

**A SAPPHO OF GREEN
SPRINGS & TALES**

BY

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A Sappho of Green Springs

CHAPTER ONE

“Come in,” said the editor.

The door of the editorial room of the “Excelsior Magazine” began to creak painfully under the hesitating pressure of an uncertain and unfamiliar hand. This continued until with a start of irritation the editor faced directly about, throwing his leg over the arm of his chair with a certain youthful dexterity. With one hand gripping its back, the other still grasping a proof-slip, and his pencil in his mouth, he stared at the intruder.

The stranger, despite his hesitating entrance, did not seem in the least disconcerted. He was a tall man, looking even taller by reason of the long formless overcoat he wore, known as a “duster,” and by a long straight beard that depended from his chin, which he combed with two reflective fingers as he contemplated the editor. The red dust which still lay in the creases of his garment and in the curves of his soft felt hat, and left a dusty circle like a precipitated halo around his feet, proclaimed him, if not a countryman, a recent inland importation by coach. “Busy?” he said, in a grave but pleasant voice. “I kin wait. Don’t mind ME. Go on.”

The editor indicated a chair with his disengaged hand and plunged again into his proof-slips. The stranger surveyed the scant furniture and appointments of the office with a look of grave curiosity, and then, taking a chair, fixed an earnest, penetrating gaze on the editor's profile. The editor felt it, and, without looking up, said—

“Well, go on.”

“But you're busy. I kin wait.”

“I shall not be less busy this morning. I can listen.”

“I want you to give me the name of a certain person who writes in your magazine.”

The editor's eye glanced at the second right-hand drawer of his desk. It did not contain the names of his contributors, but what in the traditions of his office was accepted as an equivalent—a revolver. He had never yet presented either to an inquirer. But he laid aside his proofs, and, with a slight darkening of his youthful, discontented face, said, “What do you want to know for?”

The question was so evidently unexpected that the stranger's face colored slightly, and he hesitated. The editor meanwhile, without taking his eyes from the man, mentally ran over the contents of the last magazine. They had been of a singularly peaceful character. There seemed to be nothing to justify homicide on his part or the stranger's. Yet there was no knowing, and his questioner's bucolic appearance by no means precluded an assault. Indeed, it had been a legend of the office that a predecessor had suffered vicariously from a geological hammer covertly introduced into a scientific controversy by an irate professor.

“As we make ourselves responsible for the conduct of the magazine,” continued the young editor, with mature severity, “we do not give up the names of our contributors. If you do not agree with their opinions”—

“But I DO,” said the stranger, with his former composure, “and I reckon that’s why I want to know who wrote those verses called ‘Underbrush,’ signed ‘White Violet,’ in your last number. They’re pow’ful pretty.”

The editor flushed slightly, and glanced instinctively around for any unexpected witness of his ludicrous mistake. The fear of ridicule was uppermost in his mind, and he was more relieved at his mistake not being overheard than at its groundlessness.

“The verses ARE pretty,” he said, recovering himself, with a critical air, “and I am glad you like them. But even then, you know, I could not give you the lady’s name without her permission. I will write to her and ask it, if you like.”

The actual fact was that the verses had been sent to him anonymously from a remote village in the Coast Range—the address being the post-office and the signature initials.

The stranger looked disturbed. “Then she ain’t about here anywhere?” he said, with a vague gesture. “She don’t belong to the office?”

The young editor beamed with tolerant superiority: “No, I am sorry to say.”

“I should like to have got to see her and kinder asked her a few questions,” continued the stranger, with the same

reflective seriousness. “You see, it wasn’t just the rhymin’ o’ them verses—and they kinder sing themselves to ye, don’t they?—it wasn’t the chyce o’ words—and I reckon they allus hit the idee in the centre shot every time—it wasn’t the idees and moral she sort o’ drew out o’ what she was tellin’—but it was the straight thing itself—the truth!”

“The truth?” repeated the editor.

“Yes, sir. I’ve bin there. I’ve seen all that she’s seen in the brush—the little flicks and checkers o’ light and shadder down in the brown dust that you wonder how it ever got through the dark of the woods, and that allus seems to slip away like a snake or a lizard if you grope. I’ve heard all that she’s heard there—the creepin’, the sighin’, and the whisperin’ through the bracken and the ground-vines of all that lives there.”

“You seem to be a poet yourself,” said the editor, with a patronizing smile.

“I’m a lumberman, up in Mendocino,” returned the stranger, with sublime naivete. “Got a mill there. You see, sightin’ standin’ timber and selectin’ from the gen’ral show of the trees in the ground and the lay of roots hez sorter made me take notice.” He paused. “Then,” he added, somewhat despondingly, “you don’t know who she is?”

“No,” said the editor, reflectively; “not even if it is really a WOMAN who writes.”

“Eh?”

“Well, you see, ‘White Violet’ may as well be the nom de plume of a man as of a woman, especially if adopted

for the purpose of mystification. The handwriting, I remember, WAS more boyish than feminine.”

“No,” returned the stranger doggedly, “it wasn’t no MAN. There’s ideas and words there that only come from a woman: baby-talk to the birds, you know, and a kind of fearsome keer of bugs and creepin’ things that don’t come to a man who wears boots and trousers. Well,” he added, with a return to his previous air of resigned disappointment, “I suppose you don’t even know what she’s like?”

“No,” responded the editor, cheerfully. Then, following an idea suggested by the odd mingling of sentiment and shrewd perception in the man before him, he added: “Probably not at all like anything you imagine. She may be a mother with three or four children; or an old maid who keeps a boarding-house; or a wrinkled school-mistress; or a chit of a school-girl. I’ve had some fair verses from a red-haired girl of fourteen at the Seminary,” he concluded with professional coolness.

The stranger regarded him with the naive wonder of an inexperienced man. Having paid this tribute to his superior knowledge, he regained his previous air of grave perception. “I reckon she ain’t none of them. But I’m keepin’ you from your work. Good-by. My name’s Bowers—Jim Bowers, of Mendocino. If you’re up my way, give me a call. And if you do write to this yer ‘White Violet,’ and she’s willin’, send me her address.”

He shook the editor’s hand warmly—even in its literal significance of imparting a good deal of his own earnest caloric to the editor’s fingers—and left the room. His footfall echoed along the passage and died out, and with it, I fear, all impression of his visit from the editor’s mind, as he plunged again into the silent task before him.

Presently he was conscious of a melodious humming and a light leisurely step at the entrance of the hall. They continued on in an easy harmony and unaffected as the passage of a bird. Both were pleasant and both familiar to the editor. They belonged to Jack Hamlin, by vocation a gambler, by taste a musician, on his way from his apartments on the upper floor, where he had just risen, to drop into his friend's editorial room and glance over the exchanges, as was his habit before breakfast.

The door opened lightly. The editor was conscious of a faint odor of scented soap, a sensation of freshness and cleanliness, the impression of a soft hand like a woman's on his shoulder and, like a woman's, momentarily and playfully caressing, the passage of a graceful shadow across his desk, and the next moment Jack Hamlin was ostentatiously dusting a chair with an open newspaper preparatory to sitting down.

"You ought to ship that office-boy of yours, if he can't keep things cleaner," he said, suspending his melody to eye grimly the dust which Mr. Bowers had shaken from his departing feet.

The editor did not look up until he had finished revising a difficult paragraph. By that time Mr. Hamlin had comfortably settled himself on a cane sofa, and, possibly out of deference to his surroundings, had subdued his song to a peculiarly low, soft, and heartbreaking whistle as he unfolded a newspaper. Clean and faultless in his appearance, he had the rare gift of being able to get up at two in the afternoon with much of the dewy freshness and all of the moral superiority of an early riser.

"You ought to have been here just now, Jack," said the editor.

“Not a row, old man, eh?” inquired Jack, with a faint accession of interest.

“No,” said the editor, smiling. Then he related the incidents of the previous interview, with a certain humorous exaggeration which was part of his nature. But Jack did not smile.

“You ought to have booted him out of the ranch on sight,” he said. “What right had he to come here prying into a lady’s affairs?—at least a lady as far as HE knows. Of course she’s some old blowzy with frumpled hair trying to rope in a greenhorn with a string of words and phrases,” concluded Jack, carelessly, who had an equally cynical distrust of the sex and of literature.

“That’s about what I told him,” said the editor.

“That’s just what you SHOULD’N’T have told him,” returned Jack. “You ought to have stuck up for that woman as if she’d been your own mother. Lord! you fellows don’t know how to run a magazine. You ought to let ME sit on that chair and tackle your customers.”

“What would you have done, Jack?” asked the editor, much amused to find that his hitherto invincible hero was not above the ordinary human weakness of offering advice as to editorial conduct.

“Done?” reflected Jack. “Well, first, sonny, I shouldn’t keep a revolver in a drawer that I had to OPEN to get at.”

“But what would you have said?”

“I should simply have asked him what was the price of lumber at Mendocino,” said Jack, sweetly, “and when he told me, I should have said that the samples he was offering out of his own head wouldn’t suit. You see, you don’t want any trifling in such matters. You write well enough, my boy,” continued he, turning over his paper, “but what you’re lacking in is editorial dignity. But go on with your work. Don’t mind me.”

Thus admonished, the editor again bent over his desk, and his friend softly took up his suspended song. The editor had not proceeded far in his corrections when Jack’s voice again broke the silence.

“Where are those d——d verses, anyway?”

Without looking up, the editor waved his pencil towards an uncut copy of the “Excelsior Magazine” lying on the table.

“You don’t suppose I’m going to READ them, do you?” said Jack, aggrievedly. “Why don’t you say what they’re about? That’s your business as editor.”

But that functionary, now wholly lost and wandering in the non-sequitur of an involved passage in the proof before him, only waved an impatient remonstrance with his pencil and knit his brows. Jack, with a sigh, took up the magazine.

A long silence followed, broken only by the hurried rustling of sheets of copy and an occasional exasperated start from the editor. The sun was already beginning to slant a dusty beam across his desk; Jack’s whistling had long since ceased. Presently, with an exclamation of relief, the editor laid aside the last proof-sheet and looked up.

Jack Hamlin had closed the magazine, but with one hand thrown over the back of the sofa he was still holding it, his slim forefinger between its leaves to keep the place, and his handsome profile and dark lashes lifted towards the window. The editor, smiling at this unwonted abstraction, said quietly—

“Well, what do you think of them?”

Jack rose, laid the magazine down, settled his white waistcoat with both hands, and lounged towards his friend with audacious but slightly veiled and shining eyes. “They sort of sing themselves to you,” he said, quietly, leaning beside the editor’s desk, and looking down upon him. After a pause he said, “Then you don’t know what she’s like?”

“That’s what Mr. Bowers asked me,” remarked the editor.

“D—n Bowers!”

“I suppose you also wish me to write and ask for permission to give you her address?” said the editor, with great gravity.

“No,” said Jack, coolly. “I propose to give it to YOU within a week, and you will pay me with a breakfast. I should like to have it said that I was once a paid contributor to literature. If I don’t give it to you, I’ll stand you a dinner, that’s all.”

“Done!” said the editor. “And you know nothing of her now?”

“No,” said Jack, promptly. “Nor you?”

“No more than I have told you.”

“That’ll do. So long!” And Jack, carefully adjusting his glossy hat over his curls at an ominously wicked angle, sauntered lightly from the room. The editor, glancing after his handsome figure and hearing him take up his pretermitted whistle as he passed out, began to think that the contingent dinner was by no means an inevitable prospect.

Howbeit, he plunged once more into his monotonous duties. But the freshness of the day seemed to have departed with Jack, and the later interruptions of foreman and publisher were of a more practical character. It was not until the post arrived that the superscription on one of the letters caught his eye, and revived his former interest. It was the same hand as that of his unknown contributor’s manuscript—ill-formed and boyish. He opened the envelope. It contained another poem with the same signature, but also a note—much longer than the brief lines that accompanied the first contribution—was scrawled upon a separate piece of paper. This the editor opened first, and read the following, with an amazement that for the moment dominated all other sense:

MR. EDITOR—I see you have got my poetry in. But I don’t see the spondulix that oughter follow. Perhaps you don’t know where to send it. Then I’ll tell you. Send the money to Lock Box 47, Green Springs P. O., per Wells Fargo’s Express, and I’ll get it there, on account of my parents not knowing. We’re very high-toned, and they would think it’s low making poetry for papers. Send amount usually paid for poetry in your papers. Or may be you think

I make poetry for nothing? That's where you slip up!

Yours truly,

WHITE VIOLET

P. S.—If you don't pay for poetry, send this back. It's as good as what you did put in, and is just as hard to make. You hear me? that's me—all the time.

WHITE VIOLET

The editor turned quickly to the new contribution for some corroboration of what he felt must be an extraordinary blunder. But no! The few lines that he hurriedly read breathed the same atmosphere of intellectual repose, gentleness, and imagination as the first contribution. And yet they were in the same handwriting as the singular missive, and both were identical with the previous manuscript.

Had he been the victim of a hoax, and were the verses not original? No; they were distinctly original, local in color, and even local in the use of certain old English words that were common in the Southwest. He had before noticed the apparent incongruity of the handwriting and the text, and it was possible that for the purposes of disguise the poet might have employed an amanuensis. But how could he reconcile the incongruity of the mercenary and slangy purport of the missive itself with the mental habit of its author? Was it possible that these inconsistent qualities existed in the one individual? He smiled grimly as he thought of his visitor Bowers and his friend Jack. He was startled as he

remembered the purely imaginative picture he had himself given to the seriously interested Bowers of the possible incongruous personality of the poetess.

Was he quite fair in keeping this from Jack? Was it really honorable, in view of their wager? It is to be feared that a very human enjoyment of Jack's possible discomfiture quite as much as any chivalrous friendship impelled the editor to ring eventually for the office-boy.

“See if Mr. Hamlin is in his rooms.”

The editor then sat down, and wrote rapidly as follows:

DEAR MADAM—You are as right as you are generous in supposing that only ignorance of your address prevented the manager from previously remitting the honorarium for your beautiful verses. He now begs to send it to you in the manner you have indicated. As the verses have attracted deserved attention, I have been applied to for your address. Should you care to submit it to me to be used at my discretion, I shall feel honored by your confidence. But this is a matter left entirely to your own kindness and better judgment. Meantime, I take pleasure in accepting “White Violet's” present contribution, and remain, dear madam, your obedient servant,

THE EDITOR

The boy returned as he was folding the letter. Mr. Hamlin was not only NOT in his rooms, but, according to his negro servant Pete, had left town an hour ago for a few days in the country.

“Did he say where?” asked the editor, quickly.

“No, sir: he didn’t know.”

“Very well. Take this to the manager.” He addressed the letter, and, scrawling a few hieroglyphics on a memorandum-tag, tore it off, and handed it with the letter to the boy.

An hour later he stood in the manager’s office. “The next number is pretty well made up,” he said, carelessly, “and I think of taking a day or two off.”

“Certainly,” said the manager. “It will do you good. Where do you think you’ll go?”

“I haven’t quite made up my mind.”

CHAPTER TWO

“Hullo!” said Jack Hamlin.

He had halted his mare at the edge of an abrupt chasm. It did not appear to be fifty feet across, yet its depth must have been nearly two hundred to where the hidden mountain-stream, of which it was the banks, alternately slipped, tumbled, and fell with murmuring and monotonous regularity. One or two pine-trees growing on the opposite edge, loosened at the roots, had tilted their straight shafts like spears over the abyss, and the top of one, resting on the upper branches of a sycamore a few yards from him, served as an aerial bridge for the passage of a boy of fourteen to whom Mr. Hamlin’s challenge was addressed.

The boy stopped midway in his perilous transit, and, looking down upon the horseman, responded, coolly, “Hullo, yourself!”

“Is that the only way across this infernal hole, or the one you prefer for exercise?” continued Hamlin, gravely.

The boy sat down on a bough, allowing his bare feet to dangle over the dizzy depths, and critically examined his questioner. Jack had on this occasion modified his usual correct conventional attire by a tasteful combination of a vaquero’s costume, and, in loose white bullion-fringed trousers, red sash, jacket, and sombrero, looked infinitely more dashing and picturesque than his original. Nevertheless, the boy did not reply. Mr. Hamlin’s pride in his usual ascendancy over women, children, horses, and all unreasoning animals was deeply nettled. He smiled, however, and said, quietly—

“Come here, George Washington. I want to talk to you.”

Without rejecting this august yet impossible title, the boy presently lifted his feet, and carelessly resumed his passage across the chasm until, reaching the sycamore, he began to let himself down squirrel-wise, leap by leap, with an occasional trapeze swinging from bough to bough, dropping at last easily to the ground. Here he appeared to be rather good-looking, albeit the sun and air had worked a miracle of brown tan and freckles on his exposed surfaces, until the mottling of his oval cheeks looked like a polished bird’s egg. Indeed, it struck Mr. Hamlin that he was as intensely a part of that sylvan seclusion as the hidden brook that murmured, the brown velvet shadows that lay like trappings on the white flanks of his horse, the quivering heat, and the stinging spice of bay. Mr. Hamlin had vague ideas of dryads and fauns, but at that moment would have bet something on the chances of their survival.

“I did not hear what you said just now, general,” he remarked, with great elegance of manner, “but I know from your reputation that it could not be a lie. I therefore gather that there IS another way across.”

The boy smiled; rather, his very short upper lip apparently vanished completely over his white teeth, and his very black eyes, which showed a great deal of the white around them, danced in their orbits.

“But YOU couldn’t find it,” he said, slyly.

“No more could you find the half-dollar I dropped just now, unless I helped you.”

Mr. Hamlin, by way of illustration, leaned deeply over his left stirrup, and pointed to the ground. At the same moment a bright half-dollar absolutely appeared to glitter in the herbage at the point of his finger. It was a trick that had always brought great pleasure and profit to his young friends, and some loss and discomfiture of wager to his older ones.

The boy picked up the coin: “There’s a dip and a level crossing about a mile over yer,”—he pointed—“but it’s through the woods, and they’re that high with thick bresh.”

“With what?”

“Bresh,” repeated the boy; “THAT,”—pointing to a few fronds of bracken growing in the shadow of the sycamore.

“Oh! underbrush?”

“Yes; I said ‘bresh,’” returned the boy, doggedly. “YOU might get through, ef you war spry, but not your hoss. Where do you want to go, anyway?”

“Do you know, George,” said Mr. Hamlin, lazily throwing his right leg over the horn of his saddle for greater ease and deliberation in replying, “it’s very odd, but that’s just what I’D like to know. Now, what would YOU, in your broad statesmanlike views of things generally, advise?”

Quite convinced of the stranger’s mental unsoundness, the boy glanced again at his half-dollar, as if to make sure of its integrity, pocketed it doubtfully, and turned away.

“Where are you going?” said Hamlin, resuming his seat with the agility of a circus-rider, and spurring forward.

“To Green Springs, where I live, two miles over the ridge on the far slope,”—indicating the direction.

“Ah!” said Jack, with thoughtful gravity. “Well, kindly give my love to your sister, will you?”

“George Washington didn’t have no sister,” said the boy, cunningly.

“Can I have been mistaken?” said Hamlin, lifting his hand to his forehead with grieved accents. “Then it seems YOU have. Kindly give her my love.”

“Which one?” asked the boy, with a swift glance of mischief. “I’ve got four.”

“The one that’s like you,” returned Hamlin, with prompt exactitude. “Now, where’s the ‘bresh’ you spoke of?”

“Keep along the edge until you come to the log-slide. Foller that, and it’ll lead you into the woods. But ye won’t go far, I tell ye. When you have to turn back, instead o’ comin’ back here, you kin take the trail that goes round the woods, and that’ll bring ye out into the stage road ag’in near the post-office at the Green Springs crossin’ and the new hotel. That’ll be war ye’ll turn up, I reckon,” he added, reflectively. “Fellers that come yer gunnin’ and fishin’ gin’rally do,” he concluded, with a half-inquisitive air.

“Ah?” said Mr. Hamlin, quietly shedding the inquiry. “Green Springs Hotel is where the stage stops, eh?”

“Yes, and at the post-office,” said the boy. “She’ll be along here soon,” he added.

“If you mean the Santa Cruz stage,” said Hamlin, “she’s here already. I passed her on the ridge half an hour ago.”

The boy gave a sudden start, and a quick uneasy expression passed over his face. “Go ‘long with ye!” he said, with a forced smile: “it ain’t her time yet.”

“But I SAW her,” repeated Hamlin, much amused. “Are you expecting company? Hullo! Where are you off to? Come back.”

But his companion had already vanished in the thicket with the undeliberate and impulsive act of an animal. There was a momentary rustle in the alders fifty feet away, and then all was silent. The hidden brook took up its monotonous murmur, the tapping of a distant woodpecker became suddenly audible, and Mr. Hamlin was again alone.

“Wonder whether he’s got parents in the stage, and has been playing truant here,” he mused, lazily. “Looked as if he’d been up to some devilment, or more like as if he was primed for it. If he’d been a little older, I’d have bet he was in league with some road-agents to watch the coach. Just my luck to have him light out as I was beginning to get some talk out of him.” He paused, looked at his watch, and straightened himself in his stirrups. “Four o’clock. I reckon I might as well try the woods and what that imp calls the ‘bresh;’ I may strike a shanty or a native by the way.”

With this determination, Mr. Hamlin urged his horse along the faint trail by the brink of the watercourse which the boy had just indicated. He had no definite end in view

beyond the one that had brought him the day before to that locality—his quest of the unknown poetess. His clue would have seemed to ordinary humanity the faintest. He had merely noted the provincial name of a certain plant mentioned in the poem, and learned that its habitat was limited to the southern local range; while its peculiar nomenclature was clearly of French Creole or Gulf State origin. This gave him a large though sparsely-populated area for locality, while it suggested a settlement of Louisianians or Mississippians near the Summit, of whom, through their native gambling proclivities, he was professionally cognizant. But he mainly trusted Fortune. Secure in his faith in the feminine character of that goddess, he relied a great deal on her well-known weakness for scamps of his quality.

It was not long before he came to the “slide”—a lightly-cut or shallow ditch. It descended slightly in a course that was far from straight, at times diverging to avoid the obstacles of trees or boulders, at times shaving them so closely as to leave smooth abrasions along their sides made by the grinding passage of long logs down the incline. The track itself was slippery from this, and preoccupied all Hamlin’s skill as a horseman, even to the point of stopping his usual careless whistle. At the end of half an hour the track became level again, and he was confronted with a singular phenomenon.

He had entered the wood, and the trail seemed to cleave through a far-stretching, motionless sea of ferns that flowed on either side to the height of his horse’s flanks. The straight shafts of the trees rose like columns from their hidden bases and were lost again in a roof of impenetrable leafage, leaving a clear space of fifty feet between, through which the surrounding horizon of sky was perfectly visible. All the light that entered this vast sylvan hall came from the sides; nothing permeated from above; nothing radiated from

below; the height of the crest on which the wood was placed gave it this lateral illumination, but gave it also the profound isolation of some temple raised by long-forgotten hands. In spite of the height of these clear shafts, they seemed dwarfed by the expanse of the wood, and in the farthest perspective the base of ferns and the capital of foliage appeared almost to meet. As the boy had warned him, the slide had turned aside, skirting the wood to follow the incline, and presently the little trail he now followed vanished utterly, leaving him and his horse adrift breast-high in this green and yellow sea of fronds. But Mr. Hamlin, imperious of obstacles, and touched by some curiosity, continued to advance lazily, taking the bearings of a larger red-wood in the centre of the grove for his objective point. The elastic mass gave way before him, brushing his knees or combing his horse's flanks with wide-spread elfin fingers, and closing up behind him as he passed, as if to obliterate any track by which he might return. Yet his usual luck did not desert him here. Being on horseback, he found that he could detect what had been invisible to the boy and probably to all pedestrians, namely, that the growth was not equally dense, that there were certain thinner and more open spaces that he could take advantage of by more circuitous progression, always, however, keeping the bearings of the central tree. This he at last reached, and halted his panting horse. Here a new idea which had been haunting him since he entered the wood took fuller possession of him. He had seen or known all this before! There was a strange familiarity either in these objects or in the impression or spell they left upon him. He remembered the verses! Yes, this was the "underbrush" which the poetess had described: the gloom above and below, the light that seemed blown through it like the wind, the suggestion of hidden life beneath this tangled luxuriance, which she alone had penetrated—all this was here. But, more than that, here was the atmosphere that she had breathed into the plaintive melody of her verse. It did not necessarily follow that Mr.

Hamlin's translation of her sentiment was the correct one, or that the ideas her verses had provoked in his mind were at all what had been hers: in his easy susceptibility he was simply thrown into a corresponding mood of emotion and relieved himself with song. One of the verses he had already associated in his mind with the rhythm of an old plantation melody, and it struck his fancy to take advantage of the solitude to try its effect. Humming to himself, at first softly, he at last grew bolder, and let his voice drift away through the stark pillars of the sylvan colonnade till it seemed to suffuse and fill it with no more effort than the light which strayed in on either side. Sitting thus, his hat thrown a little back from his clustering curls, the white neck and shoulders of his horse uplifting him above the crested mass of fern, his red sash the one fleck of color in their olive depths, I am afraid he looked much more like the real minstrel of the grove than the unknown poetess who transfigured it. But this, as has been already indicated, was Jack Hamlin's peculiar gift. Even as he had previously outshone the vaquero in his borrowed dress, he now silenced and supplanted a few fluttering blue-jays—rightful tenants of the wood—with a more graceful and airy presence and a far sweeter voice.

The open horizon towards the west had taken a warmer color from the already slanting sun when Mr. Hamlin, having rested his horse, turned to that direction. He had noticed that the wood was thinner there, and, pushing forward, he was presently rewarded by the sound of far-off wheels, and knew he must be near the high-road that the boy had spoken of. Having given up his previous intention of crossing the stream, there seemed nothing better for him to do than to follow the truant's advice and take the road back to Green Springs. Yet he was loath to leave the wood, halting on its verge, and turning to look back into its charmed recesses. Once or twice—perhaps because he recalled the

words of the poem—that yellowish sea of ferns had seemed instinct with hidden life, and he had even fancied, here and there, a swaying of its plumed crests. Howbeit, he still lingered long enough for the open sunlight into which he had obtruded to point out the bravery of his handsome figure. Then he wheeled his horse, the light glanced from polished double bit and bridle-fripperies, caught his red sash and bullion buttons, struck a parting flash from his silver spurs, and he was gone!

For a moment the light streamed unbrokenly through the wood. And then it could be seen that the yellow mass of undergrowth HAD moved with the passage of another figure than his own. For ever since he had entered the shade, a woman, shawled in a vague, shapeless fashion, had watched him wonderingly, eagerly, excitedly, gliding from tree to tree as he advanced, or else dropping breathlessly below the fronds of fern whence she gazed at him as between parted fingers. When he wheeled she had run openly to the west, albeit with hidden face and still clinging shawl, and taken a last look at his retreating figure. And then, with a faint but lingering sigh, she drew back into the shadow of the wood again and vanished also.

CHAPTER THREE

At the end of twenty minutes Mr. Hamlin reined in his mare. He had just observed in the distant shadows of a by-lane that intersected his road the vanishing flutter of two light print dresses. Without a moment's hesitation he lightly swerved out of the high-road and followed the retreating figures.

As he neared them, they seemed to be two slim young girls, evidently so preoccupied with the rustic amusement of edging each other off the grassy border into the dust of the track that they did not perceive his approach. Little shrieks, slight scufflings, and interjections of "Cynthy! you limb!" "Quit that, Eunice, now!" and "I just call that real mean!" apparently drowned the sound of his canter in the soft dust. Checking his speed to a gentle trot, and pressing his horse close beside the opposite fence, he passed them with gravely uplifted hat and a serious, preoccupied air. But in that single, seemingly conventional glance, Mr. Hamlin had seen that they were both pretty, and that one had the short upper lip of his errant little guide. A hundred yards farther on he halted, as if irresolutely, gazed doubtfully ahead of him, and then turned back. An expression of innocent—almost childlike—concern was clouding the rascal's face. It was well, as the two girls had drawn closely together, having been apparently surprised in the midst of a glowing eulogium of this glorious passing vision by its sudden return. At his nearer approach, the one with the short upper lip hid that piquant feature and the rest of her rosy face behind the other's shoulder, which was suddenly and significantly opposed to the advance of this handsome intruder, with a certain dignity, half real, half affected, but

wholly charming. The protectress appeared—possibly from her defensive attitude—the superior of her companion.

Audacious as Jack was to his own sex, he had early learned that such rare but discomposing graces as he possessed required a certain apologetic attitude when presented to women, and that it was only a plain man who could be always complacently self-confident in their presence. There was, consequently, a hesitating lowering of this hypocrite's brown eyelashes as he said, in almost pained accents—

“Excuse me, but I fear I've taken the wrong road. I'm going to Green Springs.”

“I reckon you've taken the wrong road, wherever you're going,” returned the young lady, having apparently made up her mind to resent each of Jack's perfections as a separate impertinence: “this is a PRIVATE road.” She drew herself fairly up here, although gurgled at in the ear and pinched in the arm by her companion.

“I beg your pardon,” said Jack, meekly. “I see I'm trespassing on your grounds. I'm very sorry. Thank you for telling me. I should have gone on a mile or two farther, I suppose, until I came to your house,” he added, innocently.

“A mile or two! You'd have run chock ag'in' our gate in another minit,” said the short-lipped one, eagerly. But a sharp nudge from her companion sent her back again into cover, where she waited expectantly for another crushing retort from her protector.

But, alas! it did not come. One cannot be always witty, and Jack looked distressed. Nevertheless, he took advantage of the pause.

“It was so stupid in me, as I think your brother”—looking at Short-lip—“very carefully told me the road.”

The two girls darted quick glances at each other. “Oh, Bawb!” said the first speaker, in wearied accents—“THAT limb! He don’t keer.”

“But he DID care,” said Hamlin, quietly, “and gave me a good deal of information. Thanks to him, I was able to see that ferny wood that’s so famous—about two miles up the road. You know—the one that there’s a poem written about!”

The shot told! Short-lip burst into a display of dazzling little teeth and caught the other girl convulsively by the shoulders. The superior girl bent her pretty brows, and said, “Eunice, what’s gone of ye? Quit that!” but, as Hamlin thought, paled slightly.

“Of course,” said Hamlin, quickly, “you know—the poem everybody’s talking about. Dear me! let me see! how does it go?” The rascal knit his brows, said, “Ah, yes,” and then murmured the verse he had lately sung quite as musically.

Short-lip was shamelessly exalted and excited. Really she could scarcely believe it! She already heard herself relating the whole occurrence. Here was the most beautiful young man she had ever seen—an entire stranger—talking to them in the most beautiful and natural way, right in the lane, and reciting poetry to her sister! It was like a novel—only more so. She thought that Cynthia, on the other hand, looked distressed, and—she must say it—“silly.”

All of which Jack noted, and was wise. He had got all he wanted—at present. He gathered up his reins.

“Thank you so much, and your brother, too, Miss Cynthia,” he said, without looking up. Then, adding, with a parting glance and smile, “But don’t tell Bob how stupid I was,” he swiftly departed.

In half an hour he was at the Green Springs Hotel. As he rode into the stable yard, he noticed that the coach had only just arrived, having been detained by a land-slip on the Summit road. With the recollection of Bob fresh in his mind, he glanced at the loungers at the stage office. The boy was not there, but a moment later Jack detected him among the waiting crowd at the post-office opposite. With a view of following up his inquiries, he crossed the road as the boy entered the vestibule of the post-office. He arrived in time to see him unlock one of a row of numbered letter-boxes rented by subscribers, which occupied a partition by the window, and take out a small package and a letter. But in that brief glance Mr. Hamlin detected the printed address of the “Excelsior Magazine” on the wrapper. It was enough. Luck was certainly with him.

He had time to get rid of the wicked sparkle that had lit his dark eyes, and to lounge carelessly towards the boy as the latter broke open the package, and then hurriedly concealed it in his jacket-pocket, and started for the door. Mr. Hamlin quickly followed him, unperceived, and, as he stepped into the street, gently tapped him on the shoulder. The boy turned and faced him quickly. But Mr. Hamlin’s eyes showed nothing but lazy good-humor.

“Hullo, Bob. Where are you going?”

The boy again looked up suspiciously at this revelation of his name.

“Home,” he said, briefly.

“Oh, over yonder,” said Hamlin, calmly. “I don’t mind walking with you as far as the lane.”

He saw the boy’s eyes glance furtively towards an alley that ran beside the blacksmith’s shop a few rods ahead, and was convinced that he intended to evade him there. Slipping his arm carelessly in the youth’s, he concluded to open fire at once.

“Bob,” he said, with irresistible gravity, “I did not know when I met you this morning that I had the honor of addressing a poet—none other than the famous author of ‘Underbrush.’”

The boy started back, and endeavored to withdraw his arm, but Mr. Hamlin tightened his hold, without, however, changing his careless expression.

“You see,” he continued, “the editor is a friend of mine, and, being afraid this package might not get into the right hands—as you didn’t give your name—he deputed me to come here and see that it was all square. As you’re rather young, for all you’re so gifted, I reckon I’d better go home with you, and take a receipt from your parents. That’s about square, I think?”

The consternation of the boy was so evident and so far beyond Mr. Hamlin’s expectation that he instantly halted him, gazed into his shifting eyes, and gave a long whistle.

“Who said it was for ME? Wot you talkin’ about? Lemme go!” gasped the boy, with the short intermittent breath of mingled fear and passion.

“Bob,” said Mr. Hamlin, in a singularly colorless voice which was very rare with him, and an expression quite unlike his own, “what is your little game?”

The boy looked down in dogged silence.

“Out with it! Who are you playing this on?”

“It’s all among my own folks; it’s nothin’ to YOU,” said the boy, suddenly beginning to struggle violently, as if inspired by this extenuating fact.

“Among your own folks, eh? White Violet and the rest, eh? But SHE’S not in it?”

No reply.

“Hand me over that package. I’ll give it back to you again.”

The boy handed it to Mr. Hamlin. He read the letter, and found the inclosure contained a twenty-dollar gold-piece. A half-supercilious smile passed over his face at this revelation of the inadequate emoluments of literature and the trifling inducements to crime. Indeed, I fear the affair began to take a less serious moral complexion in his eyes.

“Then White Violet—your sister Cynthia, you know,” continued Mr. Hamlin, in easy parenthesis—“wrote for this?” holding the coin contemplatively in his fingers, “and you calculated to nab it yourself?”

The quick searching glance with which Bob received the name of his sister, Mr. Hamlin attributed only to his natural surprise that this stranger should be on such familiar terms with her; but the boy responded immediately and bluntly:

“No! SHE didn’t write for it. She didn’t want nobody to know who she was. Nobody wrote for it but me. Nobody KNEW FOLKS WAS PAID FOR PO’TRY BUT ME. I found it out from a feller. I wrote for it. I wasn’t goin’ to let that skunk of an editor have it himself!”

“And you thought YOU would take it,” said Hamlin, his voice resuming its old tone. “Well, George—I mean Bob, your conduct was praiseworthy, although your intentions were bad. Still, twenty dollars is rather too much for your trouble. Suppose we say five and call it square?” He handed the astonished boy five dollars. “Now, George Washington,” he continued, taking four other twenty-dollar pieces from his pocket, and adding them to the inclosure, which he carefully refolded, “I’m going to give you another chance to live up to your reputation. You’ll take that package, and hand it to White Violet, and say you found it, just as it is, in the lock-box. I’ll keep the letter, for it would knock you endways if it was seen, and I’ll make it all right with the editor. But, as I’ve got to tell him that I’ve seen White Violet myself, and know she’s got it, I expect YOU to manage in some way to have me see her. I’ll manage the rest of it; and I won’t blow on you, either. You’ll come back to the hotel, and tell me what you’ve done. And now, George,” concluded Mr. Hamlin, succeeding at last in fixing the boy’s evasive eye with a peculiar look, “it may be just as well for you to understand that I know every nook and corner of this place, that I’ve already been through that underbrush you spoke of once this morning, and that I’ve got a mare that can go wherever YOU can, and a d——d sight quicker!”

“I’ll give the package to White Violet,” said the boy, doggedly.

“And you’ll come back to the hotel?”

The boy hesitated, and then said, “I’ll come back.”

“All right, then. Adios, general.”

Bob disappeared around the corner of a cross-road at a rapid trot, and Mr. Hamlin turned into the hotel.

“Smart little chap that!” he said to the barkeeper.

“You bet!” returned the man, who, having recognized Mr. Hamlin, was delighted at the prospect of conversing with a gentleman of such decidedly dangerous reputation. “But he’s been allowed to run a little wild since old man Delatour died, and the widder’s got enough to do, I reckon, lookin’ arter her four gals, and takin’ keer of old Delatour’s ranch over yonder. I guess it’s pretty hard sleddin’ for her sometimes to get clo’es and grub for the famerly, without follerin’ Bob around.”

“Sharp girls, too, I reckon; one of them writes things for the magazines, doesn’t she?—Cynthia, eh?” said Mr. Hamlin, carelessly.

Evidently this fact was not a notorious one to the barkeeper. He, however, said, “Dunno; mabbee; her father was eddicated, and the widder Delatour, too, though she’s sorter queer, I’ve heard tell. Lord! Mr. Hamlin, YOU oughter remember old man Delatour! From Opelousas, Louisiany, you know! High old sport French style, frilled bosom—open-handed, and us’ter buck ag’in’ faro awful!

Why, he dropped a heap o' money to YOU over in San Jose two years ago at poker! You must remember him!"

The slightest possible flush passed over Mr. Hamlin's brow under the shadow of his hat, but did not get lower than his eyes. He suddenly HAD recalled the spendthrift Delatour perfectly, and as quickly regretted now that he had not doubled the honorarium he had just sent to his portionless daughter. But he only said, coolly, "No," and then, raising his pale face and audacious eyes, continued in his laziest and most insulting manner, "no: the fact is, my mind is just now preoccupied in wondering if the gas is leaking anywhere, and if anything is ever served over this bar except elegant conversation. When the gentleman who mixes drinks comes back, perhaps you'll be good enough to tell him to send a whisky sour to Mr. Jack Hamlin in the parlor. Meantime, you can turn off your soda fountain: I don't want any fizz in mine."

Having thus quite recovered himself, Mr. Hamlin lounged gracefully across the hall into the parlor. As he did so, a darkish young man, with a slim boyish figure, a thin face, and a discontented expression, rose from an armchair, held out his hand, and, with a saturnine smile, said:

"Jack!"

"Fred!"

The two men remained gazing at each other with a half-amused, half-guarded expression. Mr. Hamlin was first to begin. "I didn't think YOU'D be such a fool as to try on this kind of thing, Fred," he said, half seriously.

"Yes, but it was to keep you from being a much bigger one that I hunted you up," said the editor,

mischievously. "Read that. I got it an hour after you left." And he placed a little triumphantly in Jack's hand the letter he had received from White Violet.

Mr. Hamlin read it with an unmoved face, and then laid his two hands on the editor's shoulders. "Yes, my young friend, and you sat down and wrote her a pretty letter and sent her twenty dollars—which, permit me to say, was d——d poor pay! But that isn't your fault, I reckon: it's the meanness of your proprietors."

"But it isn't the question, either, just now, Jack, however you have been able to answer it. Do you mean to say seriously that you want to know anything more of a woman who could write such a letter?"

"I don't know," said Jack, cheerfully. "She might be a devilish sight funnier than if she hadn't written it—which is the fact."

"You mean to say SHE didn't write it?"

"Yes."

"Who did, then?"

"Her brother Bob."

After a moment's scrutiny of his friend's bewildered face, Mr. Hamlin briefly related his adventures, from the moment of his meeting Bob at the mountain-stream to the barkeeper's gossiping comment and sequel. "Therefore," he concluded, "the author of 'Underbrush' is Miss Cynthia Delatour, one of four daughters of a widow who lives two miles from here at the crossing. I shall see her this evening and make sure; but to-morrow morning you will pay me the

breakfast you owe me. She's good-looking, but I can't say I fancy the poetic style: it's a little too high-toned for me. However, I love my love with a C, because she is your Contributor; I hate her with a C, because of her Connections; I met her by Chance and treated her with Civility; her name is Cynthia, and she lives on a Cross-road."

"But you surely don't expect you will ever see Bob, again!" said the editor, impatiently. "You have trusted him with enough to start him for the Sandwich Islands, to say nothing of the ruinous precedent you have established in his mind of the value of poetry. I am surprised that a man of your knowledge of the world would have faith in that imp the second time."

"My knowledge of the world," returned Mr. Hamlin, sententiously, "tells me that's the only way you can trust anybody. ONCE doesn't make a habit, nor show a character. I could see by his bungling that he had never tried this on before. Just now the temptation to wipe out his punishment by doing the square thing, and coming back a sort of hero, is stronger than any other. 'Tisn't everybody that gets that chance," he added, with an odd laugh.

Nevertheless, three hours passed without bringing Bob. The two men had gone to the billiard-room, when a waiter brought a note, which he handed to Mr. Hamlin with some apologetic hesitation. It bore no superscription, but had been brought by a boy who described Mr. Hamlin perfectly, and requested that the note should be handed to him with the remark that "Bob had come back."

"And is he there now?" asked Mr. Hamlin, holding the letter unopened in his hand.

"No, sir; he run right off."

The editor laughed, but Mr. Hamlin, having perused the note, put away his cue. "Come into my room," he said.

The editor followed, and Mr. Hamlin laid the note before him on the table. "Bob's all right," he said, "for I'll bet a thousand dollars that note is genuine."

It was delicately written, in a cultivated feminine hand, utterly unlike the scrawl that had first excited the editor's curiosity, and ran as follows:

He who brought me the bounty of your friend—for I cannot call a recompense so far above my deserts by any other name—gives me also to understand that you wished for an interview. I cannot believe that this is mere idle curiosity, or that you have any motive that is not kindly and honorable, but I feel that I must beg and pray you not to seek to remove the veil behind which I have chosen to hide myself and my poor efforts from identification. I THINK I know you—I KNOW I know myself—well enough to believe it would give neither of us any happiness. You will say to your generous friend that he has already given the Unknown more comfort and hope than could come from any personal compliment or publicity, and you will yourself believe that you have all unconsciously brightened a sad woman's fancy with a Dream and a Vision that before today had been unknown to

WHITE VIOLET

“Have you read it?” asked Mr. Hamlin.

“Yes.”

“Then you don’t want to see it any more, or even remember you ever saw it,” said Mr. Hamlin, carefully tearing the note into small pieces and letting them drift from the windows like blown blossoms.

“But, I say, Jack! look here; I don’t understand! You say you have already seen this woman, and yet”—

“I HAVEN’T seen her,” said Jack, composedly, turning from the window.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that you and I, Fred, are going to drop this fooling right here and leave this place for Frisco by first stage to-morrow, and—that I owe you that dinner.”

CHAPTER FOUR

When the stage for San Francisco rolled away the next morning with Mr. Hamlin and the editor, the latter might have recognized in the occupant of a dust-covered buggy that was coming leisurely towards them the tall figure, long beard, and straight duster of his late visitor, Mr. James Bowers. For Mr. Bowers was on the same quest that the others had just abandoned. Like Mr. Hamlin, he had been left to his own resources, but Mr. Bowers' resources were a life-long experience and technical skill; he too had noted the topographical indications of the poem, and his knowledge of the sylvia of Upper California pointed as unerringly as Mr. Hamlin's luck to the cryptogamous haunts of the Summit. Such abnormal growths were indicative of certain localities only, but, as they were not remunerative from a pecuniary point of view, were to be avoided by the sagacious woodman. It was clear, therefore, that Mr. Bowers' visit to Green Springs was not professional, and that he did not even figuratively accept the omen.

He baited and rested his horse at the hotel, where his bucolic exterior, however, did not elicit that attention which had been accorded to Mr. Hamlin's charming insolence or the editor's cultivated manner. But he glanced over a township map on the walls of the reading-room, and took note of the names of the owners of different lots, farms, and ranches, passing that of Delatour with the others. Then he drove leisurely in the direction of the woods, and, reaching them, tied his horse to a young sapling in the shade, and entered their domain with a shambling but familiar woodman's step.

It is not the purpose of this brief chronicle to follow Mr. Bowers in his professional diagnosis of the locality. He recognized Nature in one of her moods of wasteful extravagance—a waste that his experienced eye could tell was also sapping the vitality of those outwardly robust shafts that rose around him. He knew, without testing them, that half of these fair-seeming columns were hollow and rotten at the core; he could detect the chill odor of decay through the hot balsamic spices stirred by the wind that streamed through their long aisles—like incense mingling with the exhalations of a crypt. He stopped now and then to part the heavy fronds down to their roots in the dank moss, seeing again, as he had told the editor, the weird SECOND twilight through their miniature stems, and the microcosm of life that filled it. But, even while paying this tribute to the accuracy of the unknown poetess, he was, like his predecessor, haunted more strongly by the atmosphere and melody of her verse. Its spell was upon him, too. Unlike Mr. Hamlin, he did not sing. He only halted once or twice, silently combing his straight narrow beard with his three fingers, until the action seemed to draw down the lines of his face into limitless dejection, and an inscrutable melancholy filled his small gray eyes. The few birds which had hailed Mr. Hamlin as their successful rival fled away before the grotesque and angular half-length of Mr. Bowers, as if the wind had blown in a scarecrow from the distant farms.

Suddenly he observed the figure of a woman, with her back towards him, leaning motionless against a tree, and apparently gazing intently in the direction of Green Springs. He had approached so near to her that it was singular she had not heard him. Mr. Bowers was a bashful man in the presence of the other sex. He felt exceedingly embarrassed; if he could have gone away without attracting her attention he would have done so. Neither could he remain silent, a tacit

spy of her meditation. He had recourse to a polite but singularly artificial cough.

To his surprise, she gave a faint cry, turned quickly towards him, and then shrank back and lapsed quite helplessly against the tree. Her evident distress overcame his bashfulness. He ran towards her.

“I’m sorry I frightened ye, ma’am, but I was afraid I might skeer ye more if I lay low, and said nothin’.”

Even then, if she had been some fair young country girl, he would have relapsed after this speech into his former bashfulness. But the face and figure she turned towards him were neither young nor fair: a woman past forty, with gray threads and splashes in her brushed-back hair, which was turned over her ears in two curls like frayed strands of rope. Her forehead was rather high than broad, her nose large but well-shaped, and her eyes full but so singularly light in color as to seem almost sightless. The short upper lip of her large mouth displayed her teeth in an habitual smile, which was in turn so flatly contradicted by every other line of her careworn face that it seemed gratuitously artificial. Her figure was hidden by a shapeless garment that partook equally of the shawl, cloak, and wrapper.

“I am very foolish,” she began, in a voice and accent that at once asserted a cultivated woman, “but I so seldom meet anybody here that a voice quite startled me. That, and the heat,” she went on, wiping her face, into which the color was returning violently—“for I seldom go out as early as this—I suppose affected me.”

Mr. Bowers had that innate Far-Western reverence for womanhood which I fancy challenges the most polished politeness. He remained patient, undemonstrative, self-

effacing, and respectful before her, his angular arm slightly but not obtrusively advanced, the offer of protection being in the act rather than in any spoken word, and requiring no response.

“Like as not, ma’am,” he said, cheerfully looking everywhere but in her burning face. “The sun IS pow’ful hot at this time o’ day; I felt it myself comin’ yer, and, though the damp of this timber kinder sets it back, it’s likely to come out ag’in. Ye can’t check it no more than the sap in that choked limb thar”—he pointed ostentatiously where a fallen pine had been caught in the bent and twisted arm of another, but which still put out a few green tassels beyond the point of impact. “Do you live far from here, ma’am?” he added.

“Only as far as the first turning below the hill.”

“I’ve got my buggy here, and I’m goin’ that way, and I can jist set ye down thar cool and comfortable. Ef,” he continued, in the same assuring tone, without waiting for a reply, “ye’ll jist take a good grip of my arm thar,” curving his wrist and hand behind him like a shepherd’s crook, “I’ll go first, and break away the brush for ye.”

She obeyed mechanically, and they fared on through the thick ferns in this fashion for some moments, he looking ahead, occasionally dropping a word of caution or encouragement, but never glancing at her face. When they reached the buggy he lifted her into it carefully—and perpendicularly, it struck her afterwards, very much as if she had been a transplanted sapling with bared and sensitive roots—and then gravely took his place beside her.

“Bein’ in the timber trade myself, ma’am,” he said, gathering up the reins, “I chanced to sight these woods, and took a look around. My name is Bowers, of Mendocino; I

reckon there ain't much that grows in the way o' standin' timber on the Pacific Slope that I don't know and can't locate, though I DO say it. I've got ez big a mill, and ez big a run in my district, ez there is anywhere. Ef you're ever up my way, you ask for Bowers—Jim Bowers—and that's ME."

There is probably nothing more conducive to conversation between strangers than a wholesome and early recognition of each other's foibles. Mr. Bowers, believing his chance acquaintance a superior woman, naively spoke of himself in a way that he hoped would reassure her that she was not compromising herself in accepting his civility, and so satisfy what must be her inevitable pride. On the other hand, the woman regained her self-possession by this exhibition of Mr. Bowers' vanity, and, revived by the refreshing breeze caused by the rapid motion of the buggy along the road, thanked him graciously.

"I suppose there are many strangers at the Green Springs Hotel," she said, after a pause.

"I didn't get to see 'em, as I only put up my hoss there," he replied. "But I know the stage took some away this mornin': it seemed pretty well loaded up when I passed it."

The woman drew a deep sigh. The act struck Mr. Bowers as a possible return of her former nervous weakness. Her attention must at once be distracted at any cost—even conversation.

"Perhaps," he began, with sudden and appalling lightness, "I'm a-talkin' to Mrs. McFadden?"

"No," said the woman, abstractedly.

“Then it must be Mrs. Delatour? There are only two township lots on that crossroad.”

“My name IS Delatour,” she said, somewhat wearily.

Mr. Bowers was conversationally stranded. He was not at all anxious to know her name, yet, knowing it now, it seemed to suggest that there was nothing more to say. He would, of course, have preferred to ask her if she had read the poetry about the Underbrush, and if she knew the poetess, and what she thought of it; but the fact that she appeared to be an “edicated” woman made him sensitive of displaying technical ignorance in his manner of talking about it. She might ask him if it was “subjective” or “objective”—two words he had heard used at the Debating Society at Mendocino on the question, “Is poetry morally beneficial?” For a few moments he was silent. But presently she took the initiative in conversation, at first slowly and abstractedly, and then, as if appreciating his sympathetic reticence, or mayhap finding some relief in monotonous expression, talked mechanically, deliberately, but unostentatiously about herself. So colorless was her intonation that at times it did not seem as if she was talking to him, but repeating some conversation she had held with another.

She had lived there ever since she had been in California. Her husband had bought the Spanish title to the property when they first married. The property at his death was found to be greatly involved; she had been obliged to part with much of it to support her children—four girls and a boy. She had been compelled to withdraw the girls from the convent at Santa Clara to help about the house; the boy was too young—she feared, too shiftless—to do anything. The farm did not pay; the land was poor; she knew nothing about farming; she had been brought up in New Orleans,

where her father had been a judge, and she didn't understand country life. Of course she had been married too young—as all girls were. Lately she had thought of selling off and moving to San Francisco, where she would open a boarding-house or a school for young ladies. He could advise her, perhaps, of some good opportunity. Her own girls were far enough advanced to assist her in teaching; one particularly, Cynthia, was quite clever, and spoke French and Spanish fluently.

As Mr. Bowers was familiar with many of these counts in the feminine American indictment of life generally, he was not perhaps greatly moved. But in the last sentence he thought he saw an opening to return to his main object, and, looking up cautiously, said:

“And mebbe write po'try now and then?” To his great discomfiture, the only effect of this suggestion was to check his companion's speech for some moments and apparently throw her back into her former abstraction. Yet, after a long pause, as they were turning into the lane, she said, as if continuing the subject:

“I only hope that, whatever my daughters may do, they won't marry young.”

The yawning breaches in the Delatour gates and fences presently came in view. They were supposed to be reinforced by half a dozen dogs, who, however, did their duty with what would seem to be the prevailing inefficiency, retiring after a single perfunctory yelp to shameless stretching, scratching, and slumber. Their places were taken on the veranda by two negro servants, two girls respectively of eight and eleven, and a boy of fourteen, who remained silently staring. As Mr. Bowers had accepted the widow's polite invitation to enter, she was compelled, albeit in an

equally dazed and helpless way, to issue some preliminary orders:

“Now, Chloe—I mean aunt Dinah—do take Eunice—I mean Victorine and Una—away, and—you know—tidy them; and you, Sarah—it’s Sarah, isn’t it?—lay some refreshment in the parlor for this gentleman. And, Bob, tell your sister Cynthia to come here with Eunice.” As Bob still remained staring at Mr. Bowers, she added, in weary explanation, “Mr. Bowers brought me over from the Summit woods in his buggy—it was so hot. There—shake hands and thank him, and run away—do!”

They crossed a broad but scantily-furnished hall. Everywhere the same look of hopeless incompleteness, temporary utility, and premature decay; most of the furniture was mismatched and misplaced; many of the rooms had changed their original functions or doubled them; a smell of cooking came from the library, on whose shelves, mingled with books, were dresses and household linen, and through the door of a room into which Mrs. Delatour retired to remove her duster Mr. Bowers caught a glimpse of a bed, and of a table covered with books and papers, at which a tall, fair girl was writing. In a few moments Mrs. Delatour returned, accompanied by this girl, and Eunice, her short-lipped sister. Bob, who joined the party seated around Mr. Bowers and a table set with cake, a decanter, and glasses, completed the group. Emboldened by the presence of the tall Cynthia and his glimpse of her previous literary attitude, Mr. Bowers resolved to make one more attempt.

“I suppose these yer young ladies sometimes go to the wood, too?” As his eye rested on Cynthia, she replied:

“Oh, yes.”

“I reckon on account of the purty shadows down in the brush, and the soft light, eh? and all that?” he continued, with a playful manner but a serious accession of color.

“Why, the woods belong to us. It’s mar’s property!” broke in Eunice with a flash of teeth.

“Well, Lordy, I wanter know!” said Mr. Bowers, in some astonishment. “Why, that’s right in my line, too! I’ve been sightin’ timber all along here, and that’s how I dropped in on yer mar.” Then, seeing a look of eagerness light up the faces of Bob and Eunice, he was encouraged to make the most of his opportunity. “Why, ma’am,” he went on, cheerfully, “I reckon you’re holdin’ that wood at a pretty stiff figger, now.”

“Why?” asked Mrs. Delatour, simply.

Mr. Bowers delivered a wink at Bob and Eunice, who were still watching him with anxiety. “Well, not on account of the actool timber, for the best of it ain’t sound,” he said, “but on account of its bein’ famous! Everybody that reads that pow’ful pretty poem about it in the ‘Excelsior Magazine’ wants to see it. Why, it would pay the Green Springs hotel-keeper to buy it up for his customers. But I s’pose you reckon to keep it—along with the poetess—in your famerly?”

Although Mr. Bowers long considered this speech as the happiest and most brilliant effort of his life, its immediate effect was not, perhaps, all that could be desired. The widow turned upon him a restrained and darkening face. Cynthia half rose with an appealing “Oh, mar!” and Bob and Eunice, having apparently pinched each other to the last stage of endurance, retired precipitately from the room in a prolonged giggle.

“I have not yet thought of disposing of the Summit woods, Mr. Bowers,” said Mrs. Delatour, coldly, “but if I should do so, I will consult you. You must excuse the children, who see so little company, they are quite unmanageable when strangers are present. Cynthia, WILL you see if the servants have looked after Mr. Bowers’ horse? You know Bob is not to be trusted.”

There was clearly nothing else for Mr. Bowers to do but to take his leave, which he did respectfully, if not altogether hopefully. But when he had reached the lane, his horse shied from the unwonted spectacle of Bob, swinging his hat, and apparently awaiting him, from the fork of a wayside sapling.

“Hol’ up, mister. Look here!”

Mr. Bowers pulled up. Bob dropped into the road, and, after a backward glance over his shoulder, said:

“Drive ‘longside the fence in the shadder.” As Mr. Bowers obeyed, Bob approached the wheels of the buggy in a manner half shy, half mysterious. “You wanter buy them Summit woods, mister?”

“Well, per’aps, sonny. Why?” smiled Mr. Bowers.

“Coz I’ll tell ye suthin’. Don’t you be fooled into allowin’ that Cynthia wrote that po’try. She didn’t—no more’n Eunice nor me. Mar kinder let ye think it, ‘cos she don’t want folks to think SHE did it. But mar wrote that po’try herself; wrote it out o’ them thar woods—all by herself. Thar’s a heap more po’try thar, you bet, and jist as good. And she’s the one that kin write it—you hear me? That’s my mar, every time! You buy that thar wood, and get mar to run it for po’try, and you’ll make your pile, sure! I

ain't lyin'. You'd better look spry: thar's another feller snoopin' 'round yere—only he barked up the wrong tree, and thought it was Cynthia, jist as you did."

"Another feller?" repeated the astonished Bowers.

"Yes; a rig'lar sport. He was orful keen on that po'try, too, you bet. So you'd better hump yourself afore somebody else cuts in. Mar got a hundred dollars for that pome, from that editor feller and his pardner. I reckon that's the rig'lar price, eh?" he added, with a sudden suspicious caution.

"I reckon so," replied Mr. Bowers, blankly. "But—look here, Bob! Do you mean to say it was your mother—your MOTHER, Bob, who wrote that poem? Are you sure?"

"D'ye think I'm lyin'?" said Bob, scornfully. "Don't I know? Don't I copy 'em out plain for her, so as folks won't know her handwrite? Go 'way! you're loony!" Then, possibly doubting if this latter expression were strictly diplomatic with the business in hand, he added, in half-reproach, half-apology, "Don't ye see I don't want ye to be fooled into losin' yer chance o' buying up that Summit wood? It's the cold truth I'm tellin' ye."

Mr. Bowers no longer doubted it. Disappointed as he undoubtedly was at first—and even self-deceived—he recognized in a flash the grim fact that the boy had stated. He recalled the apparition of the sad-faced woman in the wood—her distressed manner, that to his inexperienced mind now took upon itself the agitated trembling of disturbed mystic inspiration. A sense of sadness and remorse succeeded his first shock of disappointment.

“Well, are ye going to buy the woods?” said Bob, eying him grimly. “Ye’d better say.”

Mr. Bowers started. “I shouldn’t wonder, Bob,” he said, with a smile, gathering up his reins. “Anyhow, I’m comin’ back to see your mother this afternoon. And meantime, Bob, you keep the first chance for me.”

He drove away, leaving the youthful diplomatist standing with his bare feet in the dust. For a minute or two the young gentleman amused himself by a few light saltatory steps in the road. Then a smile of scornful superiority, mingled perhaps with a sense of previous slights and unappreciation, drew back his little upper lip, and brightened his mottled cheek.

“I’d like ter know,” he said, darkly, “what this yer God-forsaken famerly would do without ME!”

CHAPTER FIVE

It is to be presumed that the editor and Mr. Hamlin mutually kept to their tacit agreement to respect the impersonality of the poetess, for during the next three months the subject was seldom alluded to by either. Yet in that period White Violet had sent two other contributions, and on each occasion Mr. Hamlin had insisted upon increasing the honorarium to the amount of his former gift. In vain the editor pointed out the danger of this form of munificence; Mr. Hamlin retorted by saying that if he refused he would appeal to the proprietor, who certainly would not object to taking the credit of this liberality. "As to the risks," concluded Jack, sententiously, "I'll take them; and as far as you're concerned, you certainly get the worth of your money."

Indeed, if popularity was an indiction, this had become suddenly true. For the poetess' third contribution, without changing its strong local color and individuality, had been an unexpected outburst of human passion—a love-song, that touched those to whom the subtler meditative graces of the poetess had been unknown. Many people had listened to this impassioned but despairing cry from some remote and charmed solitude, who had never read poetry before, who translated it into their own limited vocabulary and more limited experience, and were inexpressibly affected to find that they, too, understood it; it was caught up and echoed by the feverish, adventurous, and unsatisfied life that filled that day and time. Even the editor was surprised and frightened. Like most cultivated men, he distrusted popularity: like all men who believe in their own individual judgment, he doubted collective wisdom. Yet now that his protegee had been accepted by others, he questioned that

judgment and became her critic. It struck him that her sudden outburst was strained; it seemed to him that in this mere contortion of passion the sibyl's robe had become rudely disarranged. He spoke to Hamlin, and even approached the tabooed subject.

“Did you see anything that suggested this sort of business in—in—that woman—I mean in—your pilgrimage, Jack?”

“No,” responded Jack, gravely. “But it's easy to see she's got hold of some hay-footed fellow up there in the mountains with straws in his hair, and is playing him for all he's worth. You won't get much more poetry out of her, I reckon.”

It was not long after this conversation that one afternoon, when the editor was alone, Mr. James Bowers entered the editorial room with much of the hesitation and irresolution of his previous visit. As the editor had not only forgotten him, but even, dissociated him with the poetess, Mr. Bowers was fain to meet his unresponsive eye and manner with some explanation.

“Ye disremember my comin' here, Mr. Editor, to ask you the name o' the lady who called herself 'White Violet,' and how you allowed you couldn't give it, but would write and ask for it?”

Mr. Editor, leaning back in his chair, now remembered the occurrence, but was distressed to add that the situation remained unchanged, and that he had received no such permission.

“Never mind THAT, my lad,” said Mr. Bowers, gravely, waving his hand. “I understand all that; but, ez I've

known the lady ever since, and am now visiting her at her house on the Summit, I reckon it don't make much matter."

It was quite characteristic of Mr. Bowers' smileless earnestness that he made no ostentation of this dramatic retort, nor of the undisguised stupefaction of the editor.

"Do you mean to say that you have met White Violet, the author of these poems?" repeated the editor.

"Which her name is Delatour—the widder Delatour—ez she has herself give me permission to tell you," continued Mr. Bowers, with a certain abstracted and automatic precision that dissipated any suggestion of malice in the reversed situation.

"Delatour!—a widow!" repeated the editor.

"With five children," continued Mr. Bowers. Then, with unalterable gravity, he briefly gave an outline of her condition and the circumstances of his acquaintance with her.

"But I reckoned YOU might have known suthin' o' this; though she never let on you did," he concluded, eying the editor with troubled curiosity.

The editor did not think it necessary to implicate Mr. Hamlin. He said, briefly, "I? Oh, no!"

"Of course, YOU might not have seen her?" said Mr. Bowers, keeping the same grave, troubled gaze on the editor.

"Of course not," said the editor, somewhat impatient under the singular scrutiny of Mr. Bowers; "and I'm very anxious to know how she looks. Tell me, what is she like?"

“She is a fine, pow’ful, eddicated woman,” said Mr. Bowers, with slow deliberation. “Yes, sir—a pow’ful woman, havin’ grand ideas of her own, and holdin’ to ‘em.” He had withdrawn his eyes from the editor, and apparently addressed the ceiling in confidence.

“But what does she look like, Mr. Bowers?” said the editor, smiling.

“Well, sir, she looks—LIKE—IT! Yes,”—with deliberate caution—“I should say, just like it.”

After a pause, apparently to allow the editor to materialize this ravishing description, he said, gently, “Are you busy just now?”

“Not very. What can I do for you?”

“Well, not much for ME, I reckon,” he returned, with a deeper respiration, that was his nearest approach to a sigh, “but suthin’ perhaps for yourself and—another. Are you married?”

“No,” said the editor, promptly.

“Nor engaged to any—young lady?”—with great politeness.

“No.”

“Well, mebbe you think it a queer thing for me to say—mebbe you reckon you KNOW it ez well ez anybody—but it’s my opinion that White Violet is in love with you.”

“With me?” ejaculated the editor, in a hopeless astonishment that at last gave way to an incredulous and irresistible laugh.

A slight touch of pain passed over Mr. Bowers’ dejected face, but left the deep outlines set with a rude dignity. “It’s SO,” he said, slowly, “though, as a young man and a gay feller, ye may think it’s funny.”

“No, not funny, but a terrible blunder, Mr. Bowers, for I give you my word I know nothing of the lady and have never set eyes upon her.”

“No, but she has on YOU. I can’t say,” continued Mr. Bowers, with sublime naivete, “that I’d ever recognize you from her description, but a woman o’ that kind don’t see with her eyes like you and me, but with all her senses to onct, and a heap more that ain’t senses as we know ‘em. The same eyes that seed down through the brush and ferns in the Summit woods, the same ears that heerd the music of the wind trailin’ through the pines, don’t see you with my eyes or hear you with my ears. And when she paints you, it’s nat’ril for a woman with that pow’ful mind and grand idees to dip her brush into her heart’s blood for warmth and color. Yer smilin’, young man. Well, go on and smile at me, my lad, but not at her. For you don’t know her. When you know her story as I do, when you know she was made a wife afore she ever knew what it was to be a young woman, when you know that the man she married never understood the kind o’ critter he was tied to no more than ef he’d been a steer yoked to a Morgan colt, when ye know she had children growin’ up around her afore she had given over bein’ a sort of child herself, when ye know she worked and slaved for that man and those children about the house—her heart, her soul, and all her pow’ful mind bein’ all the time in the woods along with the flickering leaves and the shadders—when ye mind

she couldn't get the small ways o' the ranch because she had the big ways o' Natur' that made it—then you'll understand her.”

Impressed by the sincerity of his visitor's manner, touched by the unexpected poetry of his appeal, and yet keenly alive to the absurdity of an incomprehensible blunder somewhere committed, the editor gasped almost hysterically—

“But why should all this make her in love with ME?”

“Because ye are both gifted,” returned Mr. Bowers, with sad but unconquerable conviction; “because ye're both, so to speak, in a line o' idees and business that draws ye together—to lean on each other and trust each other ez pardners. Not that YE are ezakly her ekal,” he went on, with a return to his previous exasperating naivete, “though I've heerd promisin' things of ye, and ye're still young, but in matters o' this kind there is allers one ez hez to be looked up to by the other—and gin'rally the wrong one. She looks up to you, Mr. Editor—it's part of her po'try—ez she looks down inter the brush and sees more than is plain to you and me. Not,” he continued, with a courteously deprecating wave of the hand, “ez you hain't bin kind to her—mebbe TOO kind. For thar's the purty letter you writ her, thar's the perlite, easy, captivatin' way you had with her gals and that boy—hold on!”—as the editor made a gesture of despairing renunciation—“I ain't sayin' you ain't right in keepin' it to yourself—and thar's the extry money you sent her every time. Stop! she knows it was EXTRY, for she made a p'int o' gettin' me to find out the market price o' po'try in papers and magazines, and she reckons you've bin payin' her four hundred per cent. above them figgers—hold on! I ain't sayin' it ain't free and liberal in you, and I'd have done the same thing; yet SHE thinks”—

But the editor had risen hastily to his feet with flushing cheeks.

“One moment, Mr. Bowers,” he said, hurriedly. “This is the most dreadful blunder of all. The gift is not mine. It was the spontaneous offering of another who really admired our friend’s work—a gentleman who”—He stopped suddenly.

The sound of a familiar voice, lightly humming, was borne along the passage; the light tread of a familiar foot was approaching. The editor turned quickly towards the open door—so quickly that Mr. Bowers was fain to turn also.

For a charming instant the figure of Jack Hamlin, handsome, careless, and confident, was framed in the doorway. His dark eyes, with their habitual scorn of his average fellow-man, swept superciliously over Mr. Bowers, and rested for an instant with caressing familiarity on the editor.

“Well, sonny, any news from the old girl at the Summit?”

“No-o,” hastily stammered the editor, with a half-hysterical laugh. “No, Jack. Excuse me a moment.”

“All right; busy, I see. Hasta manana.”

The picture vanished, the frame was empty.

“You see,” continued the editor, turning to Mr. Bowers, “there has been a mistake. I”—but he stopped suddenly at the ashen face of Mr. Bowers, still fixed in the direction of the vanished figure.

“Are you ill?”

Mr. Bowers did not reply, but slowly withdrew his eyes, and turned them heavily on the editor. Then, drawing a longer, deeper breath, he picked up his soft felt hat, and, moulding it into shape in his hands as if preparing to put it on, he moistened his dry, grayish lips, and said, gently:

“Friend o’ yours?”

“Yes,” said the editor—“Jack Hamlin. Of course, you know him?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Bowers here put his hat on his head, and, after a pause, turned round slowly once or twice, as if he had forgotten it, and was still seeking it. Finally he succeeded in finding the editor’s hand, and shook it, albeit his own trembled slightly. Then he said:

“I reckon you’re right. There’s bin a mistake. I see it now. Good-by. If you’re ever up my way, drop in and see me.” He then walked to the doorway, passed out, and seemed to melt into the afternoon shadows of the hall.

He never again entered the office of the “Excelsior Magazine,” neither was any further contribution ever received from White Violet. To a polite entreaty from the editor, addressed first to “White Violet” and then to Mrs. Delatour, there was no response. The thought of Mr. Hamlin’s cynical prophecy disturbed him, but that gentleman, preoccupied in filling some professional engagements in Sacramento, gave him no chance to acquire further explanations as to the past or the future. The youthful editor was at first in despair and filled with a vague remorse

of some unfulfilled duty. But, to his surprise, the readers of the magazine seemed to survive their talented contributor, and the feverish life that had been thrilled by her song, in two months had apparently forgotten her. Nor was her voice lifted from any alien quarter; the domestic and foreign press that had echoed her lays seemed to respond no longer to her utterance.

It is possible that some readers of these pages may remember a previous chronicle by the same historian wherein it was recorded that the volatile spirit of Mr. Hamlin, slightly assisted by circumstances, passed beyond these voices at the Ranch of the Blessed Fisherman, some two years later. As the editor stood beside the body of his friend on the morning of the funeral, he noticed among the flowers laid upon his bier by loving hands a wreath of white violets. Touched and disturbed by a memory long since forgotten, he was further embarrassed, as the cortege dispersed in the Mission graveyard, by the apparition of the tall figure of Mr. James Bowers from behind a monumental column. The editor turned to him quickly.

“I am glad to see you here,” he said, awkwardly, and he knew not why; then, after a pause, “I trust you can give me some news of Mrs. Delatour. I wrote to her nearly two years ago, but had no response.”

“Thar’s bin no Mrs. Delatour for two years,” said Mr. Bowers, contemplatively stroking his beard; “and mebbe that’s why. She’s bin for two years Mrs. Bowers.”

“I congratulate you,” said the editor; “but I hope there still remains a White Violet, and that, for the sake of literature, she has not given up”—

“Mrs. Bowers,” interrupted Mr. Bowers, with singular deliberation, “found that makin’ po’try and tendin’ to the cares of a growin’-up famerly was irritatin’ to the narves. They didn’t jibe, so to speak. What Mrs. Bowers wanted—and what, po’try or no po’try, I’ve bin tryin’ to give her—was Rest! She’s bin havin’ it comfor’bly up at my ranch at Mendocino, with her children and me. Yes, sir”—his eye wandered accidentally to the new-made grave—“you’ll excuse my sayin’ it to a man in your profession, but it’s what most folks will find is a heap better than readin’ or writin’ or actin’ po’try—and that’s Rest!”

How Reuben Allen “Saw Life” in San Francisco

The junior partner of the firm of Sparlow & Kane, “Druggists and Apothecaries,” of San Francisco, was gazing meditatively out of the corner of the window of their little shop in Dupont Street. He could see the dimly lit perspective of the narrow thoroughfare fade off into the level sand wastes of Market Street on the one side, and plunge into the half-excavated bulk of Telegraph Hill on the other. He could see the glow and hear the rumble of Montgomery Street—the great central avenue farther down the hill. Above the housetops was spread the warm blanket of sea-fog under which the city was regularly laid to sleep every summer night to the cool lullaby of the Northwest Trades. It was already half-past eleven; footsteps on the wooden pavement were getting rarer and more remote; the last cart had rumbled by; the shutters were up along the street; the glare of his own red and blue jars was the only beacon left to guide the wayfarers. Ordinarily he would have been going home at this hour, when his partner, who occupied the surgery and a small bedroom at the rear of the shop, always returned to relieve him. That night, however, a professional visit would detain the “Doctor” until half-past twelve. There was still an hour to wait. He felt drowsy; the mysterious incense of the shop, that combined essence of drugs, spice, scented soap, and orris root—which always reminded him of the Arabian Nights—was affecting him. He yawned, and then, turning away, passed behind the counter, took down a jar labeled “Glycyrr. Glabra,” selected a piece of Spanish licorice, and meditatively sucked it. Not receiving from it that diversion

and sustenance he apparently was seeking, he also visited, in an equally familiar manner, a jar marked "Jujubes," and returned ruminatingly to his previous position.

If I have not in this incident sufficiently established the youthfulness of the junior partner, I may add briefly that he was just nineteen, that he had early joined the emigration to California, and after one or two previous light-hearted essays at other occupations, for which he was singularly unfitted, he had saved enough to embark on his present venture, still less suited to his temperament. In those adventurous days trades and vocations were not always filled by trained workmen; it was extremely probable that the experienced chemist was already making his success as a gold-miner, with a lawyer and a physician for his partners, and Mr. Kane's inexperienced position was by no means a novel one. A slight knowledge of Latin as a written language, an American schoolboy's acquaintance with chemistry and natural philosophy, were deemed sufficient by his partner, a regular physician, for practical cooperation in the vending of drugs and putting up of prescriptions. He knew the difference between acids and alkalies and the peculiar results which attended their incautious combination. But he was excessively deliberate, painstaking, and cautious. The legend which adorned the desk at the counter, "Physicians' prescriptions carefully prepared," was more than usually true as regarded the adverb. There was no danger of his poisoning anybody through haste or carelessness, but it was possible that an urgent "case" might have succumbed to the disease while he was putting up the remedy. Nor was his caution entirely passive. In those days the "heroic" practice of medicine was in keeping with the abnormal development of the country; there were "record" doses of calomel and quinine, and he had once or twice incurred the fury of local practitioners by sending back their prescriptions with a modest query.

The far-off clatter of carriage wheels presently arrested his attention; looking down the street, he could see the lights of a hackney carriage advancing towards him. They had already flashed upon the open crossing a block beyond before his vague curiosity changed into an active instinctive presentiment that they were coming to the shop. He withdrew to a more becoming and dignified position behind the counter as the carriage drew up with a jerk before the door.

The driver rolled from his box and opened the carriage door to a woman whom he assisted, between some hysterical exclamations on her part and some equally incoherent explanations of his own, into the shop. Kane saw at a glance that both were under the influence of liquor, and one, the woman, was disheveled and bleeding about the head. Yet she was elegantly dressed and evidently en fete, with one or two "tricolor" knots and ribbons mingled with her finery. Her golden hair, matted and darkened with blood, had partly escaped from her French bonnet and hung heavily over her shoulders. The driver, who was supporting her roughly, and with a familiarity that was part of the incongruous spectacle, was the first to speak.

"Madame le Blank! ye know! Got cut about the head down at the fete at South Park! Tried to dance upon the table, and rolled over on some champagne bottles. See? Wants plastering up!"

"Ah brute! Hog! Nozzing of ze kine! Why will you lie? I dance! Ze cowards, fools, traitors zere upset ze table and I fall. I am cut! Ah, my God, how I am cut!"

She stopped suddenly and lapsed heavily against the counter. At which Kane hurried around to support her into the surgery with the one fixed idea in his bewildered mind

of getting her out of the shop, and, suggestively, into the domain and under the responsibility of his partner. The hackman, apparently relieved and washing his hands of any further complicity in the matter, nodded and smiled, and saying, "I reckon I'll wait outside, pardner," retreated incontinently to his vehicle. To add to Kane's half-ludicrous embarrassment the fair patient herself slightly resisted his support, accused the hackman of "abandoning her," and demanded if Kane knew "zee reason of zees affair," yet she presently lapsed again into the large reclining-chair which he had wheeled forward, with open mouth, half-shut eyes, and a strange Pierrette mask of face, combined of the pallor of faintness and chalk, and the rouge of paint and blood. At which Kane's cautiousness again embarrassed him. A little brandy from the bottle labeled "Vini Galli" seemed to be indicated, but his inexperience could not determine if her relaxation was from bloodlessness or the reacting depression of alcohol. In this dilemma he chose a medium course, with aromatic spirits of ammonia, and mixing a diluted quantity in a measuring-glass, poured it between her white lips. A start, a struggle, a cough—a volley of imprecatory French, and the knocking of the glass from his hand followed—but she came to! He quickly sponged her head of the half-coagulated blood, and removed a few fragments of glass from a long laceration of the scalp. The shock of the cold water and the appearance of the ensanguined basin frightened her into a momentary passivity. But when Kane found it necessary to cut her hair in the region of the wound in order to apply the adhesive plaster, she again endeavored to rise and grasp the scissors.

"You'll bleed to death if you're not quiet," said the young man with dogged gravity.

Something in his manner impressed her into silence again. He cut whole locks away ruthlessly; he was

determined to draw the edges of the wound together with the strip of plaster and stop the bleeding— if he cropped the whole head. His excessive caution for her physical condition did not extend to her superficial adornment. Her yellow tresses lay on the floor, her neck and shoulders were saturated with water from the sponge which he continually applied, until the heated strips of plaster had closed the wound almost hermetically. She whimpered, tears ran down her cheeks; but so long as it was not blood the young man was satisfied.

In the midst of it he heard the shop door open, and presently the sound of rapping on the counter. Another customer!

Mr. Kane called out, "Wait a moment," and continued his ministrations. After a pause the rapping recommenced. Kane was just securing the last strip of plaster and preserved a preoccupied silence. Then the door flew open abruptly and a figure appeared impatiently on the threshold. It was that of a miner recently returned from the gold diggings—so recently that he evidently had not had time to change his clothes at his adjacent hotel, and stood there in his high boots, duck trousers, and flannel shirt, over which his coat was slung like a hussar's jacket from his shoulder. Kane would have uttered an indignant protest at the intrusion, had not the intruder himself as quickly recoiled with an astonishment and contrition that was beyond the effect of any reproof. He literally gasped at the spectacle before him. A handsomely dressed woman reclining in a chair; lace and jewelry and ribbons depending from her saturated shoulders; tresses of golden hair filling her lap and lying on the floor; a pail of ruddy water and a sponge at her feet, and a pale young man bending over her head with a spirit lamp and strips of yellow plaster!

“Scuse me, pard! I was just dropping in; don’t you hurry! I kin wait,” he stammered, falling back, and then the door closed abruptly behind him.

Kane gathered up the shorn locks, wiped the face and neck of his patient with a clean towel and his own handkerchief, threw her gorgeous opera cloak over her shoulders, and assisted her to rise. She did so, weakly but obediently; she was evidently stunned and cowed in some mysterious way by his material attitude, perhaps, or her sudden realization of her position; at least the contrast between her aggressive entrance into the shop and her subdued preparation for her departure was so remarkable that it affected even Kane’s preoccupation.

“There,” he said, slightly relaxing his severe demeanor with an encouraging smile, “I think this will do; we’ve stopped the bleeding. It will probably smart a little as the plaster sets closer. I can send my partner, Doctor Sparlow, to you in the morning.”

She looked at him curiously and with a strange smile. “And zees Doctor Sparlow—eez he like you, M’sieu?”

“He is older, and very well known,” said the young man seriously. “I can safely recommend him.”

“Ah,” she repeated, with a pensive smile which made Kane think her quite pretty. “Ah—he ez older—your Doctor Sparlow—but *you* are strong, M’sieu.”

“And,” said Kane vaguely, “he will tell you what to do.”

“Ah,” she repeated again softly, with the same smile, “he will tell me what to do if I shall not know myself. Dat ez good.”

Kane had already wrapped her shorn locks in a piece of spotless white paper and tied it up with narrow white ribbon in the dainty fashion dear to druggists’ clerks. As he handed it to her she felt in her pocket and produced a handful of gold.

“What shall I pay for zees, M’sieu?”

Kane reddened a little—solely because of his slow arithmetical faculties. Adhesive plaster was cheap—he would like to have charged proportionately for the exact amount he had used; but the division was beyond him! And he lacked the trader’s instinct.

“Twenty-five cents, I think,” he hazarded briefly.

She started, but smiled again. “Twenty-five cents for all zees—ze medicine, ze strips for ze head, ze hair cut”—she glanced at the paper parcel he had given her—“it is only twenty-five cents?”

“That’s all.”

He selected from her outstretched palm, with some difficulty, the exact amount, the smallest coin it held. She again looked at him curiously—half confusedly—and moved slowly into the shop. The miner, who was still there, retreated as before with a gaspingly apologetic gesture—even flattening himself against the window to give her sweeping silk flounces freer passage. As she passed into the street with a “Merci, M’sieu, good a’night,” and the hackman started from the vehicle to receive her, the miner

drew a long breath, and bringing his fist down upon the counter, ejaculated—

“B’gosh! She’s a stunner!”

Kane, a good deal relieved at her departure and the success of his ministrations, smiled benignly.

The stranger again stared after the retreating carriage, looked around the shop, and even into the deserted surgery, and approached the counter confidentially. “Look yer, pardner. I kem straight from Saint Jo, Mizzorri, to Gold Hill—whar I’ve got a claim—and I reckon this is the first time I ever struck San Francisker. I ain’t up to townty ways nohow, and I allow that mebbe I’m rather green. So we’ll let that pass! Now look yer!” he added, leaning over the counter with still deeper and even mysterious confidence, “I suppose this yer kind o’ thing is the regular go here, eh? nothin’ new to *you!* in course no! But to me, pard, it’s just fetchin’ me! Lifts me clear outer my boots every time! Why, when I popped into that thar room, and saw that lady—all gold, furbelows, and spangles—at twelve o’clock at night, sittin’ in that cheer and you a-cuttin’ her h’r and swabbin’ her head o’ blood, and kinder prospectin’ for ‘indications,’ so to speak, and doin’ it so kam and indifferent like, I sez to myself, ‘Rube, Rube,’ sez I, ‘this yer’s life! city life! San Francisker life! and b’gosh, you’ve dropped into it! Now, pard, look yar! don’t you answer, ye know, ef it ain’t square and above board for me to know; I ain’t askin’ you to give the show away, ye know, in the matter of high-toned ladies like that, but” (very mysteriously, and sinking his voice to the lowest confidential pitch, as he put his hand to his ear as if to catch the hushed reply), “what mout hev bin happening, pard?”

Considerably amused at the man's simplicity, Kane replied good-humoredly: "Danced among some champagne bottles on a table at a party, fell and got cut by glass."

The stranger nodded his head slowly and approvingly as he repeated with infinite deliberateness: "Danced on champagne bottles, champagne! you said, pard? at a party! Yes!" (musingly and approvingly). "I reckon that's about the gait they take. *She'd* do it."

"Is there anything I can do for you? sorry to have kept you waiting," said Kane, glancing at the clock.

"O *me!* Lord! ye needn't mind me. Why, I should wait for anythin' o' the like o' that, and be just proud to do it! And ye see, I sorter helped myself while you war busy."

"Helped yourself?" said Kane in astonishment.

"Yes, outer that bottle." He pointed to the ammonia bottle, which still stood on the counter. "It seemed to be handy and popular."

"Man! you might have poisoned yourself."

The stranger paused a moment at the idea. "So I mout, I reckon," he said musingly, "that's so! pizined myself jest ez you was lookin' arter that high-toned case, and kinder bothered you! It's like me!"

"I mean it required diluting; you ought to have taken it in water," said Kane.

"I reckon! It *did* sorter h'ist me over to the door for a little fresh air at first! seemed rayther scaldy to the lips. But

wot of it that *got thar*,” he put his hand gravely to his stomach, “did me pow’ful good.”

“What was the matter with you?” asked Kane.

“Well, ye see, pard” (confidentially again), “I reckon it’s suthin’ along o’ my heart. Times it gets to poundin’ away like a quartz stamp, and then it stops suddent like, and kinder leaves *me* out too.”

Kane looked at him more attentively. He was a strong, powerfully built man with a complexion that betrayed nothing more serious than the effects of mining cookery. It was evidently a common case of indigestion.

“I don’t say it would not have done you some good if properly administered,” he replied. “If you like I’ll put up a diluted quantity and directions?”

“That’s me, every time, pardner!” said the stranger with an accent of relief. “And look yer, don’t you stop at that! Ye just put me up some samples like of anythin’ you think mout be likely to hit. I’ll go in for a fair show, and then meander in every now and then, betwixt times, to let you know. Ye don’t mind my drifting in here, do ye? It’s about ez likely a place ez I struck since I’ve left the Sacramento boat, and my hotel, just round the corner. Ye just sample me a bit o’ everythin’; don’t mind the expense. I’ll take *your* word for it. The way you—a young fellow—jest stuck to your work in thar, cool and kam as a woodpecker—not minding how high-toned she was—nor the jewelery and spangles she had on—jest got me! I sez to myself, ‘Rube,’ sez I, ‘whatever’s wrong o’ *your* insides, you jest stick to that feller to set ye right.’”

The junior partner's face reddened as he turned to his shelves ostensibly for consultation. Conscious of his inexperience, the homely praise of even this ignorant man was not ungrateful. He felt, too, that his treatment of the Frenchwoman, though successful, might not be considered remunerative from a business point of view by his partner. He accordingly acted upon the suggestion of the stranger and put up two or three specifics for dyspepsia. They were received with grateful alacrity and the casual display of considerable gold in the stranger's pocket in the process of payment. He was evidently a successful miner.

After bestowing the bottles carefully about his person, he again leaned confidentially towards Kane. "I reckon of course you know this high-toned lady, being in the way of seein' that kind o' folks. I suppose you won't mind telling me, ez a stranger. But" (he added hastily, with a deprecatory wave of his hand), "perhaps ye would."

Mr. Kane, in fact, had hesitated. He knew vaguely and by report that Madame le Blanc was the proprietress of a famous restaurant, over which she had rooms where private gambling was carried on to a great extent. It was also alleged that she was protected by a famous gambler and a somewhat notorious bully. Mr. Kane's caution suggested that he had no right to expose the reputation of his chance customer. He was silent.

The stranger's face became intensely sympathetic and apologetic. "I see!—not another word, pard! It ain't the square thing to be givin' her away, and I oughtn't to hev asked. Well—so long! I reckon I'll jest drift back to the hotel. I ain't been in San Francisker mor' 'n three hours, and I calkilate, pard, that I've jest seen about ez square a sample of high-toned life as fellers ez haz bin here a year. Well, hastermanyanner—ez the Greasers say. I'll be droppin' in

to-morrow. My name's Reuben Allen o' Mariposa. I know yours; it's on the sign, and it ain't Sparlow."

He cast another lingering glance around the shop, as if loath to leave it, and then slowly sauntered out of the door, pausing in the street a moment, in the glare of the red light, before he faded into darkness. Without knowing exactly why, Kane had an instinct that the stranger knew no one in San Francisco, and after leaving the shop was going into utter silence and obscurity.

A few moments later Doctor Sparlow returned to relieve his wearied partner. A pushing, active man, he listened impatiently to Kane's account of his youthful practice with Madame le Blanc, without, however, dwelling much on his methods. "You ought to have charged her more," the elder said decisively. "She'd have paid it. She only came here because she was ashamed to go to a big shop in Montgomery Street—and she won't come again."

"But she wants you to see her to-morrow," urged Kane, "and I told her you would!"

"You say it was only a superficial cut?" queried the doctor, "and you closed it? Umph! what can she want to see *me* for?" He paid more attention, however, to the case of the stranger, Allen. "When he comes here again, manage to let me see him." Mr. Kane promised, yet for some indefinable reason he went home that night not quite as well satisfied with himself.

He was much more concerned the next morning when, after relieving the doctor for his regular morning visits, he was startled an hour later by the abrupt return of that gentleman. His face was marked by some excitement and anxiety, which nevertheless struggled with that sense of

the ludicrous which Californians in those days imported into most situations of perplexity or catastrophe. Putting his hands deeply into his trousers pockets, he confronted his youthful partner behind the counter.

“How much did you charge that French-woman?” he said gravely.

“Twenty-five cents,” said Kane timidly.

“Well, I’d give it back and add two hundred and fifty dollars if she had never entered the shop.”

“What’s the matter?”

“Her head will be—and a mass of it, in a day, I reckon! Why, man, you put enough plaster on it to clothe and paper the dome of the Capitol! You drew her scalp together so that she couldn’t shut her eyes without climbing up the bed-post! You mowed her hair off so that she’ll have to wear a wig for the next two years—and handed it to her in a beautiful sealed package! They talk of suing me and killing you out of hand.”

“She was bleeding a great deal and looked faint,” said the junior partner; “I thought I ought to stop that.”

“And you did—by thunder! Though it might have been better business for the shop if I’d found her a crumbling ruin here, than lathed and plastered in this fashion, over there! However,” he added, with a laugh, seeing an angry light in his junior partner’s eye, “*she* don’t seem to mind it—the cursing all comes from *them*. *She* rather likes your style and praises it—that’s what gets me! Did you talk to her much,” he added, looking critically at his partner.

“I only told her to sit still or she’d bleed to death,” said Kane curtly.

“Humph!—she jabbered something about your being ‘strong’ and knowing just how to handle her. Well, it can’t be helped now. I think I came in time for the worst of it and have drawn their fire. Don’t do it again. The next time a woman with a cut head and long hair tackles you, fill up her scalp with lint and tannin, and pack her off to some of the big shops and make *them* pick it out.” And with a good-humored nod he started off to finish his interrupted visits.

With a vague sense of remorse, and yet a consciousness of some injustice done him, Mr. Kane resumed his occupation with filters and funnels, and mortars and triturations. He was so gloomily preoccupied that he did not, as usual, glance out of the window, or he would have observed the mining stranger of the previous night before it. It was not until the man’s bowed shoulders blocked the light of the doorway that he looked up and recognized him. Kane was in no mood to welcome his appearance. His presence, too, actively recalled the last night’s adventure of which he was a witness—albeit a sympathizing one. Kane shrank from the illusions which he felt he would be sure to make. And with his present ill luck, he was by no means sure that his ministrations even to *him* had been any more successful than they had been to the Frenchwoman. But a glance at his good-humored face and kindling eyes removed that suspicion. Nevertheless, he felt somewhat embarrassed and impatient, and perhaps could not entirely conceal it. He forgot that the rudest natures are sometimes the most delicately sensitive to slights, and the stranger had noticed his manner and began apologetically.

“I allowed I’d just drop in anyway to tell ye that these thar pills you giv’ me did me a heap o’ good so far—though

mebbe it's only fair to give the others a show too, which I'm reckoning to do." He paused, and then in a submissive confidence went on: "But first I wanted to hev you excuse me for havin' asked all them questions about that high-toned lady last night, when it warn't none of my business. I am a darned fool."

Mr. Kane instantly saw that it was no use to keep up his attitude of secrecy, or impose upon the ignorant, simple man, and said hurriedly: "Oh no. The lady is very well known. She is the proprietress of a restaurant down the street—a house open to everybody. Her name is Madame le Blanc; you may have heard of her before?"

To his surprise the man exhibited no diminution of interest nor change of sentiment at this intelligence. "Then," he said slowly, "I reckon I might get to see her again. Ye see, Mr. Kane, I rather took a fancy to her general style and gait—arter seein' her in that fix last night. It was rather like them play pictures on the stage. Ye don't think she'd make any fuss to seein' a rough old 'forty-niner' like me?"

"Hardly," said Kane, "but there might be some objection from her gentlemen friends," he added, with a smile—"Jack Lane, a gambler, who keeps a faro bank in her rooms, and Jimmy O'Ryan, a prize-fighter, who is one of her 'chuckers out.'"

His further relation of Madame le Blanc's entourage apparently gave the miner no concern. He looked at Kane, nodded, and repeated slowly and appreciatively: "Yes, keeps a gamblin' and faro bank and a prize-fighter—I reckon that might be about her gait and style too. And you say she lives"—

He stopped, for at this moment a man entered the shop quickly, shut the door behind him, and turned the key in the lock. It was done so quickly that Kane instinctively felt that the man had been loitering in the vicinity and had approached from the side street. A single glance at the intruder's face and figure showed him that it was the bully of whom he had just spoken. He had seen that square, brutal face once before, confronting the police in a riot, and had not forgotten it. But today, with the flush of liquor on it, it had an impatient awkwardness and confused embarrassment that he could not account for. He did not comprehend that the genuine bully is seldom deliberate of attack, and is obliged—in common with many of the combative lower animals—to lash himself into a previous fury of provocation. This probably saved him, as perhaps some instinctive feeling that he was in no immediate danger kept him cool. He remained standing quietly behind the counter. Allen glanced around carelessly, looking at the shelves.

The silence of the two men apparently increased the ruffian's rage and embarrassment. Suddenly he leaped into the air with a whoop and clumsily executed a negro double shuffle on the floor, which jarred the glasses—yet was otherwise so singularly ineffective and void of purpose that he stopped in the midst of it and had to content himself with glaring at Kane.

“Well,” said Kane quietly, “what does all this mean? What do you want here?”

“What does it mean?” repeated the bully, finding his voice in a high falsetto, designed to imitate Kane's. “It means I'm going to play merry h-ll with this shop! It means I'm goin' to clean it out and the blank hair-cuttin' blank that keeps it. What do I want here? Well—what I want I intend to help myself to, and all h-ll can't stop me! And” (working

himself to the striking point) “who the blank are you to ask me?” He sprang towards the counter, but at the same moment Allen seemed to slip almost imperceptibly and noiselessly between them, and Kane found himself confronted only by the miner’s broad back.

“Hol’ yer hosses, stranger,” said Allen slowly, as the ruffian suddenly collided with his impassive figure. “I’m a sick man comin’ in yer for medicine. I’ve got somethin’ wrong with my heart, and goin’ s on like this yer kinder sets it to thumpin’.”

“Blank you and your blank heart!” screamed the bully, turning in a fury of amazement and contempt at this impotent interruption. “Who”—but his voice stopped. Allen’s powerful right arm had passed over his head and shoulders like a steel hoop, and pinioned his elbows against his sides. Held rigidly upright, he attempted to kick, but Allen’s right leg here advanced, and firmly held his lower limbs against the counter that shook to his struggles and blasphemous outcries. Allen turned quietly to Kane, and, with a gesture of his unemployed arm, said confidentially:

“Would ye mind passing me down that ar Romantic Spirits of Ammonyer ye gave me last night?”

Kane caught the idea, and handed him the bottle.

“Thar,” said Allen, taking out the stopper and holding the pungent spirit against the bully’s dilated nostrils and vociferous mouth, “thar, smell that, and taste it, it will do ye good; it was powerful kammin’ to *me* last night.”

The ruffian gasped, coughed, choked, but his blaspheming voice died away in a suffocating hiccough.

“Thar,” continued Allen, as his now subdued captive relaxed his struggling, “ye ‘r’ better, and so am I. It’s quieter here now, and ye ain’t affectin’ my heart so bad. A little fresh air will make us both all right.” He turned again to Kane in his former subdued confidential manner.

“Would ye mind openin’ that door?”

Kane flew to the door, unlocked it, and held it wide open. The bully again began to struggle, but a second inhalation of the hartshorn quelled him, and enabled his captor to drag him to the door. As they emerged upon the sidewalk, the bully, with a final desperate struggle, freed his arm and grasped his pistol at his hip-pocket, but at the same moment Allen deliberately caught his hand, and with a powerful side throw cast him on the pavement, retaining the weapon in his own hand. “I’ve one of my own,” he said to the prostrate man, “but I reckon I’ll keep this yer too, until you’re better.”

The crowd that had collected quickly, recognizing the notorious and discomfited bully, were not of a class to offer him any sympathy, and he slunk away followed by their jeers. Allen returned quietly to the shop. Kane was profuse in his thanks, and yet oppressed with his simple friend’s fatuous admiration for a woman who could keep such ruffians in her employ. “You know who that man was, I suppose?” he said.

“I reckon it was that ‘er prize-fighter belongin’ to that high-toned lady,” returned Allen simply. “But he don’t know anything about *rastlin*, b’gosh; only that I was afraid o’ bringin’ on that heart trouble, I mout hev hurt him bad.”

“They think”—hesitated Kane, “that—I—was rough in my treatment of that woman and maliciously cut off her

hair. This attack was revenge—or”—he hesitated still more, as he remembered Doctor Sparlow’s indication of the woman’s feeling—“or that bully’s idea of revenge.”

“I see,” nodded Allen, opening his small sympathetic eyes on Kane with an exasperating air of secrecy—“just jealousy.”

Kane reddened in sheer hopelessness of explanation. “No; it was earning his wages, as he thought.”

“Never ye mind, pard,” said Allen confidentially. “I’ll set ‘em both right. Ye see, this sorter gives me a show to call at that thar restaurant and give *him* back his six-shooter, and set her on the right trail for you. Why, Lordy! I was here when you was fixin’ her—I’m testimony o’ the way you did it—and she’ll remember me. I’ll sorter waltz round thar this afternoon. But I reckon I won’t be keepin’ *you* from your work any longer. And look yar!—I say, pard!—this is seein’ life in ‘Frisco—ain’t it? Gosh! I’ve had more high times in this very shop in two days, than I’ve had in two years of Saint Jo. So long, Mr. Kane!” He waved his hand, lounged slowly out of the shop, gave a parting glance up the street, passed the window, and was gone.

The next day being a half-holiday for Kane, he did not reach the shop until afternoon. “Your mining friend Allen has been here,” said Doctor Sparlow. “I took the liberty of introducing myself, and induced him to let me carefully examine him. He was a little shy, and I am sorry for it, as I fear he has some serious organic trouble with his heart and ought to have a more thorough examination.” Seeing Kane’s unaffected concern, he added, “You might influence him to do so. He’s a good fellow and ought to take some care of himself. By the way, he told me to tell you that

he'd seen Madame le Blanc and made it all right about you. He seems to be quite infatuated with the woman."

"I'm sorry he ever saw her," said Kane bitterly.

"Well, his seeing her seems to have saved the shop from being smashed up, and you from getting a punched head," returned the Doctor with a laugh. "He's no fool—yet it's a freak of human nature that a simple hayseed like that—a man who's lived in the backwoods all his life, is likely to be the first to tumble before a pot of French rouge like her."

Indeed, in a couple of weeks, there was no further doubt of Mr. Reuben Allen's infatuation. He dropped into the shop frequently on his way to and from the restaurant, where he now regularly took his meals; he spent his evenings in gambling in its private room. Yet Kane was by no means sure that he was losing his money there unfairly, or that he was used as a pigeon by the proprietress and her friends. The bully O'Ryan was turned away; Sparlow grimly suggested that Allen had simply taken his place, but Kane ingeniously retorted that the Doctor was only piqued because Allen had evaded his professional treatment. Certainly the patient had never consented to another examination, although he repeatedly and gravely bought medicines, and was a generous customer. Once or twice Kane thought it his duty to caution Allen against his new friends and enlighten him as to Madame le Blanc's reputation, but his suggestions were received with a good-humored submission that was either the effect of unbelief or of perfect resignation to the fact, and he desisted. One morning Doctor Sparlow said cheerfully:

"Would you like to hear the last thing about your friend and the Frenchwoman? The boys can't account for her singling out a fellow like that for her friend, so they say that

the night that she cut herself at the fete and dropped in here for assistance, she found nobody here but Allen—a chance customer! That it was *he* who cut off her hair and bound up her wounds in that sincere fashion, and she believed he had saved her life.” The Doctor grinned maliciously as he added: “And as that’s the way history is written you see your reputation is safe.”

It may have been a month later that San Francisco was thrown into a paroxysm of horror and indignation over the assassination of a prominent citizen and official in the gambling-rooms of Madame le Blanc, at the hands of a notorious gambler. The gambler had escaped, but in one of those rare spasms of vengeful morality which sometimes overtakes communities who have too long winked at and suffered the existence of evil, the fair proprietress and her whole entourage were arrested and haled before the coroner’s jury at the inquest. The greatest excitement prevailed; it was said that if the jury failed in their duty, the Vigilance Committee had arranged for the destruction of the establishment and the deportation of its inmates. The crowd that had collected around the building was reinforced by Kane and Doctor Sparlow, who had closed their shop in the next block to attend. When Kane had fought his way into the building and the temporary court, held in the splendidly furnished gambling saloon, whose gilded mirrors reflected the eager faces of the crowd, the Chief of Police was giving his testimony in a formal official manner, impressive only for its relentless and impassive revelation of the character and antecedents of the proprietress. The house had been long under the espionage of the police; Madame le Blanc had a dozen aliases; she was “wanted” in New Orleans, in New York, in Havana! It was in *her* house that Dyer, the bank clerk, committed suicide; it was there that Colonel Hooley was set upon by her bully, O’Ryan; it was she—Kane heard with reddening cheeks—who defied the police with riotous

conduct at a fete two months ago. As he coolly recited the counts of this shameful indictment, Kane looked eagerly around for Allen, whom he knew had been arrested as a witness. How would *he* take this terrible disclosure? He was sitting with the others, his arm thrown over the back of his chair, and his good-humored face turned towards the woman, in his old confidential attitude. *She*, gorgeously dressed, painted, but unblushing, was cool, collected, and cynical.

The Coroner next called the only witness of the actual tragedy, "Reuben Allen." The man did not move nor change his position. The summons was repeated; a policeman touched him on the shoulder. There was a pause, and the officer announced: "He has fainted, your Honor!"

"Is there a physician present?" asked the Coroner.

Sparlow edged his way quickly to the front. "I'm a medical man," he said to the Coroner, as he passed quickly to the still, upright, immovable figure and knelt beside it with his head upon his heart. There was an awed silence as, after a pause, he rose slowly to his feet.

"The witness is a patient, your Honor, whom I examined some weeks ago and found suffering from valvular disease of the heart. He is dead."

High-Water Mark

When the tide was out on the Dedlow Marsh, its extended dreariness was patent. Its spongy, low-lying surface, sluggish, inky pools, and tortuous sloughs, twisting their slimy way, eel-like, toward the open bay, were all hard facts. So were the few green tussocks, with their scant blades, their amphibious flavor and unpleasant dampness. And if you choose to indulge your fancy—although the flat monotony of the Dedlow Marsh was not inspiring—the wavy line of scattered drift gave an unpleasant consciousness of the spent waters, and made the dead certainty of the returning tide a gloomy reflection which no present sunshine could dissipate. The greener meadowland seemed oppressed with this idea, and made no positive attempt at vegetation until the work of reclamation should be complete. In the bitter fruit of the low cranberry bushes one might fancy he detected a naturally sweet disposition curdled and soured by an injudicious course of too much regular cold water.

The vocal expression of the Dedlow Marsh was also melancholy and depressing. The sepulchral boom of the bittern, the shriek of the curlew, the scream of passing brent, the wrangling of quarrelsome teal, the sharp, querulous protest of the startled crane, and syllabled complaint of the “killdeer” plover, were beyond the power of written expression. Nor was the aspect of these mournful fowls at all cheerful and inspiring. Certainly not the blue heron standing mid-leg deep in the water, obviously catching cold in a reckless disregard of wet feet and consequences; nor the mournful curlew, the dejected plover, or the low-spirited

snipe, who saw fit to join him in his suicidal contemplation; nor the impassive kingfisher—an ornithological Marius—reviewing the desolate expanse; nor the black raven that went to and fro over the face of the marsh continually, but evidently couldn't make up his mind whether the waters had subsided, and felt low-spirited in the reflection that, after all this trouble, he wouldn't be able to give a definite answer. On the contrary, it was evident at a glance that the dreary expanse of Dedlow Marsh told unpleasantly on the birds, and that the season of migration was looked forward to with a feeling of relief and satisfaction by the full-grown, and of extravagant anticipation by the callow, brood. But if Dedlow Marsh was cheerless at the slack of the low tide, you should have seen it when the tide was strong and full. When the damp air blew chilly over the cold, glittering expanse, and came to the faces of those who looked seaward like another tide; when a steel-like glint marked the low hollows and the sinuous line of slough; when the great shell-incrusted trunks of fallen trees arose again, and went forth on their dreary, purposeless wanderings, drifting hither and thither, but getting no farther toward any goal at the falling tide or the day's decline than the cursed Hebrew in the legend; when the glossy ducks swung silently, making neither ripple nor furrow on the shimmering surface; when the fog came in with the tide and shut out the blue above, even as the green below had been obliterated; when boatmen lost in that fog, paddling about in a hopeless way, started at what seemed the brushing of mermen's fingers on the boat's keel, or shrank from the tufts of grass spreading around like the floating hair of a corpse, and knew by these signs that they were lost upon Dedlow Marsh and must make a night of it, and a gloomy one at that—then you might know something of Dedlow Marsh at high water.

Let me recall a story connected with this latter view which never failed to recur to my mind in my long gunning excursions upon Dedlow Marsh. Although the event was briefly recorded in the country paper, I had the story, in all its eloquent detail, from the lips of the principal actor. I cannot hope to catch the varying emphasis and peculiar coloring of feminine delineation, for my narrator was a woman; but I'll try to give at least its substance.

She lived midway of the great slough of Dedlow Marsh and a good-sized river, which debouched four miles beyond into an estuary formed by the Pacific Ocean, on the long sandy peninsula which constituted the southwestern boundary of a noble bay. The house in which she lived was a small frame cabin raised from the marsh a few feet by stout piles, and was three miles distant from the settlements upon the river. Her husband was a logger—a profitable business in a county where the principal occupation was the manufacture of lumber.

It was the season of early spring when her husband left on the ebb of a high tide, with a raft of logs for the usual transportation to the lower end of the bay. As she stood by the door of the little cabin when the voyagers departed she noticed a cold look in the southeastern sky, and she remembered hearing her husband say to his companions that they must endeavor to complete their voyage before the coming of the southwesterly gale which he saw brewing. And that night it began to storm and blow harder than she had ever before experienced, and some great trees fell in the forest by the river, and the house rocked like her baby's cradle.

But however the storm might roar about the little cabin, she knew that one she trusted had driven bolt and bar with his own strong hand, and that had he feared for her he

would not have left her. This, and her domestic duties, and the care of her little sickly baby, helped to keep her mind from dwelling on the weather, except, of course, to hope that he was safely harbored with the logs at Utopia in the dreary distance. But she noticed that day, when she went out to feed the chickens and look after the cow, that the tide was up to the little fence of their garden-patch, and the roar of the surf on the south beach, though miles away, she could hear distinctly. And she began to think that she would like to have someone to talk with about matters, and she believed that if it had not been so far and so stormy, and the trail so impassable, she would have taken the baby and have gone over to Ryckman's, her nearest neighbor. But then, you see, he might have returned in the storm, all wet, with no one to see to him; and it was a long exposure for baby, who was croupy and ailing.

But that night, she never could tell why, she didn't feel like sleeping or even lying down. The storm had somewhat abated, but she still "sat and sat," and even tried to read. I don't know whether it was a Bible or some profane magazine that this poor woman read, but most probably the latter, for the words all ran together and made such sad nonsense that she was forced at last to put the book down and turn to that dearer volume which lay before her in the cradle, with its white initial leaf as yet unsoiled, and try to look forward to its mysterious future. And, rocking the cradle, she thought of everything and everybody, but still was wide-awake as ever.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when she at last lay down in her clothes. How long she slept she could not remember, but she awoke with a dreadful choking in her throat, and found herself standing, trembling all over, in the middle of the room, with her baby clasped to her breast, and she was "saying something." The baby cried and sobbed, and

she walked up and down trying to hush it when she heard a scratching at the door. She opened it fearfully, and was glad to see it was only old Pete, their dog, who crawled, dripping with water, into the room. She would like to have looked out, not in the faint hope of her husband's coming, but to see how things looked; but the wind shook the door so savagely that she could hardly hold it. Then she sat down a little while, and then walked up and down a little while, and then she lay down again a little while. Lying close by the wall of the little cabin, she thought she heard once or twice something scrape slowly against the clapboards, like the scraping of branches. Then there was a little gurgling sound, "like the baby made when it was swallowing"; then something went "click-click" and "cluck-cluck," so that she sat up in bed. When she did so she was attracted by something else that seemed creeping from the back door toward the center of the room. It wasn't much wider than her little finger, but soon it swelled to the width of her hand, and began spreading all over the floor. It was water.

She ran to the front door and threw it wide open, and saw nothing but water. She ran to the back door and threw it open, and saw nothing but water. She ran to the side window, and throwing that open, she saw nothing but water. Then she remembered hearing her husband once say that there was no danger in the tide, for that fell regularly, and people could calculate on it, and that he would rather live near the bay than the river, whose banks might overflow at any time. But was it the tide? So she ran again to the back door, and threw out a stick of wood. It drifted away toward the bay. She scooped up some of the water and put it eagerly to her lips. It was fresh and sweet. It was the river, and not the tide!

It was then—O God be praised for his goodness! she did neither faint nor fall; it was then—blessed be the Saviour, for it was his merciful hand that touched and

strengthened her in this awful moment—that fear dropped from her like a garment, and her trembling ceased. It was then and thereafter that she never lost her self-command, through all the trials of that gloomy night.

She drew the bedstead toward the middle of the room, and placed a table upon it and on that she put the cradle. The water on the floor was already over her ankles, and the house once or twice moved so perceptibly, and seemed to be racked so, that the closet doors all flew open. Then she heard the same rasping and thumping against the wall, and, looking out, saw that a large uprooted tree, which had lain near the road at the upper end of the pasture, had floated down to the house. Luckily its long roots dragged in the soil and kept it from moving as rapidly as the current, for had it struck the house in its full career, even the strong nails and bolts in the piles could not have withstood the shock. The hound had leaped upon its knotty surface, and crouched near the roots shivering and whining. A ray of hope flashed across her mind. She drew a heavy blanket from the bed, and, wrapping it about the babe, waded in the deepening waters to the door. As the tree swung again, broadside on, making the little cabin creak and tremble, she leaped on to its trunk. By God's mercy she succeeded in obtaining a footing on its slippery surface, and, twining an arm about its roots, she held in the other her moaning child. Then something cracked near the front porch, and the whole front of the house she had just quitted fell forward—just as cattle fall on their knees before they lie down—and at the same moment the great redwood tree swung round and drifted away with its living cargo into the black night.

For all the excitement and danger, for all her soothing of her crying babe, for all the whistling of the wind, for all the uncertainty of her situation, she still turned to look at the deserted and water-swept cabin. She remembered even then,

and she wonders how foolish she was to think of it at that time, that she wished she had put on another dress and the baby's best clothes; and she kept praying that the house would be spared so that he, when he returned, would have something to come to, and it wouldn't be quite so desolate, and—how could he ever know what had become of her and baby? And at the thought she grew sick and faint. But she had something else to do besides worrying, for whenever the long roots of her ark struck an obstacle, the whole trunk made half a revolution, and twice dipped her in the black water. The hound, who kept distracting her by running up and down the tree and howling, at last fell off at one of these collisions. He swam for some time beside her, and she tried to get the poor beast up on the tree, but he “acted silly” and wild, and at last she lost sight of him forever. Then she and her baby were left alone. The light which had burned for a few minutes in the deserted cabin was quenched suddenly. She could not then tell whither she was drifting. The outline of the white dunes on the peninsula showed dimly ahead, and she judged the tree was moving in a line with the river. It must be about slack water, and she had probably reached the eddy formed by the confluence of the tide and the overflowing waters of the river. Unless the tide fell soon, there was present danger of her drifting to its channel, and being carried out to sea or crushed in the floating drift. That peril averted, if she were carried out on the ebb toward the bay, she might hope to strike one of the wooded promontories of the peninsula, and rest till daylight. Sometimes she thought she heard voices and shouts from the river, and the bellowing of cattle and bleating of sheep. Then again it was only the ringing in her ears and throbbing of her heart. She found at about this time that she was so chilled and stiffened in her cramped position that she could scarcely move, and the baby cried so when she put it to her breast that she noticed the milk refused to flow; and she was so

frightened at that, that she put her head under her shawl, and for the first time cried bitterly.

When she raised her head again, the boom of the surf was behind her, and she knew that her ark had again swung round. She dipped up the water to cool her parched throat, and found that it was salt as her tears. There was a relief, though, for by this sign she knew that she was drifting with the tide. It was then the wind went down, and the great and awful silence oppressed her. There was scarcely a ripple against the furrowed sides of the great trunk on which she rested, and around her all was black gloom and quiet. She spoke to the baby just to hear herself speak, and to know that she had not lost her voice. She thought then—it was queer, but she could not help thinking it—how awful must have been the night when the great ship swung over the Asiatic peak, and the sounds of creation were blotted out from the world. She thought, too, of mariners clinging to spars, and of poor women who were lashed to rafts, and beaten to death by the cruel sea. She tried to thank God that she was thus spared, and lifted her eyes from the baby, who had fallen into a fretful sleep. Suddenly, away to the southward, a great light lifted itself out of the gloom, and flashed and flickered, and flickered and flashed again. Her heart fluttered quickly against the baby's cold cheek. It was the lighthouse at the entrance of the bay. As she was yet wondering, the tree suddenly rolled a little, dragged a little, and then seemed to lie quiet and still. She put out her hand and the current gurgled against it. The tree was aground, and, by the position of the light and the noise of the surf, aground upon the Dedlow Marsh.

Had it not been for her baby, who was ailing and croupy, had it not been for the sudden drying up of that sensitive fountain, she would have felt safe and relieved. Perhaps it was this which tended to make all her impressions

mournful and gloomy. As the tide rapidly fell, a great flock of black brent fluttered by her, screaming and crying. Then the plover flew up and piped mournfully as they wheeled around the trunk, and at last fearlessly lit upon it like a gray cloud. Then the heron flew over and around her, shrieking and protesting, and at last dropped its gaunt legs only a few yards from her. But, strangest of all, a pretty white bird, larger than a dove—like a pelican, but not a pelican—circled around and around her. At last it lit upon a rootlet of the tree, quite over her shoulder. She put out her hand and stroked its beautiful white neck, and it never appeared to move. It stayed there so long that she thought she would lift up the baby to see it, and try to attract her attention. But when she did so, the child was so chilled and cold, and had such a blue look under the little lashes which it didn't raise at all, that she screamed aloud, and the bird flew away, and she fainted.

Well, that was the worst of it, and perhaps it was not so much, after all, to any but herself. For when she recovered her senses it was bright sunlight, and dead low water. There was a confused noise of guttural voices about her, and an old squaw, singing an Indian "hushaby," and rocking herself from side to side before a fire built on the marsh, before which she, the recovered wife and mother, lay weak and weary. Her first thought was for her baby, and she was about to speak, when a young squaw, who must have been a mother herself, fathomed her thought and brought her the "mowitch," pale but living, in such a queer little willow cradle all bound up, just like the squaw's own young one, that she laughed and cried together, and the young squaw and the old squaw showed their big white teeth and glinted their black eyes and said, "Plenty get well, skeena mowitch," "wagee man come plenty soon," and she could have kissed their brown faces in her joy. And then she found that they had been gathering berries on the marsh in their queer, comical baskets, and saw the skirt of her gown fluttering on

the tree from afar, and the old squaw couldn't resist the temptation of procuring a new garment, and came down and discovered the "wagee" woman and child. And of course she gave the garment to the old squaw, as you may imagine, and when HE came at last and rushed up to her, looking about ten years older in his anxiety, she felt so faint again that they had to carry her to the canoe. For, you see, he knew nothing about the flood until he met the Indians at Utopia, and knew by the signs that the poor woman was his wife. And at the next high tide he towed the tree away back home, although it wasn't worth the trouble, and built another house, using the old tree for the foundation and props, and called it after her, "Mary's Ark!" But you may guess the next house was built above high-water mark. And that's all.

Not much, perhaps, considering the malevolent capacity of the Dedlow Marsh. But you must tramp over it at low water, or paddle over it at high tide, or get lost upon it once or twice in the fog, as I have, to understand properly Mary's adventure, or to appreciate duly the blessings of living beyond High-Water Mark.

The Queen of Pirate Isle

I first knew her as the Queen of the Pirate Isle. To the best of my recollection she had no reasonable right to that title. She was only nine years old, inclined to plumpness and good humor, deprecated violence, and had never been to sea. Need it be added that she did NOT live in an island and that her name was Polly?

Perhaps I ought to explain that she had already known other experiences of a purely imaginative character. Part of her existence had been passed as a Beggar Child—solely indicated by a shawl tightly folded round her shoulders, and chills; as a Schoolmistress, unnecessarily severe; as a Preacher, singularly personal in his remarks, and once, after reading one of Cooper's novels, as an Indian Maiden. This was, I believe, the only instance when she had borrowed from another's fiction. Most of the characters that she assumed for days and sometimes weeks at a time were purely original in conception; some so much so as to be vague to the general understanding. I remember that her personation of a certain Mrs. Smith, whose individuality was supposed to be sufficiently represented by a sunbonnet worn wrong side before and a weekly addition to her family, was never perfectly appreciated by her own circle although she lived the character for a month. Another creation known as "The Proud Lady"—a being whose excessive and unreasonable haughtiness was so pronounced as to give her features the expression of extreme nausea—caused her mother so much alarm that it had to be abandoned. This was easily effected. The Proud Lady was understood to have died. Indeed, most of Polly's impersonations were got rid of

in this way, although it by no means prevented their subsequent reappearance. "I thought Mrs. Smith was dead," remonstrated her mother at the posthumous appearance of that lady with a new infant. "She was buried alive and kem to!" said Polly with a melancholy air. Fortunately, the representation of a resuscitated person required such extraordinary acting, and was, through some uncertainty of conception, so closely allied in facial expression to the Proud Lady, that Mrs. Smith was resuscitated only for a day.

The origin of the title of the Queen of the Pirate Isle may be briefly stated as follows:

An hour after luncheon, one day, Polly, Hickory Hunt, her cousin, and Wan Lee, a Chinese page, were crossing the nursery floor in a Chinese junk. The sea was calm and the sky cloudless. Any change in the weather was as unexpected as it is in books. Suddenly a West Indian Hurricane, purely local in character and unfelt anywhere else, struck Master Hickory and threw him overboard, whence, wildly swimming for his life and carrying Polly on his back, he eventually reached a Desert Island in the closet. Here the rescued party put up a tent made of a table-cloth providentially snatched from the raging billows, and, from two o'clock until four, passed six weeks on the island, supported only by a piece of candle, a box of matches, and two peppermint lozenges. It was at this time that it became necessary to account for Polly's existence among them, and this was only effected by an alarming sacrifice of their morality; Hickory and Wan Lee instantly became PIRATES, and at once elected Polly as their Queen. The royal duties, which seemed to be purely maternal, consisted in putting the Pirates to bed after a day of rapine and bloodshed, and in feeding them with licorice water through a quill in a small bottle. Limited as her functions were, Polly performed them with inimitable gravity and unquestioned sincerity. Even

when her companions sometimes hesitated from actual hunger or fatigue and forgot their guilty part, she never faltered. It was her real existence; her other life of being washed, dressed, and put to bed at certain hours by her mother was the ILLUSION.

Doubt and skepticism came at last—and came from Wan Lee! Wan Lee of all creatures! Wan Lee, whose silent, stolid, mechanical performance of a pirate's duties—a perfect imitation like all his household work—had been their one delight and fascination!

It was just after the exciting capture of a merchantman, with the indiscriminate slaughter of all on board—a spectacle on which the round blue eyes of the plump Polly had gazed with royal and maternal tolerance—and they were burying the booty, two tablespoons and a thimble, in the corner of the closet, when Wan Lee stolidly rose.

“Melican boy plenty foolee! Melican boy no Pilat!” said the little Chinaman, substituting “l’s” for “r’s” after his usual fashion.

“Wotcher say?” said Hickory, reddening with sudden confusion.

“Melican boy’s papa heap lickee him—s’pose him leal Pilat,” continued Wan Lee doggedly. “Melican boy Pilat INSIDE housee. Chinee boy Pilat OUTSIDE housee. First chop Pilat.”

Staggered by this humiliating statement, Hickory recovered himself in character. “Ah! Ho!” he shrieked, dancing wildly on one leg, “Mutiny and Splordinashun! ‘Way with him to the yard-arm.”

“Yald-alm—heap foolee! Alee same clothes-horse for washee washee.”

It was here necessary for the Pirate Queen to assert her authority, which, as I have before stated, was somewhat confusingly maternal.

“Go to bed instantly without your supper,” she said seriously. “Really, I never saw such bad pirates. Say your prayers, and see that you’re up early to church tomorrow.”

It should be explained that in deference to Polly’s proficiency as a preacher, and probably as a relief to their uneasy consciences, Divine Service had always been held on the Island. But Wan Lee continued:

“Me no shabbee Pilat INSIDE housee; me shabbee Pilat OUTSIDE housee. S’pose you lun away longside Chinee boy—Chinee boy make you Pilat.”

Hickory softly scratched his leg; while a broad, bashful smile almost closed his small eyes. “Wot?” he asked.

“Mebbe you too flightened to lun away. Melican boy’s papa heap lickee.”

This last infamous suggestion fired the corsair’s blood. “Dy’ar think we daresen’t?” said Hickory desperately, but with an uneasy glance at Polly. “I’ll show yer to-morrow.”

The entrance of Polly’s mother at this moment put an end to Polly’s authority and dispersed the pirate band, but left Wan Lee’s proposal and Hickory’s rash acceptance ringing in the ears of the Pirate Queen. That evening she was unusually silent. She would have taken Bridget, her nurse,

into her confidence, but this would have involved a long explanation of her own feelings, from which, like all imaginative children, she shrank. She, however, made preparation for the proposed flight by settling in her mind which of her two dolls she would take. A wooden creature with easy-going knees and movable hair seemed to be more fit for hard service and any indiscriminate scalping that might turn up hereafter. At supper, she timidly asked a question of Bridget. "Did ye ever hear the loikes uv that, ma'am?" said the Irish handmaid with affectionate pride. "Shure the darlint's head is filled noight and day with ancient history. She's after asking me now if Queens ever run away!" To Polly's remorseful confusion here her good father, equally proud of her precocious interest and his own knowledge, at once interfered with an unintelligible account of the abdication of various queens in history until Polly's head ached again. Well meant as it was, it only settled in the child's mind that she must keep the awful secret to herself and that no one could understand her.

The eventful day dawned without any unusual sign of importance. It was one of the cloudless summer days of the Californian foothills, bright, dry, and, as the morning advanced, hot in the white sunshine. The actual, prosaic house in which the Pirates apparently lived was a mile from a mining settlement on a beautiful ridge of pine woods sloping gently towards a valley on the one side, and on the other falling abruptly into a dark deep olive gulf of pine-trees, rocks, and patches of red soil. Beautiful as the slope was, looking over to the distant snow peaks which seemed to be in another world than theirs, the children found a greater attraction in the fascinating depths of a mysterious gulf, or canyon, as it was called, whose very name filled their ears with a weird music. To creep to the edge of the cliff, to sit upon the brown branches of some fallen pine, and, putting aside the dried tassels, to look down upon the backs of

wheeling hawks that seemed to hang in mid-air was a never-failing delight. Here Polly would try to trace the winding red ribbon of road that was continually losing itself among the dense pines of the opposite mountains; here she would listen to the far-off strokes of a woodman's axe, or the rattle of some heavy wagon, miles away, crossing the pebbles of a dried-up watercourse. Here, too, the prevailing colors of the mountains, red and white and green, most showed themselves. There were no frowning rocks to depress the children's fancy, but everywhere along the ridge pure white quartz bared itself through the red earth like smiling teeth; the very pebbles they played with were streaked with shining mica like bits of looking-glass. The distance was always green and summer-like, but the color they most loved, and which was most familiar to them, was the dark red of the ground beneath their feet everywhere. It showed itself in the roadside bushes; its red dust pervaded the leaves of the overhanging laurel; it colored their shoes and pinafores; I am afraid it was often seen in Indian-like patches on their faces and hands. That it may have often given a sanguinary tone to their fancies I have every reason to believe.

It was on this ridge that the three children gathered at ten o'clock that morning. An earlier flight had been impossible on account of Wan Lee being obliged to perform his regular duty of blacking the shoes of Polly and Hickory before breakfast—a menial act which in the pure republic of childhood was never thought inconsistent with the loftiest piratical ambition. On the ridge they met one "Patsey," the son of a neighbor, sun-burned, broad-brimmed hatted, red-handed, like themselves. As there were afterwards some doubts expressed whether he joined the Pirates of his own free will, or was captured by them, I endeavor to give the colloquy exactly as it occurred:

Patsey: "Hallo, fellers."

The Pirates: "Hello!"

Patsey: "Goin' to hunt bars? Dad seed a lot o' tracks at sun-up."

The Pirates (hesitating): "No—o—"

Patsey: "I am; know where I kin get a six-shooter?"

The Pirates (almost ready to abandon piracy for bear-hunting, but preserving their dignity): "Can't! We've runn'd away for real pirates."

Patsey: "Not for good!"

The Queen (interposing with sad dignity and real tears in her round blue eyes): "Yes!" (slowly and shaking her head). "Can't go back again. Never! Never! Never! The—the—eye is cast!"

Patsey (bursting with excitement): "No-o! Sho'o! Wanter know."

The Pirates (a little frightened themselves, but tremulous with gratified vanity): "The Perleese is on our track!"

Patsey: "Lemme go with yer!"

Hickory: "Wot'll yer giv?"

Patsey: "Pistol and er bananer."

Hickory (with judicious prudence): "Let's see 'em."

Patsey was off like a shot; his bare little red feet trembling under him. In a few minutes he returned with an old-fashioned revolver known as one of "Allen's pepper-boxes" and a large banana. He was at once enrolled, and the banana eaten.

As yet they had resolved on no definite nefarious plan. Hickory, looking down at Patsey's bare feet, instantly took off his own shoes. This bold act sent a thrill through his companions. Wan Lee took off his cloth leggings, Polly removed her shoes and stockings, but, with royal foresight, tied them up in her handkerchief. The last link between them and civilization was broken.

"Let's go to the Slumgullion."

"Slumgullion" was the name given by the miners to a certain soft, half-liquid mud, formed of the water and finely powdered earth that was carried off by the sluice-boxes during gold-washing, and eventually collected in a broad pool or lagoon before the outlet. There was a pool of this kind a quarter of a mile away, where there were "diggings" worked by Patsey's father, and thither they proceeded along the ridge in single file. When it was reached they solemnly began to wade in its viscid paint-like shallows. Possibly its unctuousness was pleasant to the touch; possibly there was a fascination in the fact that their parents had forbidden them to go near it, but probably the principal object of this performance was to produce a thick coating of mud on the feet and ankles, which, when dried in the sun, was supposed to harden the skin and render their shoes superfluous. It was also felt to be the first real step towards independence; they looked down at their ensanguined extremities and

recognized the impossibility of their ever again crossing (unwashed) the family threshold.

Then they again hesitated. There was a manifest need of some well-defined piratical purpose. The last act was reckless and irretrievable, but it was vague. They gazed at each other. There was a stolid look of resigned and superior tolerance in Wan Lee's eyes.

Polly's glance wandered down the side of the slope to the distant little tunnels or openings made by the miners who were at work in the bowels of the mountain. "I'd like to go into one of them funny holes," she said to herself, half aloud.

Wan Lee suddenly began to blink his eyes with unwonted excitement. "Catchee tunnel—heap gold," he said quickly. "When manee come outside to catchee dinner—Pilats go inside catchee tunnel! Shabbee! Pilats catchee gold allee samee Melican man!"

"And take perseshiun," said Hickory.

"And hoist the Pirate flag," said Patsey.

"And build a fire, and cook, and have a family," said Polly.

The idea was fascinating to the point of being irresistible. The eyes of the four children became rounder and rounder. They seized each other's hands and swung them backwards and forwards, occasionally lifting their legs in a solemn rhythmic movement known only to childhood.

“It’s orful far off!” said Patsey with a sudden look of dark importance. “Pap says it’s free miles on the road. Take all day ter get there.”

The bright faces were overcast.

“Less go down er slide!” said Hickory boldly.

They approached the edge of the cliff. The “slide” was simply a sharp incline zigzagging down the side of the mountain used for sliding goods and provisions from the summit to the tunnel-men at the different openings below. The continual traffic had gradually worn a shallow gully half filled with earth and gravel into the face of the mountain which checked the momentum of the goods in their downward passage, but afforded no foothold for a pedestrian. No one had ever been known to descend a slide. That feat was evidently reserved for the Pirate band. They approached the edge of the slide, hand in hand, hesitated, and the next moment disappeared.

Five minutes later the tunnel-men of the Excelsior mine, a mile below, taking their luncheon on the rude platform of debris before their tunnel, were suddenly driven to shelter in the tunnel from an apparent rain of stones, and rocks, and pebbles, from the cliffs above. Looking up, they were startled at seeing four round objects revolving and bounding in the dust of the slide, which eventually resolved themselves into three boys and a girl. For a moment the good men held their breath in helpless terror. Twice one of the children had struck the outer edge of the bank, and displaced stones that shot a thousand feet down into the dizzy depths of the valley; and now one of them, the girl, had actually rolled out of the slide and was hanging over the chasm supported only by a clump of chamisal to which she clung!

“Hang on by your eyelids, sis! but don’t stir, for Heaven’s sake!” shouted one of the men, as two others started on a hopeless ascent of the cliff above them.

But a light childish laugh from the clinging little figure seemed to mock them! Then two small heads appeared at the edge of the slide; then a diminutive figure, whose feet were apparently held by some invisible companion, was shoved over the brink and stretched its tiny arms towards the girl. But in vain, the distance was too great. Another laugh of intense youthful enjoyment followed the failure, and a new insecurity was added to the situation by the unsteady hands and shoulders of the relieving party, who were apparently shaking with laughter. Then the extended figure was seen to detach what looked like a small black rope from its shoulders and throw it to the girl. There was another little giggle. The faces of the men below paled in terror. Then Polly—for it was she—hanging to the long pigtail of Wan Lee, was drawn with fits of laughter back in safety to the slide. Their childish treble of appreciation was answered by a ringing cheer from below.

“Darned ef I ever want to cut off a Chinaman’s pigtail again, boys,” said one of the tunnel-men as he went back to dinner.

Meantime the children had reached the goal and stood before the opening of one of the tunnels. Then these four heroes who had looked with cheerful levity on the deadly peril of their descent became suddenly frightened at the mysterious darkness of the cavern and turned pale at its threshold.

“Mebbee a wicked Joss backside holee, he catchee Pilats,” said Wan Lee gravely.

Hickory began to whimper, Patsey drew back, Polly alone stood her ground, albeit with a trembling lip.

“Let’s say our prayers and frighten it away,” she said stoutly.

“No! no!” said Wan Lee, with a sudden alarm. “No frighten Spillits! You waitee! Chinee boy he talkee Spillit not to frighten you.”¹

Tucking his hands under his blue blouse, Wan Lee suddenly produced from some mysterious recess of his clothing a quantity of red paper slips which he scattered at the entrance of the cavern. Then drawing from the same inexhaustible receptacle certain squibs or fireworks, he let them off and threw them into the opening. There they went off with a slight fizz and splutter, a momentary glittering of small points in the darkness, and a strong smell of gunpowder. Polly gazed at the spectacle with undisguised awe and fascination. Hickory and Patsey breathed hard with satisfaction: it was beyond their wildest dreams of mystery and romance. Even Wan Lee appeared transfigured into a superior being by the potency of his own spells. But an unaccountable disturbance of some kind in the dim interior of the tunnel quickly drew the blood from their blanched cheeks again. It was a sound like coughing, followed by something like an oath.

“He’s made the Evil Spirit orful sick,” said Hickory in a loud whisper.

¹ The Chinese pray devoutly to the Evil Spirits NOT to injure them.

A slight laugh, that to the children seemed demoniacal, followed.

“See!” said Wan Lee. “Evil Spillet he likee Chinee; try talkee him.”

The Pirates looked at Wan Lee, not without a certain envy of this manifest favoritism. A fearful desire to continue their awful experiments, instead of pursuing their piratical avocations, was taking possession of them; but Polly, with one of the swift transitions of childhood, immediately began to extemporize a house for the party at the mouth of the tunnel, and, with parental foresight, gathered the fragments of the squibs to build a fire for supper. That frugal meal, consisting of half a ginger biscuit divided into five small portions, each served on a chip of wood, and having a deliciously mysterious flavor of gunpowder and smoke, was soon over. It was necessary after this that the pirates should at once seek repose after a day of adventure, which they did for the space of forty seconds in singularly impossible attitudes and far too aggressive snoring. Indeed, Master Hickory’s almost upright pose, with tightly folded arms and darkly frowning brows, was felt to be dramatic, but impossible for a longer period. The brief interval enabled Polly to collect herself and to look around her in her usual motherly fashion. Suddenly she started and uttered a cry. In the excitement of the descent she had quite overlooked her doll, and was now regarding it with round-eyed horror.

“Lady Mary’s hair’s gone!” she cried, convulsively grasping the Pirate Hickory’s legs.

Hickory at once recognized the battered doll under the aristocratic title which Polly had long ago bestowed upon it. He stared at the bald and battered head.

“Ha! ha!” he said hoarsely; “skelped by Injins!”

For an instant the delicious suggestion soothed the imaginative Polly. But it was quickly dispelled by Wan Lee.

“Lady Maley’s pigtail hangee top side hillee. Catchee on big quartz stone allee same Polly; me go fetchee.”

“No!” quickly shrieked the others. The prospect of being left in the proximity of Wan Lee’s evil spirit, without Wan Lee’s exorcising power, was anything but reassuring. “No, don’t go!” Even Polly (dropping a maternal tear on the bald head of Lady Mary) protested against this breaking up of the little circle. “Go to bed!” she said authoritatively, “and sleep till morning.”

Thus admonished, the Pirates again retired. This time effectively; for, worn by actual fatigue or soothed by the delicious coolness of the cave, they gradually, one by one, succumbed to real slumber. Polly, withheld from joining them by official and maternal responsibility, sat and blinked at them affectionately.

Gradually she, too, felt herself yielding to the fascination and mystery of the place and the solitude that encompassed her. Beyond the pleasant shadows where she sat, she saw the great world of mountain and valley through a dreamy haze that seemed to rise from the depths below and occasionally hang before the cavern like a veil. Long waves of spicy heat rolling up the mountain from the valley brought her the smell of pine-trees and bay, and made the landscape swim before her eyes. She could hear the far-off cry of teamsters on some unseen road; she could see the far-off cloud of dust following the mountain stagecoach, whose rattling wheels she could not hear. She felt very lonely, but

was not quite afraid; she felt very melancholy, but was not entirely sad; and she could have easily awakened her sleeping companions if she wished.

No; she was a lone widow with nine children, six of whom were already in the lone churchyard on the hill, and the others lying ill with measles and scarlet fever beside her. She had just walked many weary miles that day, and had often begged from door to door for a slice of bread for the starving little ones. It was of no use now—they would die! They would never see their dear mother again. This was a favorite imaginative situation of Polly's, but only indulged when her companions were asleep, partly because she could not trust confederates with her more serious fancies, and partly because they were at such times passive in her hands. She glanced timidly around. Satisfied that no one could observe her, she softly visited the bedside of each of her companions, and administered from a purely fictitious bottle spoonfuls of invisible medicine. Physical correction in the form of slight taps, which they always required, and in which Polly was strong, was only withheld now from a sense of their weak condition. But in vain; they succumbed to the fell disease—they always died at this juncture—and Polly was left alone. She thought of the little church where she had once seen a funeral, and remembered the nice smell of the flowers; she dwelt with melancholy satisfaction of the nine little tombstones in the graveyard, each with an inscription, and looked forward with gentle anticipation to the long summer days when, with Lady Mary in her lap, she would sit on those graves clad in the deepest mourning. The fact that the unhappy victims at times moved as it were uneasily in their graves, or snored, did not affect Polly's imaginative contemplation, nor withhold the tears that gathered in her round eyes.

Presently, the lids of the round eyes began to droop, the landscape beyond began to be more confused, and sometimes to disappear entirely and reappear again with startling distinctness. Then a sound of rippling water from the little stream that flowed from the mouth of the tunnel soothed her and seemed to carry her away with it, and then everything was dark.

The next thing that she remembered was that she was apparently being carried along on some gliding object to the sound of rippling water. She was not alone, for her three companions were lying beside her, rather tightly packed and squeezed in the same mysterious vehicle. Even in the profound darkness that surrounded her, Polly could feel and hear that they were accompanied, and once or twice a faint streak of light from the side of the tunnel showed her gigantic shadows walking slowly on either side of the gliding car. She felt the little hands of her associates seeking hers, and knew they were awake and conscious, and she returned to each a reassuring pressure from the large protecting instinct of her maternal little heart. Presently the car glided into an open space of bright light, and stopped. The transition from the darkness of the tunnel at first dazzled their eyes. It was like a dream.

They were in a circular cavern from which three other tunnels, like the one they had passed through, diverged. The walls, lit up by fifty or sixty candles stuck at irregular intervals in crevices of the rock, were of glittering quartz and mica. But more remarkable than all were the inmates of the cavern, who were ranged round the walls—men who, like their attendants, seemed to be of extra stature; who had blackened faces, wore red bandana handkerchiefs round their heads and their waists, and carried enormous knives and pistols stuck in their belts. On a raised platform made of a packing-box on which was rudely painted a skull and

cross-bones, sat the chief or leader of the band covered with a buffalo robe; on either side of him were two small barrels marked "Grog" and "Gunpowder." The children stared and clung closer to Polly. Yet, in spite of these desperate and warlike accessories, the strangers bore a singular resemblance to "Christy Minstrels" in their blackened faces and attitudes that somehow made them seem less awful. In particular, Polly was impressed with the fact that even the most ferocious had a certain kindness of eye, and showed their teeth almost idiotically.

"Welcome!" said the leader—"welcome to the Pirates' Cave! The Red Rover of the North Fork of the Stanislaus River salutes the Queen of the Pirate Isle!" He rose up and made an extraordinary bow. It was repeated by the others with more or less exaggeration, to the point of one humorist losing his balance!

"Oh, thank you very much," said Polly timidly, but drawing her little flock closer to her with a small protecting arm; "but could you—would you—please—tell us—what time it is?"

"We are approaching the middle of Next Week," said the leader gravely; "but what of that? Time is made for slaves! The Red Rover seeks it not! Why should the Queen?"

"I think we must be going," hesitated Polly, yet by no means displeased with the recognition of her rank.

"Not until we have paid homage to Your Majesty," returned the leader. "What ho! there! Let Brother Step-and-Fetch-It pass the Queen around that we may do her honor." Observing that Polly shrank slightly back, he added: "Fear nothing; the man who hurts a hair of Her Majesty's head dies by this hand. Ah! ha!"

The others all said ha! ha! and danced alternately on one leg and then on the other, but always with the same dark resemblance to Christy Minstrels. Brother Step-and-Fetch-It, whose very long beard had a confusing suggestion of being a part of the leader's buffalo robe, lifted her gently in his arms and carried her to the Red Rovers in turn. Each one bestowed a kiss upon her cheek or forehead, and would have taken her in his arms, or on his knees, or otherwise lingered over his salute, but they were sternly restrained by their leader. When the solemn rite was concluded, Step-and-Fetch-It paid his own courtesy with an extra squeeze of the curly head, and deposited her again in the truck, a little frightened, a little astonished, but with a considerable accession to her dignity. Hickory and Patsey looked on with stupefied amazement. Wan Lee alone remained stolid and unimpressed, regarding the scene with calm and triangular eyes.

“Will Your Majesty see the Red Rovers dance?”

“No, if you please,” said Polly, with gentle seriousness.

“Will Your Majesty fire this barrel of gunpowder, or tap this breaker of grog?”

“No, I thank you.”

“Is there no command Your Majesty would lay upon us?”

“No, please,” said Polly, in a failing voice.

“Is there anything Your Majesty has lost? Think again! Will Your Majesty deign to cast your royal eyes on this?”

He drew from under his buffalo robe what seemed like a long tress of blond hair, and held it aloft. Polly instantly recognized the missing scalp of her hapless doll.

“If you please, sir, it’s Lady Mary’s. She’s lost it.”

“And lost it—Your Majesty—only to find something more precious. Would Your Majesty hear the story?”

A little alarmed, a little curious, a little self-anxious, and a little induced by the nudges and pinches of her companions, the Queen blushing signified her royal assent.

“Enough. Bring refreshments. Will Your Majesty prefer wintergreen, peppermint, rose, or acidulated drops? Red or white? Or perhaps Your Majesty will let me recommend these bull’s-eyes,” said the leader, as a collection of sweets in a hat were suddenly produced from the barrel labeled “Gunpowder” and handed to the children.

“Listen,” he continued, in a silence broken only by the gentle sucking of bull’s-eyes. “Many years ago the old Red Rovers of these parts locked up all their treasures in a secret cavern in this mountain. They used spells and magic to keep it from being entered or found by anybody, for there was a certain mark upon it made by a peculiar rock that stuck out of it, which signified what there was below. Long afterwards, other Red Rovers who had heard of it came here and spent days and days trying to discover it, digging holes and blasting tunnels like this, but of no use! Sometimes they thought they discovered the magic marks in the peculiar rock that stuck out of it, but when they dug there they found no treasure. And why? Because there was a magic spell upon it. And what was that magic spell? Why, this! It could only be discovered by a person who could not possibly know that he or she had discovered it; who never could or would be able

to enjoy it; who could never see it, never feel it, never, in fact, know anything at all about it! It wasn't a dead man, it wasn't an animal, it wasn't a baby!"

"Why," said Polly, jumping up and clapping her hands, "it was a Dolly."

"Your Majesty's head is level! Your Majesty has guessed it!" said the leader, gravely. "It was Your Majesty's own dolly, Lady Mary, who broke the spell! When Your Majesty came down the slide, the doll fell from your gracious hand when your foot slipped. Your Majesty recovered Lady Mary, but did not observe that her hair had caught in a peculiar rock, called the 'Outcrop,' and remained behind! When, later on, while sitting with your attendants at the mouth of the tunnel, Your Majesty discovered that Lady Mary's hair was gone, I overheard Your Majesty, and dispatched the trusty Step-and-Fetch-It to seek it at the mountain side. He did so, and found it clinging to the rock, and beneath it—the entrance to the Secret Cave!"

Patsey and Hickory, who, failing to understand a word of this explanation, had given themselves up to the unconstrained enjoyment of the sweets, began now to apprehend that some change was impending, and prepared for the worst by hastily swallowing what they had in their mouths, thus defying enchantment, and getting ready for speech. Polly, who had closely followed the story, albeit with the embellishments of her own imagination, made her eyes rounder than ever. A bland smile broke on Wan Lee's face, as to the children's amazement, he quietly disengaged himself from the group and stepped before the leader.

"Melican man plenty foolee Melican chillern. No foolee China boy! China boy knowee you. YOU no Led Lofer. YOU no Pilat—you allee same tunnel-man—you Bob

Johnson! Me shabbee you! You dressee up allee same as Led Lofer—but you Bob Johnson—allee same. My fader washee washee for you. You no payee him. You owee him folty dolla! Me blingee you billee. You no payee billee! You say, ‘Chalkee up, John.’ You say, ‘Bimeby, John.’ But me no catchee folty dolla!”

A roar of laughter followed, in which even the leader apparently forgot himself enough to join. But the next moment springing to his feet he shouted, “Ho! ho! A traitor! Away with him to the deepest dungeon beneath the castle moat!”

Hickory and Patsey began to whimper, but Polly, albeit with a tremulous lip, stepped to the side of her little Pagan friend. “Don’t you dare touch him,” she said with a shake of unexpected determination in her little curly head; “if you do, I’ll tell my father, and he will slay you! All of you—there!”

“Your father! Then you are NOT the Queen!”

It was a sore struggle to Polly to abdicate her royal position; it was harder to do it with befitting dignity. To evade the direct question she was obliged to abandon her defiant attitude. “If you please, sir,” she said hurriedly, with an increasing color and no stops, “we’re not always Pirates, you know, and Wan Lee is only our boy what brushes my shoes in the morning, and runs of errands, and he doesn’t mean anything bad, sir, and we’d like to take him back home with us.”

“Enough,” said the leader, changing his entire manner with the most sudden and shameless inconsistency. “You shall go back together, and woe betide the miscreant who would prevent it! What say you, brothers? What shall

be his fate who dares to separate our noble Queen from her faithful Chinese henchman?"

"He shall die!" roared the others, with beaming cheerfulness.

"And what say you—shall we see them home?"

"We will!" roared the others.

Before the children could fairly comprehend what had passed, they were again lifted into the truck and began to glide back into the tunnel they had just quitted. But not again in darkness and silence; the entire band of Red rovers accompanied them, illuminating the dark passage with the candles they had snatched from the walls. In a few moments they were at the entrance again. The great world lay beyond them once more with rocks and valleys suffused by the rosy light of the setting sun. The past seemed like a dream.

But were they really awake now? They could not tell. They accepted everything with the confidence and credulity of all children who have no experience to compare with their first impressions and to whom the future contains nothing impossible. It was without surprise, therefore, that they felt themselves lifted on the shoulders of the men who were making quite a procession along the steep trail towards the settlement again. Polly noticed that at the mouth of the other tunnels they were greeted by men as if they were carrying tidings of great joy; that they stopped to rejoice together, and that in some mysterious manner their conductors had got their faces washed, and had become more like beings of the outer world. When they neared the settlement the excitement seemed to have become greater; people rushed out to shake hands with the men who were carrying them, and overpowered even the children with questions they could not

understand. Only one sentence Polly could clearly remember as being the burden of all congratulations. "Struck the old lead at last!" With a faint consciousness that she knew something about it, she tried to assume a dignified attitude on the leader's shoulders, even while she was beginning to be heavy with sleep.

And then she remembered a crowd near her father's house, out of which her father came smiling pleasantly on her, but not interfering with her triumphal progress until the leader finally deposited her in her mother's lap in their own sitting-room. And then she remembered being "cross," and declining to answer any questions, and shortly afterwards found herself comfortably in bed. Then she heard her mother say to her father:

"It really seems too ridiculous for anything, John; the idea of those grown men dressing themselves up to play with children."

"Ridiculous or not," said her father, "these grown men of the Excelsior mine have just struck the famous old lode of Red Mountain, which is as good as a fortune to everybody on the Ridge, and were as wild as boys! And they say it never would have been found if Polly hadn't tumbled over the slide directly on top of the outcrop, and left the absurd wig of that wretched doll of hers to mark its site."

"And that," murmured Polly sleepily to her doll as she drew it closer to her breast, "is all that they know of it."

A Maecenas of the Pacific Slope

CHAPTER ONE

As Mr. Robert Rushbrook, known to an imaginative press as the “Maecenas of the Pacific Slope,” drove up to his country seat, equally referred to as a “palatial villa,” he cast a quick but practical look at the pillared pretensions of that enormous shell of wood and paint and plaster. The statement, also a reportorial one, that its site, the Canyon of Los Osos, “some three years ago was disturbed only by the passing tread of bear and wild-cat,” had lost some of its freshness as a picturesque apology, and already successive improvements on the original building seemingly cast the older part of the structure back to a hoary antiquity. To many it stood as a symbol of everything Robert Rushbrook did or had done—an improvement of all previous performances; it was like his own life—an exciting though irritating state of transition to something better. Yet the visible architectural result, as here shown, was scarcely harmonious; indeed, some of his friends—and Maecenas had many—professed to classify the various improvements by the successive fortunate ventures in their owner’s financial career, which had led to new additions, under the names, of “The Comstock Lode Period,” “The Union Pacific Renaissance,” “The Great Wheat Corner,” and “Water Front Gable Style,” a humorous trifling that did not, however, prevent a few who were artists from accepting Maecenas’ liberal compensation for their services in giving shape to those ideas.

Relinquishing to a groom his fast-trotting team, the second relay in his two hours' drive from San Francisco, he leaped to the ground to meet the architect, already awaiting his orders in the courtyard. With his eyes still fixed upon the irregular building before him, he mingled his greeting and his directions.

“Look here, Barker, we'll have a wing thrown out here, and a hundred-foot ballroom. Something to hold a crowd; something that can be used for music—sabe?—a concert, or a show.”

“Have you thought of any style, Mr. Rushbrook?” suggested the architect.

“No,” said Rushbrook; “I've been thinking of the time—thirty days, and everything to be in. You'll stop to dinner. I'll have you sit near Jack Somers. You can talk style to him. Say I told you.”

“You wish it completed in thirty days?” repeated the architect, dubiously.

“Well, I shouldn't mind if it were less. You can begin at once. There's a telegraph in the house. Patrick will take any message, and you can send up to San Francisco and fix things before dinner.”

Before the man could reply, Rushbrook was already giving a hurried interview to the gardener and others on his way to the front porch. In another moment he had entered his own hall—a wonderful temple of white and silver plaster, formal, yet friable like the sugared erection of a wedding cake—where his major-domo awaited him.

“Well, who’s here?” asked Rushbrook, still advancing towards his apartments.

“Dinner is set for thirty, sir,” said the functionary, keeping step demurely with his master, “but Mr. Appleby takes ten over to San Mateo, and some may sleep there. The char-a-banc is still out and five saddle-horses, to a picnic in Green Canyon, and I can’t positively say, but I should think you might count on seeing about forty-five guests before you go to town to-morrow. The opera troupe seem to have not exactly understood the invitation, sir.”

“How? I gave it myself.”

“The chorus and supernumeraries thought themselves invited too, sir, and have come, I believe, sir. At least Signora Pegrelli and Madame Denise said so, and that they would speak to you about it, but that meantime I could put them up anywhere.”

“And you made no distinction, of course?”

“No, sir, I put them in the corresponding rooms opposite, sir. I don’t think the prima donnas like it.”

“Ah!”

“Yes, sir.”

Whatever was in their minds, the two men never changed their steady, practical gravity of manner. The major-domo’s appeared to be a subdued imitation of his master’s, worn, as he might have worn his master’s clothes, had he accepted, or Mr. Rushbrook permitted, such a degradation. By this time they had reached the door of Mr. Rushbrook’s room, and the man paused. “I didn’t include

some guests of Mr. Leyton's, sir, that he brought over here to show around the place, but he told me to tell you he would take them away again, or leave them, as you liked. They're some Eastern strangers stopping with him."

"All right," said Rushbrook, quietly, as he entered his own apartment. It was decorated as garishly as the hall, as staring and vivid in color, but wholesomely new and clean for all its paint, veneering, and plaster. It was filled with heterogeneous splendor—all new and well kept, yet with so much of the attitude of the show-room still lingering about it that one almost expected to see the various articles of furniture ticketed with their prices. A luxurious bed, with satin hangings and Indian carved posts, standing ostentatiously in a corner, kept up this resemblance, for in a curtained recess stood a worn camp bedstead, Rushbrook's real couch, Spartan in its simplicity.

Mr. Rushbrook drew his watch from his pocket, and deliberately divested himself of his boots, coat, waistcoat, and cravat. Then rolling himself in a fleecy, blanket-like rug with something of the habitual dexterity of a frontiersman, he threw himself on his couch, closed his eyes, and went instantly to sleep. Lying there, he appeared to be a man comfortably middle-aged, with thick iron-gray hair that might have curled had he encouraged such inclination; a skin roughened and darkened by external hardships and exposure, but free from taint of inner vice or excess, and indistinctive features redeemed by a singularly handsome mouth. As the lower part of the face was partly hidden by a dense but closely-cropped beard, it is probable that the delicate outlines of his lips had gained something from their framing.

He slept, through what seemed to be the unnatural stillness of the large house—a quiet that might have come from the lingering influence of the still virgin solitude

around it, as if Nature had forgotten the intrusion, or were stealthily retaking her own; and later, through the rattle of returning wheels or the sound of voices, which were, however, promptly absorbed in that deep and masterful silence which was the unabdicating genius of the canyon. For it was remarkable that even the various artists, musicians, orators, and poets whom Maecenas had gathered in his cool business fashion under that roof, all seemed to become, by contrast with surrounding Nature, as new and artificial as the house, and as powerless to assert themselves against its influence.

He was still sleeping when James re-entered the room, but awoke promptly at the sound of his voice. In a few moments he had rearranged his scarcely disordered toilette, and stepped out refreshed and observant into the hall. The guests were still absent from that part of the building, and he walked leisurely past the carelessly opened doors of the rooms they had left. Everywhere he met the same glaring ornamentation and color, the same garishness of treatment, the same inharmonious extravagance of furniture, and everywhere the same troubled acceptance of it by the inmates, or the same sense of temporary and restricted tenancy. Dresses were hung over cheval glasses; clothes piled up on chairs to avoid the use of doubtful and over ornamented wardrobes, and in some cases more practical guests had apparently encamped in a corner of their apartment. A gentleman from Siskyou—sole proprietor of a mill patent now being considered by Maecenas—had confined himself to a rocking-chair and clothes-horse as being trustworthy and familiar; a bolder spirit from Yreka—in treaty for capital to start an independent journal devoted to Maecenas' interests—had got a good deal out of, and indeed all he had INTO, a Louis XVI. armoire; while a young painter from Sacramento had simply retired into his

adjoining bath-room, leaving the glories of his bedroom untarnished. Suddenly he paused.

He had turned into a smaller passage in order to make a shorter cut through one of the deserted suites of apartments that should bring him to that part of the building where he designed to make his projected improvement, when his feet were arrested on the threshold of a sitting-room. Although it contained the same decoration and furniture as the other rooms, it looked totally different! It was tasteful, luxurious, comfortable, and habitable. The furniture seemed to have fallen into harmonious position; even the staring decorations of the walls and ceiling were toned down by sprays of laurel and red-stained manzanito boughs with their berries, apparently fresh plucked from the near canyon. But he was more unexpectedly impressed to see that the room was at that moment occupied by a tall, handsome girl, who had paused to take breath, with her hand still on the heavy centre-table she was moving. Standing there, graceful, glowing, and animated, she looked the living genius of the recreated apartment.

CHAPTER TWO

Mr. Rushbrook glanced rapidly at his unknown guest. "Excuse me," he said, with respectful business brevity, "but I thought every one was out," and he stepped backward quickly.

"I've only just come," she said without embarrassment, "and would you mind, as you ARE here, giving me a lift with this table?"

"Certainly," replied Rushbrook, and under the young girl's direction the millionaire moved the table to one side.

During the operation he was trying to determine which of his unrecognized guests the fair occupant was. Possibly one of the Leyton party, that James had spoken of as impending.

"Then you have changed all the furniture, and put up these things?" he asked, pointing to the laurel.

"Yes, the room was really something TOO awful. It looks better now, don't you think?"

"A hundred per cent.," said Rushbrook, promptly. "Look here, I'll tell you what you've done. You've set the furniture TO WORK! It was simply lying still—with no return to anybody on the investment."

The young girl opened her gray eyes at this, and then smiled. The intruder seemed to be characteristic of California. As for Rushbrook, he regretted that he did not know her better, he would at once have asked her to

rearrange all the rooms, and have managed in some way liberally to reward her for it. A girl like that had no nonsense about her.

“Yes,” she said, “I wonder Mr. Rushbrook don’t look at it in that way. It is a shame that all these pretty things—and you know they are really good and valuable—shouldn’t show what they are. But I suppose everybody here accepts the fact that this man simply buys them because they are valuable, and nobody interferes, and is content to humor him, laugh at him, and feel superior. It don’t strike me as quite fair, does it you?”

Rushbrook was pleased. Without the vanity that would be either annoyed at this revelation of his reputation, or gratified at her defense of it, he was simply glad to discover that she had not recognized him as her host, and could continue the conversation unreservedly. “Have you seen the ladies’ boudoir?” he asked. “You know, the room fitted with knick-knacks and pretty things—some of ‘em bought from old collections in Europe, by fellows who knew what they were but perhaps,” he added, looking into her eyes for the first time, “didn’t know exactly what ladies cared for.”

“I merely glanced in there when I first came, for there was such a queer lot of women—I’m told he isn’t very particular in that way—that I didn’t stay.”

“And you didn’t think THEY might be just as valuable and good as some of the furniture, if they could have been pulled around and put into shape, or set in a corner, eh?”

The young girl smiled; she thought her fellow-guest rather amusing, none the less so, perhaps, for catching up her

own ideas, but nevertheless she slightly shrugged her shoulders with that hopeless skepticism which women reserve for their own sex. "Some of them looked as if they had been pulled around, as you say, and hadn't been improved by it."

"There's no one there now," said Rushbrook, with practical directness; "come and take a look at it." She complied without hesitation, walking by his side, tall, easy, and self-possessed, apparently accepting without self-consciousness his half paternal, half comrade-like informality. The boudoir was a large room, repeating on a bigger scale the incongruousness and ill fitting splendor of the others. When she had of her own accord recognized and pointed out the more admirable articles, he said, gravely looking at his watch, "We've just about seven minutes yet; if you'd like to pull and haul these things around, I'll help you."

The young girl smiled. "I'm quite content with what I've done in my own room, where I have no one's taste to consult but my own. I hardly know how Mr. Rushbrook, or his lady friends, might like my operating here." Then recognizing with feminine tact the snub that might seem implied in her refusal, she said quickly, "Tell me something about our host—but first look! isn't that pretty?"

She had stopped before the window that looked upon the dim blue abyss of the canyon, and was leaning out to gaze upon it. Rushbrook joined her.

"There isn't much to be changed down THERE, is there?" he said, half interrogatively.

"No, not unless Mr. Rushbrook took it into his head to roof it in, and somebody was ready with a contract to do

it. But what do you know of him? Remember, I'm quite a stranger here."

"You came with Charley Leyton?"

"With MRS. Leyton's party," said the young girl, with a half-smiling emphasis. "But it seems that we don't know whether Mr. Rushbrook wants us here or not till he comes. And the drollest thing about it is that they're all so perfectly frank in saying so."

"Charley and he are old friends, and you'll do well to trust to their judgment."

This was hardly the kind of response that the handsome and clever society girl before him had been in the habit of receiving, but it amused her. Her fellow-guest was decidedly original. But he hadn't told her about Rushbrook, and it struck her that his opinion would be independent, at least. She reminded him of it.

"Look here," said Rushbrook, "you'll meet a man here to-night—or he'll be sure to meet YOU—who'll tell you all about Rushbrook. He's a smart chap, knows everybody and talks well. His name is Jack Somers; he is a great ladies' man. He can talk to you about these sort of things, too,"—indicating the furniture with a half tolerant, half contemptuous gesture, that struck her as inconsistent with what seemed to be his previous interest—"just as well as he can talk of people. Been in Europe, too."

The young girl's eye brightened with a quick vivacity at the name, but a moment after became reflective and slightly embarrassed. "I know him—I met him at Mr. Leyton's. He has already talked of Mr. Rushbrook, but," she added, avoiding any conclusion, with a pretty pout, "I'd like

to have the opinion of others. Yours, now, I fancy would be quite independent.”

“You stick to what Jack Somers has said, good or bad, and you won’t be far wrong,” he said assuringly. He stopped; his quick ear had heard approaching voices; he returned to her and held out his hand. As it seemed to her that in California everybody shook hands with everybody else on the slightest occasions, sometimes to save further conversation, she gave him her own. He shook it, less forcibly than she had feared, and abruptly left her. For a moment she was piqued at this superior and somewhat brusque way of ignoring her request, but reflecting that it might be the awkwardness of an untrained man, she dismissed it from her mind. The voices of her friends in the already resounding passages also recalled her to the fact that she had been wandering about the house with a stranger, and she rejoined them a little self-consciously.

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Leyton, gayly, “it seems we are to stay. Leyton says Rushbrook won’t hear of our going.”

“Does that mean that your husband takes the whole opera troupe over to your house in exchange?”

“Don’t be satirical, but congratulate yourself on your opportunity of seeing an awfully funny gathering. I wouldn’t have you miss it for the world. It’s the most characteristic thing out.”

“Characteristic of what?”

“Of Rushbrook, of course. Nobody else would conceive of getting together such a lot of queer people.”

“But don’t it strike you that we’re a part of the lot?”

“Perhaps,” returned the lively Mrs. Leyton. “No doubt that’s the reason why Jack Somers is coming over, and is so anxious that YOU should stay. I can’t imagine why else he should rave about Miss Grace Nevil as he does. Come, Grace, no New York or Philadelphia airs, here! Consider your uncle’s interests with this capitalist, to say nothing of ours. Because you’re a millionaire and have been accustomed to riches from your birth, don’t turn up your nose at our unpampered appetites. Besides, Jack Somers is Rushbrook’s particular friend, and he may think your criticisms unkind.”

“But IS Mr. Somers such a great friend of Mr. Rushbrook’s?” asked Grace Nevil.

“Why, of course. Rushbrook consults him about all these things; gives him carte blanche to invite whom he likes and order what he likes, and trusts his taste and judgment implicitly.”

“Then this gathering is Mr. Somers’ selection?”

“How preposterous you are, Grace. Of course not. Only Somers’ IDEA of what is pleasing to Rushbrook, gotten up with a taste and discretion all his own. You know Somers is a gentleman, educated at West Point—traveled all over Europe—you might have met him there; and Rushbrook—well, you have only to see him to know what HE is. Don’t you understand?”

A slight seriousness; the same shadow that once before darkened the girl’s charming face gave way to a mischievous knitting of her brows as she said naively, “No.”

CHAPTER THREE

Grace Nevil had quite recovered her equanimity when the indispensable Mr. Somers, handsome, well-bred, and self-restrained, approached her later in the crowded drawing-room. Blended with his subdued personal admiration was a certain ostentation of respect—as of a tribute to a distinguished guest—that struck her. “I am to have the pleasure of taking you in, Miss Nevil,” he said. “It’s my one compensation for the dreadful responsibility just thrust upon me. Our host has been suddenly called away, and I am left to take his place.”

Miss Nevil was slightly startled. Nevertheless, she smiled graciously. “From what I hear this is no new function of yours; that is, if there really IS a Mr. Rushbrook. I am inclined to think him a myth.”

“You make me wish he were,” retorted Somers, gallantly; “but as I couldn’t reign at all, except in his stead, I shall look to you to lend your rightful grace to my borrowed dignity.”

The more general announcement to the company was received with a few perfidious regrets from the more polite, but with only amused surprise by the majority. Indeed, many considered it “characteristic”—“so like Bob Rushbrook,” and a few enthusiastic friends looked upon it as a crowning and intentional stroke of humor. It remained, however, for the gentleman from Siskyou to give the incident a subtlety that struck Miss Nevil’s fancy. “It reminds me,” he said in her hearing, “of ole Kernel Frisbee, of Robertson County, one of the purliest men I ever struck. When he knew a feller was very dry, he’d jest set the decanter afore him, and

managed to be called out the room on bus'ness. Now, Bob Rushbrook's about as white a man as that. He's jest the feller, who, knowing you and me might feel kinder restrained about indulging our appetites afore him, kinder drops out easy, and leaves us alone." And she was impressed by an instinct that the speaker really felt the delicacy he spoke of, and that it left no sense of inferiority behind.

The dinner, served in a large, brilliantly-lit saloon, that in floral decoration and gilded columns suggested an ingenious blending of a steamboat table d'hote and "harvest home," was perfect in its cuisine, even if somewhat extravagant in its proportions.

"I should be glad to receive the salary that Rushbrook pays his chef, and still happier to know how to earn it as fairly," said Somers to his fair companion.

"But is his skill entirely appreciated here?" she asked.

"Perfectly," responded Somers. "Our friend from Siskyou over there appreciates that 'pate' which he cannot name as well as I do. Rushbrook himself is the only exception, yet I fancy that even HIS simplicity and regularity in feeding is as much a matter of business with him as any defect in his earlier education. In his eyes, his chef's greatest qualification is his promptness and fertility. Have you noticed that ornament before you?" pointing to an elaborate confection. "It bears your initials, you see. It was conceived and executed since you arrived—rather, I should say, since it was known that you would honor us with your company. The greatest difficulty encountered was to find out what your initials were."

“And I suppose,” mischievously added the young girl to her acknowledgments, “that the same fertile mind which conceived the design eventually provided the initials?”

“That is our secret,” responded Somers, with affected gravity.

The wines were of characteristic expensiveness, and provoked the same general comment. Rushbrook seldom drank wine; Somers had selected it. But the barbaric opulence of the entertainment culminated in the Californian fruits, piled in pyramids on silver dishes, gorgeous and unreal in their size and painted beauty, and the two Divas smiled over a basket of grapes and peaches as outrageous in dimensions and glaring color as any pasteboard banquet at which they had professionally assisted. As the courses succeeded each other, under the exaltation of wine, conversation became more general as regarded participation, but more local and private as regarded the subject, until Miss Nevil could no longer follow it. The interests of that one, the hopes of another, the claims of a third, in affairs that were otherwise uninteresting, were all discussed with singular youthfulness of trust that to her alone seemed remarkable. Not that she lacked entertainment from the conversation of her clever companion, whose confidences and criticisms were very pleasant to her; but she had a gentlewoman's instinct that he talked to her too much, and more than was consistent with his duties as the general host. She looked around the table for her singular acquaintance of an hour before, but she had not seen him since. She would have spoken about him to Somers, but she had an instinctive idea that the latter would be antipathetic, in spite of the stranger's flattering commendation. So she found herself again following Somers' cynical but good-humored description of the various guests, and, I fear, seeing with his eyes, listening

with his ears, and occasionally participating in his superior attitude. The “fearful joy” she had found in the novelty of the situation and the originality of the actors seemed now quite right from this critical point of view. So she learned how the guest with the long hair was an unknown painter, to whom Rushbrook had given a commission for three hundred yards of painted canvas, to be cut up and framed as occasion and space required, in Rushbrook’s new hotel in San Francisco; how the gray-bearded foreigner near him was an accomplished bibliophile who was furnishing Mr. Rushbrook’s library from spoils of foreign collections, and had suffered unheard-of agonies from the millionaire’s insisting upon a handsome uniform binding that should deprive certain precious but musty tomes of their crumbling, worm-eaten coverings; how the very gentle, clerical-looking stranger, mildest of a noisy, disputing crowd at the other table, was a notorious duelist and dead shot; how the only gentleman at the table who retained a flannel shirt and high boots was not a late-coming mountaineer, but a well-known English baronet on his travels; how the man who told a somewhat florid and emphatic anecdote was a popular Eastern clergyman; how the one querulous, discontented face in a laughing group was the famous humorist who had just convulsed it; and how a pale, handsome young fellow, who ate and drank sparingly and disregarded the coquettish advances of the prettiest Diva with the cold abstraction of a student, was a notorious roue and gambler. But there was a sudden and unlooked-for change of criticism and critic.

The festivity had reached that stage when the guests were more or less accessible to emotion, and more or less touched by the astounding fact that every one was enjoying himself. This phenomenon, which is apt to burst into song or dance among other races, is constrained to voice itself in an Anglo-Saxon gathering by some explanation, apology, or moral—known as an after-dinner speech. Thus it was that

the gentleman from Siskyou, who had been from time to time casting glances at Somers and his fair companion at the head of the table, now rose to his feet, albeit unsteadily, pushed back his chair, and began:

“Pears to me, ladies and gentlemen, and feller pardners, that on an occasion like this, suthin’ oughter be said of the man who got it up—whose money paid for it, and who ain’t here to speak for himself, except by deputy. Yet you all know that’s Bob Rushbrook’s style—he ain’t here, because he’s full of some other plan or improvements—and it’s like him to start suthin’ of this kind, give it its aim and purpose, and then stand aside to let somebody else run it for him. There ain’t no man livin’ ez hez, so to speak, more fast horses ready saddled for riding, and more fast men ready spurred to ride ‘em—whether to win his races or run his errands. There ain’t no man livin’ ez knows better how to make other men’s games his, or his game seem to be other men’s. And from Jack Somers smilin’ over there, ez knows where to get the best wine that Bob pays for, and knows how to run this yer show for Bob, at Bob’s expense—we’re all contented. Ladies and gentlemen, we’re all contented. We stand, so to speak, on the cards he’s dealt us. What may be his little game, it ain’t for us to say; but whatever it is, WE’RE IN IT. Gentlemen and ladies, we’ll drink Bob’s health!”

There was a somewhat sensational pause, followed by good-natured laughter and applause, in which Somers joined; yet not without a certain constraint that did not escape the quick sympathy of the shocked and unsmiling Miss Nevil. It was with a feeling of relief that she caught the chaperoning eye of Mrs. Leyton, who was entreating her in the usual mysterious signal to the other ladies to rise and follow her. When she reached the drawing-room, a little behind the others, she was somewhat surprised to observe

that the stranger whom she had missed during the evening was approaching her with Mrs. Leyton.

“Mr. Rushbrook returned sooner than he expected, but unfortunately, as he always retires early, he has only time to say ‘goodnight’ to you before he goes.”

For an instant Grace Nevil was more angry than disconcerted. Then came the conviction that she was stupid not to have suspected the truth before. Who else would that brusque stranger develop into but this rude host? She bowed formally.

Mr. Rushbrook looked at her with the faintest smile on his handsome mouth. “Well, Miss Nevil, I hope Jack Somers satisfied your curiosity?”

With a sudden recollection of the Siskyou gentleman’s speech, and a swift suspicion that in some way she had been made use of with the others by this forceful-looking man before her, she answered pertly:

“Yes; but there was a speech by a gentleman from Siskyou that struck me as being nearer to the purpose.”

“That’s so—I heard it as I came in,” said Mr. Rushbrook, calmly. “I don’t know but you’re right.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Six months had passed. The Villa of Maecenas was closed at Los Osos Canyon, and the southwest trade-winds were slanting the rains of the wet season against its shut windows and barred doors. Within that hollow, deserted shell, its aspect—save for a single exception—was unchanged; the furniture and decorations preserved their eternal youth undimmed by time; the rigidly-arranged rooms, now closed to life and light, developed more than ever their resemblance to a furniture warehouse. The single exception was the room which Grace Nevil had rearranged for herself; and that, oddly enough, was stripped and bare—even to its paper and mouldings.

In other respects, the sealed treasures of Rushbrook's villa, far from provoking any sentimentality, seemed only to give truth to the current rumor that it was merely waiting to be transformed into a gorgeous watering-place hotel under Rushbrook's direction; that, with its new ball-room changed into an elaborate dining-hall, it would undergo still further improvement, the inevitable end and object of all Rushbrook's enterprise; and that its former proprietor had already begun another villa whose magnificence should eclipse the last. There certainly appeared to be no limit to the millionaire's success in all that he personally undertook, or in his fortunate complicity with the enterprise and invention of others. His name was associated with the oldest and safest schemes, as well as the newest and boldest—with an equal guarantee of security. A few, it was true, looked doubtingly upon this "one man power," but could not refute the fact that others had largely benefited by association with him, and that he shared his profits with a royal hand. Some objected on higher grounds to his brutalizing the influence of wealth

by his material and extravagantly practical processes, instead of the gentler suggestions of education and personal example, and were impelled to point out the fact that he and his patronage were vulgar. It was felt, however, by those who received his benefits, that a proper sense of this inferiority was all that ethics demanded of them. One could still accept Rushbrook's barbaric gifts by humorously recognizing the fact that he didn't know any better, and that it pleased him, as long as they resented any higher pretensions.

The rain-beaten windows of Rushbrook's town house, however, were cheerfully lit that December evening. Mr. Rushbrook seldom dined alone; in fact, it was popularly alleged that very often the unfinished business of the day was concluded over his bountiful and perfect board. He was dressing as James entered the room.

"Mr. Leyton is in your study, sir; he will stay to dinner."

"All right."

"I think, sir," added James, with respectful suggestiveness, "he wants to talk. At least, sir, he asked me if you would likely come downstairs before your company arrived."

"Ah! Well, tell the others I'm dining on BUSINESS, and set dinner for two in the blue room."

"Yes, sir."

Meanwhile, Mr. Leyton—a man of Rushbrook's age, but not so fresh and vigorous-looking—had thrown himself in a chair beside the study fire, after a glance around the

handsome and familiar room. For the house had belonged to a brother millionaire; it had changed hands with certain shares of "Water Front,"—as some of Rushbrook's dealings had the true barbaric absence of money detail—and was elegantly and tastefully furnished. The cuckoo had, however, already laid a few characteristic eggs in this adopted nest, and a white marble statue of a nude and ill-fed Virtue, sent over by Rushbrook's Paris agent, and unpacked that morning, stood in one corner, and materially brought down the temperature. A Japanese praying-throne of pure ivory, and, above it, a few yards of improper, colored exposure by an old master, equalized each other.

"And what is all this affair about the dinner?" suddenly asked a tartly-pitched female voice with a foreign accent.

Mr. Leyton turned quickly, and was just conscious of a faint shriek, the rustle of a skirt, and the swift vanishing of a woman's figure from the doorway. Mr. Leyton turned red. Rushbrook lived en garcon, with feminine possibilities; Leyton was a married man and a deacon. The incident which, to a man of the world, would have brought only a smile, fired the inexperienced Leyton with those exaggerated ideas and intense credulity regarding vice common to some very good men. He walked on tip-toe to the door, and peered into the passage. At that moment Rushbrook entered from the opposite door of the room.

"Well," said Rushbrook, with his usual practical directness, "what do you think of her?"

Leyton, still flushed, and with eyebrows slightly knit, said, awkwardly, that he had scarcely seen her.

“She cost me already ten thousand dollars, and I suppose I’ll have to eventually fix up a separate room for her somewhere,” continued Rushbrook.

“I should certainly advise it,” said Leyton, quickly, “for really, Rushbrook, you know that something is due to the respectable people who come here, and any of them are likely to see”—

“Ah!” interrupted Rushbrook, seriously, “you think she hasn’t got on clothes enough. Why, look here, old man—she’s one of the Virtues, and that’s the rig in which they always travel. She’s a ‘Temperance’ or a ‘Charity’ or a ‘Resignation,’ or something of that kind. You’ll find her name there in French somewhere at the foot of the marble.”

Leyton saw his mistake, but felt—as others sometimes felt—a doubt whether this smileless man was not inwardly laughing at him. He replied, with a keen, rapid glance at his host:

“I was referring to some woman who stood in that doorway just now, and addressed me rather familiarly, thinking it was you.”

“Oh, the Signora,” said Rushbrook, with undisturbed directness; “well, you saw her at Los Osos last summer. Likely she DID think you were me.”

The cool ignoring of any ulterior thought in Leyton’s objection forced the guest to be equally practical in his reply.

“Yes, but the fact is that Miss Nevil had talked of coming here with me this evening to see you on her own affairs, and it wouldn’t have been exactly the thing for her to meet that woman.”

“She wouldn’t,” said Rushbrook, promptly; “nor would YOU, if you had gone into the parlor as Miss Nevil would have done. But look here! If that’s the reason why you didn’t bring her, send for her at once; my coachman can take a card from you; the brougham’s all ready to fetch her, and there you are. She’ll see only you and me.” He was already moving towards the bell, when Leyton stopped him.

“No matter now. I can tell you her business, I fancy; and in fact, I came here to speak of it, quite independently of her.”

“That won’t do, Leyton,” interrupted Rushbrook, with crisp decision. “One or the other interview is unnecessary; it wastes time, and isn’t business. Better have her present, even if she don’t say a word.”

“Yes, but not in this matter,” responded Leyton; “it’s about Somers. You know he’s been very attentive to her ever since her uncle left her here to recruit her health, and I think she fancies him. Well, although she’s independent and her own mistress, as you know, Mrs. Leyton and I are somewhat responsible for her acquaintance with Somers—and for that matter so are you; and as my wife thinks it means a marriage, we ought to know something more positive about Somers’ prospects. Now, all we really know is that he’s a great friend of yours; that you trust a good deal to him; that he manages your social affairs; that you treat him as a son or nephew, and it’s generally believed that he’s as good as provided for by you—eh? Did you speak?”

“No,” said Rushbrook, quietly regarding the statue as if taking its measurement for a suitable apartment for it. “Go on.”

“Well,” said Leyton, a little impatiently, “that’s the belief everybody has, and you’ve not contradicted it. And on that we’ve taken the responsibility of not interfering with Somers’ attentions.”

“Well?” said Rushbrook, interrogatively.

“Well,” replied Leyton, emphatically, “you see I must ask you positively if you HAVE done anything, or are you going to do anything for him?”

“Well,” replied Rushbrook, with exasperating coolness, “what do you call this marriage?”

“I don’t understand you,” said Leyton.

“Look here, Leyton,” said Rushbrook, suddenly and abruptly facing him; “Jack Somers has brains, knowledge of society, tact, accomplishments, and good looks: that’s HIS capital as much as mine is money. I employ him: that’s his advertisement, recommendation, and credit. Now, on the strength of this, as you say, Miss Nevil is willing to invest in him; I don’t see what more can be done.”

“But if her uncle don’t think it enough?”

“She’s independent, and has money for both.”

“But if she thinks she’s been deceived, and changes her mind?”

“Leyton, you don’t know Miss Nevil. Whatever that girl undertakes she’s weighed fully, and goes through with. If she’s trusted him enough to marry him, money won’t stop her; if she thinks she’s been deceived, YOU’LL never know it.”

The enthusiasm and conviction were so unlike Rushbrook's usual cynical toleration of the sex that Leyton stared at him.

"That's odd," he returned. "That's what she says of you."

"Of ME; you mean Somers?"

"No, of YOU. Come, Rushbrook, don't pretend you don't know that Miss Nevil is a great partisan of yours, swears by you, says you're misunderstood by people, and, what's infernally odd in a woman who don't belong to the class you fancy, don't talk of your habits. That's why she wants to consult you about Somers, I suppose, and that's why, knowing you might influence her, I came here first to warn you."

"And I've told you that whatever I might say or do wouldn't influence her. So we'll drop the subject."

"Not yet; for you're bound to see Miss Nevil sooner or later. Now, if she knows that you've done nothing for this man, your friend and her lover, won't she be justified in thinking that you would have a reason for it?"

"Yes. I should give it."

"What reason?"

"That I knew she'd be more contented to have him speculate with HER money than mine."

"Then you think that he isn't a business man?"

“I think that she thinks so, or she wouldn’t marry him; it’s part of the attraction. But come, James has been for five minutes discreetly waiting outside the door to tell us dinner is ready, and the coast clear of all other company. But look here,” he said, suddenly stopping, with his arm in Leyton’s, “you’re through your talk, I suppose; perhaps you’d rather we’d dine with the Signora and the others than alone?”

For an instant Leyton thrilled with the fascination of what he firmly believed was a guilty temptation. Rushbrook, perceiving his hesitation, added:

“By the way, Somers is of the party, and one or two others you know.”

Mr. Leyton opened his eyes widely at this; either the temptation had passed, or the idea of being seen in doubtful company by a younger man was distasteful, for he hurriedly disclaimed any preference. “But,” he added with half-significant politeness, “perhaps I’m keeping YOU from them?”

“It makes not the slightest difference to me,” calmly returned Rushbrook, with such evident truthfulness that Leyton was both convinced and chagrined.

Preceded by the grave and ubiquitous James, they crossed the large hall, and entered through a smaller passage a charming apartment hung with blue damask, which might have been a boudoir, study, or small reception-room, yet had the air of never having been anything continuously. It would seem that Rushbrook’s habit of “camping out” in different parts of his mansion obtained here as at Los Osos, and with the exception of a small closet which contained his Spartan bed, the rooms were used separately or in suites, as occasion

or his friends required. It is recorded that an Eastern guest, newly arrived with letters to Rushbrook, after a tedious journey, expressed himself pleased with this same blue room, in which he had sumptuously dined with his host, and subsequently fell asleep in his chair. Without disturbing his guest, Rushbrook had the table removed, a bed, washstand, and bureau brought in, the sleeping man delicately laid upon the former, and left to awaken to an Arabian night's realization of his wish.

CHAPTER FIVE

James had barely disposed of his master and Mr. Leyton, and left them to the ministrations of two of his underlings, before he was confronted with one of those difficult problems that it was part of his functions to solve. The porter informed him that a young lady had just driven up in a carriage ostensibly to see Mr. Rushbrook, and James, descending to the outer vestibule, found himself face to face with Miss Grace Nevil. Happily, that young lady, with her usual tact, spared him some embarrassment.

“Oh! James,” she said sweetly, “do you think that I could see Mr. Rushbrook for a few moments IF I WAITED FOR THE OPPORTUNITY? You understand, I don’t wish to disturb him or his company by being regularly announced.”

The young girl’s practical intelligence appeared to increase the usual respect which James had always shown her. “I understand, miss.” He thought for a moment, and said: “Would you mind, then, following me where you could wait quietly and alone?” As she quickly assented, he preceded her up the staircase, past the study and drawing-room, which he did not enter, and stopped before a small door at the end of the passage. Then, handing her a key which he took from his pocket, he said: “This is the only room in the house that is strictly reserved for Mr. Rushbrook, and even he rarely uses it. You can wait here without anybody knowing it until I can communicate with him and bring you to his study unobserved. And,” he hesitated, “if you wouldn’t mind locking the door when you are in, miss, you would be more secure, and I will knock when I come for you.”

Grace Nevil smiled at the man's prudence, and entered the room. But to her great surprise, she had scarcely shut the door when she was instantly struck with a singular memory which the apartment recalled. It was exactly like the room she had altered in Rushbrook's villa at Los Osos! More than that, on close examination it proved to be the very same furniture, arranged as she remembered to have arranged it, even to the flowers and grasses, now, alas! faded and withered on the walls. There could be no mistake. There was the open ebony escritoire with the satin blotter open, and its leaves still bearing the marks of her own handwriting. So complete to her mind was the idea of her own tenancy in this bachelor's mansion, that she looked around with a half indignant alarm for the photograph or portrait of herself that might further indicate it. But there was no other exposition. The only thing that had been added was a gilt legend on the satin case of the blotter—"Los Osos, August 20, 186-," the day she had occupied the room.

She was pleased, astonished, but more than all, disturbed. The only man who might claim a right to this figurative possession of her tastes and habits was the one whom she had quietly, reflectively, and understandingly half accepted as her lover, and on whose account she had come to consult Rushbrook. But Somers was not a sentimentalist; in fact, as a young girl, forced by her independent position to somewhat critically scrutinize masculine weaknesses, this had always been a point in his favor; yet even if he had joined with his friend Rushbrook to perpetuate the memory of their first acquaintanceship, his taste merely would not have selected a chambre de garçon in Mr. Rushbrook's home for its exhibition. Her conception of the opposite characters of the two men was singularly distinct and real, and this momentary confusion of them was disagreeable to her woman's sense. But at this moment James came to release her and conduct her to Rushbrook's study, where he would

join her at once. Everything had been arranged as she had wished.

Even a more practical man than Rushbrook might have lingered over the picture of the tall, graceful figure of Miss Nevil, quietly enthroned in a large armchair by the fire, her scarlet, satin-lined cloak thrown over its back, and her chin resting on her hand. But the millionaire walked directly towards her with his usual frankness of conscious but restrained power, and she felt, as she always did, perfectly at her ease in his presence. Even as she took his outstretched hand, its straightforward grasp seemed to endow her with its own confidence.

“You’ll excuse my coming here so abruptly,” she smiled, “but I wanted to get before Mr. Leyton, who, I believe, wishes to see you on the same business as myself.”

“He is here already, and dining with me,” said Rushbrook.

“Ah! does he know I am here?” asked the girl, quietly.

“No; as he said you had thought of coming with him and didn’t, I presumed you didn’t care to have him know you had come alone.”

“Not exactly that, Mr. Rushbrook,” she said, fixing her beautiful eyes on him in bright and trustful confidence, “but I happen to have a fuller knowledge of this business than he has, and yet, as it is not altogether my own secret, I was not permitted to divulge it to him. Nor would I tell it to you, only I cannot bear that you should think that I had anything to do with this wretched inquisition into Mr. Somers’ prospects. Knowing as well as you do how perfectly

independent I am, you would think it strange, wouldn't you? But you would think it still more surprising when you found out that I and my uncle already know how liberally and generously you had provided for Mr. Somers in the future."

"How I had provided for Mr. Somers in the future?" repeated Mr. Rushbrook, looking at the fire, "eh?"

"Yes," said the young girl, indifferently, "how you were to put him in to succeed you in the Water Front Trust, and all that. He told it to me and my uncle at the outset of our acquaintance, confidentially, of course, and I dare say with an honorable delicacy that was like him, but—I suppose now you will think me foolish—all the while I'd rather he had not."

"You'd rather he had not," repeated Mr. Rushbrook, slowly.

"Yes," continued Grace, leaning forward with her rounded elbows on her knees, and her slim, arched feet on the fender. "Now you are going to laugh at me, Mr. Rushbrook, but all this seemed to me to spoil any spontaneous feeling I might have towards him, and limit my independence in a thing that should be a matter of free will alone. It seemed too much like a business proposition! There, my kind friend!" she added, looking up and trying to read his face with a half girlish pout, followed, however, by a maturer sigh, "I'm bothering you with a woman's foolishness instead of talking business. And"—another sigh—"I suppose it IS business for my uncle, who has, it seems, bought into this Trust on these possible contingencies, has, perhaps, been asking questions of Mr. Leyton. But I don't want you to think that I approve of them, or advise your answering them. But you are not listening."

“I had forgotten something,” said Rushbrook, with an odd preoccupation. “Excuse me a moment—I will return at once.”

He left the room quite as abstractedly, and when he reached the passage, he apparently could not remember what he had forgotten, as he walked deliberately to the end window, where, with his arms folded behind his back, he remained looking out into the street. A passer-by, glancing up, might have said he had seen the pale, stern ghost of Mr. Rushbrook, framed like a stony portrait in the window. But he presently turned away, and re-entered the room, going up to Grace, who was still sitting by the fire, in his usual strong and direct fashion.

“Well! Now let me see what you want. I think this would do.”

He took a seat at his open desk, and rapidly wrote a few lines.

“There,” he continued, “when you write to your uncle, inclose that.”

Grace took it, and read:

DEAR MISS NEVIL—Pray assure your uncle from me that I am quite ready to guarantee, in any form that he may require, the undertaking represented to him by Mr. John Somers. Yours very truly,

ROBERT RUSHBROOK

A quick flush mounted to the young girl's cheeks. "But this is a SECURITY, Mr. Rushbrook," she said proudly, handing him back the paper, "and my uncle does not require that. Nor shall I insult him or you by sending it."

"It is BUSINESS, Miss Nevil," said Rushbrook, gravely. He stopped, and fixed his eyes upon her animated face and sparkling eyes. "You can send it to him or not, as you like. But"—a rare smile came to his handsome mouth—"as this is a letter to YOU, you must not insult ME by not accepting it."

Replying to his smile rather than the words that accompanied it, Miss Nevil smiled, too. Nevertheless, she was uneasy and disturbed. The interview, whatever she might have vaguely expected from it, had resolved itself simply into a business indorsement of her lover, which she had not sought, and which gave her no satisfaction. Yet there was the same potent and indefinably protecting presence before her which she had sought, but whose omniscience and whose help she seemed to have lost the spell and courage to put to the test. He relieved her in his abrupt but not unkindly fashion. "Well, when is it to be?"

"It?"

"Your marriage."

"Oh, not for some time. There's no hurry."

It might have struck the practical Mr. Rushbrook that, even considered as a desirable business affair, the prospective completion of this contract provoked neither frank satisfaction nor conventional dissimulation on the part

of the young lady, for he regarded her calm but slightly wearied expression fixedly. But he only said: "Then I shall say nothing of this interview to Mr. Leyton?"

"As you please. It really matters little. Indeed, I suppose I was rather foolish in coming at all, and wasting your valuable time for nothing."

She had risen, as if taking his last question in the significance of a parting suggestion, and was straightening her tall figure, preparatory to putting on her cloak. As she reached it, he stepped forward, and lifted it from the chair to assist her. The act was so unprecedented, as Mr. Rushbrook never indulged in those minor masculine courtesies, that she was momentarily as confused as a younger girl at the gallantry of a younger man. In their previous friendship he had seldom drawn near her except to shake her hand—a circumstance that had always recurred to her when his free and familiar life had been the subject of gossip. But she now had a more frightened consciousness that her nerves were strangely responding to his powerful propinquity, and she involuntarily contracted her pretty shoulders as he gently laid the cloak upon them. Yet even when the act was completed, she had a superstitious instinct that the significance of this rare courtesy was that it was final, and that he had helped her to interpose something that shut him out from her forever.

She was turning away with a heightened color, when the sound of light, hurried footsteps, and the rustle of a woman's dress was heard in the hall. A swift recollection of her companion's infelicitous reputation now returned to her, and Grace Nevil, with a slight stiffening of her whole frame, became coldly herself again. Mr. Rushbrook betrayed neither surprise nor agitation. Begging her to wait a moment

until he could arrange for her to pass to her carriage unnoticed, he left the room.

Yet it seemed that the cause of the disturbance was unsuspected by Mr. Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton, although left to the consolation of cigars and liquors in the blue room, had become slightly weary of his companion's prolonged absence. Satisfied in his mind that Rushbrook had joined the gayer party, and that he was even now paying gallant court to the Signora, he became again curious and uneasy. At last the unmistakable sound of whispering voices in the passage got the better of his sense of courtesy as a guest, and he rose from his seat, and slightly opened the door. As he did so the figures of a man and woman, conversing in earnest whispers, passed the opening. The man's arm was round the woman's waist; the woman was—as he had suspected—the one who had stood in the doorway, the Signora—but—the man was NOT Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton drew back this time in unaffected horror. It was none other than Jack Somers!

Some warning instinct must at that moment have struck the woman, for with a stifled cry she disengaged herself from Somers' arm, and dashed rapidly down the hall. Somers, evidently unaware of the cause, stood irresolute for a moment, and then more silently but swiftly disappeared into a side corridor as if to intercept her. It was the rapid passage of the Signora that had attracted the attention of Grace and Rushbrook in the study, and it was the moment after it that Mr. Rushbrook left.

CHAPTER SIX

Vaguely uneasy, and still perplexed with her previous agitation, as Mr. Rushbrook closed the door behind him, Grace, following some feminine instinct rather than any definite reason, walked to the door and placed her hand upon the lock to prevent any intrusion until he returned. Her caution seemed to be justified a moment later, for a heavier but stealthier footstep halted outside. The handle of the door was turned, but she resisted it with the fullest strength of her small hand until a voice, which startled her, called in a hurried whisper:

“Open quick, ‘tis I.”

She stepped back quickly, flung the door open, and beheld Somers on the threshold!

The astonishment, agitation, and above all, the awkward confusion of this usually self-possessed and ready man, was so unlike him, and withal so painful, that Grace hurried to put an end to it, and for an instant forgot her own surprise at seeing him. She smiled assuringly, and extended her hand.

“Grace—Miss Nevil—I beg your pardon—I didn’t imagine”—he began with a forced laugh. “I mean, of course—I cannot—but”—He stopped, and then assuming a peculiar expression, said: “But what are YOU doing here?”

At any other moment the girl would have resented the tone, which was as new to her as his previous agitation, but in her present self-consciousness her situation seemed to require some explanation. “I came here,” she said, “to see

Mr. Rushbrook on business. Your business—OUR business,” she added, with a charming smile, using for the first time the pronoun that seemed to indicate their unity and interest, and yet fully aware of a vague insincerity in doing so.

“Our BUSINESS?” he repeated, ignoring her gentler meaning with a changed emphasis and a look of suspicion.

“Yes,” said Grace, a little impatiently. “Mr. Leyton thought he ought to write to my uncle something positive as to your prospects with Mr. Rushbrook, and”—

“You came here to inquire?” said the young man, sharply.

“I came here to stop any inquiry,” said Grace, indignantly. “I came here to say I was satisfied with what you had confided to me of Mr. Rushbrook’s generosity, and that was enough!”

“With what I had confided to you? You dared say that?”

Grace stopped, and instantly faced him. But any indignation she might have felt at his speech and manner was swallowed up in the revulsion and horror that overtook her with the sudden revelation she saw in his white and frightened face. Leyton’s strange inquiry, Rushbrook’s cold composure and scornful acceptance of her own credulousness, came to her in a flash of shameful intelligence. Somers had lied! The insufferable meanness of it! A lie, whose very uselessness and ignobility had defeated its purpose—a lie that implied the basest suspicion of her own independence and truthfulness—such a lie now stood out as plainly before her as his guilty face.

“Forgive my speaking so rudely,” he said with a forced smile and attempt to recover his self-control, “but you have ruined me unless you deny that I told you anything. It was a joke—an extravagance that I had forgotten; at least, it was a confidence between you and me that you have foolishly violated. Say that you misunderstood me—that it was a fancy of your own. Say anything—he trusts you—he’ll believe anything you say.”

“He HAS believed me,” said Grace, almost fiercely, turning upon him with the paper that Rushbrook had given her in her outstretched hand. “Read that!”

He read it. Had he blushed, had he stammered, had he even kept up his former frantic and pitiable attitude, she might at that supreme moment have forgiven him. But to her astonishment his face changed, his handsome brow cleared, his careless, happy smile returned, his graceful confidence came back—he stood before her the elegant, courtly, and accomplished gentleman she had known. He returned her the paper, and advancing with extended hand, said triumphantly:

“Superb! Splendid! No one but a woman could think of that! And only one woman achieve it. You have tricked the great Rushbrook. You are indeed worthy of being a financier’s wife!”

“No,” she said passionately, tearing up the paper and throwing it at his feet; “not as YOU understand it—and never YOURS! You have debased and polluted everything connected with it, as you would have debased and polluted ME. Out of my presence that you are insulting—out of the room of the man whose magnanimity you cannot understand!”

The destruction of the guarantee apparently stung him more than the words that accompanied it. He did not relapse again into his former shamefaced terror, but as a malignant glitter came into his eyes, he regained his coolness.

“It may not be so difficult for others to understand, Miss Nevil,” he said, with polished insolence, “and as Bob Rushbrook’s generosity to pretty women is already a matter of suspicion, perhaps you are wise to destroy that record of it.”

“Coward!” said Grace, “stand aside and let me pass!” She swept by him to the door. But it opened upon Rushbrook’s re-entrance. He stood for an instant glancing at the pair, and then on the fragments of the paper that strewed the floor. Then, still holding the door in his hand, he said quietly:

“One moment before you go, Miss Nevil. If this is the result of any misunderstanding as to the presence of another woman here, in company with Mr. Somers, it is only fair to him to say that that woman is here as a friend of MINE, not of his, and I alone am responsible.”

Grace halted, and turned the cold steel of her proud eyes on the two men. As they rested on Rushbrook they quivered slightly. “I can already bear witness,” she said coldly, “to the generosity of Mr. Rushbrook in a matter which then touched me. But there certainly is no necessity for him to show it now in a matter in which I have not the slightest concern.”

As she swept out of the room and was received in the respectable shadow of the waiting James, Rushbrook turned to Somers.

“And I’M afraid it won’t do—for Leyton saw you,” he said curtly. “Now, then, shut that door, for you and I, Jack Somers, have a word to say to each other.”

What that word was, and how it was said and received, is not a part of this record. But it is told that it was the beginning of that mighty Iliad, still remembered of men, which shook the financial camps of San Francisco, and divided them into bitter contending parties. For when it became known the next day that Somers had suddenly abandoned Rushbrook, and carried over to a powerful foreign capitalist the secret methods, and even, it was believed, the LUCK of his late employer, it was certain that there would be war to the knife, and that it was no longer a struggle of rival enterprise, but of vindictive men.

CHAPTER SEVEN

For a year the battle between the Somers faction and the giant but solitary Rushbrook raged fiercely, with varying success. I grieve to say that the proteges and parasites of Maecenas deserted him in a body; nay, they openly alleged that it was the true artistic nature and refinement of Somers that had always attracted them, and that a man like Rushbrook, who bought pictures by the yard—equally of the unknown struggling artist and the famous masters—was no true patron of Art. Rushbrook made no attempt to recover his lost prestige, and once, when squeezed into a tight “corner,” and forced to realize on his treasures, he put them up at auction and the people called them “daubs;” their rage knew no bounds. It was then that an unfettered press discovered that Rushbrook never was a Maecenas at all, grimly deprecated his assumption of that title, and even doubted if he were truly a millionaire. It was at this time that a few stood by him—notably, the mill inventor from Siskyou, grown plethoric with success, but eventually ground between the upper and nether millstone of the Somers and Rushbrook party. Miss Nevil had returned to the Atlantic States with Mrs. Leyton. While rumors had played freely with the relations of Somers and the Signora as the possible cause of the rupture between him and Rushbrook, no mention had ever been made of the name of Miss Nevil.

It was raining heavily one afternoon, when Mr. Rushbrook drove from his office to his San Francisco house. The fierce struggle in which he was engaged left him little time for hospitality, and for the last two weeks his house had been comparatively deserted. He passed through the empty rooms, changed in little except the absence of some valuable monstrosities which had gone to replenish his capital. When

he reached his bedroom, he paused a moment at the open door.

“James!”

“Yes, sir,” said James, appearing out of the shadow.

“What are you waiting for?”

“I thought you might be wanting something, sir.”

“You were waiting there this morning; you were in the ante-room of my study while I was writing. You were outside the blue room while I sat at breakfast. You were at my elbow in the drawing-room late last night. Now, James,” continued Mr. Rushbrook, with his usual grave directness, “I don’t intend to commit suicide; I can’t afford it, so keep your time and your rest for yourself—you want it—that’s a good fellow.”

“Yes, sir.”

“James!”

“Yes, sir.”

Rushbrook extended his hand. There was that faint, rare smile on his handsome mouth, for which James would at any time have laid down his life. But he only silently grasped his master’s hand, and the two men remained looking into each other’s eyes without a word. Then Mr. Rushbrook entered his room, lay down, and went to sleep, and James vanished in the shadow.

At the end of an hour Mr. Rushbrook awoke refreshed, and even James, who came to call him, appeared

to have brightened in the interval. "I have ordered a fire, sir, in the reserved room, the one fitted up from Los Osos, as your study has had no chance of being cleaned these two weeks. It will be a change for you, sir. I hope you'll excuse my not waking you to consult you about it."

Rushbrook remained so silent that James, fancying he had not heard him, was about to repeat himself when his master said quickly, "Very well, come for me there when dinner is ready," and entered the passage leading to the room. James did not follow him, and when Mr. Rushbrook, opening the door, started back with an exclamation, no one but the inmate heard the word that rose to his lips.

For there, seated before the glow of the blazing fire, was Miss Grace Nevil. She had evidently just arrived, for her mantle was barely loosened around her neck, and upon the fringe of brown hair between her bonnet and her broad, low forehead a few drops of rain still sparkled. As she lifted her long lashes quickly towards the door, it seemed as if they, too, had caught a little of that moisture. Rushbrook moved impatiently forward, and then stopped. Grace rose unhesitatingly to her feet, and met him half-way with frankly outstretched hands. "First of all," she said, with a half nervous laugh, "don't scold James; it's all my fault; I forbade him to announce me, lest you should drive me away, for I heard that during this excitement you came here for rest, and saw no one. Even the intrusion into this room is all my own. I confess now that I saw it the last night I was here; I was anxious to know if it was unchanged, and made James bring me here. I did not understand it then. I do now—and—thank you."

Her face must have shown that she was conscious that he was still holding her hand, for he suddenly released it. With a heightened color and a half girlish naivete, that was

the more charming for its contrast with her tall figure and air of thoroughbred repose, she turned back to her chair, and lightly motioned him to take the one before her. "I am here on BUSINESS; otherwise I should not have dared to look in upon you at all."

She stopped, drew off her gloves with a provoking deliberation, which was none the less fascinating that it implied a demure consciousness of inducing some impatience in the breast of her companion, stretched them out carefully by the fingers, laid them down neatly on the table, placed her elbows on her knees, slightly clasped her hands together, and bending forward, lifted her honest, handsome eyes to the man before her.

"Mr. Rushbrook, I have got between four and five hundred thousand dollars that I have no use for; I can control securities which can be converted, if necessary, into a hundred thousand more in ten days. I am free and my own mistress. It is generally considered that I know what I am about—you admitted as much when I was your pupil. I have come here to place this sum in your hands, at your free disposal. You know why and for what purpose."

"But what do you know of my affairs?" asked Rushbrook, quickly.

"Everything, and I know YOU, which is better. Call it an investment if you like—for I know you will succeed—and let me share your profits. Call it—if you please—restitution, for I am the miserable cause of your rupture with that man. Or call it revenge if you like," she said with a faint smile, "and let me fight at your side against our common enemy! Please, Mr. Rushbrook, don't deny me this. I have come three thousand miles for it; I could have sent it

to you—or written—but I feared you would not understand it. You are smiling—you will take it?”

“I cannot,” said Rushbrook, gravely.

“Then you force me to go into the Stock Market myself, and fight for you, and, unaided by YOUR genius, perhaps lose it without benefiting you.”

Rushbrook did not reply.

“At least, then, tell me why you ‘cannot.’”

Rushbrook rose, and looking into her face, said quietly with his old directness:

“Because I love you, Miss Nevil.”

A sudden instinct to rise and move away, a greater one to remain and hear him speak again, and a still greater one to keep back the blood that she felt was returning all too quickly to her cheek after the first shock, kept her silent. But she dropped her eyes.

“I loved you ever since I first saw you at Los Osos,” he went on quickly; “I said to myself even then, that if there was a woman that would fill my life, and make me what she wished me to be, it was you. I even fancied that day that you understood me better than any woman, or even any man, that I had ever met before. I loved you through all that miserable business with that man, even when my failure to make you happy with another brought me no nearer to you. I have loved you always. I shall love you always. I love you more for this foolish kindness that brings YOU beneath my roof once more, and gives me a chance to speak my heart to you, if only once and for the last time, than all the fortune that you

could put at my disposal. But I could not accept what you would offer me from any woman who was not my wife—and I could not marry any woman that did not love me. I am perhaps past the age when I could inspire a young girl's affection; but I have not reached the age when I would accept anything less." He stopped abruptly. Grace did not look up. There was a tear glistening upon her long eyelashes, albeit a faint smile played upon her lips.

"Do you call this business, Mr. Rushbrook?" she said softly.

"Business?"

"To assume a proposal declined before it has been offered."

"Grace—my darling—tell me—is it possible?"

It was too late for her to rise now, as his hands held both hers, and his handsome mouth was smiling level with her own. So it really seemed to a dispassionate spectator that it WAS possible, and before she had left the room, it even appeared to be the most probable thing in the world.

* * * * *

The union of Grace Nevil and Robert Rushbrook was recorded by local history as the crown to his victory over the Ring. But only he and his wife knew that it was the cause.

Brown of Calaveras

A subdued tone of conversation, and the absence of cigar smoke and boot heels at the windows of the Wingdam stagecoach, made it evident that one of the inside passengers was a woman. A disposition on the part of loungers at the stations to congregate before the window, and some concern in regard to the appearance of coats, hats, and collars, further indicated that she was lovely. All of which Mr. Jack Hamlin, on the box seat, noted with the smile of cynical philosophy. Not that he depreciated the sex, but that he recognized therein a deceitful element, the pursuit of which sometimes drew mankind away from the equally uncertain blandishments of poker—of which it may be remarked that Mr. Hamlin was a professional exponent.

So that when he placed his narrow boot on the wheel and leaped down, he did not even glance at the window from which a green veil was fluttering, but lounged up and down with that listless and grave indifference of his class, which was, perhaps, the next thing to good breeding. With his closely buttoned figure and self-contained air he was a marked contrast to the other passengers, with their feverish restlessness and boisterous emotion; and even Bill Masters, a graduate of Harvard, with his slovenly dress, his overflowing vitality, his intense appreciation of lawlessness and barbarism, and his mouth filled with crackers and cheese, I fear cut but an unromantic figure beside this lonely calculator of chances, with his pale Greek face and Homeric gravity.

The driver called "All aboard!" and Mr. Hamlin returned to the coach. His foot was upon the wheel, and his face raised to the level of the open window, when, at the same moment, what appeared to him to be the finest eyes in the world suddenly met his. He quietly dropped down again, addressed a few words to one of the inside passengers, effected an exchange of seats, and as quietly took his place inside. Mr. Hamlin never allowed his philosophy to interfere with decisive and prompt action.

I fear that this irruption of Jack cast some restraint upon the other passengers—particularly those who were making themselves most agreeable to the lady. One of them leaned forward, and apparently conveyed to her information regarding Mr. Hamlin's profession in a single epithet. Whether Mr. Hamlin heard it, or whether he recognized in the informant a distinguished jurist from whom, but a few evenings before, he had won several thousand dollars, I cannot say. His colorless face betrayed no sign; his black eyes, quietly observant, glanced indifferently past the legal gentleman, and rested on the much more pleasing features of his neighbor. An Indian stoicism—said to be an inheritance from his maternal ancestor—stood him in good service, until the rolling wheels rattled upon the river gravel at Scott's Ferry, and the stage drew up at the International Hotel for dinner. The legal gentleman and a member of Congress leaped out, and stood ready to assist the descending goddess, while Colonel Starbottle, of Siskiyou, took charge of her parasol and shawl. In this multiplicity of attention there was a momentary confusion and delay. Jack Hamlin quietly opened the OPPOSITE door of the coach, took the lady's hand—with that decision and positiveness which a hesitating and undecided sex know how to admire—and in an instant had dexterously and gracefully swung her to the ground, and again lifted her to the platform. An audible chuckle on the box, I fear, came from that other cynic, "Yuba Bill," the

driver. "Look keerfully arter that baggage, Kernel," said the expressman, with affected concern, as he looked after Colonel Starbottle, gloomily bringing up the rear of the triumphant procession to the waiting-room.

Mr. Hamlin did not stay for dinner. His horse was already saddled, and awaiting him. He dashed over the ford, up the gravelly hill, and out into the dusty perspective of the Wingdam road, like one leaving pleasant fancy behind him. The inmates of dusty cabins by the roadside shaded their eyes with their hands and looked after him, recognizing the man by his horse, and speculating what "was up with Comanche Jack." Yet much of this interest centered in the horse, in a community where the time made by "French Pete's" mare in his run from the Sheriff of Calaveras eclipsed all concern in the ultimate fate of that worthy.

The sweating flanks of his gray at length recalled him to himself. He checked his speed, and, turning into a by-road, sometimes used as a cutoff, trotted leisurely along, the reins hanging listlessly from his fingers. As he rode on, the character of the landscape changed and became more pastoral. Openings in groves of pine and sycamore disclosed some rude attempts at cultivation—a flowering vine trailed over the porch of one cabin, and a woman rocked her cradled babe under the roses of another. A little farther on Mr. Hamlin came upon some barelegged children wading in the willowly creek, and so wrought upon them with a badinage peculiar to himself that they were emboldened to climb up his horse's legs and over his saddle, until he was fain to develop an exaggerated ferocity of demeanor, and to escape, leaving behind some kisses and coin. And then, advancing deeper into the woods, where all signs of habitation failed, he began to sing—uplifting a tenor so singularly sweet, and shaded by a pathos so subduing and tender, that I wot the robins and linnets stopped to listen. Mr. Hamlin's voice was

not cultivated; the subject of his song was some sentimental lunacy borrowed from the Negro minstrels; but there thrilled through all some occult quality of tone and expression that was unspeakably touching. Indeed, it was a wonderful sight to see this sentimental blackleg, with a pack of cards in his pocket and a revolver at his back, sending his voice before him through the dim woods with a plaint about his "Nelly's grave" in a way that overflowed the eyes of the listener. A sparrow hawk, fresh from his sixth victim, possibly recognizing in Mr. Hamlin a kindred spirit, stared at him in surprise, and was fain to confess the superiority of man. With a superior predatory capacity, HE couldn't sing.

But Mr. Hamlin presently found himself again on the highroad, and at his former pace. Ditches and banks of gravel, denuded hillsides, stumps, and decayed trunks of trees, took the place of woodland and ravine, and indicated his approach to civilization. Then a church steeple came in sight, and he knew that he had reached home. In a few moments he was clattering down the single narrow street that lost itself in a chaotic ruin of races, ditches, and tailings at the foot of the hill, and dismounted before the gilded windows of the "Magnolia" saloon. Passing through the long barroom, he pushed open a green-baize door, entered a dark passage, opened another door with a passkey, and found himself in a dimly lighted room whose furniture, though elegant and costly for the locality, showed signs of abuse. The inlaid center table was overlaid with stained disks that were not contemplated in the original design. The embroidered armchairs were discolored, and the green velvet lounge, on which Mr. Hamlin threw himself, was soiled at the foot with the red soil of Wingdam.

Mr. Hamlin did not sing in his cage. He lay still, looking at a highly colored painting above him representing a young creature of opulent charms. It occurred to him then,

for the first time, that he had never seen exactly that kind of a woman, and that if he should, he would not, probably, fall in love with her. Perhaps he was thinking of another style of beauty. But just then someone knocked at the door. Without rising, he pulled a cord that apparently shot back a bolt, for the door swung open, and a man entered.

The newcomer was broad-shouldered and robust—a vigor not borne out in the face, which, though handsome, was singularly weak, and disfigured by dissipation. He appeared to be also under the influence of liquor, for he started on seeing Mr. Hamlin, and said, “I thought Kate was here,” stammered, and seemed confused and embarrassed.

Mr. Hamlin smiled the smile which he had before worn on the Wingdam coach, and sat up, quite refreshed and ready for business.

“You didn’t come up on the stage,” continued the newcomer, “did you?”

“No,” replied Hamlin; “I left it at Scott’s Ferry. It isn’t due for half an hour yet. But how’s luck, Brown?”

Damn bad,” said Brown, his face suddenly assuming an expression of weak despair; “I’m cleaned out again, Jack,” he continued, in a whining tone that formed a pitiable contrast to his bulky figure, “can’t you help me with a hundred till tomorrow’s cleanup? You see I’ve got to send money home to the old woman, and—you’ve won twenty times that amount from me.”

The conclusion was, perhaps, not entirely logical, but Jack overlooked it, and handed the sum to his visitor. “The old-woman business is about played out, Brown,” he added,

by way of commentary; “why don’t you say you want to buck agin’ faro? You know you ain’t married!”

“Fact, sir,” said Brown, with a sudden gravity, as if the mere contact of the gold with the palm of the hand had imparted some dignity to his frame. “I’ve got a wife—a damned good one, too, if I do say it—in the States. It’s three year since I’ve seen her, and a year since I’ve writ to her. When things is about straight, and we get down to the lead, I’m going to send for her.”

“And Kate?” queried Mr. Hamlin, with his previous smile.

Mr. Brown of Calaveras essayed an archness of glance, to cover his confusion, which his weak face and whisky-muddled intellect but poorly carried out, and said:

“Damn it, Jack, a man must have a little liberty, you know. But come, what do you say to a little game? Give us a show to double this hundred.”

Jack Hamlin looked curiously at his fatuous friend. Perhaps he knew that the man was predestined to lose the money, and preferred that it should flow back into his own coffers rather than any other. He nodded his head, and drew his chair toward the table. At the same moment there came a rap upon the door.

“It’s Kate,” said Mr. Brown.

Mr. Hamlin shot back the bolt, and the door opened. But, for the first time in his life, he staggered to his feet, utterly unnerved and abashed, and for the first time in his life the hot blood crimsoned his colorless cheeks to his forehead. For before him stood the lady he had lifted from the

Wingdam coach, whom Brown— dropping his cards with a hysterical laugh—greeted as:

“My old woman, by thunder!”

They say that Mrs. Brown burst into tears, and reproaches of her husband. I saw her, in 1857, at Marysville, and disbelieve the story. And the WINGDAM CHRONICLE, of the next week, under the head of “Touching Reunion,” said: “One of those beautiful and touching incidents, peculiar to California life, occurred last week in our city. The wife of one of Wingdam’s eminent pioneers, tired of the effete civilization of the East and its inhospitable climate, resolved to join her noble husband upon these golden shores. Without informing him of her intention, she undertook the long journey, and arrived last week. The joy of the husband may be easier imagined than described. The meeting is said to have been indescribably affecting. We trust her example may be followed.”

Whether owing to Mrs. Brown’s influence, or to some more successful speculations, Mr. Brown’s financial fortune from that day steadily improved. He bought out his partners in the “Nip and Tuck” lead, with money which was said to have been won at poker, a week or two after his wife’s arrival, but which rumor, adopting Mrs. Brown’s theory that Brown had forsworn the gaming-table, declared to have been furnished by Mr. Jack Hamlin. He built and furnished the “Wingdam House,” which pretty Mrs. Brown’s great popularity kept overflowing with guests. He was elected to the Assembly, and gave largess to churches. A street in Wingdam was named in his honor.

Yet it was noted that in proportion as he waxed wealthy and fortunate, he grew pale, thin, and anxious. As his wife’s popularity increased, he became fretful and

impatient. The most uxorious of husbands, he was absurdly jealous. If he did not interfere with his wife's social liberty, it was because it was maliciously whispered that his first and only attempt was met by an outburst from Mrs. Brown that terrified him into silence. Much of this kind of gossip came from those of her own sex whom she had supplanted in the chivalrous attentions of Wingdam, which, like most popular chivalry, was devoted to an admiration of power, whether of masculine force or feminine beauty. It should be remembered, too, in her extenuation that since her arrival, she had been the unconscious priestess of a mythological worship, perhaps not more ennobling to her womanhood than that which distinguished an older Greek democracy. I think that Brown was dimly conscious of this. But his only confidant was Jack Hamlin, whose INFELIX reputation naturally precluded any open intimacy with the family, and whose visits were infrequent.

It was midsummer, and a moonlit night; and Mrs. Brown, very rosy, large-eyed, and pretty, sat upon the piazza, enjoying the fresh incense of the mountain breeze, and, it is to be feared, another incense which was not so fresh, nor quite as innocent. Beside her sat Colonel Starbottle and Judge Boompointer, and a later addition to her court in the shape of a foreign tourist. She was in good spirits.

“What do you see down the road?” inquired the gallant Colonel, who had been conscious, for the last few minutes, that Mrs. Brown's attention was diverted.

“Dust,” said Mrs. Brown, with a sigh. “Only Sister Anne's ‘flock of sheep.’”

The Colonel, whose literary recollections did not extend farther back than last week's paper, took a more

practical view. "It ain't sheep," he continued; "it's a horseman. Judge, ain't that Jack Hamlin's gray?"

But the Judge didn't know; and as Mrs. Brown suggested the air was growing too cold for further investigations, they retired to the parlor.

Mr. Brown was in the stable, where he generally retired after dinner. Perhaps it was to show his contempt for his wife's companions; perhaps, like other weak natures, he found pleasure in the exercise of absolute power over inferior animals. He had a certain gratification in the training of a chestnut mare, whom he could beat or caress as pleased him, which he couldn't do with Mrs. Brown. It was here that he recognized a certain gray horse which had just come in, and, looking a little farther on, found his rider. Brown's greeting was cordial and hearty, Mr. Hamlin's somewhat restrained. But at Brown's urgent request, he followed him up the back stairs to a narrow corridor, and thence to a small room looking out upon the stable yard. It was plainly furnished with a bed, a table, a few chairs, and a rack for guns and whips.

"This yer's my home, Jack," said Brown, with a sigh, as he threw himself upon the bed, and motioned his companion to a chair. "Her room's t'other end of the hall. It's more'n six months since we've lived together, or met, except at meals. It's mighty rough papers on the head of the house, ain't it?" he said, with a forced laugh. "But I'm glad to see you, Jack, damn glad," and he reached from the bed, and again shook the unresponsive hand of Jack Hamlin.

"I brought ye up here, for I didn't want to talk in the stable; though, for the matter of that, it's all round town. Don't strike a light. We can talk here in the moonshine. Put

up your feet on that winder, and sit here beside me. Thar's whisky in that jug."

Mr. Hamlin did not avail himself of the information. Brown of Calaveras turned his face to the wall and continued:

"If I didn't love the woman, Jack, I wouldn't mind. But it's loving her, and seeing her, day arter day, goin' on at this rate, and no one to put down the brake; that's what gits me! But I'm glad to see ye, Jack, damn glad."

In the darkness he groped about until he had found and wrung his companion's hand again. He would have detained it, but Jack slipped it into the buttoned breast of his coat, and asked, listlessly, "How long has this been going on?"

"Ever since she came here; ever since the day she walked into the Magnolia. I was a fool then; Jack, I'm a fool now; but I didn't know how much I loved her till then. And she hasn't been the same woman since.

"But that ain't all, Jack; and it's what I wanted to see you about, and I'm glad you've come. It ain't that she doesn't love me any more; it ain't that she fools with every chap that comes along, for, perhaps, I staked her love and lost it, as I did everything else at the Magnolia; and, perhaps, foolin' is nateral to some women, and thar ain't no great harm done, 'cept to the fools. But, Jack, I think—I think she loves somebody else. Don't move, Jack; don't move; if your pistol hurts ye, take it off.

"It's been more'n six months now that she's seemed unhappy and lonesome, and kinder nervous and scared-like. And sometimes I've ketched her lookin' at me sort of timid

and pitying. And she writes to somebody. And for the last week she's been gathering her own things—trinkets, and furbelows, and jew'ry—and, Jack, I think she's goin' off. I could stand all but that. To have her steal away like a thief—” He put his face downward to the pillow, and for a few moments there was no sound but the ticking of a clock on the mantel. Mr. Hamlin lit a cigar, and moved to the open window. The moon no longer shone into the room, and the bed and its occupant were in shadow. “What shall I do, Jack?” said the voice from the darkness.

The answer came promptly and clearly from the window-side: “Spot the man, and kill him on sight.”

“But, Jack?”

“He's took the risk!”

“But will that bring HER back?”

Jack did not reply, but moved from the window toward the door.

“Don't go yet, Jack; light the candle, and sit by the table. It's a comfort to see ye, if nothin' else.”

Jack hesitated, and then complied. He drew a pack of cards from his pocket and shuffled them, glancing at the bed. But Brown's face was turned to the wall. When Mr. Hamlin had shuffled the cards, he cut them, and dealt one card on the opposite side of the table and toward the bed, and another on his side of the table for himself. The first was a deuce, his own card, a king. He then shuffled and cut again. This time “dummy” had a queen, and himself a four-spot. Jack brightened up for the third deal. It brought his adversary a

deuce, and himself a king again. "Two out of three," said Jack, audibly.

"What's that, Jack?" said Brown.

"Nothing."

Then Jack tried his hand with dice; but he always threw sixes, and his imaginary opponent aces. The force of habit is sometimes confusing.

Meanwhile, some magnetic influence in Mr. Hamlin's presence, or the anodyne of liquor, or both, brought surcease of sorrow, and Brown slept. Mr. Hamlin moved his chair to the window, and looked out on the town of Wingdam, now sleeping peacefully—its harsh outlines softened and subdued, its glaring colors mellowed and sobered in the moonlight that flowed over all. In the hush he could hear the gurgling of water in the ditches, and the sighing of the pines beyond the hill. Then he looked up at the firmament, and as he did so a star shot across the twinkling field. Presently another, and then another. The phenomenon suggested to Mr. Hamlin a fresh augury. If in another fifteen minutes another star should fall— He sat there, watch in hand, for twice that time, but the phenomenon was not repeated.

The clock struck two, and Brown still slept. Mr. Hamlin approached the table and took from his pocket a letter, which he read by the flickering candlelight. It contained only a single line, written in pencil, in a woman's hand:

"Be at the corral, with the buggy, at three."

The sleeper moved uneasily, and then awoke. "Are you there Jack?"

"Yes."

"Don't go yet. I dreamed just now, Jack—dreamed of old times. I thought that Sue and me was being married agin, and that the parson, Jack, was—who do you think?—you!"

The gambler laughed, and seated himself on the bed—the paper still in his hand.

"It's a good sign, ain't it?" queried Brown.

"I reckon. Say, old man, hadn't you better get up?"

The "old man," thus affectionately appealed to, rose, with the assistance of Hamlin's outstretched hand.

"Smoke?"

Brown mechanically took the proffered cigar.

"Light?"

Jack had twisted the letter into a spiral, lit it, and held it for his companion. He continued to hold it until it was consumed, and dropped the fragment—a fiery star—from the open window. He watched it as it fell, and then returned to his friend.

"Old man," he said, placing his hands upon Brown's shoulders, "in ten minutes I'll be on the road, and gone like that spark. We won't see each other agin; but, before I go, take a fool's advice: sell out all you've got, take your wife

with you, and quit the country. It ain't no place for you, nor her. Tell her she must go; make her go, if she won't. Don't whine because you can't be a saint, and she ain't an angel. Be a man—and treat her like a woman. Don't be a damn fool. Good-by.”

He tore himself from Brown's grasp, and leaped down the stairs like a deer. At the stable door he collared the half-sleeping hostler and backed him against the wall. “Saddle my horse in two minutes, or I'll—” The ellipsis was frightfully suggestive.

“The missis said you was to have the buggy,” stammered the man.

“Damn the buggy!”

The horse was saddled as fast as the nervous hands of the astounded hostler could manipulate buckle and strap.

“Is anything up, Mr. Hamlin?” said the man, who, like all his class, admired the elan of his fiery patron, and was really concerned in his welfare.

“Stand aside!”

The man fell back. With an oath, a bound, and clatter, Jack was into the road. In another moment, to the man's half-awakened eyes, he was but a moving cloud of dust in the distance, toward which a star just loosed from its brethren was trailing a stream of fire.

But early that morning the dwellers by the Wingdam turnpike, miles away, heard a voice, pure as a skylark's, singing afield. They who were asleep turned over on their rude couches to dream of youth and love and olden days.

Hard-faced men and anxious gold-seekers, already at work, ceased their labors and leaned upon their picks, to listen to a romantic vagabond ambling away against the rosy sunrise.