonia," said Young Doc. "Bad," he added as we stepped into the drawing-room. "Take lots of care."

I thought it as well that Young Doc had come. Old Doc, though well liked, boasted that all any man of his profession needed, really, were calomel and a good knife. Young Doc had always seemed to be subtler. Anyway, he was of a later generation. I learned that Old Doc had scorned to make the call, believing that a "nigger" could not suffer from anything but yellow fever or cracked shins. For this reason he became genuinely interested in Clem's case as it was later reported to him by Young Doc.

To the rest of Little Arcady the case was also of interest. Sympathy had heretofore been with Clem, because Miss Caroline paid him no wages, and was believed to take what he earned from other people.

Now, however, an important number of persons veered--in wonder if not in absolute sympathy. That the woman should watch and nurse the black fellow, apparently with perfect single-heartedness, was not to be squared with any known laws of human association. "Nursing a nigger in her own house with her own hands," was the fashion of describing this untoward spectacle. It was like taking a sick horse into your house, and

making play that it was human. The already puzzled town was further mystified, and it is probable that Miss Caroline fell a little in public esteem. Her course was not thought to be edifying. She could have sent Clem to the county poor farm, where he would have been seen to, after a fashion good enough for one of his color, by the proper authorities.

My own bewilderment was at first hardly less than the town's. Had Miss Caroline suddenly changed her manner toward Clem, showing regret, however belated, for her previous abuse of him, I should have understood. That would have been a simple case of awakened sensibility. But she continued to disparage him to his face and to me. She was venomous--scurrilous in her abuse. Yet only with the greatest difficulty could I persuade her to let me share the watch that must be kept over him. She called him an infamous black wretch, in tones befitting her words, but I could not get her to leave him even so long as her own health demanded.

There came nights, however, as the disease ran its course, when she had to give up from sheer lack of force. Then she permitted me to watch, though even at these times she often broke from sleep to come and be assured that the worthless black hound had not changed for the worse.

One dim, early morning, when she thought I had gone, after my night's watch, I returned softly to the half-opened door with a forgotten injunction about the medicines. All night Clem had babbled languidly of many things, of "a hundred thousan' hatchin' aigs," and "a thousan' billion dollahs," of "Mahstah Jere" and "Little Miss," of a visiting Cousin Peavey whom he had been obliged to "whup" for his repeated misdemeanors; and darkly and often had he whispered, so low I could scarcely hear it, of an enemy that was entering the room with a fell design. "_Tha'_ he is--he go'n' a' sprinkle snake-dust in mah boots--tha' he is--watch _out_!"

He still maundered weakly as I reached the door, but it was not this that detained me at its threshold. It was Miss Caroline, who had actually knelt at his side. At first I thought she wept over one of his blue-black hands, which she clung eagerly to with both her own. Then I saw that there seemed to be no tears--yet silently, almost impassively, she gave me a sense of hopeless grief that I thought no outburst of weeping could have done.

I wondered wildly then if her fashion of speech for Clem might not mask some real affection for him. But this was unsatisfying. On the spot I gave up all wondering forever about Miss Caroline. I have ever since constrained myself to accept her without question, even in situations of difficulty. There is so much vain knowledge.

That day, too, was the bad day when news came that Little Miss had been stricken with the same dread pneumonia. When she told me this, Miss Caroline had a look in her eyes that I suspect must often have been there in the first half of the sixties. It was calm enough, but there was a resistance in it that promised to be unbreakable. And to my never-ending wonder she seemed still to be more concerned about Clem than about her daughter.

"Will you go to her?" I asked.

She smiled. "That could hardly be afforded just now."

"You could manage it, I think. Clem has some money due from me."

"Even so, I couldn't leave Clem. My daughter will be cared for, but Clem wouldn't have anybody. We'll fight it out on this line, Major."

I now saw that continuous questioning about Miss Caroline would bring one in time to madness, and I was glad of my resolve never again to indulge in this unprofitable occupation.

But even pneumonia has its defeats. Young Doc surprised Old Doc again; for the latter, once convinced that an African could suffer so civilized an affliction as pneumonia, had declined to believe that he could ever "throw it off," and had disclosed good reasons why he could not to an attentive group at the City Drug Store.

Yet after a night when Miss Caroline had refused to let me watch, she met me at the door as Young Doc was leaving. She was wearied but chipper, though there was an unsteady little lift in her voice as she said:--

"That lazy black wretch is going to get well!"

"It's about time," I said grimly. "I've been in a bad way without him. Indeed I'm very glad to hear you say so."

Her eyes twinkled approval upon me, I thought.

"You've behaved excellently, Major. Really, I am glad that we left you that other arm." This was almost in her old manner, though her eyes seemed a little dimmed by her excitement. Then, with a sudden return to the patient:--

"I wonder if you would be good enough to go in and swear at Clem. He's perfectly rational now, and it will hearten him wonderfully. He's dreadfully mortified because he's been sick so long. And it needs a man, you know, really. I'll close the door for you. Do it hard! Call him a damned black hound, if you please, and ask him what he means by it!"

I hurried in, for Miss Caroline's eyes were threatening to betray her.

CHAPTER XX

IN WHICH SOMETHING MUST BE DONE

Clem's prolonged convalescence was a trial to his militant spirit. The month or more of curious weakness in his body, always before so stout, left him with a fear that he had been "pah'lyzed in th' frame." Moreover, there were troubles less intimately personal to him, but not less harassing to the household.

There was Little Miss, who was making a fight like Clem's own in a Baltimore hospital. Each day I bore to Miss Caroline a telegram detailing the progress of her daughter, though it had cost me time and trouble to convince my correspondent that he was not to skimp such encouragement as might be his to offer, merely to comprise it within ten

words. There were three days, it is true, when ten words were more than enough in which to be non-committal. And there was a day that came upon the heels of these when the profits of the telegraph company must have been unusual, for only two words came instead of ten--"Recovery doubtful." This might as well have been left unsent, for I tore it up and assured the waiting pair that no news was good news. They tried eagerly to believe this aphorism, which has the authority of age, but which I suspect was coined originally from despair.

The next day's bulletin read "Temperature still up, but making a strong fight." Stupid it was, when these were but eight words, not to have added two more, such as, "Very hopeful." I induced our telegraph operator to rectify this oversight, and felt repaid for my trouble when I showed the message. That last touch seemed to have been needed. Of course Little Miss would make a strong fight. Miss Caroline and Clem both knew that. But they had known other strong fights to be none the less hopeless, and they were grateful for those last two words of qualification.

There were four other days when the report seemed to need judicious editing, and in this I did not prove remiss. As the telegraph company remained indifferent, I could see that no harm was done. For at last came a bulletin of seventeen words which left us assured that Little Miss had conquered. Henceforth we could receive the things without that stifling dread, that eager fearfulness of the eyes to read all the words in one glance. Leisurely could we learn that Little Miss was getting back her strength, and Miss Caroline and I could laugh at Clem's fear that she also would find herself "pah'lyzed in th' frame."

After that Miss Caroline and I were free to consider another matter, weighty enough with pneumonia out of the running. This was a matter of ways and means--of sheer, downright money.

When Clem, in the first days of his sickness, had warned Miss Caroline that she would not be let to waste "all that gold money," his lofty reference, as a matter of cold figures, was to a sum less than nine dollars. I forget the precise amount, but that is near enough--nine dollars, in round numbers. And the winter had been an expensive one.

At the lowest time of doubt, when Miss Caroline had affairs of extreme gravity to face, I had spoken to her incidentally of money that I owed to Clem for services performed, and I had, in fact, paid several instalments of the debt as money seemed to be needed.

When Clem's recovery was assured and I urged Miss Caroline to go to Little Miss, she asked me bluntly what sum I had owed Clem. I felt obliged to confess that it was not more than two hundred dollars.

This must have surprised Miss Caroline as much as it rejoiced her, for she took up the matter with Clem, and in so clumsy a fashion that he, perhaps owing to his enfeebled condition, witlessly made a confession at variance with mine, and with an effect of candor that moved his questioner to take his word rather than that of an officer and a gentleman. Of course this was not at all like Clem. In referring to sums of money due him he had ever been wont to chant them with a bard-like inflation that recognized only sums of a vague but immense rotundity. I had never known him to be thus prosaic, and I suspected that Miss Caroline had, in a sudden impulse of doubt, terrified him into being so brutally explicit.

Whence fell a coldness between Miss Caroline and me, for the discrepancy between Clem's confession and mine was not slight. Even my mutterings about interest having accumulated were put down as the desperate resource of embarrassment. Miss Caroline did not even dignify them with her notice, and the coldness increased.

Yet, while it was a true coldness, it was distinguished by a certain alien quality of warmth, for Miss Caroline, though now on guard against any mere vulgar benevolence of mine, talked to me frankly, as she had never done before, about her situation.

First, it was impossible to think of going to her daughter. There were debts in the town; Clem would be unable to work for many weeks; and not only had Little Miss's contribution from her small wage now failed, but she herself had incurred debts and would be without money to pay them.

My neighbor depicted the gravity of this situation with a spirit that taxed my powers of admiration,--powers not slight, I may explain; for had they not already been developed beyond the ordinary by this same woman? Not even was she downcast in my presence. In fine, she was superbly Miss Caroline to me. If I saw that to herself she was an ill-fated old woman, perversely surviving a wreck with which she should have gone down, alone in a land that seemed unkind because it did not understand, and in desperate straits for the commonest stuff in the world,--why, that was no matter to be opened between us. We affected with mild philosophy to study a situation that not only did not require study but scarcely permitted it by candid souls. But we affected to agree that something must be done, which sounded very well indeed.

As a sign that she bore me no malice it was promised that I might hire a man to plant Clem's garden that spring, with the understanding that I should thus acquire an equity in its product. This seemed to be in the line of that something that must be done, and Miss Caroline and I made much of it, to avoid the situation's more embarrassing aspects.

"If I could only sell something," said my neighbor, with a vacant look about the room--a look of humorous disparagement. "The silver is good, but there's hardly enough of it to pay one of those debts--and I've nothing else but Clem. But if I tried to sell him," she added brightly, "it would only bring on trouble again with your Northern President. I know just how it would be."

We parted on this jest. Miss Caroline, I believe, went to be scolded by Clem for her trifling ways, while I sought out Solon Denney.

When something must be done, I seem never to know what it shall be. I believe Solon is often quite as uncertain, but he will never confess this, so that talk with him under such circumstances stimulates if it does not sustain.

I put Miss Caroline's difficulties before him. As any common catalogue of troubles will not provoke Solon from a happy unconcern which is temperamental, I spared no details in my recital, and I observed at length that my listener was truly aroused to the bad way in which Miss Caroline found herself. He sat forward in his chair, rested one elbow upon his untidy desk, and for several moments of silence jabbed an inky pen rhythmically into the largest rutabaga ever grown in Slocum County. At last he sat back and gazed upon me distantly from inspired eyes.

Then, with his characteristic enthusiasm, he exclaimed:--

"Something will have to be done!"

"Wonderful!" I murmured. "Here I've worried over the thing for two months, studied it in court, studied it in my office, studied it in bed--and couldn't make a thing out of it. All at once I am guided to a welling fount of wisdom, and the thing is solved in a flash. Solon, you dazzle me! Denney forever!"

"Now, don't be funny, Calvin--I mean, don't try to be--" but I arose to go.

"You've solved it, Solon. _Something must be done._ There's the difference between intuition and mere clumsy ratiocination. In another month I might have found this out for myself, but you divine it instantly. You're a clairvoyant. Now I'm going to find Billy Durgin. You've done the heavy work--you've discovered that something must be done. What we need now, I suppose, is a bright young detective to tell us what it is."

But Solon interrupted soothingly. "There, there, something must be done, and, of course, I'll do it."

"What will you do?"

Even then I think he did not know.

"We must use common sense in these matters," he said, to gain time, and narrowed his gaze for an interval of study. At last he drove the pen viciously to its hilt in the rutabaga, and almost shouted:--

"I'll go to see Mrs. Potts!"

Before I could again express my enthusiasm, reawakened by the felicitous adequacy of this device, he had seized his hat and was clattering noisily down the stairway.

Two hours later Solon bustled into my own office, whither I had fled to forget his manifest incompetence. His hat was well back, and he seemed to be inflated with secrecy. I remembered it was thus he had impressed me just previous to the _coup_ that had relieved us of Potts. I knew at once that he was going to be mysterious with me.

"I am not to say a word to any one," I began, merely to show him that I was not dense.

He paused, apparently on the point of telling me as much. I saw that I had read him aright.

"I am merely to be quiet and trust everything to you," I continued.

"Oh, well,--if you--"

"One moment--let me take a few more words out of your mouth. You are not certain, I am to remember, that anything will come of it, but you think something will. You think you may say _that_ much. But I am again to remember not to talk about it. There! That's it, isn't it?"

He was entirely serious.

"Well, that's practically it. But I don't mind hinting a little, in strict confidence." He dropped into a chair, sitting earnestly forward.

"You see, Cal, I remembered a little remark Mrs. Potts once made. I believe it was the day after Mrs. Lansdale entertained the ladies' club last summer--I remember she was complaining of a headache--"

"I never knew Mrs. Potts to make a little remark," I said. I was not to be trifled with. Solon grinned.

"Well, perhaps this one wasn't so very little, only I never thought of it again until this morning. It was about Mrs. Lansdale's furniture."

"Indeed," I said in cold disinterest, having designed to be told more.

"Well, Mrs. Potts thinks there may be something in it."

His effort was to seem significant, but those things are apt to fail with me.

"Oh, I see. Well, that's a good idea, Solon, but you and Mrs. Potts are slow. Billy Durgin had the same idea last summer while the furniture was being unloaded. He took a good look at some of those old pieces, and he confided to me in strict secrecy that there were probably missing wills and rolls of banknotes hidden away in them. It seems that they're the kind that have secret drawers. Billy knows a case where a man touched a spring and found thirty thousand dollars in a secret drawer, 'and from there,' as Billy says, 'he fled to Australia.' So you can see it's been thought of. Of course I've never spoken of it, because I promised Billy not to,--but there's nothing in it."

"Bosh!" said Solon.

"Of course it's bosh. I could have told Billy that, but some way I always feel tender about his illusions. You may be sure I've learned enough of the Lansdale family to know that no member of it ever hid any real money--money that would spend--and there hasn't been a will missing for at least six generations."

"Bosh again!" said Solon. "It isn't secret drawers!"

"No? What then?"

"Well,--it's worse--and more of it."

"Is that all you have to say?" I asked as he stood up.

"Well, that's all I can say now. We must use common sense in these matters. But--Mrs. Potts has written!" With this cryptic utterance he stalked out.

There had been little need to caution me to secrecy. I was not tempted to speak. Had I known any debtor of Miss Caroline's who would have taken "Mrs. Potts has written" in payment of his account, it might have been otherwise.

CHAPTER XXI

LITTLE ARCADY IS GRIEVOUSLY SHAKEN

Mrs. Potts had written. I had Solon's word for it; but that which followed the writing will not cease within this generation or the next to be an affair of the most baffling mystery to our town folk. Me, also, it amazed; though my emotion was chiefly concerned with those gracious effects which the gods continued to manage from that apparently meaningless sojourn of J. Rodney Potts among us.

Superficially it was a thing of utter fortuity. Actually it was a masterpiece of cunning calculation, a thing which clear-visioned persons might see to bristle with intention on every side.

Years after that innocent encounter between an adventurous negro and an amiable human derelict in the streets of a far city,—those two atoms shaken into contact while the gods affected to be engaged with weightier matters,—the cultured widow of that derelict recalled the name of a gentleman in the East who was accustomed to buy tall clocks and fiddle-backed chairs, in her native New England, paying prices therefor to make one, in that conservative locality, rich beyond the dreams of avarice, almost.

Such was the cleverly devised circumstance that now intervened between my neighbor and an indigence distressing to think about. It was as if, in the game, a red four which one had neglected to "play up" should actually permit victory after an intricate series of disasters, by providing a temporary resting-place for a black trey, otherwise fatally obstructive, causing the player to marvel afresh at that last fateful but apparently chance shuffle.

A week after Mrs. Potts had written, the gentleman who received her letter registered as "Hyman Cohen, New York, N.Y.," at the City Hotel. From his manner of speech when he inquired for the Lansdale home it was seen that he seemed to be a German.

When Miss Caroline received him a little later, he asked abruptly about furniture, and she, in some astonishment, showed him what she had, even to that crowded into dark rooms and out of use.

He examined it carelessly and remarked that it was the worst lot that he had ever seen.

This did not surprise Miss Caroline in the least, though she thought the gentleman's candor exceptional. Little Arcady's opinion, which she knew to tally with his, had always come to her more circuitously.

The strange gentleman then asked Miss Caroline, not too urbanely, if she had expected him to come all the way from New York to look at such cheap stuff. Miss Caroline assured him quite honestly that she had expected nothing of the sort, and intimated that her regret for his coming surpassed his own, even if it must remain more obscurely worded. She indicated that the interview was at an end.

The strange gentleman arose also, but as Clem was about to close the

door after him, he offered Miss Caroline one hundred and fifty dollars for "the lot," observing again that it was worthless stuff, but that in "this business" a man had to take chances. Miss Caroline declined to notice this, having found that there was something in the gentleman's manner which she did not like, and he went down the path revealing annoyance in the shrug of his shoulders and the sidewise tilt of his head.

To Mrs. Lansdale's unaffected regret, and amazement as well, the gentleman returned the following morning to say that he was about to leave for New York, but that he would actually pay one hundred and seventy-eight dollars for the stuff. This was at least twenty-two dollars more than it could possibly be worth, but the gentleman had an unfortunate passion for such things. Miss Caroline bowed, and called Clem as she left the room.

The gentleman returned the morning of the third day to close the deal. He said he had missed his train on the previous day, and being a superstitious man he regarded that as an augury of evil. Nevertheless he had resolved to take the stuff even at a price that was ruinous. He unfolded two hundred dollars in the presence of Clem, and wished to know if he might send a wagon at once. Clem brought back word from Miss Caroline, who had declined to appear, that the strange gentleman would oblige her by ceasing his remarkable intrusions. Whereupon the gentleman had said: "Oh, very _well_! Then I go!"

But he went no farther than the City Hotel; and here one may note a further contrivance of indirection on the part of our attending Fates.

From the evening train of that day the 'bus brought another strange gentleman, of an Eastern manner, but somewhat neater of dress than the first one and speaking with an accent much less obtrusive. This gentleman wrote "James Walsingham Price, N.Y.," on the register, called for a room with a bath, ordered "coffee and rolls" to be sent there at eight-thirty the next morning, and then asked to see the "dinner card."

After mine host, Jake Kilburn, had been made to understand what "dinner card" meant, he made Mr. James Walsingham Price understand that there was no dinner card. This being clear at last, the newcomer said: "Oh, _very_ well! Then just give my order to the head-waiter, will you--there's a good chap--a cup of consomme, a bit of fish, a bird of some sort, broiled, I fancy,--er--potatoes _au gratin_, a green salad of some kind,--serve that with the bird,--a piece of Camembert, if it's in good condition, any _entremet_ you have and a _demi-tasse_. I'll mix the salad dressing myself, tell him,--oh, yes--and a pint of Chambertin if you've something you can recommend."

Billy Durgin, scrutinizing the newcomer in a professional way, told me afterwards that Jake Kilburn "batted his eyes" during this strange speech and replied to it, "like a man coming to"--"supper in twenty minutes," after which he pounded a bell furiously and then himself showed his new and puzzling guest to a room--but not a room "with a bath," be it understood, for a most excellent reason.

Billy Durgin was excited half an hour later by noting the behavior of the first strange gentleman from the East as his eyes fell upon this second. He threw both hands into the air, where they engaged in rapid horizontal shakings from his pliant wrists, and in hushed gutturals exclaimed, "My God, my God!" in his own fashion of speech, which was

reproduced admirably for me by my informant. Billy was thus confirmed in his earlier belief that the first strange gentleman was a house-breaker badly wanted somewhere, and he now surmised that the newcomer must be a detective on his trail. But a close watch on their meeting, a little later in the evening, seemed to contradict this engaging hypothesis. The second stranger emerged from the dining room, where he had been served with supper, and as he shut the door of that banqueting hall, Billy, standing by, heard him, too, call upon his Maker. He called only once, but it was in a voice so full of feeling as to make Billy suspect that he was remembering something unpleasant.

At this point the newcomer had glanced up to behold the first strange gentleman, and Billy held his breath, expecting to witness a sensational capture. To his unspeakable disgust the supposed sleuth grinned affably at his supposed quarry and said: "Ah, Hyman! Is the stuff any good?"

"How did you find it out?" asked the first strange gentleman.

The other smiled winningly. "Why, I dropped into your place the other day, and that beautiful daughter-in-law of yours mentioned incidentally where you'd gone and what for. She's a good soul, Hyman, bright, and as chatty as she can be."

"Ach! That Malke! She goes back right off to De Lancey Street, where she belongs," said the first stranger, plainly irritated.

"How did you find the stuff, Hyman?"

"Have you et your supper yet?"

"Yes--'tisn't Kosher, is it? How did you find the stuff?"

"No, it ain't Kosher--nothing ain't Kosher!"

"It's a devilish sight worse, though. How did you find the stuff, Hyman?"

The one called Hyman here seemed to despair of putting off this query.

"No good! No good!--not a decent piece in the lot! I pledge you my word as a gentleman I wouldn't pay the freight on it to Fourth Avenue!" Billy remarked that the gentleman said "plech" for pledge and "afanoo" for avenue.

The second stranger, hearing this, at once became strangely cheerful and insisted upon shaking hands with the first one.

"Fine, Hyman, fine! I'm delighted to hear you say so. Your words lift a load of doubt from my mind. It came to me in there just now that I might be incurring that supper for nothing but my sins!"

"Have your choke," said Hyman, a little bitterly.

"I have, Hyman, I have had my 'choke'!" said James Walsingham Price, with a glance of disrelish toward the dining room.

It seemed clear to Billy Durgin, who reported this interview to me in a manner of able realism, that these men were both crooks of the first water.

Billy at once polished his star and cleaned and oiled his new 32-caliber "bull-dog." The promise of work ahead for the right man loomed more brightly than ever before in his exciting career.

While I discussed with Miss Caroline, that evening, the unpleasant mystery of her late caller, there came a note from him by messenger. He offered six hundred and twenty-one dollars for her furniture, the sum being written in large letters, so that it had the effect of being shouted from the page. He further expressed a wish to close the deal within the half hour, as he must leave town on the night train.

Had Miss Caroline been alone, she might have fallen. Even I was staggered, but not beyond recovery. The messenger bore back, at my suggestion, a refusal of the offer and a further refusal to consider any more offers that evening. There was indicated a need for calm daylight consideration, and a face-to-face meeting with this variable Mr. Cohen.

"But he leaves on the night train," said Miss Caroline. "It may be our last chance, and six hundred dollars is--"

"He only says he leaves," I responded. "And for three days, at least, Mr. Cohen seems to have been grossly misinformed about his own movements. Perhaps he's deceived himself again."

At eight o'clock the following morning Clem served my breakfast for the first time since his illness, and I approached it with thanksgiving for his recovery.

A knock at the door took him from me just as he had poured the first cup of real coffee I had seen for nearly three months. He came back with the card of one James Walsingham Price, whom I did not know; whereas I did know the coffee.

"Fetch him here," I said. "He can't expect me to leave this coffee, whoever he is."

Into my dining room was then ushered a tall, smartly dressed, smooth-faced man of perhaps middle age, with yellowish hair compactly plastered to his head. He became, I thought, suddenly alert as he crossed my threshold. I arose to greet him.

"This is--" I had to glance at the card.

"Yes--and you're Major Blake? I regret to disturb you, Major,"--here his glance rested blankly upon the rich golden-brown surface of Clem's omelette, and it seemed to me that the thread of his intention was broken for an instant by a fit of absentmindedness. He resumed his speech only after an appreciable pause, as if the omelette had reminded him of something.

"The hour is untimely, but I'm told that you're a friend of a Mrs. Lansdale, who has some pieces of Colonial furniture she wishes to let go. I wondered, you know, if you'd be good enough to introduce me. I rather thought some such formality might be advisable--I understand that a shark named Cohen has already approached her."

Even as he spoke I recalled that Mr. Cohen's face, in profile, might provoke the vision of a shark to a person of lively imagination.

"I shall be glad," I said, "to present you to Mrs. Lansdale."

Again had my caller's glance trailed across the breakfast table, where the omelette, the muffins, and the coffee-urn waited. The glance was politely unnoting, but in it there yet lurked, far back, the unmistakable quality of a caress. In an instant I remembered, and, with a pang of sympathy, I became his hungered brother.

"By the way, Mr. Price, are you staying at the City Hotel?"

"The man said it was the only place, you know."

"You had breakfast there this morning?" He bowed his assent eloquently, I thought.

"Then by all means sit down and have breakfast."

"Oh, really, no--by no means--I assure you I'd a capital breakfast--"

"Clem!"

Clem placed a chair, into which Mr. Price dropped without loss of time, though protesting with polished vehemence against the imposition.

His eyes shone, nevertheless, as Clem set a cup of coffee at his elbow and brought a plate.

"May I ask when you arrived?" I questioned.

"Only last evening."

"Then you dined at the City Hotel?"

"Major Blake, I will be honest with you--I did!"

"Clem, another omelette, quick--but first fetch some oranges, then put on a lot more of that Virginia ham and mix up some waffles, too. Hurry along!"

"Really, you are very good, Major."

"Not that," I answered modestly; "I've merely eaten at the City Hotel." But I doubt if he heard, for he lovingly inhaled the aroma of his coffee with half-shut eyes.

"I am delighted to have met you," he said. "If ever you come to New York--" He tore himself from the omelette long enough to scribble the name of a club on the card by my plate.

"I rarely crave more than coffee and a roll in the morning," he continued, after the second omelette, the ham, the waffles, and more coffee had been consumed. "I fancy it's your bracing air."

I fancied it was only the City Hotel, but I did not revert to that.

When at last Mr. Price lighted a cigar which I had procured at an immense distance from Slocum County, he spoke of furniture, also of

Cohen.

Beheld through the romantic mist of after-breakfast, Cohen was, perhaps, not wholly a shark; at least not more than any dealer in old furniture. Really, they were almost forced to be sharks. It was not in the nature of the business that they should lead honest lives. Mere collectors--of which class my guest was--were bad enough. Still, if you could catch a collector in one of his human moments--

He blew forth the smoke of my cigar with a relish so poignant that I suspected he had already tried one of Jake Kilburn's best, the kind concerning which Jake feels it considerate to warn purchasers that they are "five cents, straight" and not six for a quarter. I saw that if the collector before me were subject to human moments, he must be suffering one now. So, while he smoked, I told him freely of Miss Caroline, of her furniture and her plight.

He commended the tale.

"One of the best I ever heard," he declared. "Only, if you'll pardon me, it sounds too good to be true. It sounds, indeed, like a 'plant,'--fine old Southern family, impoverished by war--faithful body-servant--old Colonial mansion despoiled of its heirlooms--rare opportunities for the collector. Really, Major, you should see some of the stuff that was landed on me when I began, years ago, with a story almost as good. Reproductions, every piece of it, with as fine an imitation of worm-eaten backs as you could ever wish to see."

I had never wished to see any worm-eaten backs whatever, but I sought to betray regret that I had not encountered this surpassing lot of them.

"Of course," he continued, "you will understand that I am speaking now as a hardened collector, whose life is beset with pitfalls and with gins--not as a starved wretch to the saver of his life."

"You shall see the stuff," I said.

"Oh, by all means, and the quicker the better. Cohen is waiting at the hotel for me now--at the foot of the front stairway, and he may suspect any minute that I was mean enough to slink down the back stairs and out through an alley. In fact, I'm rather excited at the prospect of seeing that furniture--Cohen condemned it so bitterly."

"He sent an offer of six hundred dollars for it last night," I said. Hereupon my guest became truly excited.

"He did--six hundred--Cohen did? I don't wish to be rude, old chap, but would you mind hastening? That is more eloquent than all your story."

For half an hour, notwithstanding his eagerness, Mr. James Walsingham Price succumbed to the manner of Miss Caroline. Noting the lack of compunction with which she played upon him before my very eyes, I divined that the late Colonel Lansdale had not found the need of pistols entirely done away with even by the sacrament of marriage.

Not until Clem announced "Mr. Cohen" did the self-confessed collector cease to be a man.

"Not at home," said Miss Caroline, crisply. Price grinned with appreciation and fell to examining the furniture in strange ways.

It was a busy day for him, but I could see that he found it enjoyable, and strangely was it borne in upon me that Miss Caroline's ancient stuff was in some sense desirable.

More than once did Price permit some sign of emotion to be read in his face--as when the sixth chair of a certain set was at last found supporting a water-pail in the kitchen. The house was not large, but it was crowded, and Price was frankly surprised at the number of things it held.

At six o'clock he went to dine with me, Miss Caroline having told him that I was authorized to act for her on any proposal he might have to make.

"You have saved me again," he said warmly, in the midst of Clem's dinner. "I assure you, Major, that hotel is infamous. I'm surprised, you know, that something isn't done about it by the authorities."

I had to confess that the City Hotel was very highly regarded by most of our citizens.

Again, after a brief interval of stupefaction, did James Walsingham Price call upon his Maker. "And yet," he murmured, "we are spending millions annually to impose mere theology upon savages far less benighted. Think for a moment what a tithe of that money would do for these poor people. Take the matter of green salads alone--to say nothing of soups--don't you have so simple a thing as lettuce here?"

"We do," I said, "but it's regarded as a trifle. They put vinegar and sugar on it and cut it up with their knives."

My guest shuddered.

"I dare say it's hopeless, but I shall always be glad to remember that you exist away from your City Hotel."

Thus did we reach the coffee and some cognac which the late L.Q. Peavey had gifted me with by the hands of his estimable kinswoman.

"And now to business," said my guest. His whimsical gray eyes had become studious and detached from our surroundings. He had a generous mouth, which he seemed habitually to sew up in a close-drawn seam, but this would suddenly and pleasantly rip in moments of forgetfulness. Being the collector at this moment, the mouth was tightly stitched.

"Let me begin this way," he said. "There are exactly six pieces in that house that will prevent my being honest so long as they are not mine. I am not unmindful of your succor, Major. I'll prove that to you if you look me up in town,--send me a wire and a room shall be waiting for you,--and I am enraptured by that small and lively brown lady. Nevertheless I shall remain a collector and, humanly speaking, an ingrate, a wolf, a caitiff, until those six articles are mine. Make them mine, and for the remainder of that stuff you shall have the benefit of an experience that has been of incredible cost. Accept my figure, and I promise you as man to man to de-Cohenize myself utterly."

"They are yours," I said--"what are they and what is the figure?
Clem--Mr. Price's glass."

"There--you disarm me. One bit of haggling or hesitation might have hardened me even now; the serpent within me would have lifted its head and struck. But you have saved yourself--and very well for that! The articles are those six ball-and-claw-foot chairs with violin backs. I will pay fifty dollars apiece for those. Remember--it is the voice of Cohen. The chairs are worth more--some day they'll fetch twice that; but, really, I must throw a sop to that collector-Cerberus within me. He's entitled to something. He had the wit to fetch me here."

"The chairs are yours," I said, wondering if I had not mistaken his offer, but determining not to betray this.

"A little memorandum of sale, if you please--and I'll give you my check. That larger sideboard would also have stood in the way, but those glass handles aren't the originals."

The formality was soon despatched, and my curious friend became truly human.

"Now, Blake, this is from the grateful wretch whose life you have not only saved but enriched. Well, there's an excellent lot of stuff there. I've got the pick, from a collector's standpoint--though not from a money valuation. I can't tell what it will bring, but enough to put our youngish old friend easy for some time to come. You box it up, as much as she wants to let go, and send it to the Empire Auction Rooms--here's the card. They're plain auction-room people, you understand,--wouldn't hesitate to rob you in a genteel, auction way,--but I'll be there and see that they don't. Some of those other pieces I may want, but I'll take a bidding chance on them like a man, and I'll watch the whole thing through and see that it's straight."

Billy Durgin told me that Cohen and James Walsingham Price left on the night train going East. Billy noticed that Cohen seemed morose, and heard him exclaim something that sounded like "Goniff!" under his breath, as Price turned away from him after a brief chat.

For Little Arcady the appalling wonder was still to dawn. Load after load of the despised furniture went into freight-cars, until the home of Miss Caroline was only comfortably furnished. This was sensational enough--that the things should be thought worth shipping about the country with freights so high.

But after a few weeks came tales that atrophied belief--tales corroborated by a printed catalogue and by certain deposits of money in our bank to the account of Miss Caroline. That six wretched chairs, plain to ugliness, had sold for three hundred dollars spread consternation. The plain old sideboard for a hundred and ten dollars only fed the flames. But there had been sold what the catalogue described as "A Colonial sofa with carved dolphin arms, winged claw feet, and carved back" for two hundred and ten dollars, and after that the emotions aroused in Little Arcady were difficult to classify. Upon that very sofa most of the ladies of Little Arcady had sat to pity Miss Caroline for being "lumbered" with it. Again, a "Colonial highboy, hooded," recalled as an especially awkward thing, and "five mahogany side chairs" had gone for three hundred and eighty dollars. A "Heppelwhite mahogany armchair," remembered for its faded red satin, had

veritably brought one hundred and sixty dollars; and a carved rosewood screen, said to be of Empire design, but a shabby thing, had sold astonishingly for ninety dollars. A "Hogarth chair-back settee" for two hundred and ten dollars, and "four Hogarth side chairs" for three hundred and fifteen dollars only darkened our visions still further. Some of us had known that Hogarth was an artist, but not that he had found time from his drawing to make furniture. Of Heppelwhite we had heard not at all, although twelve arm-chairs said to be his had been by some one thought to be worth around seven hundred dollars. Nor of any Sheraton did we know, though one of his sideboards and a "pair of Sheraton knife urns" fetched the incredible sum of five hundred and fifty dollars. Chippendale was another name unfamiliar in Slocum County, but Chippendale, it seemed, had once made a wing book-case which was now worth two hundred and forty dollars of some enthusiast's money. After that a Chippendale settee for a hundred and forty dollars and an "Empire table with 1830 base" for ninety-three dollars seemed the merest trifles of this insane outbreak.

The amount netted by the late owner of these things was reported with various exaggerations, which I never saw any good reason to correct. As I have said, the thing was, and promises to remain forever in Little Arcady, a phenomenon to be explained by no known natural laws. For a long time our ladies were too aghast even to marvel at it intelligibly. When Aunt Delia McCormick in my hearing said, "Well, now, what a world this is!" and Mrs. Westley Keyts answered, "That's very true!" I knew they referred to the Lansdale furniture. It was typical of the prevailing stupefaction.

"It seems that a collector may be a gentleman," said Miss Caroline, "but Mr. Cohen wasn't even a collector!"

Then I told her the considerable sum now to her credit. She drew a long breath and said, "Now!" and Clem, who stood by, almost cried, "Now!, Little Miss!"

The Book of LITTLE MISS

CHAPTER XXII

THE TIME OF DREAMS

I had Clem to myself for a time. Little Miss, it seemed, was not yet rugged enough for travel into the far Little Country. Nor was she at once to be convinced that she might safely leave her work. I suspect that she had found cause in the past to rank her mother with Clem as a weigher and disburser of moneys. I noticed that she chose to accept Miss Caroline's earliest letters about their good fortune with a sort of half-tolerant attention, as an elder listens to the wonder-tales of an imaginative child, or as I had long listened to Clem's own dreamy-eyed recital of the profits already his from "billions" of chickens not yet come even to the egg-stage of their careers.

Not until Miss Caroline had ceased from large and beautiful phrases about "the great good fortune that has befallen us in the strangest manner"--not until she descended to actual, dumbfounding figures with powerful little dollar-marks back of them, did her daughter seem to permit herself the sweet alarms of hope. Even in that moment she did not forget that she knew her own mother, for she took the precaution to elicit a confirmatory letter from her mother's attorney, under guise of thanking him for the friendly interest he had "ever manifested" in the welfare of the Lansdales.

It occurred to me that Little Miss had been endowed, either by nature or experience, with a marked distrust of mere seemings. The impression conveyed to me by her unenthusiastic though skilfully polite letter was of one who had formed the habit of doubting beyond her years. These I judged to be twenty-eight or thereabouts, while her powers of restraint under provocation to believe savored of more years than even her mother could claim. I had myself been compelled to note the value of negative views, save in that inner and lonely world where I abode of nights and Sundays; I, too, had proved the wisdom of much doubting as to actual, literal events; but Little Miss was making me think of myself as almost raw-and-twenty credulous. In a lawyer's letter of formal conciseness, devoid of humanities, maintaining to the end an atmosphere of unemotional fact and figure that descended not even to conventional felicitations upon the result, I therefore acquainted Little Miss with the situation. So nearly perfect was this letter that it caused her to refer to me, in a later communication to Miss Caroline, as "your dry-and-dusty counting-machine of a lawyer, who doubtless considers the multiplication table as a cycle of sonnets." That, after I had merely determined to meet her palpable needs and had signed myself her obedient servant!

But I had convinced her. She admitted as much in words almost joyous, so that Miss Caroline went to be with her--to fetch her when she should be strong enough for the adventure of travel.

There were three weeks of my neighbor's absence--three weeks in which Clem "cleaned house", polished the battered silver, "neated" the rooms, and tried to arrange the remaining furniture so that it would look like a great deal of furniture indeed; three weeks in which Little Arcady again decked itself with June garlands and seemed not, at first glance, to belie its rather pretentious name; three weeks when I studied a calendar which impassively averred that I was thirty-five, a mirror which added weight to that testimony, and the game which taught me with some freshness at each failure that the greater game it symbolizes is not meant to be won--only to be played forever with as eager a zest, as daring a hope, as if victory were sure.

The season at hand found me in sore need of this teaching. It was then that errant impulse counselled rebellion against the decrees of calendar and looking-glass. If vatted wine in dark cellars turns in its bed and mutters seethingly at this time, in a mysterious, intuitive sympathy with the blossoming grape, a man free and above ground, with eyes to behold that miracle, may hardly hope to escape an answering thrill to its call.

Wherefore I played the game diligently, torn by the need of its higher lessons. And at last I was well instructed by it, as all may be who approach it thus, above a trivial lust for winning.

Two of us played in that provocative June. One was myself, alert for auspicious falls of the cards, yet stoical and undepressed when a deal promising to be almost too easy for interest was suddenly blocked by some trifling card. Thus was I schooled to expectations of a wise shallowness, not so deep but that they might be overrun by the moderate flow of human happiness. Thus one learned to expect little under much wanting, and to find his most certain profit in observing the freshness of those devices which left him frustrated. Jim, the other player of us, chased gluttonous robins on the lawn, ever with an indifferent success, but with as undimmed a faith, as fatuous a certainty, as the earliest of gods could have wished to see. And between us we achieved a conviction that the greater game is worth playing, even when one has discovered its terrific percentage of failures.

I was not displeased to be alone during this period of discipline when my soul was perforce purged of its troublesome ferments. It was well that my neighbor should have gone where she might distract me never so little.

For it was at the season when Nature brews the irresistible philter. Always, I resolved to forego it like a man; always, like a man, I was overborne by the ancient longing, the formless "heimweh" that haunts the hearts of the unmated, and which in my own case made short work of stoic resolutions. And, since the game had taught me that yielding--where opposition is fated to avail not--is graceful in proportion to its readiness, I surrendered as quietly as might be.

One woman face had been wholly mine for hidden cherishing through all the years. A woman face, be it understood, not the face of a woman. At first it had been that; but with the years it had lost the lines that made it but that one. Imperceptibly, it had taken on an alien, vague softness that but increased its charm while diminishing its power to hurt.

It brought me now only a pensive pleasure and no feeling more acute. It was my ashes of roses, the music of my first love, its poignancies softened by time and memory into an ineffable, faint melody; it was the moon that drenched my bygone youth with wonder-light--a dream-face, exquisite as running water, unfolding flowers and those other sweets that poets try in vain to entangle in the meshes of word and rhythm.

This was the face my fancy brought to go with me into every June garden of familiar surprises. All of which meant that I was a poor thing of clay and many dolors, who still perversely made himself believe that somewhere between him and God was the one woman, breathing and conscious, perhaps even longing. More plainly, it meant that I was a man whose gift for self-fooling promised ably to survive his hair. Gravitation would presently pull down my shoulders, my face would flaunt "the wrinkled spoils of age", my voice would waver ominously, and I should forfeit the dignities befitting even this decay by still playing childish games of belief with some foolish dog. I would be a village "character" of the sort that is justly said to "dodder." And the judicious would shun observation by me, or, if it befell them, would affect an intense preoccupation lest I halt and dodder to them of a past unromantically barren.

There were moments in which I made no doubt of all this. But I fought them off as foolishly as did Jim his own intervals of clear seeing. Sometimes in a half doze he breathes a long, almost human sigh of

perfect and despairing comprehension, as if the whole dead weight of his race's history flashed upon him; as if the woful failure of his species to achieve anything worth while, and the daily futilities of himself as an individual dog were suddenly revealed. In such instants he knows, perhaps, that there is little reward in being a dog, unless you cheat yourself by believing more than the facts warrant. But presently he is up to dash at a bird, with a fine forgetfulness, quite as startled by the trick of flight as in his first days. And I, envying him his gift of credulity, weakly strive for it.

As I have said, I had noted that in these free dreamings of mine the painted face above my neighbor's mantel seemed to have had a place long before I looked upon its actual lines. This perplexed me not a little; that the face should seem to have been familiar before I had seen it--the portrait, that it should have blended with and then almost replaced another's, so that now the woman face I saw was eloquent of two, though fittingly harmonized in itself. Must I lay to the philter's magic this audacious notion; that the face of Little Miss had tangibly come to me in some night of the mind? Sober, I was loath to commit this absurdity; but breasting drunkenly that tide of dreams, it ceased to be absurd.

And so I had plunged into the current again one early evening when the growing things seemed to have stopped reluctantly for rest, when the robins had fluted of their household duties the last time for the day, and when only the songs of children at a game were brought to me from a neighboring yard.

Unconsciously my thoughts fell into the rhythm of this song, with the result that I presently listened to catch its words--faint, childish, laughing, yet musical in the scented dusk:--

"King William was King James's son and from the royal race he sprung;
Upon his breast he wore a star that showed the royal points of war.
Go choose your east and choose your west, and choose the one that you
love best.
If she's not here to take your part, go choose another with all your
heart.
Down on this carpet you must kneel, low as the grass grows in yon field.
Salute your bride and kiss her sweet, and then arise upon your feet."

The sentiment was ill suited to my own at the moment, but the raw-voiced little singers appealed to my ears not unpleasantly. Again the verse came--

"If she's not here to take your part--go choose another with all your
heart!"

I heard wheels then, nearer than the singing,--the clumsy rumble of our big yellow 'bus. Voices were borne to me,--Clem's voice, Miss Caroline's and another not like her's, a voice firmer, yet a dusky-warm woman's voice. That was all I could think of at the time: perhaps the night suggested it; they had qualities in common. It was a woman's voice, but a determined woman's. I knew of course that Little Miss had come. But also I knew at once--this being her voice--that it would not be in my power to call her Little Miss.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE STRAIN OF PEAVEY

It was too true that I could not call her "Little Miss," as I had lightly called her mother "Miss Caroline" at our first encounter. Of a dusky pallor was Miss Lansdale when I first beheld her under the night of her hair. As the waning light showed me her, I thought of a blossomed young sloe tree in her own far valley of the Old Dominion. Closer to her I could note only that she was dark but fair, for observations of this character became, for some reason, impracticable in her immediate presence.

She greeted me kindly, as her mother's lawyer; she was cordial to me a moment, as her mother's friend; but later, when these debts of civility had been duly paid, when we had gone from the outer dusk into candle light, she favored me only with occasional glances of the mildest curiosity, in which was neither kindness nor cordiality. Not that these had given way to their opposites; they were simply not there. Not the faintest hint of unfriendliness could I detect. Miss Lansdale had merely detached herself into a magnificent void of disinterest, from the centre of which she surveyed me without prejudice in moments when her glance could not be better occupied.

I have caught much the same look in the eyes of twelve bored jurymen who were, nevertheless, bound to give my remarks their impartial attention. Sometimes one may know from the look of these twelve that one's case is already as good as lost; or, at least, that an opinion has been reached which new and important testimony will be required to change.

It occurred to me as my call wore on that I caught even a hint of this prejudgment in the eyes of the young woman. It put me sorely at a disadvantage, for I knew not what I was expected to prove; knew not if I were on trial as her mother's lawyer, her mother's friend, or as a mere man. The latter seemed improbable as an offence, for was not my judge a daughter of Miss Caroline? And yet, strangely enough, I came to think that this must be my offence--that I was a man. She made me feel this in her careless, incidental glances, her manner of turning briskly from me to address her mother with a warmer show of interest than I had been able to provoke.

It seemed, indeed, opportune to remember at the moment that, while this alleged Little Miss was the daughter of Miss Caroline, she was likewise--and even more palpably, as I could note by fugitive swift glimpses of her face--the daughter of a gentleman whose metal had been often tried; one who had won his reputation as much by self-possession under difficulties as by the militant spirit that incurred them.

"Kate has little of the Peavey in her,--she is every inch a Lansdale," Miss Caroline found occasion to say; while I, thus provided with an excuse to look, remarked to myself that her inches, while not excessive, were unusually meritorious.

"Worse than that--she's a Jere Lansdale," was my response, though I tactfully left it unuttered for an "Indeed?" that seemed less emotional. I could voice my deeper conviction not more explicitly than by saying further to Miss Caroline, "Perhaps that explains why she has the effect

of making her mother seem positively immature."

"My mother is positively immature," remarked the daughter, with the air of telling something she had found out long since.

"Then perhaps the other is the false effect," I ventured. "It is your mother's immaturity that makes you seem so--" I thought it kind to hesitate for the word, but Miss Lansdale said, again confidently:--

"Oh, but I really am," and this with a finality that seemed to close the incident.

Her voice had the warm little roughness of a thrush's, which sings through a throat that is loosely strung with wires of soft gold.

"In my day," began Miss Caroline; but here I rebelled, no longer perceiving any good reason to be overborne by her daughter. I could endure only a certain amount of that.

"Your day is to-day," I interrupted, "and to-morrow and many to-morrows. You are a woman bereft of all her yesterdays. Let your daughter have had her day--let her have come to an incredible maturity. But you stay here in to-day with me. We won't be fit companions for her, but she shall not lack for company. Uncle Jerry Honeycutt is now ninety-four, and he has a splendid new ear-trumpet--he will be rarely diverting for Miss Lansdale."

But the daughter remained as indifferent to taunts as she had been to my friendly advances. It occurred to me now that her self-possession was remarkable. It was little short of threatening if one regarded her too closely. I wondered if this could really be an inheritance from her well-nerved father or the result of her years as teacher in a finishing school for young ladies. I was tempted to suspect the latter, for, physically, the creature was by no means formidable. Perhaps an inch or two taller than her mother, she was of a marked slenderness; a completed slenderness, I might say--a slenderness so palpably finished as to details that I can only describe it as felicitous in the extreme. It seemed almost certain that her appearance had once been disarming, that the threat in her eye-flash and tilted head was a trick learned by contact with many young ladies who needed finishing more than they would admit.

Of course this did not explain why Miss Lansdale should visually but patently disparage me at this moment. I was by no means an unfinished young lady, and, in any event, she should have left all that behind; the moment was one wherein relaxation would have been not only graceful but entirely safe, for she was in no manner to be held accountable for my conduct.

Yet again and again her curious reserve congealed me back upon the stanch regard of Miss Caroline. My passion for that sprightly dame and her gracious acceptance of it were happily not to deteriorate under the regard of any possible daughter, however egregiously might we flaunt to her trained eye our need to be "finished."

The newcomer's reserve was indeed pregnable to no assault I could devise. Not even did she lighten when I said to her mother, in open mockery of that reserve, "Well, she cost you a lot of furniture that was really most companionable about the house," and paused with a sigh

betokening a regretful comparison of values. That lance shattered against her Lansdale shield like all the others.

Ending my call, I felt vividly what I have elsewhere seen described as "the cosmic chill". The small, mighty, night-eyed, well-completed Miss Lansdale, with the voice of a golden jangle, had frozen it about me in lavish abundance.

I went home to play the game, until my eyes tired so that the face of king, queen, and knave leered at me in defeat or simpered sickeningly when I was able to shape their destinies. Thrice I lost interestingly and with profit to my soul, and once I won, though without elation, for we know that little skill may be needed to win when the cards fall right; whereas, to lose profitably is a mark of supreme merit.

Even after that I must have recourse to the wonted philter to bring sleep, the face of my vision being unaccountably the face of the true Little Miss before she had evolved into Miss Lansdale of the threatening self-possession. I refused to bother about the absurdity of this, for the sake of bringing sleep the sooner.

I was privileged to observe the following day that my neighbor's daughter was still of a dusky whiteness, the baffling, shaded whiteness of soft new snow in a cedar thicket. Incidentally she partook of another quality of soft new snow--one by no means so incommunicable.

And yet in sunlight I incurred the full, close look of her eyes, and no longer doubted the presence of a Peavey strain in her immediate ancestry. Far in their incalculable depths I saw a myriad of lights, brown-gold, that smouldered, ominously, even promisingly. It might never meet this young woman's caprice to be flagrantly a Peavey in my presence, but her capacity for this, if she chose to exercise it, I detected beyond a doubt. She was patently a daughter of Miss Caroline, and the cosmic chill had been an afterthought of her own.

She did me the honor, late in the afternoon of this day, to occupy an easy-chair within my vined porch. She went farther. She affected a polite interest in myself. But her craft was crude. I detected at once that she had fallen in love with my dog; that she came not to seek me, but to follow him, who had raced joyously from her at his first knowledge of my home-coming.

I was secretly proud of the exquisite thoroughness with which he now ignored her. Again and again he assured me in her very presence that the woman was nothing, could be nothing, to him. I knew this well enough--I needed no protestations from him; but I thought it was well that she should know it. I saw that he had probably consented to receive her addresses through a long afternoon, had perhaps eaten of her provender, and even behaved with a complaisance which could have led her to hope that some day she might be something to him. But I knew that he had not persistently faced the peril of being trampled to death by me in his pulpy infancy--so great his fear of our separation--to let a mere woman come between us at this day. And it was well that he should now tell her this in the plainest of words.

The woman seemed to view me with an increased respect from that very moment. She tried first to bring Jim to her side by a soft call that almost made me tremble for his integrity. But he did not so much as turn his head. His eyes were for me alone. With a rubber shoe flung gallantly

over his shoulder, he danced incitingly before me, praying that I would pretend to be crazed by the sight of his prize and seek to wrench it from him.

But I pretended instead to be bored by his importunities, choosing to rub it in. To her who longed for his friendly notice,--a little throaty bark, a lift of the paw, perhaps a winsome laying of his head along her lap,--I affected indifference to his infatuation for me. I pretended always to have been a perfect devil of a fellow among the dogs, and professed loftily not to have divined the secret of my innumerable and unvarying conquests.

"Dogs are so foolishly faithful," remarked Miss Lansdale, with polite acerbity.

"I know it," I conceded; "that fellow thinks I am the most beautiful person in all the world."

She said "Indeed?" with an inflection and a sweeping glance at me which I found charged with meaning. But I knew well enough that I had for all time mastered a certain measure of her difficult respect.

"And he's such a fine dog, too," she added in a tone intended to convey to me the full extent of her pity for him.

"I have him remarkably well trained," I said. "I can often force him to notice people whom I like, especially if they are clever enough to let him see that they like me rather well."

"It would be almost worth while," she remarked with a longing look at Jim but none at me.

"Many have found it quite so," I said, ordering Jim to charge at my feet, "but it's a great bore, I assure you."

I needed not to be told that she envied me my power, and so deep and genuine appeared to be her love for him that secretly I hoped he would again be amiable to her during my absence on the morrow. The contrast of his manner on my return would further chasten her.

From the porch we both watched her move across the little stretch of lawn, and, at my whispered suggestion, Jim rose to his feet and barked her insultingly over the last twenty feet of it. I was delighted to note that this induced a shamed acceleration of her pace and a tighter clutching of her skirts. I thought it important to let her know clearly and at once just who was the master in my own house.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LOYALTY OF JIM

If it must be my lot to dream out a life of insubstantial visions, that were well. But it appeared not unreasonable that I should keep at least one ponderable dog by me, as an emblem of something I had missed through one too many shuffle of the cards before this big game began. Yet Miss

Lansdale had clearly resolved to deprive my dreaming of even this slight support of realness. I tried always to remember, in her behalf, that she did not know the circumstances, and she herself very soon discovered that she did not know Jim. The assaults she made upon his fidelity proved her to be past-mistress of tactics and strategy. No possible approach to his heart did she leave untried. She flattered and petted, lured, cajoled, entreated; she menaced, commanded, stormed, raged. Drawing inspiration from a siege celebrated in antiquity, she sought to secrete her forces--not in a horse of wood, but within the frames of numerous fowl, picked to the bone but shredded over so temptingly with fugitive succulence as to have made a dog of feelings less fine her slave for life.

It was not until the desperate woman had, in the terminology of Billy Durgin, been "baffled and beaten at every turn," that I could get into communication with her on a basis at all acceptable to a free-necked man. Having proved to the last resource of her ingenuity that Jim was more than human in his loyalty, she seemed disposed to admit, though grudgingly enough, that I myself might be not less than human to have won him so utterly. And thereafter I found it often practicable to associate with her on terms of apparent equality.

She surrendered, I believe, on a day when she had thought to lure Jim into her boat,--fatuously, for was I not a distinguishable figure in the landscape? Her hopes must have been high, for she had but lately repleted him with chicken-bones divinely crunchable, and then bestowed upon him a charlotte russe, an unnatural taste for which she had succeeded in teaching him.

With something of a swagger,--she swaggered in a rather starchy white dress that day, and under a garden hat of broad rim,--she had enticed him to the water's edge, so that I must have been nervous but for knowing the dog through and through.

Her failure was so crushing, so swift, so entire, that for an instant I almost failed to rejoice in her open humiliation. Seated in the boat, oars poised, she invited Jim with soft speech and a smile that might have moved an iron dog without occasioning any remark from me; but Jim, noting, with one paw already in the boat, that I was not to be of the party, turned quickly from her and came to me with his head down. His informing and well-feathered tail signalled to Miss Lansdale that she seemed to have forgotten herself.

At that moment, I think, the woman abandoned all her preposterous hopes; then, too, I think, she learned the last and bitterest lesson which great fighters must learn, to embellish defeat with an air of urbane acceptance. Miss Lansdale relaxed--she melted before my eyes to an aspect that no victor who knew his business could afford to despise.

I clambered in. Jim followed, remarking amiably to the woman as he passed her on his way to the bow of the boat, "I _thought_ you couldn't have meant _that_!"

And Defeat rowed Jim and me; rowed us past the feathered marge of green islands quite as if nothing had happened. But I knew it _had_ happened, for Miss Lansdale was so nearly human that I presently found myself thinking "Miss Kate" of her. She not only answered questions, but, what amazed me far more, she condescended to ask them now and then. To an observer we might have seemed to be holding speech of an actual

friendliness--speech of the water and the day; of herself and the dog and a little of me.

At length, as I caught an overhanging willow to rest her arms a moment, I felt bold enough to venture words about this assumption of amity which was so becoming in her. I even confessed that she was reminding me of certain distinguished but truly amiable personages who are commonly to be found in the side-show adjacent to the main tent. "Particularly of the wild man," I said, to be more specific, for my listener seemed at once to crave details.

"There is a powerfully painted banner swelling in the breeze outside, you know. It shows the wild man in all his untamed ferocity, in his native jungle, armed with a simple but rather promising club. A dozen intrepid tars from a British man-of-war--to be seen in the offing--are in the act of casting a net over him. It's an exciting picture, I assure you, Miss Lansdale. The net looks flimsy, and the wild person is not only enraged but very muscular--"

"I fail to see," she interrupted, with a slight lapse into what I may call her first, or Lansdale, manner.

"Of course you fail! You have to go inside to see," I explained kindly. "But it only costs a dime, which is little enough--the hired enthusiast, indeed, stationed just outside the entrance, reminds us over and over again that it is only 'the tenth part of a dollar,' and he sometimes adds that 'it will neither make nor break nor set a man up in business.' He is a flagrant optimist in small money matters, ever looking on the bright side."

"Inside?" suggested my listener, with some impatience. I had regretted my beginning and had meant to shirk a finish if she would let me; but it seemed I must go on.

"Well, inside there's a hand-organ going all the time, you know--"

"The wild man?" she insisted, like a child looking ahead for the real meat of the story one is telling it.

"I'm getting to him as fast as I consistently can. The wild man sits tamely in a cheap chair on a platform, with a row of his photographs spread charmingly at his feet. Of course you are certain at once that he is no longer wild. You know that a wild man whose spirit had not been utterly broken would never sit there and listen to that hand-organ eight hours every day except Sunday. The fluent and polished gentleman in charge--who has a dyed mustache--assures us that we have nothing to fear from this 'once ferocious monster of the tropic jungle, with his bestial craving for human flesh,' but that seems a mere matter of form, with the hand-organ going in our ears--"

"Really," Miss Lansdale began--or tried to.

"One moment, please! The scholarly person goes on to relate the circumstances of the wild person's capture--substantially as depicted upon the canvas outside--and winds up with: 'After being brought to this country in chains he was reclaimed from his savage estate, was given a good English education, and can now converse intelligently upon all the leading topics of the day. Step up, ladies and gentlemen' he concludes, with a rather pointed delicacy, 'and you will find him ready and willing

to answer all proper questions."

Miss Lansdale dropped her oars into the water, dully, I thought. I released the willow that had moored us, but I persisted.

"And he always does answer all proper questions, just as the gentleman said he would. Doubtless an improper question would be to ask him if he weren't born tame on our own soil, of reputable New England parents; but I don't know. I have always conducted myself in his presence as a gentleman must, with the result that he has never failed to be chatty. He is a trifle condescending, to be sure; he does not forget the difference in our stations, but he does not permit himself to study me with eyes of blank indifference, nor is he reticent to the verge of hostility. Of course he feels indifferent to me,--nothing else could be expected,--but his captors have taught him to be gracious in public. And, really, Miss Lansdale, you seemed strangely tame and broken to-day yourself. You have not only received a good English education, but you answer all proper questions with a condescension hardly more marked than that of the wild person's. I can only pray you won't resume a manner that will inevitably recall him to me to your own disadvantage."

She rowed in silence against the gentle current, but she lifted her eyes to me with a look that was not all Lansdale. There was Peavey in it. And she smiled. I had seen her smile before, but never before had she seen me at those times. That she should now smile for and at me seemed to be a circumstance little short of epoch-making.

I cannot affirm that there was even one moment of that curiously short afternoon when she became wholly and frankly a Peavey. But more than once did this felicity seem to impend, and I suspected that she might even have been more graciously endowed than with a mere Peavey capacity in general. I believed that if she chose, she might almost become a Miss Caroline Peavey. This occurred to me when she said:--

"I only brought you along for your dog."

It was, of course, quite like a Lansdale to do that; but much liker a Peavey to tell it, with that brief poise of the opened eyes upon one's own.

"Don't hold it against Jim," I pleaded. "It's my fault. I'm obliged to be most careful about his associates. I've brought him up on a system."

"Indeed? It would be interesting to know why you object--" she bridled with a challenge almost Miss Caroline in its flippancy.

"Well, for one thing, I have to make sure that he doesn't become worldly. Lots of good dogs are spoiled that way. And I've succeeded very well, thus far. To this moment he believes everything is true that ought to be true; or, if not, that something 'just as good' is true, as the people in drug stores tell one."

"And you are afraid of me--that I'll--"

"One can't be too careful about dogs, especially one that believes as much as that one does. Frankly, I am afraid of you. You have such a knowing way of fighting off moments that might become Peavey."

"I don't quite understand--"

"Of course you don't, but that's of little consequence--to Jim. He doesn't understand either. But you see he has a fine faith now that the world is all Peavey--he learned it from me. Of course, I know better, but I pretend not to, and often I can fool myself for half an hour at a time. And of course I shouldn't care to have that dog find out that this apparently Peavey world--flawlessly Peavey--has a streak of Lansdale running through it--that it has even its moments of curious, hard suspicion, of distrust, of downright disbelief in all the good things,--in short, its Miss Katherine Lansdale moments, if you will pardon that hastily contrived metaphor."

Perceiving that further concealment would be unavailing, I added quite openly: "Now, young woman, you see that I know your secret. I felt it in the dark of our first meeting; it has since become plainer,--too plain. You know too much--far more than is good for either Jim or me to know. You can't believe enough--all those things that Jim and I have found it best to believe. I myself always fear that I shall be led into ways of unbelief in your presence. That is why I can't trust Jim with you alone, and why I could hardly trust myself there without Jim's sustaining looks--that is why, in fact, that I shall try to shun you in all but your approximately Peavey moments. I trust now that this shall be the last time I must ever speak bitterly in your presence. You are sufficiently warned."

While I spoke she had ceased rowing, and we drifted with the current. A long time we drifted, and I rejoiced to see that I had taunted Miss Lansdale into something like interest. I saw that she was uncertain as to the degree of seriousness I had meant my words to convey. Once she began as if they were wholly serious, and once again as if they had been wholly unserious. If she at last appeared to suspect that she must effect a compromise, I dare say she was as nearly correct as I could have put her with any words I knew.

"But you had that dog from the first," she at length decided to say, clearly in self-defence, "and still you are worried and obliged to guard him from evil companions."

"You confess," I exclaimed in triumph.

"You had him as a puppy. Could you have expected so much of him if he had run wild, in a world where any number of good dogs learn unbelief, where they are shocked into it, all in a moment?"

"I didn't have myself from the first," I reminded her, "and I believe only a few trifles less than Jim does. I know that robins ascend without visible means, for example, if you run at them; but I believe it's good to run at them just the same, even more enjoyable than if they sat still to be caught."

"We were speaking of dogs," said Miss Lansdale. "At any rate Jim had you from the first."

"Let us keep to dogs, then," I answered. "Meantime, if you listen to me, you'll soon be in deep water, when we've both lost the taste for adventure. This current will take us over the dam in about seven minutes, I should judge."

She fell to the oars again with a dreaming face, in which Lansdale and

the other were so well blended that it was indeed the face of visions that had long been coming to me.

"You remind me again of the wild gentleman," I said, after a long look at her, a look which she was good enough to let me see that she observed.

"_Et ego in Arcadia vixi_--and I, too, was netted in my native jungle."

I saw that she, too, essayed the feat of being both light and serious without letting the seam show.

"I mean about pictures," I explained. "The gentlemanly curator of the side-show always says of the wild man thoughtfully, 'I _believe_ he has a few photographs for sale.' He is always right--the wild man does have them, though I should not care to say that they're worth the money; that depends upon one's tastes, of course--by the way, Miss Lansdale, I have long had a picture of you."

"Has mother--"

"No--long before I became a fellow-slave with Clem--long before there was a juvenile mother or even a Clem in Little Arcady."

"May I ask how you got it?"

"Certainly you may! I don't know."

"May I see it?" I thought she felt a deeper interest than she cared to reveal.

"Unfortunately, no. If you only could see it, you would see that it is almost a perfect likeness--perhaps a bit more Little Miss than you could be now--but it's unmistakably true."

"I lost such a picture once," she said with a fall of her eyes. "Where is the one you have?"

"Sometimes it's behind my eyes and sometimes it is out before them."

"Nonsense!"

"To be sure! Only Jim and I, trained and hardened in the ways of belief, are equal to a feat of that sort."

"I see no merit in believing that."

"I don't know that there is, especially--not in believing this particular thing, but the power for belief in general which it implies--you see I am unprejudiced."

"Why should you want to believe it?"

I should have known, without catching the glint of her eyes under the hat brim, that a Peavey spoke there.

"If you could see the thing once, you'd understand," I said, an answer, of course, fit only for a Peavey.

"At all events, you'll not keep it long." The words were Peavey enough, but the voice was rather curiously Lansdale.

"I have made as little effort to keep it as I did to acquire it," I said, "but it stays on, and I've a notion it will stay on as long as Jim and I are uncorrupted. But it shan't inconvenience you," I added brightly, in time to forestall an imminent other "Nonsense!"

Being thus neatly thwarted, she looked over my shoulder and bent to her oars, for we had again drifted toward the troubled waters of the dam.

"I warned you--if you listened to me," I reminded her.

"Oh, I've not been listening--only thinking."

"Of course, and you were disbelieving. It's high time you put us ashore. I want to believe, and I want not to be drowned. So does Jim,--_both_ of 'em."

She pointed the boat to our landing, and as she leaned her narrow shoulders far back she shot me; one swift look. But I could see much farther into the water that floated us.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CASE OF FATTY BUDLOW

Lest Miss Katharine Lansdale seem unduly formidable, I should, perhaps, say that I appeared to be alone in finding her so. Little Arcadians of my own sex younger than myself--and, if I may suggest it, less discerning--were not only not menaced, but she invited them with a cordiality in which the keenest eye among them could detect no flaw. Miss Lansdale's mother had also pleased the masculine element of the town at her first progress through its pleasant streets. But Miss Caroline, despite many details of dress and manner that failed interestingly to corroborate the fact, was an old woman, and one whose way of life made her difficult of comprehension to the Little Country. Socially and industrially, one might say, she did not fit the scheme of things as the town had been taught to conceive it. Whereas, her daughter was a person readily to be understood in all parts of the world where men have eyes--as well by the homekeeping as by the travelled. Eustace Eubanks, more or less a man of the world by virtue of that adventurous trip to the Holy Land, understood her at one glance, as did Arthur Updyke, who had fared abroad to the college of pharmacy and knew things. But she was also lucid as crystal to G. Brown and Creston Fancett, whose knowledge of the outside world was somewhat affected by their experience of it, which was nothing. To all seven of the ages was this woman comprehensible. Old Bolivar Kent, eighty-six and shuffling his short steps to the grave not far ahead, understood her with one look; the but adolescent Guy McCormick, hovering tragically on the verge of his first public shave, divined her quite as capably; the middle-aged Westley Keys read her so unerringly on a day when she first regaled his vision that he toiled for half an hour as one entranced, disengaging what he believed to be porter-house steaks long after the porter-house line in the beef under his hand had been passed.

In short, Miss Lansdale was understood spontaneously--to borrow a phrase from the *_Argus_*--"by each and all who had the good fortune to be present," for she was dowered with that quick-drawing charm which has worked a familiar spell upon the sons of men in all times. She was incontestably feminine. She gave the woman-call. That she seemed to give it against her wish,--without intention,--that I was alone in detecting this, were trifles beside the point. Masculine Little Arcady cared not that she had been less successful than the late Colonel Potts, for example, in preserving the truly Greek spirit--cared naught for this so long as, meaningly or otherwise, she uttered the immemorial woman-call in its true note wheresoever she fared.

And, curiously, since Miss Lansdale did not appear formidable to masculine Little Arcady--with one negligible exception--she seemed to try perversely not to be so. She was amazingly gracious to it--still with one exception. She melted to frivolity and the dance of mirth. She affected joy in its music and confessed to a new feeling for Jerusalem after attending a lawn party at which Eustace Eubanks did his best to please. She spoke of this to Eustace with a crafty implication that it had remained for him to interpret the antique graces of that storied place to a world all too heedless. Eustace himself felt not only a renewed interest in the land exploited by his magic lantern, but he began to view all the rest of the world in a new and rosy light, of which Miss Lansdale was the iridescent globe that diffused and subdued it to the mellow hue of romance.

It is impossible to believe that Eustace was ever at any pains to conceal the effects of this astral phenomenon from his family, for its members were very quickly excited. If in that vale the woman-call could be heard by ears attuned to its haunting cadences, so also did the frightened mother-call echo its equally primitive note, accompanied by the less well-known sister-call of warning and distress.

The truth is that Eustace was becoming harder to manage with each recurring crisis. For testimony in the present instance, I need only adduce that he wrote poetry, more or less, after meeting Miss Lansdale but a scant half-dozen times. This came to me in confidence, however, and the obliquity of it spread no farther beyond the family lines.

Fluttering with alarm, the mother of Eustace approached me as one presumably familiar with the power of the Lansdales to work disaster in a peaceful and orderly family. She sought to know if I could not prevent her boy from "making a fool of himself." It was never her way to bother with many words when she knew the right few.

With an air that signified her intention of letting me know the worst at once, Mrs. Eubanks drew from her bead reticule a sheet of paper scribbled over in the handwriting of her misguided offspring. It was a rondeau; I knew that by the shape, and the mother apologized for the indelicacy of it before permitting my own cheeks to blush thereat. The dominant line of the composition I saw to be--

"When love lights night to be its day."

I turned from the stricken mother to cough deprecatingly when I had read. She likewise had the delicacy to turn away and cough. But an emergency of this momentous import must be discussed in plain terms, however disconcerting the details, and Mrs. Eubanks had nerved herself

for the ordeal.

"I can't think," she began, "where the boy _learned_ such things!"

I had not the courage to tell her that they might be entirely self-taught under certain circumstances.

"Such shameless, brazen things!" she persisted. "We have always been _so_ careful of Euty--striving to keep him--well, wholesome and pure, you understand, Major Blake."

"There are always dangers," I said, but only because she had stopped speaking, and not in any hope of instructing her.

"If only we can keep him from making a fool of himself--"

"It seems rather late," I said, this time with profound conviction. "See there!"

Upon the margin of that captured sheet Eustace had exposed, as it were, the very secret mechanics of his passion. There were written tentative rhymes, one under another, as "Kate--mate--Fate--late"--and eke an unblushing "sate." Also had he, in the frenzy of his poetic rapture, divined and indicated the technical affinities existing among words like "bliss," "kiss," and "miss."

Interference, however delicately managed, seemed hopeless after that, and I said as much. But I added: "Of course, if you let him alone, he may come back to his better self. Perhaps the young lady herself may prove to be your ally."

"Indeed not! She has set out deliberately to ensnare my poor Euty," said the mother, with an incisive drawing in of her expressively thin lips. "I knew it the very first evening I saw them together."

"Mightn't it have been sheer trifling on her part?" I suggested.

"Can you imagine that young woman _daring_ to trifle with Eustace Eubanks?" she demanded.

I could, as a matter of fact; but as her query seemed to repel such a disclosure, I lied.

"True," I said, "she would never dare. I didn't think of that."

"With _all_ her frivolity and lightness of manner and fondness for dress, she must have some sense of fitness--"

"She must, indeed!"

"She could not go _that_ far!"

"Certainly _not_!"

"Even if she _does_ wear too many ribbons and laces and fancy furbelows, with never a common-sense shoe to her foot!"

"Even if she _does_" I assented warmly.

And thus we were compelled to leave it. In view of those verses I could suggest no plan for relief, and my one poor morsel of encouragement had been stonily rejected.

Eustace went the mad pace. So did Arthur Updyke. It was rather to be expected of Arthur, however. His duties at the City Drug Store seemed to encourage a debonair lightness of conduct. He treated his blond ringlets assiduously from the stock of pomades; he was as fastidious about his fingernails as we might expect one to be in an environment of manicure implements and nail beautifiers; it was his privilege to make free with the varied assortment of perfumes--a privilege he forewent in no degree; his taste in tooth-powders was widely respected; and in moments of leisure, while he leaned upon a showcase awaiting custom, he was wont to draw a slender comb from an upper waistcoat pocket and pass it delicately through his small but perfect mustache. Naturally enough, it was said by the ladies of Little Arcady that Arthur's attentions were never serious,--"except them he pays to himself!" Aunt Delia McCormick would often add, for that excellent woman was not above playing venomously with familiar words.

Also did G. Brown and Creston Fancett go the same mad pace. These four were filled with distrust of one another, but as they composed our male quartette, they would gather late on summer nights and conduct themselves in a manner to make me wish that old Azariah Prouse's peculiar belief as to house structure might have included a sound-proof fence about his premises. For, on the insufficient stretch of lawn between that house and my own, the four rivals sang serenades.

"She sleeps--my lady sleeps," they sang, with a volume that seemed bound to insure their inaccuracy as to the lady, and which assuredly left them in the wrong as to her mother's attorney--if their song meant in the least to report conditions at large. As this was, however, the one occasion when they felt that none of the four had any advantage over his fellows, they made the most of it. Then, in the dead of night, I would be very sorry that I had not counselled the mother of Eustace Eubanks to send him around the world on a slow sailing ship; for it was his voice, even in songs of sleep, that rendered this salutary exercise most difficult.

On one of these wakeful summer nights, however, I received a queer little shock. Perhaps I half dreamed it in some fugitive moment of half sleep; but it was as if I were again an awkward, silent boy, worshipping a girl new to the school, a girl who wore two long yellow braids. I worshipped her from afar so that she saw me not, being occupied with many adorers less timid, who made nothing of snatching a hair ribbon. But the face in that instant of dream was the face of Miss Katharine Lansdale, and coupled with the vision was a prescience that in some later life I should again look back and see myself as now, a grown but awkward boy, still holding aloof--still adoring from some remote background while other and bolder gallants captured trophies and lightly carolled their serenades. It seemed like borrowing trouble to look still farther into the future, but the vision was striking. Surely, History does repeat itself. I should have made this discovery for myself had it not been exploited before my day. For on the morrow I found my woman child on the Lansdale lawn when I went home in the afternoon. She had now reached an age when she was beginning to do "pretties" with her lips as she talked--almost at the age when I had first been enraptured by her mother, with the identical two braids, also the tassels dangling from her boot tops. This latter was unexciting as a coincidence, however. I

myself had deliberately produced it.

Miss Lansdale turned from talk with the child to greet me. Her face was so little menacing that I called her "Miss Katharine" on the spot. But my business was with the child.

"Lucy," I said, as I took the wicker chair by the hammock in which they both lounged, "there is a boy at school who looks at you a great deal when you're not watching him--you catch him at it--but he never comes near you. He acts as if he were afraid of you. He is an awkward, stupid boy. If he gets up to recite about geography, or about 'a gentleman sent his servant to buy ten and five-eighths yards of fine broadcloth,' or anything of that sort, and if he happens to catch your eye at the moment, he flounders like a caught fish, stares hard at the map of North America on the wall, and sits down in disgrace. And when the other boys are chasing you and pulling off your hair ribbons, he mopes off in a corner of the school yard, though he looks as if he'd like to shoot down all the other boys in cold blood."

"He has nice hair," said my woman child.

"Oh, he has! Very well; does his name happen to be 'Horsehead' or anything like that--the name the boys call him by, you know?"

"Fatty--Fatty Budlow, if that's the one you mean. Do you know him, Uncle Maje?"

"Better than any boy in the world! Haven't I been telling you about him?"

"Once he brought a bag of candy to school, and I thought he was coming up to hand it to me, but he turned red in the face and stuffed it right into his pocket."

"He meant to give it to you, really--he bought it for you--but he couldn't when the time came."

"Oh, did he tell you?"

"It wasn't necessary for him to tell me. I know that boy, I tell you, through and through. Lucy, do you think you could encourage him a little, now and then--be sociable with him--not enough to hurt, of course? You don't know how he'd appreciate the least kindness. He might remember it all his life."

"I might pat his hair--he has such nice hair--if he wouldn't know it--but of course he would know it, and when he looks at you, he is so queer--"

"Yes, I know; I suppose it is hopeless. Couldn't you even ask him to write in your autograph album?"

"Y-e-s--I could, only he'd be sure to write something funny like 'In Memory's wood-box let me be a stick.' He always does write something witty, and I don't much care for ridiculous things in my album; I'm being careful with it."

"Well, if he's as witty as that in your album, it will be to mask a bleeding heart. I happen to know that in a former existence he was never

even asked to write, though he always hoped he might be."

"I'm sorry if you like him, Uncle Maje, but I'm positive that Fatty Budlow is not a boy I could ever feel deeply for. I don't believe our acquaintance will even ripen into friendship," and she looked with profound eyes into the wondrous, opening future.

"Of course it won't," I said. "I might have known that. He will continue through the ages to be an impossible boy. Miss Lansdale feels the same way about him. Poor Fatty or Horsehead or whatever they call him stands off and glares at her, and can't say his lesson when he catches her eye--only he seldom does catch it, because she's so busy with other boys of more spirit who crowd about her and snatch hair ribbons and sing 'My lady sleeps' until no one else can."

"Do you know Fatty Budlow?" asked my surprised woman child of Miss Lansdale. But that young woman only reached out one foot to point its toe idly at a creeping green worm and turn its vagrant course. The toe was by no means common-sense, and the heel was simply idiotic.

"Of course she knows him," I said; "she knows he would give his right hand for her, which is a good deal under the circumstances, and she very properly despises him for it. She'd take her picture away from him if she could."

"She wouldn't," said Miss Lansdale, with a gesture of her foot that disconcerted me.

"Miss Kate," I said, "I have lived my life in terror of seeing one of those squashy green worms meet a fearful disaster in my presence. Would you mind--"

With a fillip of the bronzed toe she sent the amazed worm into a country that must have been utterly strange to it,

"She'd take it back quickly enough if she knew what he makes of it," I said, returning to the picture; "if she knew that he had kept it ever since he learned that agriculture, mining, and ship-building are principal industries--only at first it had two long yellow braids, and tassels dangling from its boot tops."

"My mother had beautiful long golden hair," said the woman child, adding simply, "papa says mine is just like it."

Miss Lansdale regarded me narrowly.

"You get me all mixed up," she said.

"I like to. You're heady then--like your mother's punch when it's 'all mixed up.'"

"I must put in more ice," remarked Miss Lansdale, calmly.

"Fatty Budlow is so serious," said the woman child, suspecting that the talk had drifted away from her.

"It's his curse," I admitted. "If he weren't an A No. 1 dreamer, he'd be too serious to live, but he goes dreaming and maundering along--dreaming that things are about as he would like to have them. He sees your face

and Miss Lansdale's, and then they get mixed up in a queer way, and Miss Kate's face comes out of the picture with such a look in the eyes that a man of ordinary spirit would call her 'Little Miss' right off without ever stopping to think; but of course this Fatty or Horsehead or whatever it is can't say it right out, so he says it to himself about twenty-three or twenty-four thousand times a day, as nearly as he can reckon--he always was weak in arithmetic."

"You might let him write in _your_ autograph album," said the woman child, brightly, to Miss Lansdale.

"I know what he'd write if he got the chance," I added incitingly. But it did not avail. Miss Lansdale remained incurious and merely said, "Long golden braids," as one trying to picture them.

"And later a little row of curls over each ear, and a tiny chain with a locket around the neck. I had a picture once--"

"You have had many pictures."

"Yes--two are many if you've had nothing else."

But she was now regarding the woman child with a curious, close look, almost troubled in its intensity.

"Do you look like your mother?" she asked.

"Papa says I do, and Uncle Maje thinks so too. She was very pretty," This came with an unconscious placidity.

"She looks almost as her mother's picture did," I said.

When the child had gone, Miss Lansdale searched my face long before speaking. She seemed to hesitate for words, and at length to speak of other matters than those which might have perplexed her.

"Why did they call you 'Horsehead'?" she asked almost kindly.

"I never asked. It seemed to be a common understanding. Doubtless there was good reason for it, as good as there is for calling Budlow 'Fatty.'"

"What did you do?" she asked again.

"I went to the war with what I could take--nothing but a picture."

"And you lost that?"

"Yes--under peculiar circumstances. It seemed a kind thing to do at the time."

"And you came back with--"

"_With yours, Little Miss!_"

Some excitement throbbed between us so that I had involuntarily emphasized my words. Briefly her eyes clung to mine, and very slowly we relaxed from that look.

"I only wanted to say," she began presently, "that I shall have to

believe your absurd tale of my picture being with you before you saw me. Something makes me credit it--a strange little notion that I have carried that child's picture in my own mind."

"We are even, then," I answered, "only you are thinking more things than you say. That isn't fair."

But she only nodded her head inscrutably.

CHAPTER XXVI

A LITTLE MYSTERY IS SOLVED

The significance of Miss Lansdale's manner, rather than her words, ran through my darkened thoughts like a thread as I played the game that night. After a third defeat this thread seemed to guide me to daylight from a tortuously winding cavern. At first the thing was of an amazing simplicity.

In a far room was a chest filled with forgotten odds and ends that had come back with me years before. I ran to it, and from under bundles of letters, old family trinkets, a canteen, a pair of rusty pistols, and other such matters, I brought forth an ambrotype--the kind that was mounted in a black case of pressed rubber and closed with a spring.

But even as I held the thing, flushed with my discovery, another recollection cooled me, and the structure of my discovery tumbled as quickly as it had built itself. Little Miss had found her own picture when she found him. Her mother had told me this definitely. It had been clutched in his hands, and she, after a look, had tenderly replaced it to stay with his dust forever. This I had forgotten at first, in my eagerness for light.

I pressed the spring that brought the face to my eyes, knowing it would not be her face. Close to the light I studied it; the face of a girl, eighteen or so, with dreaming eyes that looked beyond me. It could not be Miss Lansdale, and yet it was strangely like her--like the Little Miss she must once have been.

But one mystery at least was now plain--the mystery of my own mind picture. I had not looked at this thing for ten years, but its lines had stayed with me, and this was the face of my dreaming, carried so long after its source had been forgotten. The face of this picture had naturally enough changed to seem like the face of Miss Lansdale after I had seen her.

Perhaps it was the face of a Peavey; there was at least a family resemblance; that would explain the likeness to Miss Kate. This was not much, but it was enough to sleep on.

As I left the house the following morning, Miss Lansdale, her skirts pinned up, was among her roses with a watering pot and a busy pair of scissors.

As I approached her I had something to say, but it was, for an interval,

driven from my lips.

"Promise me," I said instead, "never to wear a common-sense shoe."

She stared at me with brows a trifle raised.

"Of course it will displease Mrs. Eubanks, but there is still a better reason for it."

The brows went farther up at this until they were hardly to be detected under the broad rim of her garden hat.

Her answer was icy, even for an "Indeed?"--quite in her best Lansdale manner.

"Yes, 'indeed!'" I retorted somewhat rudely, "but never mind--it's not of the least consequence. What I meant to say was this--about those pictures of people, you remember."

"I remember perfectly, and I've concluded that it's all nonsense--all of it, you understand."

"That's queer--so have I." Had I been a third person and an observer, I would doubtless have sworn that Miss Lansdale was more surprised than pleased by this remark of mine.

"I haven't had your picture at all," I went on; "it was a picture of some one else, and I hadn't thought to look at it for a long time--had forgotten it utterly, in fact. That's how I came to think I knew your face before I knew you."

"I told you it was nonsense!" and she snipped off a rose with a kind of miniature brusqueness.

"But you shall see that I had some reason. If you find time to-day, step into my library and look at the picture. It's on the mantel, and the door is open. It may be some one you know, though I doubt even that."

With this I brazenly snatched a pink rose from those within her arm.

"You see Fatty Budlow is coming on," I remarked of this bit of boldness.

"Let him come--he shan't find me in the way." This with an effort to seem significant.

"Oh, not at all!" I assured her politely, and with equal subtlety, I believe.

Had I known that this was the last time I should ever look upon Miss Katharine Lansdale, I might have looked longer. She was well worth seeing for sundry other reasons than her need for common-sense shoes. But those last times pass so often without our suspecting them! And it was, indeed, my good fortune never to see her again. For never again was she to rise, even at her highest, above Miss Kate.

She was even so low as Little Miss when I found her on my porch that afternoon--a troubled Little Miss, so drooping, so queerly drawn about the eyes, so weak of mouth, so altogether stricken that I was shot through at sight of her.

"I waited here--to speak alone--you are late to-day."

I was early, but if she had waited, she would of course not know this.

"What has happened, Miss Kate?"

"Come here."

Through my opened door I followed her quick step.

"You were jesting about that this morning,"--she pointed to the picture, propped open against a book on the mantel; and then, with an effort to steady her voice,--"you were jesting, and of course you didn't know--but you shouldn't have jested."

"Can it be you, Miss Kate--can it really be you?"

"It is, it is--couldn't you see? Tell me quickly--don't, don't jest again!"

"Be sure I shall not. Sit down."

But she stood still, with an arm extended to the picture, and again implored me: "See--I'm waiting. Where--how--did you get it?"

"Sit down," I said; and this time she obeyed with a little cry of impatience.

"I'll try to bring it back," I said. "It was that day Sheridan hurried back to find his army broken--all but beaten. Just at dark there was a last charge--a charge that was met. I went down in it, hearing yells and a spitting fire, but feeling only numbness. When I woke up the firing was far off. Near me I could hear a voice, the voice of a young man, I thought, wounded like myself. I first took him for one of our men. But his talk undeceived me. It was the talk of your men, and sorrowful talk. He was badly hurt; he knew that. But he was sure of life. He couldn't die there like a brute. He had to go back and he would go back alive and well; for God was a gentleman, whatever else He was, and above practical jokes of that sort. Then he seemed to know he was losing strength, and he cried out for a picture, as if he must at least have that before he went. Weak as he was, he tried to turn on his side to search for it. 'It was here a moment ago,' he would say; 'I had it once,' and he tried to turn again, still crying out for it,--he must not die without it. It hurt me to hear his voice break, and I made out to roll near him to help him search. 'We'll find it,' I told him, and he thanked me for my help. 'Look for a square hard case,' he said eagerly. 'It must be here; I had it after I fell down.' Together we searched the rough ground over in the dark as well as we could. I was glad enough to help him. I had a picture like that of my own that I shouldn't have liked to lose. But we were clumsy searchers, and he seemed to lose hope as he lost strength. Again he cried out for that picture, but now it was a despairing cry, and it hurt me. Under the darkness I reached my one good hand up and took my own picture from its place. So many of us carried pictures over our hearts in those days. I pretended then to search once more, telling him to have courage, and then I said, 'Is this it?' He fumbled for it, and his hand caught it quickly up under his chin. He was so glad. He thanked me for finding it, and then he lay still, panting. After a while--we both wanted water--I crawled away to where I heard a running stream. It

must have been farther than I thought, and I couldn't be quick because so much of me was numb and had to be dragged. But I reached the water and filled a canteen I had found on the way. As soon as I could manage it I went back to him with the water, but I must have been gone a long time. He wasn't there. But as I crawled near where he had lain, I put my hand on a little square case such as I had given him. I thought it must be mine. I lost consciousness again. When I awoke two hospital stewards carried me on a stretcher, and a field surgeon walked beside us. I still had the picture, and not for many days did I know that it wasn't my own. After that I forgot it--but I've already told you of that."

Her eyes had not quitted my face while I spoke, though they were glistening; her mouth had weakened more than once, and a piteous little "Oh!" would come from her lips. When I had finished she looked away from me, dropping her eyes to the floor, leaning forward intently, her hands shut between her knees. For a long time she remained so, forgetting me. But at last I could hear her breathe and could see the increasing rise and fall of it, so that I feared a crisis. But none came. Again she mastered herself and even managed a smile for me, though it was a poor thing.

"I've told you all, Miss Kate."

"Yes--I'm unfair, but you have a right to know. I found that picture--your picture, when they brought him in. His hands were clenched about it. They said he had pleaded to hold it and made them promise not to take it from him--ever. I was left alone, and I dared to take it, just for a moment. Something in the design of the cover puzzled me. I had meant to put it right back, and after I had looked at it there was only one thing to do--to put it back."

"They said you found your own picture, or I might have suspected."

"They had reason to say it--I never told."

"Of course you never told, Miss Kate!" I seemed to learn a great deal of her from that. She had carried her wound secretly through all those years.

"Poor Little Miss!" I said in spite of myself, and at this quite unexpectedly there befell what I had hoped we might both be spared.

I might not soothe her as I would have wished, so I busied myself in the next room until she called to me. She was putting what touches she could to her eyes with a small and sadly bedraggled handkerchief.

"There is a better reason for telling no one now," she said, "so we must destroy this. Mother might see it."

My grate contained its summer accumulation of waste paper. She laid the picture on this and I lighted the pyre.

"Your mother will see your eyes," I said.

"She has seen them so before." And she gave me her hand, which I kissed.

"Poor Little Miss!" I said, still holding it.

"Not poor now--you have given me back so much. I can believe again--I

can believe almost as much as Jim."

But I released her hand. Though her eyes had not quitted mine, their look was one of utter friendliness.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW A TRUCE WAS TROUBLESOME

In the days and nights that followed this interview I associated rather more than usual with Jim. It seemed well to do so. I needed to learn once more some of the magnificent belief that I had taught him in days when my own was stronger. Close companionship with a dog of the truly Greek spirit, under circumstances in which I now found myself, was bound to be of a tonic value. I had seen, almost at the moment of Miss Kate's disclosure, that a change was to come in our relations. Perhaps I was wild enough at the moment to hope that it might be a change for the better; but this was only in the first flush of it--of a moment ill adapted for close reasoning. It took no great while to convince me that the discovery in which we had cooperated was of a character necessarily to put me from her even farther than she had at first chosen to put me--and that was far enough, Heaven knows.

In effect I had given back her love to her, a love she had for ten years unjustly doubted. That was the cold truth of it for one who knew women. One who could doubt the tenth year as poignantly as she had doubted in the first--would she not in bitterness regret her doubt ten other years, and sweetly mourn her lost love still another ten? She who had let me be little enough to her while she felt her wound--how much less could I be when the hurt was healed? Before she might have been in want. At least that was conceivable. Now her want was met. Not only was there this to fill her heart, but remorse, the tenderest a woman may know, it seems to me--remorse for undeserved suspicion.

In a setting less prosaic than Little Arcady, where events might be of a story-fitness, that lover would have been alive by a happy chance, estranged by the misunderstanding but splendidly faithful, and I should have been helper and interested witness to an ideal reconciliation; thereafter to play out my game with a full heart, though with an exterior placidly unconcerned. But with us events halt always a little short of true romance. They are unexcitingly usual.

I would have to play out my game full heartedly, nursing my powers of belief back to their one-time vigor; nothing would occur to ease my lot--not even an occasion to pretend that I gave my blessing to a reunited and happy pair. Miss Kate could go on believing. Unwittingly I had given her the stuff for belief. I, too, must go on believing, and providing my own material, as had ever been my lot; all of which was why my dog seemed my most profitable companion at this time. His every bark at a threatening baby-carriage a block away, each fresh time he believed sincerely that a rubber shoe was engaging in deadly struggle with him, taxing all his forces to subdue it, each time he testified with sensitive, twitching nostrils that the earth is good with innumerable scents, each streaking of his glad-tongued white length over yellowing fields designed solely for his recreation held for me a certain soothing

value. And when in quiet moments he assured me with melting gaze that I was a being to challenge the very heart of love--in some measure, at least, did my soul gain strength from his own.

To know as much as I have indicated had been unavoidable for one of any intuitive powers. The change at once to be detected in Miss Kate's manner toward me confirmed my divinations without enlarging them. Miss Katharine Lansdale was gone forever; in her place was a Miss Kate,--even a Little Miss to the eye,--who regarded me at first with an undisguised alarm, then with a curious interfusion of alarm and shyness, a little disguised with not a little effort. This was plain reading. She would at first have distrusted me, apprehending I know not what rashness of ill-timed and forever impossible declarations. As she perceived this alarm to be baseless, for I not only refrained from intruding but I ostentatiously let Miss Kate alone, shyness would creep into her apprehension to make amends for its first crude manifestations.

As the days went by and I displayed still the fine sense to keep myself aloof, to seek Miss Kate only in those ways that I sought her refreshing mother, she let me discern more clearly her faith in my firmness and good sense. To be plain, in reward for letting her alone, she did not let me alone. And this reward I accepted becomingly, with a resolve--the metal of which I hoped she would divine--never to show myself undeserving of its benisons.

When I say that the young woman did not let me alone, I mean that she seemed almost to put herself in my way; not obviously, true enough, but in a degree palpable enough to one who had observed her first almost shrinking alarm. And this behavior of hers went forward, at last, without the slightest leaven of apprehension on her part, but her shyness remained. It was so marked and so novel in her--with reference to myself--that I could not fail to be sensible to it. It was as if she divined that mad notions might still lurk within my untaught mind to be reasons why she should fear me; but that her confidence in my self-mastery could not, at the same time, be too openly shown.

Tacitly, it was as if we had treated together; a treaty that bound me to observe a perpetual truce. My arms were forever laid down, and she, who had once so feared me, was now free to wander when she would within the lines of an honorable enemy. That she should walk there with increasing frequency as the days passed was a tribute to my powers of restraint which I was too wise to undervalue. I ignored the shyness of which she seemed unable to divest herself in my presence. It would have been easy not to ignore it, for there were times when, so little careful was she to guard herself, that this shyness suggested, invited, appealed, signalled; times when, without my deeper knowledge of her sex, I could have sworn that the true woman-call rang in my ears. But a treaty is a treaty, on paper or on honor, and ours would never be broken by black treachery of mine, let her eyes fall under my own with never so fluttering an allurements.

They were not bad days, as days go in this earth-life of too much exact knowledge. Miss Kate rowed me over still waters and walked beside me in green pastures. At times like these she might even seem to forget. She would even become, I must affirm, more nearly Peavey than was strictly her right; for it was plain that our treaty, must involve certain stipulations of restraint on her part as well as on my own. The burden was not all to be mine. But these moments I learned to withstand, remembering that she was a woman. That was a circumstance not hard to

remember when she was by. It is probable that my heart could not have forgotten it, even had my trained head learned blandly to ignore it.

Further to enliven those days, I permitted Jim to give her lessons in believing everything. When I told her of this, she said, "I need them, I'm so out of practice." That was the nearest we had come to touching upon the interview of a certain afternoon. I should not have considered this a forbidden topic, but her shyness became pitiful at any seeming approach to it. "Jim will put you right again," I assured her. And I believe he did, though it was not easy to persuade him that she could be morally recognized when I was by. The occasion on which he first remained crouching at her feet while I walked away was regarded by Miss Kate as a personal triumph. She was so childishly open of her pleasure at this that I did not tell her it was a mere trick of mine; that I had told him to charge when he sprang up. She knew his eyes so little as to think he displayed regard for rather than respect for my command. She could not see that he begged me piteously to know why he must crouch there at a couple of strange inconsequential feet and see the good world go suddenly wrong.

Still further, to make those days not bad days, Miss Kate would cross our little common ground of an early evening to where I played the game on my porch. Often I did this until dusk obscured the faces of the cards. I faintly suspected in the course of these bird-like visits a caprice in Miss Kate to know what it might be that I preferred to the society of her mother on her own porch. She appeared to be more curious than interested. She promptly made those observations which the unilluminated have ever considered it witty to make concerning those who play at solitaire. But, finding that I had long ceased to be moved by these, she was friendly enough to judge the game upon its merits. That she judged it to be stupid was neither strange nor any reflection upon the fairness of her mind. The game--in those profounder, rarer aspects which alone dignify it--is not for women. I believe that the game of cards to teach them philosophy under defeat, respect for the inevitable and a cheerful manipulation of such trifling good fortune as may befall--instead of that wild, womanish demand for all or nothing--has yet to be invented. I predict of this game, moreover, if ever it be found, that it will be a game at which two, at least, must play. Rarely have I known a woman, however rigid her integrity otherwise, who would not brazenly amend or even repeal utterly those decrees of Fate which are symbolized by the game. She desires intensely to win, and she will not be above shifting a card or two in contravention of the known rules. Far am I from intimating that this puts upon her the stigma of moral delinquency. It is mere testimony, rather, to her astounding capacity for self-deception. And this I cannot believe to be other than gracious of influence upon the intricate muddle of human association.

Miss Kate was finely the woman at those times when she deigned for a ten minutes to overlook my playing of the game. Before I had half finished, on the first occasion, she had mastered its simple mechanism; and before I had quite finished she sought to practise upon it those methods of the world woman in games of solitaire. She would calmly have placed a black nine on a black ten.

"But the colors must alternate," I protested, thinking she had forgotten this important rule.

"Of course--I know that perfectly well--but look what a fine lot of cards that would give you. There's a deuce of hearts you could play up

and a three of spades, and then you could go back to crossing the colors again, right away, you know, and you'd have that whole line running up to the king ready to put into that space."

I looked at her, as she would have glided brazenly over that false play to rejoice in the true plays it permitted. But I did not speak. There are times, indeed, when we most honor the tongue of Shakspeare by silence; emergencies to which words are so inadequate that to attempt to use them were to degrade the whole language.

At the last I was brought face to face with a most intricately planned defeat; a defeat insured by one spot on a card. Had the obstructive card been a six-spot of clubs instead of a seven-spot, victory was mine. I pointed this out to Miss Kate, who had declined a chair at the table and had chosen to stand beside my own. I showed her the series of plays which, but for that seven-spot, would put the kings in their places at the top and let me win. And I was beaten for lack of a six.

That she had grasped my explanation was quickly made plain. Actually with some enthusiasm she showed me that the much-desired six of clubs lay directly under the fatal seven.

"Just lay the seven over here," she began eagerly, "and there's your black six ready for that horrid red five that's in the way--"

"But there isn't any 'over here,'" I exclaimed in some irritation. "There can only be eight cards in a row--that would make nine."

"Yes, but then you could play up all the others so beautifully--just see!"

"Is this a game," I asked, "or a child's crazy play?"

"Then it's an exceedingly stupid game if you can't do a little thing like that when it's absolutely necessary. What is the sense of it?"

Her eyes actually flashed into mine as she leaned at my side pointing out this simple way to victory.

"What's the sense of any rules to any game on earth?" I retorted. "If I hadn't learned to respect rules--if I hadn't learned to be thankful for what the game allows me, however little it may be--" I paused, for the water was deeper than I had thought.

"Well?"

"Well--well then--I shouldn't be as thankful as I am this instant for--for many things that I can't have more of."

She straightened herself and favored me with a curious look that melted at last into a puzzling smile.

"I don't understand you," she said. With a shade more of encouragement in her voice I had been near to forgetting my honor as a truce-observing enemy. I was grateful, indeed, afterwards, that her wish to understand me was not sufficiently implied to bring me thus low.

"Neither do I understand the morbid psychology that finds satisfaction in cheating at solitaire," I succeeded in saying. "I never can see how

they fix it up with themselves."

"I believe you think and talk a great deal of foolishness," said Miss Kate, in tones of reproof; and with this she was off the porch before I could rise.

She wore pink, with bits of blue spotting it in no systematic order that I could discern, and a pink rose lay abashed in her hair.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ABDICATION OF THE BOSS

There is no need to conceal that I was by this time put to it for matters to think upon not clearly related to myself; in other words for matters extraneous to my neighbor's troublesome daughter. In sheer self-defence was I driven to look abroad for interests that would suffice without disquieting me. I was now compelled to admit that there was plainly to be observed in Miss Kate Lansdale something more than a mere winning faith in my powers of self-control. It was difficult at first to suspect that she actually meant to try me to the breaking point. The suspicion brought a false note to that harmony of chastened grief wherein, I had divined, she meant to live out her life. It seemed too Peavey and perverse a thing that she should, finding our truce honorably observed by myself, behave toward me as if with a cold design to bring me down in disgrace--as a proof of her superior powers and my own wretched weakness. Yet this very thing was I obliged regretfully to concede of her before many days. And it was behavior that I could palliate only by reminding myself constantly that she was not only a woman but the daughter of Miss Caroline, and by that token subject inevitably to certain infirmities of character. And still did she at times evince for me that shyness which only enhanced my peril.

I managed to refrain, though in so grievous a plight, from wishing for another war; though I did concede that if we must ever again be cursed with war, it might as well come now as later. Regrettable though I must consider it, I should there find, spite of my disability, some field of active endeavor to engage my mind.

Lacking war, I sought distraction in a matter close at hand--one which possessed quite all the vivacity of war without its violence.

Early in the summer Mrs. Aurelia Potts had resumed her activities in behalf of our broader culture, whereupon our people murmured promptly at Solon Denney; for him did Little Arcady still hold to account for the infliction of this relentless evangel.

It was known that something still remained to Mrs. Potts, even after a year, of the pittance secured from the railway company, so that it was not necessity which drove her. To a considerable element of the town it seemed to be mere innate perversity. "It's _in_ her," was an explanation which Westley Keyts thought all-sufficient, though he added by way, as it were, of putting this into raised letters for the blind, "she'd have to raise hell just the same if it had cost that there railroad eight million 'stead of eight hundred to exterminate Potts!"

For myself, I should have set this thing to different words. I regarded Mrs. Potts as a zealot whom no advantage of worldly resource could blind to our shortcomings, nor deter from ministering unto them. Had it been unnecessary to earn bread for herself and little Roscoe, I am persuaded that she would still have been unremitting in her efforts to uplift us. In that event she might, it is true, have read us more papers and sold us fewer books; but she would have allowed herself as little leisure.

That Little Arcady was unequal to this broader view, however, was to be inferred from comments made in the hearing of and often, in truth, meant for the ears of Solon Denney. The burden was shifted to his poor shoulders with as little concern as if our best citizens had not cooperated with him in the original move, with grateful applause for its ingenious and fanciful daring. In ways devoid of his own vaunted subtlety, it was conveyed to Solon that Little Arcady expected him to do something. This was after the town had been cleanly canvassed for two monthly magazines--one of which had a dress-pattern in each number, to be cut out on the dotted line--and after our heroine had gallantly returned to the charge with a rather heavy "Handbook of Science for the Home,"--a book costing two dollars and fifty cents and treating of many matters, such as, how to conduct electrical experiments in a drawing-room, how to cleanse linen of ink-stains, how the world was made, who invented gun-powder, and how to restore the drowned. I recite these from memory, not having at hand either of my own two copies of this valuable work. Upon myself Mrs. Potts was never to call in vain, for to me she was an important card miraculously shuffled into the right place in the game. It was the custom of Miss Caroline, also, to sign gladly for whatsoever Mrs. Potts signified would be to her advantage. She gave the "Handbook of Science" to Clem, who, being strongly moved by any group of figures over six, rejoiced passionately to read the weight of the earth in net tons, and to dwell upon those vastly extensive distances affected by astronomers.

But abroad in the town there was not enough of this complaisance nor of this passion for mere numerals to prevent worry from creasing the brow of Solon Denney.

"The good God helped him once, but it looks like he'd have to help himself now," said Uncle Billy McCormick, the day he refused to subscribe for an improving book on the ground that the clock-shelf wouldn't hold another one. And this view of the situation came also to be the desperate view of Solon himself. That he suffered a black hour each week when Mrs. Potts read the Argus to him with corrections to make it square with "One Hundred Common Errors" and with good taste, in no way lessened the feeling against him. If he sustained an injury peculiar to his calling, it seemed probable that he would the sooner be moved to action. Little Arcady did not know what he could do, but it had faith that he would do something if he were pushed hard enough. So the good people pushed and trusted and pushed.

To those brutal enough to seek direct speech about it with Solon, he professed to be awaiting only the right opportunity for a brilliant stroke, and he counselled patience.

To me alone, I think, did he confide his utter lack of inspiration. And yet, though he seemed to affect entire candor with me, I was, strangely enough, puzzled by some reserve that still lurked beneath his manner. I hoped this meant that he was slowly finding a way too good to be told as

yet, even to his best friend.

"Something must be done, Cal," he said, on one occasion, "but you see, here's the trouble--she's a woman and I'm a man."

"That's a famous old trouble," I remarked.

"And she's got to live, though Wes' Keyts says he isn't so sure of that--he says I'm lucky enough to have an earthquake made up especially for this case--and if she lives, she must have ways and means. And then I have my own troubles. Say, I never knew I was so careless about my language until she came along. She says only an iron will can correct it. Did you ever notice how she says 'i--ron' the way people say it when they're reading poetry out loud? I'll bet, if he had her help, the author of 'One Hundred Common Errors' could take an Argus and run his list up to a hundred and fifty in no time. She keeps finding common errors there that I'll bet this fellow never heard of. You mustn't say 'by the sweat of the brow,' but 'by the perspiration'--perspiration is refined and sweat is coarse--and to-day I learned for the first time that it's wrong to say 'Mrs. Henry Peterby of Plum Creek, nee Jennie McCormick, spent Sunday with her parents of this city.' It looks right on the face of it, but it seems you mustn't say 'nee' for the first name--only the last; though it means in French that that was her name before she was married. I tell you, that woman is a stickler. But what can I do?"

"Well, what can you do? Far be it from me to suggest that something must be done."

"Do you know, Cal, sometimes I've thought I'd adopt a tone with her?"

"Better be careful," I cautioned. Mrs. Potts was not a person that one should adopt a tone with except after long and prayerful deliberation.

"Oh, I've considered it long enough--in fact I've considered a lot of things. That woman has bothered me in more ways than one, I tell you frankly. She's such a fine woman, splendid-looking, capable, an intellectual giant--one, I may say, who makes no common errors--and yet--"

"Ah! and yet--?" There was then in Solon's eyes that curious reserve I had before noted--a reserve that hinted of some desperate but still secret design.

"Well, there you are."

"Where?"

"Well--she seems to me to be a born leader of men."

"I see, and you?"

"Oh, nothing--only I'm a man. But something has got to be done. We must use common sense in these matters."

It was early evening a week later when I again saw Solon; one of those still, serene evenings of later summer when the light would yet permit an hour's play at the game. I heard a step, but it was not she I longed, half-expected, and wholly dreaded to see. Instead came Solon, and by his

restored confidence of bearing I knew at a glance that something had been done or--since he seemed to be hurried--that he was about to do it.

"It's all over, Cal--it's fixed!"

"Good--how did you fix it?"

"Well--uh--I adopted a tone."

"That was brave, Solon. No other man on God's earth would have dared--"

"A tone, I was about to say--" he broke in a little uncomfortably, I thought--"which I have long contemplated adopting. If I could tell you just how that woman has impressed herself upon me, you'd understand what I mean when I say that she has powers. But I suppose you can't understand it, can you?" His tone, curiously enough, was almost pleading.

"It isn't necessary that I should. I can at least understand that you are the Boss of Little Arcady once more."

"Boss of nothing!--that's all over. Cal, I've abdicated--I'm not even Boss of myself."

"Why, Solon--you can't possibly mean--"

"I do, though! Mrs. Potts is going to marry me and--uh--put an end to everything!"

With this rather curious finish he held out his hand expectantly.

"Well, you certainly did something, Solon."

"We have to use common sense in these matters," he said with an effort to control his excitement. But, looking into his eyes, I saw reason to shake him warmly by the hand. What was my own poor opinion at a crisis like this? Certainly nothing to be obtruded upon my friend. It was clear that he had done a thing which he earnestly wanted and had earnestly dreaded to do--and that the dread was past.

"I'm pretty happy, Cal--that's all. Of course you'll soon know how it is yourself." He referred here to the well-known fact that I was much in the company of Miss Lansdale. But this was a thing to be turned.

"Oh, the game is teaching me resignation to a solitary life," I said with an affectation of disinterest that must have irritated him, for he asked bluntly:--

"Say, Calvin, how long do you intend to keep up that damned nonsense when everybody knows--"

This interesting sentence was cut off by Miss Kate Lansdale, who appeared around the corner and paused politely before us, with a look of trained and admirable deafness.

"Ah, Miss Lansdale," said Solon, urbanely, "I was just about to speak of you."

"Dear me!" said the young woman, simply. I thought she was aghast.

"Yes--but it's not worth repeating--or finishing."

Miss Lansdale seemed to be relieved by this assurance.

"And now I must hurry off," added Solon.

"Good evening!" we both said.

It seemed to be of a stuff from which curtains are sometimes made, white, with little colored figures in it, but the design would have required at least a column of the most technical description in a magazine I had subscribed for that summer. There was lace at the throat, and I should say that the thing had been constructed with the needs of Miss Lansdale's slender but completed figure solely and clearly in mind.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH ALL RULES ARE BROKEN

Swiftly I appraised the cool perfection of her attire, scenting the spice of the pinks she had thrust at her belt. And I suffered one heart-quickenning look from her eyes before she could lower them to me. In that instant I was stung with a presentiment that our treaty was in peril--that it might go fearfully to smash if I did not fortify myself. It came to me that the creature had regarded my past success in observing this treaty with a kind of provocative resentment. I cannot tell how I knew it--certainly through no recognized media of communication.

Most formally I offered her a chair by the card-table, and resumed my own chair with what I meant for an air of inhospitable abstraction. She declined the chair, preferring to stand by the table as was her custom.

"It was on this spot years ago," I said, laying down the second eight cards, "that Solon Denney first told me he was about to marry."

Discursive gossip seemed best, I thought.

"Two long yellow braids," she remarked. It would be too much to say that her words were snapped out.

"And now he has told me again--I mean that he's going to marry again."

"What did you do?" she asked more cordially, studying the cards.

"The first time I went to war," I answered absently, having to play up the ace and deuce of diamonds.

"I have never been able to care much for yellow hair," she observed, also studying the cards; "of course, it's effective, in a way, but--may I ask what you're going to do this time?"

"This time I'm going to play the game."

Again she studied the cards.

"It's refining," I insisted. "It teaches. I'm learning to be a Sannyasin."

Eight other cards were down, and I engrossed myself with them.

"Is a Sannyasin rather dull?"

"In the Bhagavad-gita," I answered, "he is to be known as a Sannyasin who does not hate and does not love anything."

"How are you progressing?" I felt her troubling eyes full upon me, and I suspected there was mockery in their depths.

"Oh, well, fairishly--but of course I haven't studied as faithfully as I might."

"I should think you couldn't afford to be negligent."

I played up the four of spades and put a king of hearts in the space thus happily secured.

"I have read," I answered absently, "that a benevolent man should allow himself a few faults to keep his friends in countenance. I mustn't be everything perfect, you know."

"Don't restrain yourself in the least on my account."

"You are my sole trouble," I said, playing a black seven on a red eight. She looked off the table as I glanced up at her.

I am a patient enough man, I believe, and I hope meek and lowly, but I saw suddenly that not all the beatitudes should be taken without reservation.

"I repeat," I said, for she had not spoken, "your presence is the most troubling thing I know. It keeps me back in my studies."

"There's a red five for that black six," she observed.

"Thank you!" and I made the play.

"Then you're not a Sannyasin yet?"

"I've nearly taken the first degree. Sometimes after hard practice I can succeed in not hating anything for as much as an hour."

I dealt eight more cards and became, to outward seeming, I hope, absorbed in the new aspect of the game.

"Perseverance will be rewarded," she said kindly. "You can't expect to learn it all at once."

"You might try not to make it harder for me."

Again had I been a third person of fair discernment, I believe I should have sworn that I caught in her eyes a gleam of hardened, relentless determination; but she only pointed to a four of hearts which I was

neglecting to play up.

"Why not play the game to win?" she asked, and there was that in her voice which was like to undo me--a tone and the merest fanning of my face by her loose sleeve as she pointed to the card.

Suddenly I knew that honor was not in me. She walked within my lines in imminent peril of the deadliest character. But there was no sign of fear in the look she held me with, and I knew she had not sensed her danger.

"You should play your stupid game to win," she repeated terribly. "You are too ingenious at finding balm in defeat." That little golden roughness in her voice seemed to grate on my bared heart. I left her eyes with a last desperate appeal to the game. My hand shook as it laid down the final eight cards.

"Have I ever had any reason to think I could win?" I found I could ask this if I kept my eyes upon the cards.

She laughed a curious, almost silent, confidential little laugh, through which a sigh of despair seemed to breathe.

I looked quickly up, but again there was that strange gleam in her eyes, a gleam of sternest resolve I should have called it under other circumstances.

"You see!" I exclaimed, pointing with a trembling but triumphant finger at the cards. "You see! I am beaten now, in this game that seemed easy up to the very last moment. What could I hope for in a game where the cards fell wretchedly from the very start? If I hoped now, I'd be a hopeless fool, indeed!"

[Illustration: "THAT WILL DO," I SAID SEVERELY. "REMEMBER, THERE IS A GENTLEMAN PRESENT."]

"Are you sure you know how to play this game?"

There was a sort of finality in her words that sickened me.

"I have abided always by the rules," I answered doggedly, "and I do know the rules. Look--this game is neatly blocked by one little four-spot on that queen. If that queen were free, I could finish everything."

"Oh, oh--I've told you it's a stupid game with stupid rules--and it makes its players--" She did not complete that, but went about on another tack--with the danger note in her voice. "Just now I overheard your caller say a thing--"

"Ah, I feared you overheard."

The arrogance of the gesture with which she interrupted me was splendid.

"He said, 'How long are you going to keep up that--that--'"

"That will do," I said severely. "Remember there is a gentleman present." But my voice sounded queerly indeed to the ears most familiar with its quality. Also it trembled, for her gaze, almost stern in its questioning, had not released me.

"But how long are you?" Her own voice had trembled, as mine did. She might as well have used the avoided word. Her tone carried it far too intelligibly. It was quite as bad as swearing. I tried twice before I succeeded in finding my voice.

"I've told you," I said desperately; "can't you see--that queen isn't free?"

Swiftly--I regret to say, almost with a show of temper--she snatched the four of diamonds from its lawful place and laid it brazenly far outside the game.

"The creature is free," she said crisply--but at once her arrogance was gone and she drooped visibly in weakness.

So quickly did I rise from the table that the cards of the game were hurled into a meaningless confusion. I stood at her side. I had lost myself.

"Little Miss,--oh, Little Miss! I've a thousand arms all crying for you."

Slowly she made her eyes come to mine--not without effort, for we were close.

"I am glad we left you,"--she had meant to say "that arm," I judge, but there was a break in her voice, a swift movement, and she suddenly said "this arm," with a little shudder in which she could not meet my eyes; for, such as the arm was, she had finished her speech from within it. Close I held her, like a witless moonling, forgetting all resolves, all lessons, all treaties--all but that she was not a dream woman.

"Oh, Little Miss!" was all I could say; and she--"Calvin Blake!" as if it were a phrase of endearment.

"Little Miss, that loss has put me out, but never has it been the hardship it is now--one arm!"

I had not thought it possible for her to come nearer, but a successful nestling movement was her answer.

"I feel the need of a thousand arms, and yet their strength is--"

"Is in this one." She completed my sentence with her own nestling emphasis for "this one."

"Can you believe now, Little Miss?"

"Yes--you gave it to me again."

"Can you believe that I--I--"

"That was never hard. I believed that the first evening I saw you."

"A womanish thing to say--I didn't know it myself."

But she laughed to me, laughed still as I brought her face nearer--so near. Only then did her parted lips close tensely in the woman fear of what she read in my eyes. I have reason to believe that she would have

mastered this fear, but at that instant Miss Caroline coughed rather alarmingly.

"You should do something for that right away," I said, as we struck ourselves apart. "You let a cough like that run along and you don't know what it may end in." Whereupon, having kissed no one on this occasion, I now kissed Miss Caroline,--without difficulty, I may add.

"I've been meaning to do it for a year," I explained.

"I must remind you that they were far less deliberate in my day," said she, with a delicate hint of reminiscence in her tone. Whereupon she looked searchingly at each of us in turn. Then, with a little gasp, she wept daintily upon my love's shoulder.

I had long suspected that tears were a mere aesthetic refreshment with Miss Caroline. I had never known her weaken to them when there seemed to be far better reasons for it than the present occasion furnished.

"I must take her home," said my love, without speaking.

"Do!" I urged, likewise in silence, but understandably.

"And I must be alone," she called, as they stepped out on to the lawn.

"So must I." It had not occurred to me; but I could see thoughts with which my mind needed at once to busy itself. I watched them go slowly into the dusk. I thought Miss Caroline seemed to be recovering.

When they had gone, I stepped out to look up at the strange new stars. The measure of my dream was full and running over. To stand there and breathe full and laugh aloud--that was my prayer of gratitude; nor did I lack the presence of mind to hope that, in ascending, it might in some way advantage the soul of J. Rodney Potts, that humble tool with which the gods had wrought such wonders.

It was no longer a dream, no vision brief as a summer's night, when the light fades late to come again too soon. Before, in that dreaming time, I saw that I had drawn water like the Danaides, in a pitcher full of holes. But now--I wondered how long she would find it good to be alone. I felt that I had been alone long enough, and that seven minutes, or possibly eight, might suffice even her.

She came almost with the thought, though I believe she did not hurry after she saw that I observed her.

"I had to be alone a long time, to think well about it--to think it all out," she said simply.

I thought it unnecessary to state the precise number of minutes this had required. Instead I showed her all those strange new stars above us, and together we surveyed the replenished heavens.

"How light it is--and so late!" she murmured absently.

"Come back to our porch."

There for the first time in its green life my vine came into its natural right of screening lovers. In its shade my love cast down her eyes, but

intrepidly lifted her lips. Miss Caroline was still where she should have remained in the first place.

"I am very happy, Little Miss!"

"You shall be still happier, Calvin Blake. I haven't waited this long without knowing--"

"Nor I! I know, too."

"I hope Jim will be glad," she suggested.

"He'll be delighted, and vastly relieved. It has puzzled him fearfully of late to see you living away from me."

We sat down, for there seemed much to say.

"I believed more than you did, with all your game," she taunted me.

"But you broke the rules. Anybody can believe anything if he can break all the rules."

"I'd a dreadful time showing you that I meant to."

I shall not detail a conversation that could have but little interest to others. Indeed, I remember it but poorly. I only know that it seemed magically to feed upon itself, yet waxed to little substance for the memory.

One thing, however, I retain vividly enough. In a moment when we both were silent, renewing our amazement at the stars, there burst upon the night a volume of song that I instantly identified.

"She sleeps, my lady sleeps!" sang the clear tenor of Arthur Updyke. "My lady sleeps--she sleeps!" sang three other voices in well-blended corroboration; after which the four discoursed upon this interesting theme.

We were down from the stars at once, but I saw nothing to laugh at, and said as much.

"We might take them out some sandwiches and things to drink," persisted my Little Miss.

But the starlight had shown me a gleam in her eyes that was too outrageously Peavey.

"We will not" I chanted firmly to the music's mellowed accompaniment. "I am free to say now that the thing must be stopped, but you shall do it less brutally--to-morrow or next day."

"Oh, well, if you--"

She nestled again. So soon had this habit seemed to fasten upon her adaptable nature.

"It's wonderful what one arm can do," she said; and in the darkness she felt for the closing hand of it to draw it yet more firmly about her.

"It has the spirit of all the arms in the world, Little Miss--oh, my Little Miss--my dream woman come true!"

She nestled again, with a sigh of old days ended.

"You can't get any closer," I admonished.

"Here!" she whispered insistingly, so that I felt the breath of it.

CHAPTER XXX

BY ANOTHER HAND

A wanderer from Little Arcady in early days returned to its placid shades after many years, drawn thither by a little quick-born yearning to walk the old streets again. But he found such strangeness in these that his memory was put to prodigious feats of reconstruction ere it could make them seemly as of yore.

To the west, away from the river, the town has groped beyond a prairie frontier that had once been sacred to boyish games and the family cow. Now, so thickly was it built with neat white houses, that only with strenuous clairvoyance could famous old localities be identified: the ball-ground; the marshy stretch that made skating in winter, or, in spring, a fascinating place to catch cold by wading; the grassy common where "shinny" was played by day and "Yellow Horn" by night; the enchanted spot where the circus built airy castles of canvas, and where, on the day after, one might plant one's feet squarely in the magic ring, on the veritable spot, perchance, where the clown had superhumanly ridden the difficult trick-mule after local volunteers had failed so entertainingly.

Barns in this once wild country had failed amazingly. Only one of any character was left, and it had shrunk. Of old a structure of possibilities intensely romantic, it was now dingy, pitiable, insignificant. No reasonable person would consider holding a circus there--admission ten pins for boys and five pins for girls.

Orchards, too, had suffered. Acres of them, once known to their last tree, including the safest routes of approach by day or night, had been cut down to make space for substantial but unexciting houses, quite like the houses in anybody's town. Other orchards had shrunk to a few poor unproductive trees so little prized by their owners that they could no longer excite evil thoughts in the young.

Indeed, almost everything had shrunk. The church steeples, once of an inconceivable height, were now but a scant sixty feet; and the buildings beneath them, that once had vied with old-world cathedrals, were seen to be but toy churches.

Especially had gardens shrunk. One that boasted the widest area in days when it must be hoed for the advantage of potatoes insanely planted there, was now a plot so tiny that the returned wanderer, amazedly staring at it, abandoned all effort to make it occupy its old place in his memory.

North and south were dozens of strange, prim houses to puzzle up the streets. The street-signs, another innovation, were truly needed. Of old it had been enough to say "down toward the depot," "out by the McCormick place," "next to the Presbyterian church," "up around the schoolhouse," or "down by the lumber yard." But now it was plain that one had to know First, Second, and Third streets, Washington, Adams, and Jefferson streets.

Socially as well, the town had changed. Not only is the native stock more travelled, speaking--entirely without an air--of trips to the Yellowstone, to Europe, Chicago, or Santa Barbara, but a new element has invaded the little country. It goes in the fall, but it comes again each summer, drawn by the green beauty of the spot, and it has left its impress.

The revisiting wanderer observed, as in a dream, an immaculate coupe with a couple of men on the box who behaved quite as if they were about to enter the park in the full glare of Fifty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, though they were but on a street of the little country among farm wagons. The outfit was ascertained to belong to a summer resident who was said, by common report, to "have wine right on the table at every meal." No one born out of Little Arcady can appraise the revolutionary character of this circumstance at anything like its true value.

Further, in the line of vehicular sensationalism, a modish wicker-bodied phaeton and a minute pony-cart were seen on a pleasant afternoon to issue from a driveway far up a street that now has a name, but which used to be adequately identified by saying "up toward the Fair Grounds."

The phaeton was occupied by two ladies, one rather old, to whom a couple of half-grown children in the pony-cart kissed their hands and shouted. They were not permitted to follow the phaeton, however, as they seemed to have wished. Its shock-headed pony, driven by an aged negro who scolded both children with a worn and practised garrulity, was turned in another direction. One of the children, a little dark-faced girl of eight or nine, called "Little Miss" by the driver, was repeatedly threatened in the fiercest tone by him because of her perilous twistings to look back at the phaeton. The cart was followed by a liver-and-white setter; a young dog, it seemed, from his frenzied caperings and his manner of appearing to think of something else in the midst of every important moment.

There proved to be two papers in the town, as of old, but the Argus was now published twice a week, Wednesdays and Saturdays. The wanderer eagerly scanned its columns for familiar names and for something of the town's old tone; but with little success.

Said one item, "A string of electric lights, on a street leading up one of our hills, looks like a necklace of brilliants on the bosom of the night." Old Little Arcady had not electric lights; nor the Argus this exuberance of simile.

Again: "This new game of golf that the summer folks play seems to have too much walking for a good game and just enough game to spoil a good walk." Golf in the Little Country!

The advent of musical culture was signified by this: "At least thirty

girls in this town can play the first part of 'Narcissus' pretty well. But when they come to the second part they mangle the keys for a minute and then say, 'I don't care much for that second part--do you?' Why don't some of them learn it and give us a chance to judge?"

The Argus had acquired a "Woman's Department," conducted by Mrs. Aurelia Potts Denney, wife of the editor,--a public-spirited woman, prominent in club circles, and said to be of great assistance to her husband in his editorial duties. The town was proud of her, and sent her as delegate to the Federation of Woman's Clubs; her name, indeed, has been printed in full more than once, even by Chicago newspapers. Some say that wisely she might give more attention to her twin sons, Hayes and Wheeler Denney; but this likely is ill-natured carping, for Hayes and Wheeler seem not more lawless than other twins of eight. And carpers, to a certainty, do exist in Little Arcady.

One Westley Keyts, for example, lounging in the doorway of his meat-shop, renewed acquaintance with the wanderer, who remembered him as a glum-faced but not bad-hearted chap. Names recalled and hands shaken, Mr. Keyts began to lament the simple ways of an elder day, glancing meanwhile with honest disapproval at a newly installed competitor across the street. The shop itself was something of an affront, its gilt name more--"The Bon Ton Market." Mr. Keyts pronounced "Bon Ton" in his own fashion, but his contempt was ably and amply expressed.

"Sounds like one of them fancy names for a corset or a patent lamp," he complained. "It's this here summer business that done it. They swarm in here with their private hacks and their hired help all togged out till you'd think they was generals in the army, and they play that game of sissy-shinny (drop-the-handkerchief for mine, if I got to play any such game), and they're such great hands to kite around nights when folks had ought to be in their beds. I tell you, my friend, it ain't doing this town one bit of good. The idea of a passel of strong, husky young men settin' around on porches in their white pants and calling it 'passing the summer.' I ain't never found time to pass any summers."

The wanderer expressed a proper regret for this decadence. Mr. Keyts reverted bitterly to the Bon Ton market:--

"Good name for a tooth powder, or a patent necktie, or an egg-beater. But a butcher-shop!--why, it's a hell of a name for a butcher-shop!"

The wanderer expressed perfect sympathy with this view of the shop legend, and remarked, "By the way, whose big house is that with the columns in front, up where the Prouse and old Blake houses used to be?"

The face of Mr. Keyts became pleasanter.

"Oh, that?--that's Cal Blake's--Major Blake's, you know. He married a girl that come in here from the South with her mother. I guess that was after you got out of here. They tore down the two houses and built that big one. They say it's like them Southern houses, but I don't know. It seems awful plain up the front of it. Cal's all right, though. I guess mebbe he built the house kind of bare that way to please his wife and his mother-in-law. I'll bet if he'd had his own way, there'd be some brackets and fret work on the front to liven it up some. But I'd a done just like him in his place, I would, by Gee! So would you if you seen his wife. Say! but never mind; you wait right here. She'll drive up to

git Cal from his office at four-thirty--it's right across there over the bank where that young fellow is settin' in the window--that's young Cal Denney, studyin' law with Blake. You just wait and see--she'll drive up in about six minutes."

The wanderer waited, out of pure cordiality to Mr. Keyts. The prospect was not exciting, but the simple faith of the villagers that outsiders must share their interest in local concerns has always seemed too touching a thing to wreck.

Within the six minutes mentioned by Mr. Keyts the diurnal happening to which he attached such importance was observed. A woman (the younger of the two seen in the phaeton) drove up for Major Calvin Blake; a youngish rather than a young woman, slight, with an effect of stateliness, and not unattractive. Her husband, a tall and pleasant enough looking man, came down the stairs, and when he saw the woman his face lighted swiftly--and rather wonderfully, when one considers that she was not unexpected. They drove away.

The wanderer was not disposed to minimize the incident, however far he might fall short of Westley Keyts's appreciation. But he had been long absent from the Little Country, and the people of to-day were strange and unimportant. He preferred to revive, as best he might, the days of his own simple faith in the town's sufficiency; days when the world beyond the Little Country was but a place from which to order merchandise, or into which, at the most, adventurous Arcadians dared brief journeys for profit or a doubtful pleasure; the days of a boy's Little Arcady, that existed no more save as a wraith in remembering minds.

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