

**THROUGH THE SANTA
CLARA WHEAT &
STORIES
BY
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Through the Santa Clara Wheat

CHAPTER ONE

It was an enormous wheat-field in the Santa Clara valley, stretching to the horizon line unbroken. The meridian sun shone upon it without glint or shadow; but at times, when a stronger gust of the trade winds passed over it, there was a quick slanting impression of the whole surface that was, however, as unlike a billow as itself was unlike a sea. Even when a lighter zephyr played down its long level, the agitation was superficial, and seemed only to momentarily lift a veil of greenish mist that hung above its immovable depths. Occasional puffs of dust alternately rose and fell along an imaginary line across the field, as if a current of air were passing through it, but were otherwise inexplicable.

Suddenly a faint shout, apparently somewhere in the vicinity of the line, brought out a perfectly clear response, followed by the audible murmur of voices, which it was impossible to localize. Yet the whole field was so devoid of any suggestion of human life or motion that it seemed rather as if the vast expanse itself had become suddenly articulate and intelligible.

“Wot say?”

“Wheel off.”

“Whare?”

“In the road.”

One of the voices here indicated itself in the direction of the line of dust, and said, “Comin’,” and a man stepped out from the wheat into a broad and dusty avenue.

With his presence three things became apparent.

First, that the puffs of dust indicated the existence of the invisible avenue through the unlimited and unfenced field of grain; secondly, that the stalks of wheat on either side of it were so tall as to actually hide a passing vehicle; and thirdly, that a vehicle had just passed, had lost a wheel, and been dragged partly into the grain by its frightened horse, which a dusty man was trying to restrain and pacify.

The horse, given up to equine hysterics, and evidently convinced that the ordinary buggy behind him had been changed into some dangerous and appalling creation, still plunged and kicked violently to rid himself of it. The man who had stepped out of the depths of the wheat quickly crossed the road, unhitched the traces, drew back the vehicle, and, glancing at the traveler’s dusty and disordered clothes, said, with curt sympathy:

“Spilt, too; but not hurt, eh?”

“No, neither of us. I went over with the buggy when the wheel cramped, but SHE jumped clear.”

He made a gesture indicating the presence of another. The man turned quickly. There was a second figure, a young

girl standing beside the grain from which he had emerged, embracing a few stalks of wheat with one arm and a hand in which she still held her parasol, while she grasped her gathered skirts with the other, and trying to find a secure foothold for her two neat narrow slippers on a crumbling cake of adobe above the fathomless dust of the roadway. Her face, although annoyed and discontented, was pretty, and her light dress and slim figure were suggestive of a certain superior condition.

The man's manner at once softened with Western courtesy. He swung his broad-brimmed hat from his head, and bent his body with the ceremoniousness of the country ball-room. "I reckon the lady had better come up to the shanty out o' the dust and sun till we kin help you get these things fixed," he said to the driver. "I'll send round by the road for your hoss, and have one of mine fetch up your wagon."

"Is it far?" asked the girl, slightly acknowledging his salutation, without waiting for her companion to reply.

"Only a step this way," he answered, motioning to the field of wheat beside her.

"What in THERE? I never could go in there," she said, decidedly.

"It's a heap shorter than by the road, and not so dusty. I'll go with you, and pilot you."

The young girl cast a vexed look at her companion as the probable cause of all this trouble, and shook her head. But at the same moment one little foot slipped from the adobe into the dust again. She instantly clambered back with a little feminine shriek, and ejaculated: "Well, of all things!"

and then, fixing her blue annoyed eyes on the stranger, asked impatiently, "Why couldn't I go there by the road 'n the wagon? I could manage to hold on and keep in."

"Because I reckon you'd find it too pow'ful hot waitin' here till we got round to ye."

There was no doubt it was very hot; the radiation from the baking roadway beating up under her parasol, and pricking her cheekbones and eyeballs like needles. She gave a fastidious little shudder, furred her parasol, gathered her skirts still tighter, faced about, and said, "Go on, then." The man slipped backwards into the ranks of stalks, parting them with one hand, and holding out the other as if to lead her. But she evaded the invitation by holding her tightly-drawn skirt with both hands, and bending her head forward as if she had not noticed it. The next moment the road, and even the whole outer world, disappeared behind them, and they seemed floating in a choking green translucent mist.

But the effect was only momentary; a few steps further she found that she could walk with little difficulty between the ranks of stalks, which were regularly spaced, and the resemblance now changed to that of a long pillared conservatory of greenish glass, that touched all objects with its pervading hue. She also found that the close air above her head was continually freshened by the interchange of currents of lower temperature from below—as if the whole vast field had a circulation of its own—and that the adobe beneath her feet was gratefully cool to her tread. There was no dust, as he had said; what had at first half suffocated her seemed to be some stimulating aroma of creation that filled the narrow green aisles, and now imparted a strange vigor and excitement to her as she walked along. Meantime her guide was not conversationally idle. Now, no doubt, she had never seen anything like this before? It was ordinary wheat,

only it was grown on adobe soil—the richest in the valley. These stalks, she could see herself, were ten and twelve feet high. That was the trouble, they all ran too much to stalk, though the grain yield was “suthen’ pow’ful.” She could tell that to her friends, for he reckoned she was the only young lady that had ever walked under such a growth. Perhaps she was new to Californy? He thought so from the start. Well, this was Californy, and this was not the least of the ways it could “lay over” every other country on God’s yearth. Many folks thought it was the gold and the climate, but she could see for herself what it could do with wheat. He wondered if her brother had ever told, her of it? No, the stranger wasn’t her brother. Nor cousin, nor company? No; only the hired driver from a San Jose hotel, who was takin’ her over to Major Randolph’s. Yes, he knew the old major; the ranch was a pretty place, nigh unto three miles further on. Now that he knew the driver was no relation of hers he didn’t mind telling her that the buggy was a “rather old consarn,” and the driver didn’t know his business. Yes, it might be fixed up so as to take her over to the major’s; there was one of their own men—a young fellow—who could do anything that COULD be done with wood and iron—a reg’lar genius!—and HE’D tackle it. It might take an hour, but she’d find it quite cool waiting in the shanty. It was a rough place, for they only camped out there during the season to look after the crop, and lived at their own homes the rest of the time. Was she going to stay long at the major’s? He noticed she had not brought her trunk with her. Had she known the major’s wife long? Perhaps she thought of settling in the neighborhood?

All this naive, good-humored questioning—so often cruelly misunderstood as mere vulgar curiosity, but as often the courteous instinct of simple unaffected people to entertain the stranger by inviting him to talk of what concerns himself rather than their own selves—was nevertheless, I fear, met only by monosyllables from the

young lady or an impatient question in return. She scarcely raised her eyes to the broad jean-shirted back that preceded her through the grain until the man abruptly ceased talking, and his manner, without losing its half-paternal courtesy, became graver. She was beginning to be conscious of her incivility, and was trying to think of something to say, when he exclaimed with a slight air of relief, "Here we are!" and the shanty suddenly appeared before them.

It certainly was very rough—a mere shell of unpainted boards that scarcely rose above the level of the surrounding grain, and a few yards distant was invisible. Its slightly sloping roof, already warped and shrunken into long fissures that permitted glimpses of the steel-blue sky above, was evidently intended only as a shelter from the cloudless sun in those two months of rainless days and dewless nights when it was inhabited. Through the open doors and windows she could see a row of "bunks," or rude sleeping berths against the walls, furnished with coarse mattresses and blankets. As the young girl halted, the man with an instinct of delicacy hurried forward, entered the shanty, and dragging a rude bench to the doorway, placed it so that she could sit beneath the shade of the roof, yet with her back to these domestic revelations. Two or three men, who had been apparently lounging there, rose quietly, and unobtrusively withdrew. Her guide brought her a tin cup of deliciously cool water, exchanged a few hurried words with his companions, and then disappeared with them, leaving her alone.

Her first sense of relief from their company was, I fear, stronger than any other feeling. After a hurried glance around the deserted apartment, she arose, shook out her dress and mantle, and then going into the darkest corner supported herself with one hand against the wall while with the other she drew off, one by one, her slippers from her slim, striped-stockinged feet, shook and blew out the dust that had

penetrated within, and put them on again. Then, perceiving a triangular fragment of looking-glass nailed against the wall, she settled the strings of her bonnet by the aid of its reflection, patted the fringe of brown hair on her forehead with her separated five fingers as if playing an imaginary tune on her brow, and came back with maidenly abstraction to the doorway.

Everything was quiet, and her seclusion seemed unbroken. A smile played for an instant in the soft shadows of her eyes and mouth as she recalled the abrupt withdrawal of the men. Then her mouth straightened and her brows slightly bent. It was certainly very unmannerly in them to go off in that way. "Good heavens! couldn't they have stayed around without talking? Surely it didn't require four men to go and bring up that wagon!" She picked up her parasol from the bench with an impatient little jerk. Then she held out her ungloved hand into the hot sunshine beyond the door with the gesture she would have used had it been raining, and withdrew it as quickly—her hand quite scorched in the burning rays. Nevertheless, after another impatient pause she desperately put up her parasol and stepped from the shanty.

Presently she was conscious of a faint sound of hammering not far away. Perhaps there was another shed, but hidden, like everything else, in this monotonous, ridiculous grain. Some stalks, however, were trodden down and broken around the shanty; she could move more easily and see where she was going. To her delight, a few steps further brought her into a current of the trade-wind and a cooler atmosphere. And a short distance beyond them, certainly, was the shed from which the hammering proceeded. She approached it boldly.

It was simply a roof upheld by rude uprights and crossbeams, and open to the breeze that swept through it. At

one end was a small blacksmith's forge, some machinery, and what appeared to be part of a small steam-engine. Midway of the shed was a closet or cupboard fastened with a large padlock. Occupying its whole length on the other side was a work-bench, and at the further end stood the workman she had heard.

He was apparently only a year or two older than herself, and clad in blue jean overalls, blackened and smeared with oil and coal-dust. Even his youthful face, which he turned towards her, had a black smudge running across it and almost obliterating a small auburn moustache. The look of surprise that he gave her, however, quickly passed; he remained patiently and in a half-preoccupied way, holding his hammer in his hand, as she advanced. This was evidently the young fellow who could "do anything that could be done with wood and iron."

She was very sorry to disturb him, but could he tell her how long it would be before the wagon could be brought up and mended? He could not say that until he himself saw what was to be done; if it was only a matter of the wheel he could fix it up in a few moments; if, as he had been told, it was a case of twisted or bent axle, it would take longer, but it would be here very soon. Ah, then, would he let her wait here, as she was very anxious to know at once, and it was much cooler than in the shed? Certainly; he would go over and bring her a bench. But here she begged he wouldn't trouble himself, she could sit anywhere comfortably.

The lower end of the work-bench was covered with clean and odorous shavings; she lightly brushed them aside and, with a youthful movement, swung herself to a seat upon it, supporting herself on one hand as she leaned towards him. She could thus see that his eyes were of a light-yellowish brown, like clarified honey, with a singular look of clear

concentration in them, which, however, was the same whether turned upon his work, the surrounding grain, or upon her. This, and his sublime unconsciousness of the smudge across his face and his blackened hands, made her wonder if the man who could do everything with wood and iron was above doing anything with water. She had half a mind to tell him of it, particularly as she noticed also that his throat below the line of sunburn disclosed by his open collar was quite white, and his grimy hands well made. She was wondering whether he would be affronted if she said in her politest way, "I beg your pardon, but do you know you have quite accidentally got something on your face," and offer her handkerchief, which, of course, he would decline, when her eye fell on the steam-engine.

"How odd! Do you use that on the farm?"

"No,"—he smiled here, the smudge accenting it and setting off his white teeth in a Christy Minstrel fashion that exasperated her—no, although it **COULD** be used, and had been. But it was his first effort, made two years ago, when he was younger and more inexperienced. It was a rather rough thing, she could see—but he had to make it at odd times with what iron he could pick up or pay for, and at different forges where he worked.

She begged his pardon—where—

WHERE HE WORKED.

Ah, then he was the machinist or engineer here?

No, he worked here just like the others, only he was allowed to put up a forge while the grain was green, and have his bench in consideration of the odd jobs he could do in the way of mending tools, etcetera. There was a heap of mending

and welding to do—she had no idea how quickly agricultural machines got out of order! He had done much of his work on the steam-engine on moonlit nights. Yes; she had no idea how perfectly clear and light it was here in the valley on such nights; although of course the shadows were very dark, and when he dropped a screw or a nut it was difficult to find. He had worked there because it saved time and because it didn't cost anything, and he had nobody to look on or interfere with him. No, it was not lonely; the coyotes and wild cats sometimes came very near, but were always more surprised and frightened than he was; and once a horseman who had strayed off the distant road yonder mistook him for an animal and shot at him twice.

He told all this with such freedom from embarrassment and with such apparent unconsciousness of the blue eyes that were following him, and the light, graceful figure—which was so near his own that in some of his gestures his grimy hands almost touched its delicate garments—that, accustomed as she was to a certain masculine aberration in her presence, she was greatly amused by his naive acceptance of her as an equal. Suddenly, looking frankly in her face, he said:

“I'll show you a secret, if you care to see it.”

Nothing would please her more.

He glanced hurriedly around, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the padlock that secured the closet she had noticed. Then, reaching within, with infinite care he brought out a small mechanical model.

“There's an invention of my own. A reaper and thresher combined. I'm going to have it patented and have a big one made from this model. This will work, as you see.”

He then explained to her with great precision how as it moved over the field the double operation was performed by the same motive power. That it would be a saving of a certain amount of labor and time which she could not remember. She did not understand a word of his explanations; she saw only a clean and pretty but complicated toy that under the manipulation of his grimy fingers rattled a number of frail-like staves and worked a number of wheels and drums, yet there was no indication of her ignorance in her sparkling eyes and smiling, breathless attitude. Perhaps she was interested in his own absorption; the revelation of his preoccupation with this model struck her as if he had made her a confidante of some boyish passion for one of her own sex, and she regarded him with the same sympathizing superiority.

“You will make a fortune out of it,” she said pleasantly.

Well, he might make enough to be able to go on with some other inventions he had in his mind. They cost money and time, no matter how careful one was.

This was another interesting revelation to the young girl. He not only did not seem to care for the profit his devotion brought him, but even his one beloved ideal might be displaced by another. So like a man, after all!

Her reflections were broken upon by the sound of voices. The young man carefully replaced the model in its closet with a parting glance as if he was closing a shrine, and said, “There comes the wagon.” The young girl turned to face the men who were dragging it from the road, with the half-complacent air of having been victorious over their late rude abandonment, but they did not seem to notice it or to be surprised at her companion, who quickly stepped forward

and examined the broken vehicle with workmanlike deliberation.

“I hope you will be able to do something with it,” she said sweetly, appealing directly to him. “I should thank you SO MUCH.”

He did not reply. Presently he looked up to the man who had brought her to the shanty, and said, “The axle’s strained, but it’s safe for five or six miles more of this road. I’ll put the wheel on easily.” He paused, and without glancing at her, continued, “You might send her on by the cart.”

“Pray don’t trouble yourselves,” interrupted the young girl, with a pink uprising in her cheeks; “I shall be quite satisfied with the buggy as it stands. Send her on in the cart, indeed! Really, they were a rude set—ALL of them.”

Without taking the slightest notice of her remark, the man replied gravely to the young mechanic, “Yes, but we’ll be wanting the cart before it can get back from taking her.”

“Her” again. “I assure you the buggy will serve perfectly well—if this—gentleman—will only be kind enough to put on the wheel again,” she returned hotly.

The young mechanic at once set to work. The young girl walked apart silently until the wheel was restored to its axle. But to her surprise a different horse was led forward to be harnessed.

“We thought your horse wasn’t safe in case of another accident,” said the first man, with the same smileless consideration. “This one wouldn’t cut up if he was harnessed to an earthquake or a worse driver than you’ve got.”

It occurred to her instantly that the more obvious remedy of sending another driver had been already discussed and rejected by them. Yet, when her own driver appeared a moment afterwards, she ascended to her seat with some dignity and a slight increase of color.

“I am very much obliged to you all,” she said, without glancing at the young inventor.

“Don’t mention it, miss.”

“Good afternoon.”

“Good afternoon.” They all took off their hats with the same formal gravity as the horse moved forward, but turned back to their work again before she was out of the field.

CHAPTER TWO

The ranch of Major Randolph lay on a rich falda of the Coast Range, and overlooked the great wheat plains that the young girl had just left. The house of wood and adobe, buried to its first story in rose-trees and passion vines, was large and commodious. Yet it contained only the major, his wife, her son and daughter, and the few occasional visitors from San Francisco whom he entertained, and she tolerated.

For the major's household was not entirely harmonious. While a young infantry subaltern at a Gulf station, he had been attracted by the piquant foreign accent and dramatic gestures of a French Creole widow, and—believing them, in the first flush of his youthful passion more than an offset to the encumbrance of her two children who, with the memory of various marital infidelities were all her late husband had left her—had proposed, been accepted, and promptly married to her. Before he obtained his captaincy, she had partly lost her accent, and those dramatic gestures, which had accented the passion of their brief courtship, began to intensify domestic altercation and the bursts of idle jealousy to which she was subject. Whether she was revenging herself on her second husband for the faults of her first is not known, but it was certain that she brought an unhallowed knowledge of the weaknesses, cheap cynicism, and vanity of a foreign predecessor, to sit in judgment upon the simple-minded and chivalrous American soldier who had succeeded him, and who was, in fact, the most loyal of husbands. The natural result of her skepticism was an espionage and criticism of the wives of the major's brother officers that compelled a frequent change of quarters. When to this was finally added a racial divergence and antipathy, the public disparagement of the customs and

education of her female colleagues, and the sudden insistence of a foreign and French dominance in her household beyond any ordinary Creole justification, Randolph, presumably to avoid later international complications, resigned while he was as yet a major. Luckily his latest banishment to an extreme Western outpost had placed him in California during the flood of a speculation epoch. He purchased a valuable Spanish grant to three leagues of land for little over a three months' pay. Following that yearning which compels retired ship-captains and rovers of all degrees to buy a farm in their old days, the major, professionally and socially inured to border strife, sought surcease and Arcadian repose in ranching.

It was here that Mrs. Randolph, late relict of the late Scipion L'Hommadiou, devoted herself to bringing up her children after the extremest of French methods, and in resurrecting a "de" from her own family to give a distinct and aristocratic character to their name. The "de Fontanges l'Hommadiou" were, however, only known to their neighbors, after the Western fashion, by their stepfather's name—when they were known at all—which was seldom. For the boy was unpleasantly conceited as a precocious worldling, and the girl as unpleasantly complacent in her role of ingenue. The household was completely dominated by Mrs. Randolph. A punctilious Catholic, she attended all the functions of the adjacent mission, and the shadow of a black soutane at twilight gliding through the wild oat-fields behind the ranch had often been mistaken for a coyote. The peace-loving major did not object to a piety which, while it left his own conscience free, imparted a respectable religious air to his household, and kept him from the equally distasteful approaches of the Puritanism of his neighbors, and was blissfully unconscious that he was strengthening the antagonistic foreign element in his family with an alien church.

Meantime, as the repaired buggy was slowly making its way towards his house, Major Randolph entered his wife's boudoir with a letter which the San Francisco post had just brought him. A look of embarrassment on his good-humored face strengthened the hard lines of hers; she felt some momentary weakness of her natural enemy, and prepared to give battle.

"I'm afraid here's something of a muddle, Josephine," he began with a deprecating smile. "Mallory, who was coming down here with his daughter, you know"—

"This is the first intimation I have had that anything has been settled upon," interrupted the lady, with appalling deliberation.

"However, my dear, you know I told you last week that he thought of bringing her here while he went South on business. You know, being a widower, he has no one to leave her with."

"And I suppose it is the American fashion to intrust one's daughters to any old boon companions?"

"Mallory is an old friend," interrupted the major, impatiently. "He knows I'm married, and although he has never seen YOU, he is quite willing to leave his daughter here."

"Thank you!"

"Come, you know what I mean. The man naturally believes that my wife will be a proper chaperone for his daughter. But that is not the present question. He intended to call here; I expected to take you over to San Jose to see her and all that, you know; but the fact of it is—that is—it seems

from this letter that—he's been called away sooner than he expected, and that—well—hang it! the girl is actually on her way here now."

"Alone?"

"I suppose so. You know one thinks nothing of that here."

"Or any other propriety, for that matter."

"For heaven's sake, Josephine, don't be ridiculous! Of course it's stupid her coming in this way, and Mallory ought to have brought her—but she's coming, and we must receive her. By Jove! Here she is now!" he added, starting up after a hurried glance through the window. "But what kind of a d——d turn-out is that, anyhow?"

It certainly was an odd-looking conveyance that had entered the gates, and was now slowly coming up the drive towards the house. A large draught horse harnessed to a dust-covered buggy, whose strained fore-axle, bent by the last mile of heavy road, had slanted the tops of the fore-wheels towards each other at an alarming angle. The light, graceful dress and elegant parasol of the young girl, who occupied half of its single seat, looked ludicrously pronounced by the side of the slouching figure and grimy duster of the driver, who occupied the other half.

Mrs. Randolph gave a gritty laugh. "I thought you said she was alone. Is that an escort she has picked up, American fashion, on the road?"

"That's her hired driver, no doubt. Hang it! she can't drive here by herself," retorted the major, impatiently, hurrying to the door and down the staircase. But he was

instantly followed by his wife. She had no idea of permitting a possible understanding to be exchanged in their first greeting. The late M. l'Hommadiou had been able to impart a whole plan of intrigue in a single word and glance.

Happily, Rose Mallory, already in the hall, in a few words detailed the accident that had befallen her, to the honest sympathy of the major and the coldly-polite concern of Mrs. Randolph, who, in deliberately chosen sentences, managed to convey to the young girl the conviction that accidents of any kind to young ladies were to be regarded as only a shade removed from indiscretions. Rose was impressed, and even flattered, by the fastidiousness of this foreign-appearing woman, and after the fashion of youthful natures, accorded to her the respect due to recognized authority. When to this authority, which was evident, she added a depreciation of the major, I fear that some common instinct of feminine tyranny responded in Rose's breast, and that on the very threshold of the honest soldier's home she tacitly agreed with the wife to look down upon him. Mrs. Randolph departed to inform her son and daughter of their guest's arrival. As a matter of fact, however, they had already observed her approach to the house through the slits of their drawn window-blinds, and those even narrower prejudices and limited comprehensions which their education had fostered. The girl, Adele, had only grasped the fact that Rose had come to their house in fine clothes, alone with a man, in a broken-down vehicle, and was moved to easy mirth and righteous wonder. The young man, Emile, had agreed with her, with the mental reservation that the guest was pretty, and must eventually fall in love with him. They both, however, welcomed her with a trained politeness and a superficial attention that, while the indifference of her own countrymen in the wheat-field was still fresh in her recollection, struck her with grateful contrast; the major's

quiet and unobtrusive kindness naturally made less impression, or was accepted as a matter of course.

“Well,” said the major, cheerfully but tentatively, to his wife when they were alone again, “she seems a nice girl, after all; and a good deal of pluck and character, by Jove! to push on in that broken buggy rather than linger or come in a farm cart, eh?”

“She was alone in that wheat-field,” said Mrs. Randolph, with grim deliberation, “for half an hour; she confesses it herself—TALKING WITH A YOUNG MAN!”

“Yes, but the others had gone for the buggy. And, in the name of Heaven, what would you have her do—hide herself in the grain?” said the major, desperately. “Besides,” he added, with a recklessness he afterwards regretted, “that mechanical chap they’ve got there is really intelligent and worth talking to.”

“I have no doubt SHE thought so,” said Mrs. Randolph, with a mirthless smile. “In fact, I have observed that the American freedom generally means doing what you WANT to do. Indeed, I wonder she didn’t bring him with her! Only I beg, major, that you will not again, in the presence of my daughter—and I may even say, of my son—talk lightly of the solitary meetings of young ladies with mechanics, even though their faces were smutty, and their clothes covered with oil.”

The major here muttered something about there being less danger in a young lady listening to the intelligence of a coarsely-dressed laborer than to the compliments of a rose-scented fop, but Mrs. Randolph walked out of the room before he finished the evident platitude.

That night Rose Mallory retired to her room in a state of self-satisfaction that she even felt was to a certain extent a virtue. She was delighted with her reception and with her hostess and family. It was strange her father had not spoken more of MRS. Randolph, who was clearly the superior of his old friend. What fine manners they all had, so different from other people she had known! There was quite an Old World civilization about them; really, it was like going abroad! She would make the most of her opportunity and profit by her visit. She would begin by improving her French; they spoke it perfectly, and with such a pure accent. She would correct certain errors she was conscious of in her own manners, and copy Mrs. Randolph as much as possible. Certainly, there was a great deal to be said of Mrs. Randolph's way of looking at things. Now she thought of it calmly, there WAS too much informality and freedom in American ways! There was not enough respect due to position and circumstances. Take those men in the wheat-field, for example. Yet here she found it difficult to formulate an indictment against them for "freedom." She would like to go there some day with the Randolphs and let them see what company manners were! She was thoroughly convinced now that her father had done wrong in sending her alone; it certainly was most disrespectful to them and careless of him (she had quite forgotten that she had herself proposed to her father to go alone rather than wait at the hotel), and she must have looked very ridiculous in her fine clothes and the broken-down buggy. When her trunk came by express to-morrow she would look out something more sober. She must remember that she was in a Catholic and religious household now. Ah, yes! how very fine it was to see that priest at dinner in his soutane, sitting down like one of the family, and making them all seem like a picture of some historical and aristocratic romance! And then they were actually "de Fontanges l'Hommadieu." How different he was from that shabby Methodist minister who used to come to see her

father in a black cravat with a hideous bow! Really there was something to say for a religion that contained so much picturesque refinement; and for her part—but that will do. I beg to say that I am not writing of any particular snob or feminine monstrosity, but of a very charming creature, who was quite able to say her prayers afterwards like a good girl, and lay her pretty cheek upon her pillow without a blush.

She opened her window and looked out. The moon, a great silver dome, was uplifting itself from a bluish-gray level, which she knew was the distant plain of wheat. Somewhere in its midst appeared a dull star, at times brightening as if blown upon or drawn upwards in a comet-like trail. By some odd instinct she felt that it was the solitary forge of the young inventor, and pictured him standing before it with his abstracted hazel eyes and a face more begrimed in the moonlight than ever. When DID he wash himself? Perhaps not until Sunday. How lonely it must be out there! She slightly shivered and turned from the window. As she did so, it seemed to her that something knocked against her door from without. Opening it quickly, she was almost certain that the sound of a rustling skirt retreated along the passage. It was very late; perhaps she had disturbed the house by shutting her window. No doubt it was the motherly interest of Mrs. Randolph that impelled her to come softly and look after her; and for once her simple surmises were correct. For not only the inspecting eyes of her hostess, but the amatory glances of the youthful Emile, had been fastened upon her window until the light disappeared, and even the Holy Mission Church of San Jose had assured itself of the dear child's safety with a large and supple ear at her keyhole.

The next morning Major Randolph took her with Adele in a light cariole over the ranch. Although his domain was nearly as large as the adjoining wheat plain, it was not,

like that, monopolized by one enormous characteristic yield, but embraced a more diversified product. There were acres and acres of potatoes in rows of endless and varying succession; there were miles of wild oats and barley, which overtopped them as they drove in narrow lanes of dry and dusty monotony; there were orchards of pears, apricots, peaches, and nectarines, and vineyards of grapes, so comparatively dwarfed in height that they scarcely reached to the level of their eyes, yet laden and breaking beneath the weight of their ludicrously disproportionate fruit. What seemed to be a vast green plateau covered with tiny patches, that headed the northern edge of the prospect, was an enormous bed of strawberry plants. But everywhere, crossing the track, bounding the fields, orchards, and vineyards, intersecting the paths of the whole domain, were narrow irrigating ducts and channels of running water.

“Those,” said the major, poetically, “are the veins and arteries of the ranch. Come with me now, and I’ll show you its pulsating heart.” Descending from the wagon into pedestrian prose again, he led Rose a hundred yards further to a shed that covered a wonderful artesian well. In the centre of a basin a column of water rose regularly with the even flow and volume of a brook. “It is one of the largest in the State,” said the major, “and is the life of all that grows here during six months of the year.”

Pleased as the young girl was with those evidences of the prosperity and position of her host, she was struck, however, with the fact that the farm-laborers, wine-growers, nurserymen, and all field hands scattered on the vast estate were apparently of the same independent, unpastoral, and unprofessional character as the men of the wheat-field. There were no cottages or farm buildings that she could see, nor any apparent connection between the household and the estate; far from suggesting tenantry or retainers, the men

who were working in the fields glanced at them as they passed with the indifference of strangers, or replied to the major's greetings or questionings with perfect equality of manner, or even businesslike reserve and caution. Her host explained that the ranch was worked by a company "on shares;" that those laborers were, in fact, the bulk of the company; and that he, the major, only furnished the land, the seed, and the implements. "That man who was driving the long roller, and with whom you were indignant because he wouldn't get out of our way, is the president of the company."

"That needn't make him so uncivil," said Rose, poutingly, "for if it comes to that you're the LANDLORD," she added triumphantly.

"No," said the major, good-humoredly. "I am simply the man driving the lighter and more easily-managed team for pleasure, and he's the man driving the heavier and more difficult machine for work. It's for me to get out of his way; and looked at in the light of my being THE LANDLORD it is still worse, for as we're working 'on shares' I'm interrupting HIS work, and reducing HIS profits merely because I choose to sacrifice my own."

I need not say that those atrociously leveling sentiments were received by the young ladies with that feminine scorn which is only qualified by misconception. Rose, who, under the influence of her hostess, had a vague impression that they sounded something like the French Revolution, and that Adele must feel like the Princess Elizabeth, rushed to her relief like a good girl. "But, major, now, YOU'RE a gentleman, and if YOU had been driving that roller, you know you would have turned out for us."

“I don’t know about that,” said the major, mischievously; “but if I had, I should have known that the other fellow who accepted it wasn’t a gentleman.”

But Rose, having sufficiently shown her partisanship in the discussion, after the feminine fashion, did not care particularly for the logical result. After a moment’s silence she resumed: “And the wheat ranch below—is that carried on in the same way?”

“Yes. But their landlord is a bank, who advances not only the land, but the money to work it, and doesn’t ride around in a buggy with a couple of charmingly distracting young ladies.”

“And do they all share alike?” continued Rose, ignoring the pleasantry, “big and little—that young inventor with the rest?”

She stopped. She felt the ingenue’s usually complacent eyes suddenly fixed upon her with an unhallowed precocity, and as quickly withdrawn. Without knowing why, she felt embarrassed, and changed the subject.

The next day they drove to the Convent of Santa Clara and the Mission College of San Jose. Their welcome at both places seemed to Rose to be a mingling of caste greeting and spiritual zeal, and the austere seclusion and reserve of those cloisters repeated that suggestion of an Old World civilization that had already fascinated the young Western girl. They made other excursions in the vicinity, but did not extend it to a visit to their few neighbors. With their reserved and exclusive ideas this fact did not strike Rose as peculiar, but on a later shopping expedition to the town of San Jose, a certain reticence and aggressive sensitiveness on the part of the shopkeepers and tradespeople towards the

Randolphs produced an unpleasant impression on her mind. She could not help noticing, too, that after the first stare of astonishment which greeted her appearance with her hostess, she herself was included in the antagonism. With her youthful prepossession for her friends, this distinction she regarded as flattering and aristocratic, and I fear she accented it still more by discussing with Mrs. Randolph the merits of the shopkeepers' wares in schoolgirl French before them. She was unfortunate enough, however, to do this in the shop of a polyglot German.

“Oxcoos me, mees,” he said gravely—“but dot lady speeks Engeleesh so goot mit yourselluf, and ven you dells to her dot silk is hallf gotton in English, she onderstand you mooch better, and it don't make nodings to me.” The laugh which would have followed from her own countrywomen did not, however, break upon the trained faces of the “de Fontanges l’Hommadius,” yet while Rose would have joined in it, albeit a little ruefully, she felt for the first time mortified at their civil insincerity.

At the end of two weeks, Major Randolph received a letter from Mr. Mallory. When he had read it, he turned to his wife: “He thanks you,” he said, “for your kindness to his daughter, and explains that his sudden departure was owing to the necessity of his taking advantage of a great opportunity for speculation that had offered.” As Mrs. Randolph turned away with a slight shrug of the shoulders, the major continued: “But you haven't heard all! That opportunity was the securing of a half interest in a cinnabar lode in Sonora, which has already gone up a hundred thousand dollars in his hands! By Jove! a man can afford to drop a little social ceremony on those terms—eh, Josephine?” he concluded with a triumphant chuckle.

“He’s as likely to lose his hundred thousand tomorrow, while his manners will remain,” said Mrs. Randolph. “I’ve no faith in these sudden California fortunes!”

“You’re wrong as regards Mallory, for he’s as careful as he is lucky. He don’t throw money away for appearance sake, or he’d have a rich home for that daughter. He could afford it.”

Mrs. Randolph was silent. “She is his only daughter, I believe,” she continued presently.

“Yes—he has no other kith or kin,” returned the major.

“She seems to be very much impressed by Emile,” said Mrs. Randolph.

Major Randolph faced his wife quickly.

“In the name of all that’s ridiculous, my dear, you are not already thinking of”—he gasped.

“I should be very loth to give MY sanction to anything of the kind, knowing the difference of her birth, education, and religion—although the latter I believe she would readily change,” said Mrs. Randolph, severely. “But when you speak of MY already thinking of ‘such things,’ do you suppose that your friend, Mr. Mallory, didn’t consider all that when he sent that girl here?”

“Never,” said the major, vehemently, “and if it entered his head now, by Jove, he’d take her away tomorrow—always supposing I didn’t anticipate him by sending her off myself.”

Mrs. Randolph uttered her mirthless laugh. "And you suppose the girl would go? Really, major, you don't seem to understand this boasted liberty of your own countrywoman. What does she care for her father's control? Why, she'd make him do just what SHE wanted. But," she added with an expression of dignity, "perhaps we had better not discuss this until we know something of Emile's feelings in the matter. That is the only question that concerns us." With this she swept out of the room, leaving the major at first speechless with honest indignation, and then after the fashion of all guileless natures, a little uneasy and suspicious of his own guilelessness. For a day or two after, he found himself, not without a sensation of meanness, watching Rose when in Emile's presence, but he could distinguish nothing more than the frank satisfaction she showed equally to the others. Yet he found himself regretting even that, so subtle was the contagion of his wife's suspicions.

CHAPTER THREE

It had been a warm morning; an unusual mist, which the sun had not dissipated, had crept on from the great grain-fields beyond, and hung around the house charged with a dry, dusty closeness that seemed to be quite independent of the sun's rays, and more like a heated exhalation or emanation of the soil itself. In its acrid irritation Rose thought she could detect the breath of the wheat as on the day she had plunged into its pale, green shadows. By the afternoon this mist had disappeared, apparently in the same mysterious manner, but not scattered by the usual trade-wind, which—another unusual circumstance—that day was not forthcoming. There was a breathlessness in the air like the hush of listening expectancy, which filled the young girl with a vague restlessness, and seemed to even affect a scattered company of crows in the field beyond the house, which rose suddenly with startled but aimless wings, and then dropped vacantly among the grain again.

Major Randolph was inspecting a distant part of the ranch, Mrs. Randolph was presumably engaged in her boudoir, and Rose was sitting between Adele and Emile before the piano in the drawing-room, listlessly turning over the leaves of some music. There had been an odd mingling of eagerness and abstraction in the usual attentions of the young man that morning, and a certain nervous affectation in his manner of twisting the ends of a small black moustache, which resembled his mother's eyebrows, that had affected Rose with a half-amused, half-uneasy consciousness, but which she had, however, referred to the restlessness produced by the weather. It occurred to her also that the vacuously amiable Adele had once or twice regarded her with the same precocious, childlike curiosity and

infantine cunning she had once before exhibited. All this did not, however, abate her admiration for both—perhaps particularly for this picturesquely gentlemanly young fellow, with his gentle audacities of compliment, his caressing attentions, and his unfailing and equal address. And when, discovering that she had mislaid her fan for the fifth time that morning, he started up with equal and undiminished fire to go again and fetch it, the look of grateful pleasure and pleading perplexity in her pretty eyes might have turned a less conceited brain than his.

“But you don’t know where it is!”

“I shall find it by instinct.”

“You are spoiling me—you two.” The parenthesis was a hesitating addition, but she continued, with fresh sincerity, “I shall be quite helpless when I leave here—if I am ever able to go by myself.”

“Don’t ever go, then.”

“But just now I want my fan; it is so close everywhere to-day.”

“I fly, mademoiselle.”

He started to the door.

She called after him:

“Let me help your instinct, then; I had it last in the major’s study.”

“That was where I was going.”

He disappeared. Rose got up and moved uneasily towards the window. "How queer and quiet it looks outside. It's really too bad that he should be sent after that fan again. He'll never find it." She resumed her place at the piano, Adele following her with round, expectant eyes. After a pause she started up again. "I'll go and fetch it myself," she said, with a half-embarrassed laugh, and ran to the door.

Scarcely understanding her own nervousness, but finding relief in rapid movement, Rose flew lightly up the staircase. The major's study, where she had been writing letters, during his absence, that morning, was at the further end of a long passage, and near her own bedroom, the door of which, as she passed, she noticed, half-abstractedly, was open, but she continued on and hurriedly entered the study. At the same moment Emile, with a smile on his face, turned towards her with the fan in his hand.

"Oh, you've found it," she said, with nervous eagerness. "I was so afraid you'd have all your trouble for nothing."

She extended her hand, with a half-breathless smile, for the fan, but he caught her outstretched little palm in his own, and held it.

"Ah! but you are not going to leave us, are you?"

In a flash of consciousness she understood him, and, as it seemed to her, her own nervousness, and all, and everything. And with it came a swift appreciation of all it meant to her and her future. To be always with him and like him, a part of this refined and restful seclusion—akin to all that had so attracted her in this house; not to be obliged to educate herself up to it, but to be in it on equal terms at once; to know that it was no wild, foolish youthful fancy, but a

wise, thoughtful, and prudent resolve, that her father would understand and her friends respect: these were the thoughts that crowded quickly upon her, more like an explanation of her feelings than a revelation, in the brief second that he held her hand. It was not, perhaps, love as she had dreamed it, and even BELIEVED it, before. She was not ashamed or embarrassed; she even felt, with a slight pride, that she was not blushing. She raised her eyes frankly. What she WOULD have said she did not know, for the door, which he had closed behind her, began to shake violently.

It was not the fear of some angry intrusion or interference surely that made him drop her hand instantly. It was not—her second thought—the idea that some one had fallen in a fit against it that blanched his face with abject and unreasoning terror! It must have been something else that caused him to utter an inarticulate cry and dash out of the room and down the stairs like a madman! What had happened?

In her own self-possession she knew that all this was passing rapidly, that it was not the door now that was still shaking, for it had swung almost shut again—but it was the windows, the book-shelves, the floor beneath her feet, that were all shaking. She heard a hurried scrambling, the trampling of feet below, and the quick rustling of a skirt in the passage, as if some one had precipitately fled from her room. Yet no one had called to her—even HE had said nothing. Whatever had happened they clearly had not cared for her to know.

The jarring and rattling ceased as suddenly, but the house seemed silent and empty. She moved to the door, which had now swung open a few inches, but to her astonishment it was fixed in that position, and she could not pass. As yet she had been free from any personal fear, and

even now it was with a half smile at her imprisonment in the major's study, that she rang the bell and turned to the window. A man, whom she recognized as one of the ranch laborers, was standing a hundred feet away in the garden, looking curiously at the house. He saw her face as she tried to raise the sash, uttered an exclamation, and ran forward. But before she could understand what he said, the sash began to rattle in her hand, the jarring recommenced, the floor shook beneath her feet, a hideous sound of grinding seemed to come from the walls, a thin seam of dust-like smoke broke from the ceiling, and with the noise of falling plaster a dozen books followed each other from the shelves, in what in the frantic hurry of that moment seemed a grimly deliberate succession; a picture hanging against the wall, to her dazed wonder, swung forward, and appeared to stand at right angles from it; she felt herself reeling against the furniture; a deadly nausea overtook her; as she glanced despairingly towards the window, the outlying fields beyond the garden seemed to be undulating like a sea. For the first time she raised her voice, not in fear, but in a pathetic little cry of apology for her awkwardness in tumbling about and not being able to grapple this new experience, and then she found herself near the door, which had once more swung free. She grasped it eagerly, and darted out of the study into the deserted passage. Here some instinct made her follow the line of the wall, rather than the shaking balusters of the corridor and staircase, but before she reached the bottom she heard a shout, and the farm laborer she had seen coming towards her seized her by the arm, dragged her to the open doorway of the drawing-room, and halted beneath its arch in the wall. Another thrill, but lighter than before, passed through the building, then all was still again.

“It's over; I reckon that's all just now,” said the man, coolly. “It's quite safe to cut and run for the garden now, through this window.” He half led, half lifted her through the

French window to the veranda and the ground, and locking her arm in his, ran quickly forward a hundred feet from the house, stopping at last beneath a large post oak where there was a rustic seat into which she sank. "You're safe now, I reckon," he said grimly.

She looked towards the house; the sun was shining brightly; a cool breeze seemed to have sprung up as they ran. She could see a quantity of rubbish lying on the roof from which a dozen yards of zinc gutter were perilously hanging; the broken shafts of the further cluster of chimneys, a pile of bricks scattered upon the ground and among the battered down beams of the end of the veranda—but that was all. She lifted her now whitened face to the man, and with the apologetic smile still lingering on her lips, asked:

"What does it all mean? What has happened?"

The man stared at her. "D'ye mean to say ye don't know?"

"How could I? They must have all left the house as soon as it began. I was talking to—to M. l'Hommadieu, and he suddenly left."

The man brought his face angrily down within an inch of her own. "D'ye mean to say that them d——d French half-breeds stampeded and left yer there alone?"

She was still too much stupefied by the reaction to fully comprehend his meaning, and repeated feebly with her smile still faintly lingering: "But you don't tell me WHAT it was?"

"An earthquake," said the man, roughly, "and if it had lasted ten seconds longer it would have shook the whole

shanty down and left you under it. Yer kin tell that to them, if they don't know it, but from the way they made tracks to the fields, I reckon they did. They're coming now."

Without another word he turned away half surlily, half defiantly, passing scarce fifty yards away Mrs. Randolph and her daughter, who were hastening towards their guest.

"Oh, here you are!" said Mrs. Randolph, with the nearest approach to effusion that Rose had yet seen in her manner. "We were wondering where you had run to, and were getting quite concerned. Emile was looking for you everywhere."

The recollection of his blank and abject face, his vague outcry and blind fright, came back to Rose with a shock that sent a flash of sympathetic shame to her face. The ingenious Adele noticed it, and dutifully pinched her mother's arm.

"Emile?" echoed Rose faintly—"looking for ME?"

Mother and daughter exchanged glances.

"Yes," said Mrs. Randolph, cheerfully, "he says he started to run with you, but you got ahead and slipped out of the garden door—or something of the kind," she added, with the air of making light of Rose's girlish fears. "You know one scarcely knows what one does at such times, and it must have been frightfully strange to YOU—and he's been quite distracted, lest you should have wandered away. Adele, run and tell him Miss Mallory has been here under the oak all the time."

Rose started—and then fell hopelessly back in her seat. Perhaps it WAS true! Perhaps he had not rushed off with that awful face and without a word. Perhaps she herself had been half-frightened out of her reason. In the simple, weak kindness of her nature it seemed less dreadful to believe that the fault was partly her own.

“And you went back into the house to look for us when all was over,” said Mrs. Randolph, fixing her black, beady, magnetic eyes on Rose, “and that stupid yokel Zake brought you out again. He needn’t have clutched your arm so closely, my dear—I must speak to the major about his excessive familiarity—but I suppose I shall be told that that is American freedom. I call it ‘a liberty.’”

It struck Rose that she had not even thanked the man—in the same flash that she remembered something dreadful that he had said. She covered her face with her hands and tried to recall herself.

Mrs. Randolph gently tapped her shoulder with a mixture of maternal philosophy and discipline, and continued: “Of course, it’s an upset—and you’re confused still. That’s nothing. They say, dear, it’s perfectly well known that no two people’s recollections of these things ever are the same. It’s really ridiculous the contradictory stories one hears. Isn’t it, Emile?”

Rose felt that the young man had joined them and was looking at her. In the fear that she should still see some trace of the startled, selfish animal in his face, she did not dare to raise her eyes to his, but looked at his mother. Mrs. Randolph was standing then, collected but impatient.

“It’s all over now,” said Emile, in his usual voice, “and except the chimneys and some fallen plaster there’s

really no damage done. But I'm afraid they have caught it pretty badly at the mission, and at San Francisco in those tall, flashy, rattle-trap buildings they're putting up. I've just sent off one of the men for news."

Her father was in San Francisco by that time; and she had never thought of him! In her quick remorse she now forgot all else and rose to her feet.

"I must telegraph to my father at once," she said hurriedly; "he is there."

"You had better wait until the messenger returns and hear his news," said Emile. "If the shock was only a slight one in San Francisco, your father might not understand you, and would be alarmed."

She could see his face now—there was no record of the past expression upon it, but he was watching her eagerly. Mrs. Randolph and Adele had moved away to speak to the servants. Emile drew nearer.

"You surely will not desert us now?" he said in a low voice.

"Please don't," she said vaguely. "I'm so worried," and, pushing quickly past him, she hurriedly rejoined the two women.

They were superintending the erection of a long tent or marquee in the garden, hastily extemporized from the awnings of the veranda and other cloth. Mrs. Randolph explained that, although all danger was over, there was the possibility of the recurrence of lighter shocks during the day and night, and that they would all feel much more secure and

comfortable to camp out for the next twenty-four hours in the open air.

“Only imagine you’re picnicking, and you’ll enjoy it as most people usually enjoy those horrid al fresco entertainments. I don’t believe there’s the slightest real necessity for it, but,” she added in a lower voice, “the Irish and Chinese servants are so demoralized now, they wouldn’t stay indoors with us. It’s a common practice here, I believe, for a day or two after the shock, and it gives time to put things right again and clear up. The old, one-storied, Spanish houses with walls three feet thick, and built round a courtyard or patio, were much safer. It’s only when the Americans try to improve upon the old order of things with their pinchbeck shams and stucco that Providence interferes like this to punish them.”

It was the fact, however, that Rose was more impressed by what seemed to her the absolute indifference of Providence in the matter, and the cool resumption by Nature of her ordinary conditions. The sky above their heads was as rigidly blue as ever, and as smilingly monotonous; the distant prospect, with its clear, well-known silhouettes, had not changed; the crows swung on lazy, deliberate wings over the grain as before; and the trade-wind was again blowing in its quiet persistency. And yet she knew that something had happened that would never again make her enjoyment of the prospect the same—that nothing would ever be as it was yesterday. I think at first she referred only to the material and larger phenomena, and did not confound this revelation of the insecurity of the universe with her experience of man. Yet the fact also remained that to the conservative, correct, and, as she believed, secure condition to which she had been approximating, all her relations were rudely shaken and upset. It really seemed to this simple-minded young woman that the revolutionary disturbance of

settled conditions might have as Providential an origin as the “Divine Right” of which she had heard so much.

CHAPTER FOUR

In her desire to be alone and to evade the now significant attentions of Emile, she took advantage of the bustle that followed the hurried transfer of furniture and articles from the house to escape through the garden to the outlying fields. Striking into one of the dusty lanes that she remembered, she wandered on for half an hour until her progress and meditation were suddenly arrested. She had come upon a long chasm or crack in the soil, full twenty feet wide and as many in depth, crossing her path at right angles. She did not remember having seen it before; the track of wheels went up to its precipitous edge; she could see the track on the other side, but the hiatus remained, unbridged and uncovered. It was not there yesterday. She glanced right and left; the fissure seemed to extend, like a moat or ditch, from the distant road to the upland between her and the great wheat valley below, from which she was shut off. An odd sense of being in some way a prisoner confronted her. She drew back with an impatient start, and perhaps her first real sense of indignation. A voice behind her, which she at once recognized, scarcely restored her calmness.

“You can’t get across there, miss.”

She turned. It was the young inventor from the wheat ranch, on horseback and with a clean face. He had just ridden out of the grain on the same side of the chasm as herself.

“But you seem to have got over,” she said bluntly.

“Yes, but it was further up the field. I reckoned that the split might be deeper but not so broad in the rock outcrop

over there than in the adobe here. I found it so and jumped it.”

He looked as if he might—alert, intelligent, and self-contained. He lingered a moment, and then continued:

“I’m afraid you must have been badly shaken and a little frightened up there before the chimneys came down?”

“No,” she was glad to say briefly, and she believed truthfully, “I wasn’t frightened. I didn’t even know it was an earthquake.”

“Ah!” he reflected, “that was because you were a stranger. It’s odd—they’re all like that. I suppose it’s because nobody really expects or believes in the unlooked-for thing, and yet that’s the thing that always happens. And then, of course, that other affair, which really is serious, startled you the more.”

She felt herself ridiculously and angrily blushing. “I don’t know what you mean,” she said icily. “What other affair?”

“Why, the well.”

“The well?” she repeated vacantly.

“Yes; the artesian well has stopped. Didn’t the major tell you?”

“No,” said the girl. “He was away; I haven’t seen him yet.”

“Well, the flow of water has ceased completely. That’s what I’m here for. The major sent for me, and I’ve been to examine it.”

“And is that stoppage so very important?” she said dubiously.

It was his turn to look at her wonderingly.

“If it’s LOST entirely, it means ruin for the ranch,” he said sharply. He wheeled his horse, nodded gravely, and trotted off.

Major Randolph’s figure of the “life-blood of the ranch” flashed across her suddenly. She knew nothing of irrigation or the costly appliances by which the Californian agriculturist opposed the long summer droughts. She only vaguely guessed that the dreadful earthquake had struck at the prosperity of those people whom only a few hours ago she had been proud to call her friends. The underlying goodness of her nature was touched. Should she let a momentary fault—if it were not really, after all, only a misunderstanding—rise between her and them at such a moment? She turned and hurried quickly towards the house.

Hastening onward, she found time, however, to wonder also why these common men—she now included even the young inventor in that category—were all so rude and uncivil to HER! She had never before been treated in this way; she had always been rather embarrassed by the admiring attentions of young men (clerks and collegians) in her Atlantic home, and, of professional men (merchants and stockbrokers) in San Francisco. It was true that they were not as continually devoted to her and to the nice art and etiquette of pleasing as Emile—they had other things to think about, being in business and not being GENTLEMEN—but then

they were greatly superior to these clowns, who took no notice of her, and rode off without lingering or formal leave-taking when their selfish affairs were concluded. It must be the contact of the vulgar earth—this wretched, cracking, material, and yet ungovernable and lawless earth—that so depraved them. She felt she would like to say this to some one—not her father, for he wouldn't listen to her, nor to the major, who would laughingly argue with her, but to Mrs. Randolph, who would understand her, and perhaps say it some day in her own sharp, sneering way to these very clowns. With those gentle sentiments irradiating her blue eyes, and putting a pink flush upon her fair cheeks, Rose reached the garden with the intention of rushing sympathetically into Mrs. Randolph's arms. But it suddenly occurred to her that she would be obliged to state how she became aware of this misfortune, and with it came an instinctive aversion to speak of her meeting with the inventor. She would wait until Mrs. Randolph told her. But although that lady was engaged in a low-voiced discussion in French with Emile and Adele, which instantly ceased at her approach, there was no allusion made to the new calamity. "You need not telegraph to your father," she said as Rose approached, "he has already telegraphed to you for news; as you were out, and the messenger was waiting an answer, we opened the dispatch, and sent one, telling him that you were all right, and that he need not hurry here on your account. So you are satisfied, I hope." A few hours ago this would have been true, and Rose would have probably seen in the action of her hostess only a flattering motherly supervision; there was, in fact, still a lingering trace of trust in her mind yet she was conscious that she would have preferred to answer the dispatch herself, and to have let her father come. To a girl brought up with a belief in the right of individual independence of thought and action, there was something in Mrs. Randolph's practical ignoring of that right which startled her in spite of her new conservatism, while,

as the daughter of a business man, her instincts revolted against Mrs. Randolph's unbusiness-like action with the telegram, however vulgar and unrefined she may have begun to consider a life of business. The result was a certain constraint and embarrassment in her manner, which, however, had the laudable effect of limiting Emile's attention to significant glances, and was no doubt variously interpreted by the others. But she satisfied her conscience by determining to make a confidence of her sympathy to the major on the first opportunity.

This she presently found when the others were preoccupied; the major greeting her with a somewhat careworn face, but a voice whose habitual kindness was unchanged. When he had condoled with her on the terrifying phenomenon that had marred her visit to the ranch—and she could not help impatiently noticing that he too seemed to have accepted his wife's theory that she had been half deliriously frightened—he regretted that her father had not concluded to come down to the ranch, as his practical advice would have been invaluable in this emergency. She was about to eagerly explain why, when it occurred to her that Mrs. Randolph had only given him a suppressed version of the telegram, and that she would be betraying her, or again taking sides in this partisan divided home. With some hesitation she at last alluded to the accident to the artesian well. The major did not ask her how she had heard of it; it was a bad business, he thought, but it might not be a total loss. The water may have been only diverted by the shock and might be found again at the lower level, or in some lateral fissure. He had sent hurriedly for Tom Bent—that clever young engineer at the wheat ranch, who was always studying up these things with his inventions—and that was his opinion. No, Tom was not a well-digger, but it was generally known that he had “located” one or two, and had long ago advised the tapping of that flow by a second boring,

in case of just such an emergency. He was coming again to-morrow. By the way, he had asked how the young lady visitor was, and hoped she had not been alarmed by the earthquake!

Rose felt herself again blushing, and, what was more singular, with an unexpected and it seemed to her ridiculous pleasure, although outwardly she appeared to ignore the civility completely. And she had no intention of being so easily placated. If this young man thought by mere perfunctory civilities to her HOST to make up for his clownishness to HER, he was mistaken. She would let him see it when he called to-morrow. She quickly turned the subject by assuring the major of her sympathy and her intention of sending for her father. For the rest of the afternoon and during their al fresco dinner she solved the difficulty of her strained relations with Mrs. Randolph and Emile by conversing chiefly with the major, tacitly avoiding, however, any allusion to this Mr. Bent. But Mrs. Randolph was less careful.

“You don’t really mean to say, major,” she began in her driest, grittiest manner, “that instead of sending to San Francisco for some skilled master-mechanic, you are going to listen to the vagaries of a conceited, half-educated farm-laborer, and employ him? You might as well call in some of those wizards or water-witches at once.” But the major, like many other well-managed husbands who are good-humoredly content to suffer in the sunshine of prosperity, had no idea of doing so in adversity, and the prospect of being obliged to go back to youthful struggles had recalled some of the independence of that period. He looked up quietly, and said:

“If his conclusions are as clear and satisfactory tomorrow as they were to-day, I shall certainly try to secure his services.”

“Then I can only say I would prefer the water-witch. He at least would not represent a class of neighbors who have made themselves systematically uncivil and disagreeable to us.”

“I am afraid, Josephine, we have not tried to make ourselves particularly agreeable to THEM,” said the major.

“If that can only be done by admitting their equality, I prefer they should remain uncivil. Only let it be understood, major, that if you choose to take this Tom-the-ploughboy to mend your well, you will at least keep him there while he is on the property.”

With what retort the major would have kept up this conjugal discussion, already beginning to be awkward to the discreet visitor, is not known, as it was suddenly stopped by a bullet from the rosebud lips of the ingenuous Adele.

“Why, he’s very handsome when his face is clean, and his hands are small and not at all hard. And he doesn’t talk the least bit queer or common.”

There was a dead silence. “And pray where did YOU see him, and what do you know about his hands?” asked Mrs. Randolph, in her most desiccated voice. “Or has the major already presented you to him? I shouldn’t be surprised.”

“No, but”—hesitated the young girl, with a certain mouse-like audacity—“when you sent me to look after Miss Mallory, I came up to him just after he had spoken to her,

and he stopped to ask me how we all were, and if Miss Mallory was really frightened by the earthquake, and he shook hands for good afternoon—that's all."

"And who taught you to converse with common strangers and shake hands with them?" continued Mrs. Randolph, with narrowing lips.

"Nobody, mamma; but I thought if Miss Mallory, who is a young lady, could speak to him, so could I, who am not out yet."

"We won't discuss this any further at present," said Mrs. Randolph, stiffly, as the major smiled grimly at Rose. "The earthquake seems to have shaken down in this house more than the chimneys."

It certainly had shaken all power of sleep from the eyes of Rose when the household at last dispersed to lie down in their clothes on the mattresses which had been arranged under the awnings. She was continually starting up from confused dreams of the ground shaking under her, or she seemed to be standing on the brink of some dreadful abyss like the great chasm on the grain-field, when it began to tremble and crumble beneath her feet. It was near morning when, unable to endure it any longer, she managed without disturbing the sleeping Adele, who occupied the same curtained recess with her, to slip out from the awning. Wrapped in a thick shawl, she made her way through the encompassing trees and bushes of the garden that had seemed to imprison and suffocate her, to the edge of the grain-field, where she could breathe the fresh air beneath an open, starlit sky. There was no moon and the darkness favored her; she had no fears that weighed against the horror of seclusion with her own fancies. Besides, they were camping OUT of the house, and if she chose to sit up or walk

about, no one could think it strange. She wished her father were here that she might have some one of her own kin to talk to, yet she knew not what to say to him if he had come. She wanted somebody to sympathize with her feelings—or rather, perhaps, some one to combat and even ridicule the uneasiness that had lately come over her. She knew what her father would say—“Do you want to go, or do you want to stay here? Do you like these people, or do you not?” She remembered the one or two glowing and enthusiastic accounts she had written him of her visit here, and felt herself blushing again. What would he think of Mrs. Randolph’s opening and answering the telegram? Wouldn’t he find out from the major if she had garbled the sense of his dispatch?

Away to the right, in the midst of the distant and invisible wheat-field, there was the same intermittent star, which like a living, breathing thing seemed to dilate in glowing respiration, as she had seen it the first night of her visit. Mr. Bent’s forge! It must be nearly daylight now; the poor fellow had been up all night, or else was stealing this early march on the day. She recalled Adele’s sudden eulogium of him. The first natural smile that had come to her lips since the earthquake broke up her nervous restraint, and sent her back more like her old self to her couch.

But she had not proceeded far towards the tent, when she heard the sound of low voices approaching her. It was the major and his wife, who, like herself, had evidently been unable to sleep, and were up betimes. A new instinct of secretiveness, which she felt was partly the effect of her artificial surrounding, checked her first natural instinct to call to them, and she drew back deeper in the shadow to let them pass. But to her great discomfiture the major in a conversational emphasis stopped directly in front of her.

“You are wrong, I tell you, a thousand times wrong. The girl is simply upset by this earthquake. It’s a great pity her father didn’t come instead of telegraphing. And by Jove, rather than hear any more of this, I’ll send for him myself,” said the major, in an energetic but suppressed voice.

“And the girl won’t thank you, and you’ll be a fool for your pains,” returned Mrs. Randolph, with dry persistency.

“But according to your own ideas of propriety, Mallory ought to be the first one to be consulted—and by me, too.”

“Not in this case. Of course, before any actual engagement is on, you can speak of Emile’s attentions.”

“But suppose Mallory has other views. Suppose he declines the honor. The man is no fool.”

“Thank you. But for that very reason he must. Listen to me, major; if he doesn’t care to please his daughter for her own sake, he will have to do so for the sake of decency. Yes, I tell you, she has thoroughly compromised herself—quite enough, if it is ever known, to spoil any other engagement her father may make. Why, ask Adele! The day of the earthquake she ABSOLUTELY had the audacity to send him out of the room upstairs into your study for her fan, and then follow him up there alone. The servants knew it. I knew it, for I was in her room at the time with Father Antonio. The earthquake made it plain to everybody. Decline it! No. Mr. Mallory will think twice about it before he does that. What’s that? Who’s there?”

There was a sudden rustle in the bushes like the passage of some frightened animal—and then all was still again.

CHAPTER FIVE

The sun, an hour high, but only just topping the greenish crests of the wheat, was streaming like the morning breeze through the open length of Tom Bent's workshed. An exaggerated and prolonged shadow of the young inventor himself at work beside his bench was stretching itself far into the broken-down ranks of stalks towards the invisible road, and falling at the very feet of Rose Mallory as she emerged from them.

She was very pale, very quiet, and very determined. The traveling mantle thrown over her shoulders was dusty, the ribbons that tied her hat under her round chin had become unloosed. She advanced, walking down the line of shadow directly towards him.

"I am afraid I will have to trouble you once more," she said with a faint smile, which did not, however, reach her perplexed eyes. "Could you give me any kind of a conveyance that would take me to San Jose at once?"

The young man had started at the rustling of her dress in the shavings, and turned eagerly. The faintest indication of a loss of interest was visible for an instant in his face, but it quickly passed into a smile of recognition. Yet she felt that he had neither noticed any change in her appearance, nor experienced any wonder at seeing her there at that hour.

"I did not take a buggy from the house," she went on quickly, "for I left early, and did not want to disturb them. In fact, they don't know that I am gone. I was worried at not hearing news from my father in San Francisco since the earthquake, and I thought I would run down to San Jose to

inquire without putting them to any trouble. Anything will do that you have ready, if I can take it at once.”

Still without exhibiting the least surprise, Bent nodded affirmatively, put down his tools, begged her to wait a moment, and ran off in the direction of the cabin. As he disappeared behind the wheat, she lapsed quite suddenly against the work bench, but recovered herself a moment later, leaning with her back against it, her hands grasping it on either side, and her knit brows and determined little face turned towards the road. Then she stood erect again, shook the dust out of her skirts, lifted her veil, wiped her cheeks and brow with the corner of a small handkerchief, and began walking up and down the length of the shed as Bent reappeared.

He was accompanied by the man who had first led her through the wheat. He gazed upon her with apparently all the curiosity and concern that the other had lacked.

“You want to get to San Jose as quick as you can?” he said interrogatively.

“Yes,” she said quickly, “if you can help me.”

“You walked all the way from the major’s here?” he continued, without taking his eyes from her face.

“Yes,” she answered with an affectation of carelessness she had not shown to Bent. “But I started very early, it was cool and pleasant, and didn’t seem far.”

“I’ll put you down in San Jose inside the hour. You shall have my horse and trotting sulky, and I’ll drive you myself. Will that do?”

She looked at him wonderingly. She had not forgotten his previous restraint and gravity, but now his face seemed to have relaxed with some humorous satisfaction. She felt herself coloring slightly, but whether with shame or relief she could not tell.

“I shall be so much obliged to you,” she replied hesitatingly, “and so will my father, I know.”

“I reckon,” said the man with the same look of amused conjecture; then, with a quick, assuring nod, he turned away, and dived into the wheat again.

“You’re all right now, Miss Mallory,” said Bent, complacently. “Dawson will fix it. He’s got a good horse, and he’s a good driver, too.” He paused, and then added pleasantly, “I suppose they’re all well up at the house?”

It was so evident that his remark carried no personal meaning to herself that she was obliged to answer carelessly, “Oh, yes.”

“I suppose you see a good deal of Miss Randolph—Miss Adele, I think you call her?” he remarked tentatively, and with a certain boyish enthusiasm, which she had never conceived possible to his nature.

“Yes,” she replied a little dryly, “she is the only young lady there.” She stopped, remembering Adele’s naive description of the man before her, and said abruptly, “You know her, then?”

“A little,” replied the young man, modestly. “I see her pretty often when I am passing the upper end of the ranch. She’s very well brought up, and her manners are very refined—don’t you think so?—and yet she’s just as simple

and natural as a country girl. There's a great deal in education after all, isn't there?" he went on confidentially, "and although"—he lowered his voice and looked cautiously around him—"I believe that some of us here don't fancy her mother much, there's no doubt that Mrs. Randolph knows how to bring up her children. Some people think that kind of education is all artificial, and don't believe in it, but I do!"

With the consciousness that she was running away from these people and the shameful disclosure she had heard last night—with the recollection of Adele's scandalous interpretation of her most innocent actions and her sudden and complete revulsion against all that she had previously admired in that household, to hear this man who had seemed to her a living protest against their ideas and principles, now expressing them and holding them up for emulation, almost took her breath away.

"I suppose that means you intend to fix Major Randolph's well for him?" she said dryly.

"Yes," he returned without noticing her manner; "and I think I can find that water again. I've been studying it up all night, and do you know what I'm going to do? I am going to make the earthquake that lost it help me to find it again." He paused, and looked at her with a smile and a return of his former enthusiasm. "Do you remember the crack in the adobe field that stopped you yesterday?"

"Yes," said the girl, with a slight shiver.

"I told you then that the same crack was a split in the rock outcrop further up the plain, and was deeper. I am satisfied now, from what I have seen, that it is really a rupture of the whole strata all the way down. That's the one weak point that the imprisoned water is sure to find, and

that's where the borer will tap it—in the new well that the earthquake itself has sunk.”

It seemed to her now that she understood his explanation perfectly, and she wondered the more that he had been so mistaken in his estimate of Adele. She turned away a little impatiently and looked anxiously towards the point where Dawson had disappeared. Bent followed her eyes.

“He'll be here in a moment, Miss Mallory. He has to drive slowly through the grain, but I hear the wheels.” He stopped, and his voice took up its previous note of boyish hesitation. “By the way—I'll—I'll be going up to the Rancho this afternoon to see the major. Have you any message for Mrs. Randolph—or for—for Miss Adele?”

“No”—said Rose, hesitatingly, “and—and”—

“I see,” interrupted Bent, carelessly. “You don't want anything said about your coming here. I won't.”

It struck her that he seemed to have no ulterior meaning in the suggestion. But before she could make any reply, Dawson reappeared, driving a handsome mare harnessed to a light, spider-like vehicle. He had also assumed, evidently in great haste, a black frock coat buttoned over his waistcoatless and cravatless shirt, and a tall black hat that already seemed to be cracking in the sunlight. He drove up, at once assisted her to the narrow perch beside him, and with a nod to Bent drove off. His breathless expedition relieved the leave-taking of these young people of any ceremony.

“I suppose,” said Mr. Dawson, giving a half glance over his shoulder as they struck into the dusty highway—“I

suppose you don't care to see anybody before you get to San Jose?"

"No-o-o," said Rose, timidly.

"And I reckon you wouldn't mind my racin' a bit if anybody kem up?"

"No."

"The mare's sort o' fastidious about takin' anybody's dust."

"Is she?" said Rose, with a faint smile.

"Awful," responded her companion; "and the queerest thing of all is, she can't bear to have any one behind her, either."

He leaned forward with his expression of humorous enjoyment of some latent joke and did something with the reins—Rose never could clearly understand what, though it seemed to her that he simply lifted them with ostentatious lightness; but the mare suddenly seemed to LENGTHEN herself and lose her height, and the stalks of wheat on either side of the dusty track began to melt into each other, and then slipped like a flash into one long, continuous, shimmering green hedge. So perfect was the mare's action that the girl was scarcely conscious of any increased effort; so harmonious the whole movement that the light skeleton wagon seemed only a prolonged process of that long, slim body and free, collarless neck, both straight as the thin shafts on each side and straighter than the delicate ribbon-like traces which, in what seemed a mere affectation of conscious power, hung at times almost limp between the whiffle-tree and the narrow breast band which was all that confined the

animal's powerful fore-quarters. So superb was the reach of its long easy stride that Rose could scarcely see any undulations in the brown shining back on which she could have placed her foot, nor felt the soft beat of the delicate hoofs that took the dust so firmly and yet so lightly.

The rapidity of motion which kept them both with heads bent forward and seemed to force back any utterance that rose to their lips spared Rose the obligation of conversation, and her companion was equally reticent. But it was evident to her that he half suspected she was running away from the Randolphs, and that she wished to avoid the embarrassment of being overtaken even in persuasive pursuit. It was not possible that he knew the cause of her flight, and yet she could not account for his evident desire to befriend her, nor, above all, for his apparently humorous enjoyment of the situation. Had he taken it gravely, she might have been tempted to partly confide in him and ask his advice. Was she doing right, after all? Ought she not to have stayed long enough to speak her mind to Mrs. Randolph and demand to be sent home? No! She had not only shrunk from repeating the infamous slander she had overheard, but she had a terrible fear that if she had done so, Mrs. Randolph was capable of denying it, or even charging her of being still under the influence of the earthquake shock and of walking in her sleep. No! She could not trust her—she could trust no one there. Had not even the major listened to those infamous lies? Had she not seen that he was helpless in the hands of this cabal in his own household?—a cabal that she herself had thoughtlessly joined against him.

They had reached the first slight ascent. Her companion drew out his watch, looked at it with satisfaction, and changed the position of his hands on the reins. Without being able to detect the difference, she felt they were slackening speed. She turned inquiringly towards him; he

nodded his head, with a half smile and a gesture to her to look ahead. The spires of San Jose were already faintly uplifting from the distant fringe of oaks.

So soon! In fifteen minutes she would be there—and THEN! She remembered suddenly she had not yet determined what to do. Should she go on at once to San Francisco, or telegraph to her father and await him at San Jose? In either case a new fear of the precipitancy of her action and the inadequacy of her reasons had sprung up in her mind. Would her father understand her? Would he underrate the cause and be mortified at the insult she had given the family of his old friend, or, more dreadful still, would he exaggerate her wrongs and seek a personal quarrel with the major. He was a man of quick temper, and had the Western ideas of redress. Perhaps even now she was precipitating a duel between them. Her cheeks grew wan again, her breath came quickly, tears gathered in her eyes. Oh, she was a dreadful girl, she knew it; she was an utterly miserable one, and she knew that too!

The reins were tightened. The pace lessened and at last fell to a walk. Conscious of her telltale eyes and troubled face, she dared not turn to her companion to ask him why, but glanced across the fields.

“When you first came I didn’t get to know your name, Miss Mallory, but I reckon I know your father.”

Her father! What made him say that? She wanted to speak, but she felt she could not. In another moment, if he went on, she must do SOMETHING—she would cry!

“I reckon you’ll be wanting to go to the hotel first, anyway?”

There!—she knew it! He WOULD keep on! And now she had burst into tears.

The mare was still walking slowly; the man was lazily bending forward over the shafts as if nothing had occurred. Then suddenly, illogically, and without a moment's warning, the pride that had sustained her crumbled and became as the dust of the road.

She burst out and told him—this stranger!—this man she had disliked!—all and EVERYTHING. How she had felt, how she had been deceived, and what she had overheard!

“I thought as much,” said her companion, quietly, “and that's why I sent for your father.”

“You sent for my father!—when?—where?” echoed Rose, in astonishment.

“Yesterday. He was to come to-day, and if we don't find him at the hotel it will be because he has already started to come here by the upper and longer road. But you leave it to ME, and don't you say anything to him of this now. If he's at the hotel, I'll say I drove you down there to show off the mare. Sabe? If he isn't, I'll leave you there and come back here to find him. I've got something to tell him that will set YOU all right.” He smiled grimly, lifted the reins, the mare started forward again, and the vehicle and its occupants disappeared in a vanishing dust cloud.

CHAPTER SIX

It was nearly noon when Mr. Dawson finished rubbing down his sweating mare in the little stable shed among the wheat. He had left Rose at the hotel, for they found Mr. Mallory had previously started by a circuitous route for the wheat ranch. He had resumed not only his working clothes but his working expression. He was now superintending the unloading of a wain of stores and implements when the light carryall of the Randolphs rolled into the field. It contained only Mrs. Randolph and the driver. A slight look of intelligence passed between the latter and the nearest one of Dawson's companions, succeeded, however, by a dull look of stupid vacancy on the faces of all the others, including Dawson. Mrs. Randolph noticed it, and was forewarned. She reflected that no human beings ever looked NATURALLY as stupid as that and were able to work. She smiled sarcastically, and then began with dry distinctness and narrowing lips.

“Miss Mallory, a young lady visiting us, went out for an early walk this morning and has not returned. It is possible she may have lost her way among your wheat. Have you seen anything of her?”

Dawson raised his eyes from his work and glanced slowly around at his companions, as if taking the heavy sense of the assembly. One or two shook their heads mechanically, and returned to their suspended labor. He said, coolly:

“Nobody here seems to.”

She felt that they were lying. She was only a woman against five men. She was only a petty domestic tyrant; she might have been a larger one. But she had all the courage of that possibility.

“Major Randolph and my son are away,” she went on, drawing herself erect. “But I know that the major will pay liberally if these men will search the field, besides making it all right with your—EMPLOYERS—for the loss of time.”

Dawson uttered a single word in a low voice to the man nearest him, who apparently communicated it to the others, for the four men stopped unloading, and moved away one after the other—even the driver joining in the exodus. Mrs. Randolph smiled sarcastically; it was plain that these people, with all their boasted independence, were quite amenable to pecuniary considerations. Nevertheless, as Dawson remained looking quietly at her, she said:

“Then I suppose they’ve concluded to go and see?”

“No; I’ve sent them away so that they couldn’t HEAR.”

“Hear what?”

“What I’ve got to say to you.”

She looked at him suddenly. Then she said, with a disdainful glance around her: “I see I am helpless here, and—thanks to your trickery—alone. Have a care, sir; I warn you that you will have to answer to Major Randolph for any insolence.”

“I reckon you won’t tell Major Randolph what I have to say to you,” he returned coolly.

Her lips were nearly a grayish hue, but she said scornfully: “And why not? Do you know who you are talking to?”

The man came lazily forward to the carryall, carelessly brushed aside the slack reins, and resting his elbows on the horse’s back, laid his chin on his hands, as he looked up in the woman’s face.

“Yes; I know who I’m talking to,” he said coolly. “But as the major don’t, I reckon you won’t tell him.”

“Stand away from that horse!” she said, her whole face taking the grayish color of her lips, but her black eyes growing smaller and brighter. “Hand me those reins, and let me pass! What canaille are you to stop me?”

“I thought so,” returned the man, without altering his position; “you don’t know ME. You never saw ME before. Well, I’m Jim Dawson, the nephew of L’Hommedieu, YOUR OLD MASTER!”

She gripped the iron rail of the seat as if to leap from it, but checked herself suddenly and leaned back, with a set smile on her mouth that seemed stamped there. It was remarkable that with that smile she flung away her old affectation of superciliousness for an older and ruder audacity, and that not only the expression, but the type of her face appeared to have changed.

“I don’t say,” continued the man quietly, “that he didn’t MARRY you before he died. But you know as well as I do that the laws of his State didn’t recognize the marriage

of a master with his octoroon slave! And you know as well as I do that even if he had freed you, he couldn't change your blood. Why, if I'd been willing to stay at Avoyelles to be a [racial expletive]-driver like him, the plantation of 'de Fontanges'—whose name you have taken—would have been left to me. If YOU had stayed there, you might have been my property instead of YOUR owning a square man like Randolph. You didn't think of that when you came here, did you?" he said composedly.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" she said, dropping rapidly into a different accent, with her white teeth and fixed mirthless smile, "so it is a claim for PROPERTY, eh? You're wanting money—you? Tres bien, you forget we are in California, where one does not own a slave. And you have a fine story there, my poor friend. Very pretty, but very hard to prove, m'sieu. And these peasants are in it, eh, working it on shares like the farm, eh?"

"Well," said Dawson, slightly changing his position, and passing his hand over the horse's neck with a half-wearied contempt, "one of these men is from Plaquemine, and the other from Coupee. They know all the l'Hommadiéus' history. And they know a streak of the tar brush when they see it. They took your measure when they came here last year, and sized you up fairly. So had I, for the matter of that, when I FIRST saw you. And we compared notes. But the major is a square man, for all he is your husband, and we reckoned he had a big enough contract on his hands to take care of you and l'Hommadiéus' half-breeds, and so"—he tossed the reins contemptuously aside—"we kept this to ourselves."

"And now you want—what—eh?"

“We want an end to this foolery,” he broke out roughly, stepping back from the vehicle, and facing her suddenly, with his first angry gesture. “We want an end to these airs and grimaces, and all this dandy [racial expletive] business; we want an end to this ‘cake-walking’ through the wheat, and flouting of the honest labor of your betters. We want you and your ‘de Fontanges’ to climb down. And we want an end to this roping-in of white folks to suit your little game; we want an end to your trying to mix your [racial expletive] blood with any one here, and we intend to stop it. We draw the line at the major.”

Lashed as she had been by those words apparently out of all semblance of her former social arrogance, a lower and more stubborn resistance seemed to have sprung up in her, as she sat sideways, watching him with her set smile and contracting eyes.

“Ah,” she said dryly, “so SHE IS HERE. I thought so. Which of you is it, eh? It’s a good spec—Mallory’s a rich man. She’s not particular.”

The man had stopped as if listening, his head turned towards the road. Then he turned carelessly, and facing her again, waved his hand with a gesture of tired dismissal, and said, “Go! You’ll find your driver over there by the toolshed. He has heard nothing yet—but I’ve given you fair warning. Go!”

He walked slowly back towards the shed, as the woman, snatching up the reins, drove violently off in the direction where the men had disappeared. But she turned aside, ignoring her waiting driver in her wild and reckless abandonment of all her old conventional attitudes, and lashing her horse forward with the same set smile on her

face, the same odd relaxation of figure, and the same squaring of her elbows.

Avoiding the main road, she pushed into a narrow track that intersected another nearer the scene of the accident to Rose's buggy three weeks before. She had nearly passed it when she was hailed by a strange voice, and looking up, perceived a horseman floundering in the mazes of the wheat to one side of the track. Whatever mean thought of her past life she was flying from, whatever mean purpose she was flying to, she pulled up suddenly, and as suddenly resumed her erect, aggressive stiffness. The stranger was a middle-aged man; in dress and appearance a dweller of cities. He lifted his hat as he perceived the occupant of the wagon to be a lady.

"I beg your pardon, but I fear I've lost my way in trying to make a short cut to the Excelsior Company's Ranch."

"You are in it now," said Mrs. Randolph, quickly.

"Thank you, but where can I find the farmhouse?"

"There is none," she returned, with her old superciliousness, "unless you choose to give that name to the shanties and sheds where the laborers and servants live, near the road."

The stranger looked puzzled. "I'm looking for a Mr. Dawson," he said reflectively, "but I may have made some mistake. Do you know Major Randolph's house hereabouts?"

"I do. I am Mrs. Randolph," she said stiffly.

The stranger's brow cleared, and he smiled pleasantly. "Then this is a fortunate meeting," he said, raising his hat again as he reined in his horse beside the wagon, "for I am Mr. Mallory, and I was looking forward to the pleasure of presenting myself to you an hour or two later. The fact is, an old acquaintance, Mr. Dawson, telegraphed me yesterday to meet him here on urgent business, and I felt obliged to go there first."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a sudden gratified intelligence, but her manner seemed rather to increase than abate its grim precision.

"Our meeting this morning, Mr. Mallory, is both fortunate and unfortunate, for I regret to say that your daughter, who has not been quite herself since the earthquake, was missing early this morning and has not yet been found, though we have searched everywhere. Understand me," she said, as the stranger started, "I have no fear for her PERSONAL safety, I am only concerned for any INDISCRETION that she may commit in the presence of these strangers whose company she would seem to prefer to ours."

"But I don't understand you, madam," said Mallory, sternly; "you are speaking of my daughter, and"—

"Excuse me, Mr. Mallory," said Mrs. Randolph, lifting her hand with her driest deprecation and her most desiccating smile, "I'm not passing judgment or criticism. I am of a foreign race, and consequently do not understand the freedom of American young ladies, and their familiarity with the opposite sex. I make no charges, I only wish to assure you that she will no doubt be found in the company and under the protection of her own countrymen. There is," she added with ironical distinctness, "a young mechanic, or field

hand, or 'quack well-doctor,' whom she seems to admire, and with whom she appears to be on equal terms."

Mallory regarded her for a moment fixedly, and then his sternness relaxed to a mischievously complacent smile. "That must be young Bent, of whom I've heard," he said with unabated cheerfulness. "And I don't know but what she may be with him, after all. For now I think of it, a chuckle-headed fellow, of whom a moment ago I inquired the way to your house, told me I'd better ask the young man and young woman who were 'philandering through the wheat' yonder. Suppose we look for them. From what I've heard of Bent he's too much wrapped up in his inventions for flirtation, but it would be a good joke to stumble upon them."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a mingling of gratified malice and undisguised contempt for the fatuous father beside her. But before she could accept or decline the challenge, it had become useless. A murmur of youthful voices struck her ear, and she suddenly stood upright and transfixed in the carriage. For lounging down slowly towards them out of the dim green aisles of the arborescent wheat, lost in themselves and the shimmering veil of their seclusion, came the engineer, Thomas Bent, and on his arm, gazing ingenuously into his face, the figure of Adele—her own perfect daughter.

"I don't think, my dear," said Mr. Mallory, as the anxious Rose flew into his arms on his return to San Jose, a few hours later, "that it will be necessary for you to go back again to Major Randolph's before we leave. I have said 'Good-by' for you and thanked them, and your trunks are packed and will be sent here. The fact is, my dear, you see this affair of the earthquake and the disaster to the artesian well have upset all their arrangements, and I am afraid that my little girl would be only in their way just now."

“And you have seen Mr. Dawson—and you know why he sent for you?” asked the young girl, with nervous eagerness.

“Ah, yes,” said Mr. Mallory thoughtfully, “THAT was really important. You see, my child,” he continued, taking her hand in one of his own and patting the back of it gently with the other, “we think, Dawson and I, of taking over the major’s ranch and incorporating it with the Excelsior in one, to be worked on shares like the Excelsior; and as Mrs. Randolph is very anxious to return to the Atlantic States with her children, it is quite possible. Mrs. Randolph, as you have possibly noticed,” Mr. Mallory went on, still patting his daughter’s hand, “does not feel entirely at home here, and will consequently leave the major free to rearrange, by himself, the ranch on the new basis. In fact, as the change must be made before the crops come in, she talks of going next week. But if you like the place, Rose, I’ve no doubt the major and Dawson will always find room for you and me when we run down there for a little fresh air.”

“And did you have all that in your mind, papa, when you came down here, and was that what you and Mr. Dawson wanted to talk about?” said the astonished Rose.

“Mainly, my dear, mainly. You see I’m a capitalist now, and the real value of capital is to know how and when to apply it to certain conditions.”

“And this Mr.—Mr. Bent—do you think—he will go on and find the water, papa?” said Rose, hesitatingly.

“Ah! Bent—Tom Bent—oh, yes,” said Mallory, with great heartiness. “Capital fellow, Bent! and mighty ingenious! Glad you met him! Well,” thoughtfully but still heartily, “he may not find it exactly where he expected, but

he'll find it or something better. We can't part with him, and he has promised Dawson to stay. We'll utilize HIM, you may be sure."

It would seem that they did, and from certain interviews and conversations that took place between Mr. Bent and Miss Mallory on a later visit, it would also appear that her father had exercised a discreet reticence in regard to a certain experiment of the young inventor, of which he had been an accidental witness.

Bulger's Reputation

We all remembered very distinctly Bulger's advent in Rattlesnake Camp. It was during the rainy season—a season singularly inducive to settled reflective impressions as we sat and smoked around the stove in Mosby's grocery. Like older and more civilized communities, we had our periodic waves of sentiment and opinion, with the exception that they were more evanescent with us, and as we had just passed through a fortnight of dissipation and extravagance, owing to a visit from some gamblers and speculators, we were now undergoing a severe moral revulsion, partly induced by reduced finances and partly by the arrival of two families with grownup daughters on the hill. It was raining, with occasional warm breaths, through the open window, of the southwest trades, redolent of the saturated spices of the woods and springing grasses, which perhaps were slightly inconsistent with the hot stove around which we had congregated. But the stove was only an excuse for our listless, gregarious gathering; warmth and idleness went well together, and it was currently accepted that we had caught from the particular reptile which gave its name to our camp much of its pathetic, lifelong search for warmth, and its habit of indolently basking in it.

A few of us still went through the affectation of attempting to dry our damp clothes by the stove, and sizzling our wet boots against it; but as the same individuals calmly permitted the rain to drive in upon them through the open window without moving, and seemed to take infinite delight in the amount of steam they generated, even that pretense dropped. *Crotalus* himself, with his tail in a muddy ditch, and

the sun striking cold fire from his slit eyes as he basked his head on a warm stone beside it, could not have typified us better.

Percy Briggs took his pipe from his mouth at last and said, with reflective severity:

“Well, gentlemen, if we can’t get the wagon road over here, and if we’re going to be left out by the stagecoach company, we can at least straighten up the camp, and not have it look like a cross between a tenement alley and a broken-down circus. I declare, I was just sick when these two Baker girls started to make a short cut through the camp. Darned if they didn’t turn round and take to the woods and the rattlers again afore they got halfway. And that benighted idiot, Tom Rollins, standin’ there in the ditch, spattered all over with slumgullion ‘til he looked like a spotted tarrypin, wavin’ his fins and sashaying backwards and forrards and sayin’, ‘This way, ladies; this way!’”

“I didn’t,” returned Tom Rollins, quite casually, without looking up from his steaming boots; “I didn’t start in night afore last to dance ‘The Green Corn Dance’ outer ‘Hiawatha,’ with feathers in my hair and a red blanket on my shoulders, round that family’s new potato patch, in order that it might ‘increase and multiply.’ I didn’t sing ‘Sabbath Morning Bells’ with an anvil accompaniment until twelve o’clock at night over at the Crossing, so that they might dream of their Happy Childhood’s Home. It seems to me that it wasn’t me did it. I might be mistaken—it was late—but I have the impression that it wasn’t me.”

From the silence that followed, this would seem to have been clearly a recent performance of the previous speaker, who, however, responded quite cheerfully:

“An evenin’ o’ simple, childish gaiety don’t count. We’ve got to start in again FAIR. What we want here is to clear up and encourage decent immigration, and get rid o’ gamblers and blatherskites that are makin’ this yer camp their happy hunting- ground. We don’t want any more permiskus shootin’. We don’t want any more paintin’ the town red. We don’t want any more swaggerin’ galoots ridin’ up to this grocery and emptyin’ their six-shooters in the air afore they ‘light. We want to put a stop to it peacefully and without a row—and we kin. We ain’t got no bullies of our own to fight back, and they know it, so they know they won’t get no credit bullyin’ us; they’ll leave, if we’re only firm. It’s all along of our cussed fool good-nature; they see it amuses us, and they’ll keep it up as long as the whisky’s free. What we want to do is, when the next man comes waltzin’ along—”

A distant clatter from the rocky hillside here mingled with the puff of damp air through the window.

“Looks as ef we might hev a show even now,” said Tom Rollins, removing his feet from the stove as we all instinctively faced toward the window.

“I reckon you’re in with us in this, Mosby?” said Briggs, turning toward the proprietor of the grocery, who had been leaning listlessly against the wall behind his bar.

“Arter the man’s had a fair show,” said Mosby, cautiously. He deprecated the prevailing condition of things, but it was still an open question whether the families would prove as valuable customers as his present clients. “Everything in moderation, gentlemen.”

The sound of galloping hoofs came nearer, now swishing in the soft mud of the highway, until the unseen

rider pulled up before the door. There was no shouting, however, nor did he announce himself with the usual salvo of firearms. But when, after a singularly heavy tread and the jingle of spurs on the platform, the door flew open to the newcomer, he seemed a realization of our worst expectations. Tall, broad, and muscular, he carried in one hand a shotgun, while from his hip dangled a heavy navy revolver. His long hair, unkempt but oiled, swept a greasy circle around his shoulders; his enormous mustache, dripping with wet, completely concealed his mouth. His costume of fringed buckskin was wild and outre even for our frontier camp. But what was more confirmative of our suspicions was that he was evidently in the habit of making an impression, and after a distinct pause at the doorway, with only a side glance at us, he strode toward the bar.

“As there don’t seem to be no hotel hereabouts, I reckon I kin put up my mustang here and have a shakedown somewhere behind that counter,” he said. His voice seemed to have added to its natural depth the hoarseness of frequent overstraining.

“Ye ain’t got no bunk to spare, you boys, hev ye?” asked Mosby, evasively, glancing at Percy Briggs without looking at the stranger. We all looked at Briggs also; it was HIS affair after all—HE had originated this opposition. To our surprise he said nothing.

The stranger leaned heavily on the counter.

“I was speaking to YOU,” he said, with his eyes on Mosby, and slightly accenting the pronoun with a tap of his revolver butt on the bar. “Ye don’t seem to catch on.”

Mosby smiled feebly, and again cast an imploring glance at Briggs. To our greater astonishment, Briggs said, quietly: "Why don't you answer the stranger, Mosby?"

"Yes, yes," said Mosby, suavely, to the newcomer, while an angry flush crossed his cheek as he recognized the position in which Briggs had placed him. "Of course, you're welcome to what doings I hev here, but I reckoned these gentlemen over there," with a vicious glance at Briggs, "might fix ye up suthin' better; they're so pow'ful kind to your sort."

The stranger threw down a gold piece on the counter and said: "Fork out your whisky, then," waited until his glass was filled, took it in his hand, and then, drawing an empty chair to the stove, sat down beside Briggs. "Seein' as you're that kind," he said, placing his heavy hand on Briggs' knee, "mebbe ye kin tell me ef thar's a shanty or a cabin at Rattlesnake that I kin get for a couple o' weeks. I saw an empty one at the head o' the hill. You see, gennelmen," he added confidentially as he swept the drops of whisky from his long mustache with his fingers and glanced around our group, "I've got some business over at Bigwood," our nearest town, "but ez a place to stay AT it ain't my style."

"What's the matter with Bigwood?" said Briggs, abruptly.

"It's too howlin', too festive, too rough; thar's too much yellin' and shootin' goin' day and night. Thar's too many card sharps and gay gamboliers cavortin' about the town to please me. Too much permiskus soakin' at the bar and free jimjams. What I want is a quiet place what a man kin give his mind and elbow a rest from betwixt grippin' his shootin' irons and crookin' in his whisky. A sort o' slow, quiet, easy place LIKE THIS."

We all stared at him, Percy Briggs as fixedly as any. But there was not the slightest trace of irony, sarcasm, or peculiar significance in his manner. He went on slowly:

“When I struck this yer camp a minit ago; when I seed that thar ditch meanderin’ peaceful like through the street, without a hotel or free saloon or express office on either side; with the smoke just a curlin’ over the chimbley of that log shanty, and the bresh just set fire to and a smolderin’ in that potato patch with a kind o’ old-time stingin’ in your eyes and nose, and a few women’s duds just a flutterin’ on a line by the fence, I says to myself: ‘Bulger—this is peace! This is wot you’re lookin’ for, Bulger— this is wot you’re wantin’—this is wot YOU’LL HEV!’”

“You say you’ve business over at Bigwood. What business?” said Briggs.

“It’s a peculiar business, young fellow,” returned the stranger, gravely. “Thar’s different men ez has different opinions about it. Some allows it’s an easy business, some allows it’s a rough business; some says it’s a sad business, others says it’s gay and festive. Some wonders ez how I’ve got into it, and others wonder how I’ll ever get out of it. It’s a payin’ business—it’s a peaceful sort o’ business when left to itself. It’s a peculiar business—a business that sort o’ b’longs to me, though I ain’t got no patent from Washington for it. It’s MY OWN business.” He paused, rose, and saying, “Let’s meander over and take a look at that empty cabin, and ef she suits me, why, I’ll plank down a slug for her on the spot, and move in tomorrow,” walked towards the door. “I’ll pick up suthin’ in the way o’ boxes and blankets from the grocery,” he added, looking at Mosby, “and ef thar’s a corner whar I kin stand my gun and a nail to hang up my revolver—why, I’m all thar!”

By this time we were no longer astonished when Briggs rose also, and not only accompanied the sinister-looking stranger to the empty cabin, but assisted him in negotiating with its owner for a fortnight's occupancy. Nevertheless, we eagerly assailed Briggs on his return for some explanation of this singular change in his attitude toward the stranger. He coolly reminded us, however, that while his intention of excluding ruffianly adventurers from the camp remained the same, he had no right to go back on the stranger's sentiments, which were evidently in accord with our own, and although Mr. Bulger's appearance was inconsistent with them, that was only an additional reason why we should substitute a mild firmness for that violence which we all deprecated, but which might attend his abrupt dismissal. We were all satisfied except Mosby, who had not yet recovered from Briggs' change of front, which he was pleased to call "crawl-fishing." "Seemed to me his account of his business was extraordinary satisfactory! Sorter filled the bill all round—no mistake thar," he suggested, with a malicious irony. "I like a man that's outspoken."

"I understood him very well," said Briggs, quietly.

"In course you did. Only when you've settled in your MIND whether he was describing horse-stealing or tract-distributing, mebbe you'll let ME know."

It would seem, however, that Briggs did not interrogate the stranger again regarding it, nor did we, who were quite content to leave matters in Briggs' hands. Enough that Mr. Bulger moved into the empty cabin the next day, and, with the aid of a few old boxes from the grocery, which he quickly extemporized into tables and chairs, and the purchase of some necessary cooking utensils, soon made himself at home. The rest of the camp, now thoroughly aroused, made a point of leaving their work in the ditches,

whenever they could, to stroll carelessly around Bulger's tenement in the vague hope of satisfying a curiosity that had become tormenting. But they could not find that he was doing anything of a suspicious character—except, perhaps, from the fact that it was not OUTWARDLY suspicious, which I grieve to say did not lull them to security. He seemed to be either fixing up his cabin or smoking in his doorway. On the second day he checked this itinerant curiosity by taking the initiative himself, and quietly walking from claim to claim and from cabin to cabin with a pacific but by no means a satisfying interest. The shadow of his tall figure carrying his inseparable gun, which had not yet apparently “stood in the corner,” falling upon an excavated bank beside the delving miners, gave them a sense of uneasiness they could not explain; a few characteristic yells of boisterous hilarity from their noontide gathering under a cottonwood somehow ceased when Mr. Bulger was seen gravely approaching, and his casual stopping before a poker party in the gulch actually caused one of the most reckless gamblers to weakly recede from “a bluff” and allow his adversary to sweep the board. After this it was felt that matters were becoming serious. There was no subsequent patrolling of the camp before the stranger's cabin. Their curiosity was singularly abated. A general feeling of repulsion, kept within bounds partly by the absence of any overt act from Bulger, and partly by an inconsistent over-consciousness of his shotgun, took its place. But an unexpected occurrence revived it.

One evening, as the usual social circle were drawn around Mosby's stove, the lazy silence was broken by the familiar sounds of pistol shots and a series of more familiar shrieks and yells from the rocky hill road. The circle quickly recognized the voices of their old friends the roisterers and gamblers from Sawyer's Dam; they as quickly recognized the returning shouts here and there from a few companions

who were welcoming them. I grieve to say that in spite of their previous attitude of reformation a smile of gratified expectancy lit up the faces of the younger members, and even the older ones glanced dubiously at Briggs. Mosby made no attempt to conceal a sigh of relief as he carefully laid out an extra supply of glasses in his bar. Suddenly the oncoming yells ceased, the wild gallop of hoofs slackened into a trot, and finally halted, and even the responsive shouts of the camp stopped also. We all looked vacantly at each other; Mosby leaped over his counter and went to the door; Briggs followed with the rest of us. The night was dark, and it was a few minutes before we could distinguish a straggling, vague, but silent procession moving through the moist, heavy air on the hill. But, to our surprise, it was moving away from us— absolutely LEAVING the camp! We were still staring in expectancy when out of the darkness slowly emerged a figure which we recognized at once as Captain Jim, one of the most reckless members of our camp. Pushing us back into the grocery he entered without a word, closed the door behind him, and threw himself vacantly into a chair. We at once pressed around him. He looked up at us dazedly, drew a long breath, and said slowly:

“It’s no use, gentlemen! Suthin’s GOT to be done with that Bulger; and mighty quick.”

“What’s the matter?” we asked eagerly.

“Matter!” he repeated, passing his hand across his forehead. “Matter! Look yere! Ye all of you heard them boys from Sawyer’s Dam coming over the hill? Ye heard their music—mebbe ye heard US join in the chorus? Well, on they came waltzing down the hill, like old times, and we waitin’ for ‘em. Then, jest as they passed the old cabin, who do you think they ran right into—shooting iron, long hair and

mustache, and all that—standing there plump in the road? why, Bulger!”

“Well?”

“Well!—Whatever it was—don’t ask ME—but, dern my skin, ef after a word or two from HIM—them boys just stopped yellin’, turned round like lambs, and rode away, peaceful-like, along with him. We ran after them a spell, still yellin’, when that thar Bulger faced around, said to us that he’d ‘come down here for quiet,’ and ef he couldn’t hev it he’d have to leave with those gentlemen WHO WANTED IT too! And I’m gosh darned ef those GENTLEMEN—you know ‘em all— Patsey Carpenter, Snapshot Harry, and the others—ever said a darned word, but kinder nodded ‘So long’ and went away!”

Our astonishment and mystification were complete; and I regret to say, the indignation of Captain Jim and Mosby equally so. “If we’re going to be bossed by the first newcomer,” said the former, gloomily, “I reckon we might as well take our chances with the Sawyer’s Dam boys, whom we know.”

“Ef we are going to hev the legitimate trade of Rattlesnake interfered with by the cranks of some hidin’ horse thief or retired road agent,” said Mosby, “we might as well invite the hull of Joaquin Murietta’s gang here at once! But I suppose this is part o’ Bulger’s particular ‘business,’” he added, with a withering glance at Briggs.

“I understand it all,” said Briggs, quietly. “You know I told you that bullies couldn’t live in the same camp together. That’s human nature—and that’s how plain men like you and me manage to scud along without getting plugged. You see, Bulger wasn’t going to hev any of his own

kind jumpin' his claim here. And I reckon he was pow'ful enough to back down Sawyer's Dam. Anyhow, the bluff told— and here we are in peace and quietness.”

“Until he lets us know what is his little game,” sneered Mosby.

Nevertheless, such is the force of mysterious power that although it was exercised against what we firmly believed was the independence of the camp, it extorted a certain respect from us. A few thought it was not a bad thing to have a professional bully, and even took care to relate the discomfiture of the wicked youth of Sawyer's Dam for the benefit of a certain adjacent and powerful camp who had looked down upon us. He himself, returning the same evening from his self-imposed escort, vouchsafed no other reason than the one he had already given. Preposterous as it seemed, we were obliged to accept it, and the still more preposterous inference that he had sought Rattlesnake Camp solely for the purpose of acquiring and securing its peace and quietness. Certainly he had no other occupation; the little work he did upon the tailings of the abandoned claim which went with his little cabin was scarcely a pretense. He rode over on certain days to Bigwood on account of his business, but no one had ever seen him there, nor could the description of his manner and appearance evoke any information from the Bigwoodians. It remained a mystery.

It had also been feared that the advent of Bulger would intensify that fear and dislike of riotous Rattlesnake which the two families had shown, and which was the origin of Briggs' futile attempt at reformation. But it was discovered that since his arrival the young girls had shown less timidity in entering the camp, and had even exchanged some polite conversation and good-humoured badinage with its younger and more impressible members. Perhaps this

tended to make these youths more observant, for a few days later, when the vexed question of Bulger's business was again under discussion, one of them remarked, gloomily:

“I reckon there ain't no doubt WHAT he's here for!”

The youthful prophet was instantly sat upon after the fashion of all elderly critics since Job's. Nevertheless, after a pause he was permitted to explain.

“Only this morning, when Lance Forester and me were chirping with them gals out on the hill, who should we see hanging around in the bush but that cussed Bulger! We allowed at first that it might be only a new style of his interferin', so we took no notice, except to pass a few remarks about listeners and that sort o' thing, and perhaps to bedevil the girls a little more than we'd hev done if we'd been alone. Well, they laughed, and we laughed—and that was the end of it. But this afternoon, as Lance and me were meandering down by their cabin, we sorter turned into the woods to wait till they'd come out. Then all of a sudden Lance stopped as rigid as a pointer that's flushed somethin', and says, ‘B'gosh!’ And thar, under a big redwood, sat that slimy hypocrite Bulger, twisting his long mustaches and smiling like clockwork alongside o' little Meely Baker—you know her, the pootiest of the two sisters—and she smilin' back on him. Think of it! that unknown, unwashed, longhaired tramp and bully, who must be forty if a day, and that innocent gal of sixteen. It was simply disgustin'!”

I need not say that the older cynics and critics already alluded to at once improved the occasion. ‘What more could be expected? Women, the world over, were noted for this sort of thing! This long-haired, swaggering bully, with his air of mystery, had captivated them, as he always had done since the days of Homer. Simple merit, which sat lowly in

barrooms, and conceived projects for the public good around the humble, unostentatious stove, was nowhere! Youth could not too soon learn this bitter lesson. And in this case youth too, perhaps, was right in its conjectures, for this WAS, no doubt, the little game of the perfidious Bulger. We recalled the fact that his unhallowed appearance in camp was almost coincident with the arrival of the two families. We glanced at Briggs; to our amazement, for the first time he looked seriously concerned. But Mosby in the meantime leaned his elbows lazily over the counter and, in a slow voice, added fuel to the flame.

“I wouldn’t hev spoken of it before,” he said, with a sidelong glance at Briggs, “for it might be all in the line o’ Bulger’s ‘business,’ but suthin’ happened the other night that, for a minit, got me! I was passin’ the Bakers’ shanty, and I heard one of them gals a singing a camp-meeting hymn. I don’t calkilate to run agin you young fellers in any sparkin’ or canoodlin’ that’s goin’ on, but her voice sounded so pow’ful soothin’ and pretty thet I jest stood there and listened. Then the old woman—old Mother Baker— SHE joined in, and I listened too. And then—dern my skin!—but a man’s voice joined in—jest belching outer that cabin!—and I sorter lifted myself up and kem away.

“That voice, gentlemen,” said Mosby, lingering artistically as he took up a glass and professionally eyed it before wiping it with his towel, “that voice, cumf’bly fixed thar in thet cabin among them wimen folks, was Bulger’s!”

Briggs got up, with his eyes looking the darker for his flushed face. “Gentlemen,” he said huskily, “thar’s only one thing to be done. A lot of us have got to ride over to Sawyer’s Dam tomorrow morning and pick up as many square men as we can muster; there’s a big camp meeting goin’ on there, and there won’t be no difficulty in that. When

we've got a big enough crowd to show we mean business, we must march back here and ride Bulger out of this camp! I don't hanker arter Vigilance Committees, as a rule—it's a rough remedy—it's like drinkin' a quart o' whisky agin rattlesnake poison but it's got to be done! We don't mind being sold ourselves but when it comes to our standin' by and seein' the only innocent people in Rattlesnake given away—we kick! Bulger's got to be fired outer this camp! And he will be!"

But he was not.

For when, the next morning, a determined and thoughtful procession of the best and most characteristic citizens of Rattlesnake Camp filed into Sawyer's Dam, they found that their mysterious friends had disappeared, although they met with a fraternal but subdued welcome from the general camp. But any approach to the subject of their visit, however, was received with a chilling disapproval. Did they not know that lawlessness of any kind, even under the rude mantle of frontier justice, was to be deprecated and scouted when a "means of salvation, a power of regeneration," such as was now sweeping over Sawyer's Dam, was at hand? Could they not induce this man who was to be violently deported to accompany them willingly to Sawyer's Dam and subject himself to the powerful influence of the "revival" then in full swing?

The Rattlesnake boys laughed bitterly, and described the man of whom they talked so lightly; but in vain. "It's no use, gentlemen," said a more worldly bystander, in a lower voice, "the camp meetin's got a strong grip here, and betwixt you and me there ain't no wonder. For the man that runs it—the big preacher—has got new ways and methods that fetches the boys every time. He don't preach no cut-and-dried gospel; he don't carry around no slop-shop robes and

clap ‘em on you whether they fit or not; but he samples and measures the camp afore he wades into it. He scouts and examines; he ain’t no mere Sunday preacher with a comfortable house and once-a-week church, but he gives up his days and nights to it, and makes his family work with him, and even sends ‘em forward to explore the field. And he ain’t no white-choker shadbelly either, but fits himself, like his gospel, to the men he works among. Ye ought to hear him afore you go. His tent is just out your way. I’ll go with you.”

Too dejected to offer any opposition, and perhaps a little curious to see this man who had unwittingly frustrated their design of lynching Bulger, they halted at the outer fringe of worshipers who packed the huge inclosure. They had not time to indulge their cynicisms over this swaying mass of emotional, half-thinking, and almost irresponsible beings, nor to detect any similarity between THEIR extreme methods and the scheme of redemption they themselves were seeking, for in a few moments, apparently lifted to his feet on a wave of religious exultation, the famous preacher arose. The men of Rattlesnake gasped for breath.

It was Bulger!

But Briggs quickly recovered himself. “By what name,” said he, turning passionately towards his guide, “does this man—this impostor—call himself here?”

“Baker.”

“Baker?” echoed the Rattlesnake contingent.

“Baker?” repeated Lance Forester, with a ghastly smile.

“Yes,” returned their guide. “You oughter know it too! For he sent his wife and daughters over, after his usual style, to sample your camp, a week ago! Come, now, what are you givin’ us?”

Jimmy's Big Brother from California

As night crept up from the valley that stormy afternoon, Sawyer's Ledge was at first quite blotted out by wind and rain, but presently reappeared in little nebulous star-like points along the mountain side, as the straggling cabins of the settlement were one by one lit up by the miners returning from tunnel and claim. These stars were of varying brilliancy that evening, two notably so—one that eventually resolved itself into a many-candled illumination of a cabin of evident festivity; the other into a glimmering taper in the window of a silent one. They might have represented the extreme mutations of fortune in the settlement that night: the celebration of a strike by Robert Falloner, a lucky miner; and the sick-bed of Dick Lasham, an unlucky one.

The latter was, however, not quite alone. He was ministered to by Daddy Folsom, a weak but emotional and aggressively hopeful neighbor, who was sitting beside the wooden bunk whereon the invalid lay. Yet there was something perfunctory in his attitude: his eyes were continually straying to the window, whence the illuminated Falloner festivities could be seen between the trees, and his ears were more intent on the songs and laughter that came faintly from the distance than on the feverish breathing and unintelligible moans of the sufferer.

Nevertheless he looked troubled equally by the condition of his charge and by his own enforced absence from the revels. A more impatient moan from the sick man,

however, brought a change to his abstracted face, and he turned to him with an exaggerated expression of sympathy.

“In course! Lordy! I know jest what those pains are: kinder ez ef you was havin’ a tooth pulled that had roots branchin’ all over ye! My! I’ve jest had ‘em so bad I couldn’t keep from yellin’! That’s hot rheumatics! Yes, sir, I oughter know! And” (confidentially) “the sing’ler thing about ‘em is that they get worse jest as they’re going off—sorter wringin’ yer hand and punchin’ ye in the back to say ‘Good-by.’ There!” he continued, as the man sank exhaustedly back on his rude pillow of flour-sacks. “There! didn’t I tell ye? Ye’ll be all right in a minit, and ez chipper ez a jay bird in the mornin’. Oh, don’t tell me about rheumatics—I’ve bin thar! On’y mine was the cold kind—that hangs on longest—yours is the hot, that burns itself up in no time!”

If the flushed face and bright eyes of Lasham were not enough to corroborate this symptom of high fever, the quick, wandering laugh he gave would have indicated the point of delirium. But the too optimistic Daddy Folsom referred this act to improvement, and went on cheerfully: “Yes, sir, you’re better now, and”—here he assumed an air of cautious deliberation, extravagant, as all his assumptions were—“I ain’t sayin’ that—ef—you—was—to—rise—up” (very slowly) “and heave a blanket or two over your shoulders—jest by way o’ caution, you know—and leanin’ on me, kinder meander over to Bob Falloner’s cabin and the boys, it wouldn’t do you a heap o’ good. Changes o’ this kind is often prescribed by the faculty.” Another moan from the sufferer, however, here apparently corrected Daddy’s too favorable prognosis. “Oh, all right! Well, perhaps ye know best; and I’ll jest run over to Bob’s and say how as ye ain’t comin’, and will be back in a jiffy!”

“The letter,” said the sick man hurriedly, “the letter, the letter!”

Daddy leaned suddenly over the bed. It was impossible for even his hopefulness to avoid the fact that Lasham was delirious. It was a strong factor in the case—one that would certainly justify his going over to Falloner’s with the news. For the present moment, however, this aberration was to be accepted cheerfully and humored after Daddy’s own fashion. “Of course—the letter, the letter,” he said convincingly; “that’s what the boys hev bin singin’ jest now—

‘Good-by, Charley; when you are away,
Write me a letter, love; send me a
letter, love!’

That’s what you heard, and a mighty purty song it is too, and kinder clings to you. It’s wonderful how these things gets in your head.”

“The letter—write—send money—money—money, and the photograph—the photograph—photograph—money,” continued the sick man, in the rapid reiteration of delirium.

“In course you will—to-morrow—when the mail goes,” returned Daddy soothingly; “plenty of them. Jest now you try to get a snooze, will ye? Hol’ on!—take some o’ this.”

There was an anodyne mixture on the rude shelf, which the doctor had left on his morning visit. Daddy had a comfortable belief that what would relieve pain would also check delirium, and he accordingly measured out a dose with a liberal margin to allow of waste by the patient in

swallowing in his semi-conscious state. As he lay more quiet, muttering still, but now unintelligibly, Daddy, waiting for a more complete unconsciousness and the opportunity to slip away to Falloner's, cast his eyes around the cabin. He noticed now for the first time since his entrance that a crumpled envelope bearing a Western post-mark was lying at the foot of the bed. Daddy knew that the tri-weekly post had arrived an hour before he came, and that Lasham had evidently received a letter. Sure enough the letter itself was lying against the wall beside him. It was open. Daddy felt justified in reading it.

It was curt and businesslike, stating that unless Lasham at once sent a remittance for the support of his brother and sister—two children in charge of the writer—they must find a home elsewhere. That the arrears were long standing, and the repeated promises of Lasham to send money had been unfulfilled. That the writer could stand it no longer. This would be his last communication unless the money were sent forthwith.

It was by no means a novel or, under the circumstances, a shocking disclosure to Daddy. He had seen similar missives from daughters, and even wives, consequent on the varying fortunes of his neighbors; no one knew better than he the uncertainties of a miner's prospects, and yet the inevitable hopefulness that buoyed him up. He tossed it aside impatiently, when his eye caught a strip of paper he had overlooked lying upon the blanket near the envelope. It contained a few lines in an unformed boyish hand addressed to "my brother," and evidently slipped into the letter after it was written. By the uncertain candlelight Daddy read as follows:

Dear Brother, Rite to me and Cissy rite off. Why aint you done it? It's so long since you rote any. Mister Recketts

ses you dont care any more. Wen you rite send your fotograff. Folks here ses I aint got no big bruther any way, as I disremember his looks, and cant say wots like him. Cissy's kryin' all along of it. I've got a hedake. William Walker make it ake by a blo. So no more at present from your loving little bruther Jim.

The quick, hysteric laugh with which Daddy read this was quite consistent with his responsive, emotional nature; so, too, were the ready tears that sprang to his eyes. He put the candle down unsteadily, with a casual glance at the sick man. It was notable, however, that this look contained less sympathy for the ailing "big brother" than his emotion might have suggested. For Daddy was carried quite away by his own mental picture of the helpless children, and eager only to relate his impressions of the incident. He cast another glance at the invalid, thrust the papers into his pocket, and clapping on his hat slipped from the cabin and ran to the house of festivity. Yet it was characteristic of the man, and so engrossed was he by his one idea, that to the usual inquiries regarding his patient he answered, "he's all right," and plunged at once into the incident of the dunning letter, reserving—with the instinct of an emotional artist—the child's missive until the last. As he expected, the money demand was received with indignant criticisms of the writer.

"That's just like 'em in the States," said Captain Fletcher; "darned if they don't believe we've only got to bore a hole in the ground and snake out a hundred dollars. Why, there's my wife—with a heap of hoss sense in everything else—is allus wonderin' why I can't rake in a cool fifty betwixt one steamer day and another."

"That's nothin' to my old dad," interrupted Gus Houston, the "infant" of the camp, a bright-eyed young fellow of twenty; "why, he wrote to me yesterday that if I'd

only pick up a single piece of gold every day and just put it aside, sayin' 'That's for popper and mommer,' and not fool it away—it would be all they'd ask of me."

"That's so," added another; "these ignorant relations is just the ruin o' the mining industry. Bob Falloner hez bin lucky in his strike to-day, but he's a darned sight luckier in being without kith or kin that he knows of."

Daddy waited until the momentary irritation had subsided, and then drew the other letter from his pocket. "That ain't all, boys," he began in a faltering voice, but gradually working himself up to a pitch of pathos; "just as I was thinking all them very things, I kinder noticed this yer poor little bit o' paper lyin' thar lonesome like and forgotten, and I—read it—and well—gentlemen— it just choked me right up!" He stopped, and his voice faltered.

"Go slow, Daddy, go slow!" said an auditor smilingly. It was evident that Daddy's sympathetic weakness was well known.

Daddy read the child's letter. But, unfortunately, what with his real emotion and the intoxication of an audience, he read it extravagantly, and interpolated a child's lisp (on no authority whatever), and a simulated infantile delivery, which, I fear, at first provoked the smiles rather than the tears of his audience. Nevertheless, at its conclusion the little note was handed round the party, and then there was a moment of thoughtful silence.

"Tell you what it is, boys," said Fletcher, looking around the table, "we ought to be doin' suthin' for them kids right off! Did you," turning to Daddy, "say anythin' about this to Dick?"

“Nary—why, he’s clean off his head with fever—don’t understand a word—and just babbles,” returned Daddy, forgetful of his roseate diagnosis a moment ago, “and hasn’t got a cent.”

“We must make up what we can amongst us afore the mail goes to- night,” said the “infant,” feeling hurriedly in his pockets. “Come, ante up, gentlemen,” he added, laying the contents of his buckskin purse upon the table.

“Hold on, boys,” said a quiet voice. It was their host Falloner, who had just risen and was slipping on his oilskin coat. “You’ve got enough to do, I reckon, to look after your own folks. I’ve none! Let this be my affair. I’ve got to go to the Express Office anyhow to see about my passage home, and I’ll just get a draft for a hundred dollars for that old skeesicks—what’s his blamed name? Oh, Ricketts”—he made a memorandum from the letter—“and I’ll send it by express. Meantime, you fellows sit down there and write something—you know what—saying that Dick’s hurt his hand and can’t write—you know; but asked you to send a draft, which you’re doing. Sabe? That’s all! I’ll skip over to the express now and get the draft off, and you can mail the letter an hour later. So put your dust back in your pockets and help yourselves to the whiskey while I’m gone.” He clapped his hat on his head and disappeared.

“There goes a white man, you bet!” said Fletcher admiringly, as the door closed behind their host. “Now, boys,” he added, drawing a chair to the table, “let’s get this yer letter off, and then go back to our game.”

Pens and ink were produced, and an animated discussion ensued as to the matter to be conveyed. Daddy’s plea for an extended explanatory and sympathetic

communication was overruled, and the letter was written to Ricketts on the simple lines suggested by Falloner.

“But what about poor little Jim’s letter? That ought to be answered,” said Daddy pathetically.

“If Dick hurt his hand so he can’t write to Ricketts, how in thunder is he goin’ to write to Jim?” was the reply.

“But suthin’ oughter be said to the poor kid,” urged Daddy piteously.

“Well, write it yourself—you and Gus Houston make up somethin’ together. I’m going to win some money,” retorted Fletcher, returning to the card-table, where he was presently followed by all but Daddy and Houston.

“Ye can’t write it in Dick’s name, because that little brother knows Dick’s handwriting, even if he don’t remember his face. See?” suggested Houston.

“That’s so,” said Daddy dubiously; “but,” he added, with elastic cheerfulness, “we can write that Dick ‘says.’ See?”

“Your head’s level, old man! Just you waded in on that.”

Daddy seized the pen and “waded in.” Into somewhat deep and difficult water, I fancy, for some of it splashed into his eyes, and he sniffled once or twice as he wrote. “Suthin’ like this,” he said, after a pause:

DEAR LITTLE JIMMIE—Your big brother havin’ hurt his hand, wants me to tell you that otherways he is all hunky and A1. He says he don’t forget you and little Cissy,

you bet! and he's sendin' money to old Ricketts straight off. He says don't you and Cissy mind whether school keeps or not as long as big Brother Dick holds the lines. He says he'd have written before, but he's bin follerin' up a lead mighty close, and expects to strike it rich in a few days.

"You ain't got no sabe about kids," said Daddy imperturbably; "they've got to be humored like sick folks. And they want everythin' big—they don't take no stock in things ez they are— even ef they hev 'em worse than they are. 'So,'" continued Daddy, reading to prevent further interruption, "'he says you're just to keep your eyes skinned lookin' out for him comin' home any time— day or night. All you've got to do is to sit up and wait. He might come and even snake you out of your beds! He might come with four white horses and a [racial expletive] driver, or he might come disguised as an ornary tramp. Only you've got to be keen on watchin'.'" (Ye see," interrupted Daddy explanatorily, "that'll jest keep them kids lively.) 'He says Cissy's to stop cryin' right off, and if Willie Walker hits yer on the right cheek you just slug out with your left fist, 'cordin' to Scripter.' Gosh," ejaculated Daddy, stopping suddenly and gazing anxiously at Houston, "there's that blamed photograph—I clean forgot that."

"And Dick hasn't got one in the shop, and never had," returned Houston emphatically. "Golly! that stumps us! Unless," he added, with diabolical thoughtfulness, "we take Bob's? The kids don't remember Dick's face, and Bob's about the same age. And it's a regular star picture—you bet! Bob had it taken in Sacramento—in all his war paint. See!" He indicated a photograph pinned against the wall—a really striking likeness which did full justice to Bob's long silken mustache and large, brown determined eyes. "I'll snake it off while they ain't lookin', and you jam it in the letter. Bob

won't miss it, and we can fix it up with Dick after he's well, and send another."

Daddy silently grasped the "infant's" hand, who presently secured the photograph without attracting attention from the card-players. It was promptly inclosed in the letter, addressed to Master James Lasham. The "infant" started with it to the post-office, and Daddy Folsom returned to Lasham's cabin to relieve the watcher that had been detached from Falloner's to take his place beside the sick man.

Meanwhile the rain fell steadily and the shadows crept higher and higher up the mountain. Towards midnight the star points faded out one by one over Sawyer's Ledge even as they had come, with the difference that the illumination of Falloner's cabin was extinguished first, while the dim light of Lasham's increased in number. Later, two stars seemed to shoot from the centre of the ledge, trailing along the descent, until they were lost in the obscurity of the slope—the lights of the stage-coach to Sacramento carrying the mail and Robert Falloner. They met and passed two fainter lights toiling up the road—the buggy lights of the doctor, hastily summoned from Carterville to the bedside of the dying Dick Lasham.

The slowing up of his train caused Bob Falloner to start from a half doze in a Western Pullman car. As he glanced from his window he could see that the blinding snowstorm which had followed him for the past six hours had at last hopelessly blocked the line. There was no prospect beyond the interminable snowy level, the whirling flakes, and the monotonous palisades of leafless trees seen through it to the distant banks of the Missouri. It was a prospect that the mountain-bred Falloner was beginning to loathe, and although it was scarcely six weeks since he left

California, he was already looking back regretfully to the deep slopes and the free song of the serried ranks of pines.

The intense cold had chilled his temperate blood, even as the rigors and conventions of Eastern life had checked his sincerity and spontaneous flow of animal spirits begotten in the frank intercourse and brotherhood of camps. He had just fled from the artificialities of the great Atlantic cities to seek out some Western farming lands in which he might put his capital and energies. The unlooked-for interruption of his progress by a long- forgotten climate only deepened his discontent. And now—that train was actually backing! It appeared they must return to the last station to wait for a snow-plough to clear the line. It was, explained the conductor, barely a mile from Shepherdstown, where there was a good hotel and a chance of breaking the journey for the night.

Shepherdstown! The name touched some dim chord in Bob Falloner's memory and conscience—yet one that was vague. Then he suddenly remembered that before leaving New York he had received a letter from Houston informing him of Lasham's death, reminding him of his previous bounty, and begging him—if he went West—to break the news to the Lasham family. There was also some allusion to a joke about his (Bob's) photograph, which he had dismissed as unimportant, and even now could not remember clearly. For a few moments his conscience pricked him that he should have forgotten it all, but now he could make amends by this providential delay. It was not a task to his liking; in any other circumstances he would have written, but he would not shirk it now.

Shepherdstown was on the main line of the Kansas Pacific Road, and as he alighted at its station, the big through trains from San Francisco swept out of the stormy distance

and stopped also. He remembered, as he mingled with the passengers, hearing a childish voice ask if this was the Californian train. He remembered hearing the amused and patient reply of the station-master: "Yes, sonny— here she is again, and here's her passengers," as he got into the omnibus and drove to the hotel. Here he resolved to perform his disagreeable duty as quickly as possible, and on his way to his room stopped for a moment at the office to ask for Ricketts' address. The clerk, after a quick glance of curiosity at his new guest, gave it to him readily, with a somewhat familiar smile. It struck Falloner also as being odd that he had not been asked to write his name on the hotel register, but this was a saving of time he was not disposed to question, as he had already determined to make his visit to Ricketts at once, before dinner. It was still early evening.

He was washing his hands in his bedroom when there came a light tap at his sitting-room door. Falloner quickly resumed his coat and entered the sitting-room as the porter ushered in a young lady holding a small boy by the hand. But, to Falloner's utter consternation, no sooner had the door closed on the servant than the boy, with a half-apologetic glance at the young lady, uttered a childish cry, broke from her, and calling, "Dick! Dick!" ran forward and leaped into Falloner's arms.

The mere shock of the onset and his own amazement left Bob without breath for words. The boy, with arms convulsively clasping his body, was imprinting kisses on Bob's waistcoat in default of reaching his face. At last Falloner managed gently but firmly to free himself, and turned a half-appealing, half-embarrassed look upon the young lady, whose own face, however, suddenly flushed pink. To add to the confusion, the boy, in some reaction of instinct, suddenly ran back to her, frantically clutched at her skirts, and tried to bury his head in their folds.

“He don’t love me,” he sobbed. “He don’t care for me any more.”

The face of the young girl changed. It was a pretty face in its flushing; in the paleness and thoughtfulness that overcast it it was a striking face, and Bob’s attention was for a moment distracted from the grotesqueness of the situation. Leaning over the boy she said in a caressing yet authoritative voice, “Run away for a moment, dear, until I call you,” opening the door for him in a maternal way so inconsistent with the youthfulness of her figure that it struck him even in his confusion. There was something also in her dress and carriage that equally affected him: her garments were somewhat old-fashioned in style, yet of good material, with an odd incongruity to the climate and season.

Under her rough outer cloak she wore a polka jacket and the thinnest of summer blouses; and her hat, though dark, was of rough straw, plainly trimmed. Nevertheless, these peculiarities were carried off with an air of breeding and self-possession that was unmistakable. It was possible that her cool self-possession might have been due to some instinctive antagonism, for as she came a step forward with coldly and clearly-opened gray eyes, he was vaguely conscious that she didn’t like him. Nevertheless, her manner was formally polite, even, as he fancied, to the point of irony, as she began, in a voice that occasionally dropped into the lazy Southern intonation, and a speech that easily slipped at times into Southern dialect:

“I sent the child out of the room, as I could see that his advances were annoying to you, and a good deal, I reckon, because I knew your reception of them was still more painful to him. It is quite natural, I dare say, you should feel as you do, and I reckon consistent with your attitude towards him. But you must make some allowance for the

depth of his feelings, and how he has looked forward to this meeting. When I tell you that ever since he received your last letter, he and his sister—until her illness kept her home—have gone every day when the Pacific train was due to the station to meet you; that they have taken literally as Gospel truth every word of your letter”—

“My letter?” interrupted Falloner.

The young girl’s scarlet lip curled slightly. “I beg your pardon— I should have said the letter you dictated. Of course it wasn’t in your handwriting—you had hurt your hand, you know,” she added ironically. “At all events, they believed it all—that you were coming at any moment; they lived in that belief, and the poor things went to the station with your photograph in their hands so that they might be the first to recognize and greet you.”

“With my photograph?” interrupted Falloner again.

The young girl’s clear eyes darkened ominously. “I reckon,” she said deliberately, as she slowly drew from her pocket the photograph Daddy Folsom had sent, “that that is your photograph. It certainly seems an excellent likeness,” she added, regarding him with a slight suggestion of contemptuous triumph.

In an instant the revelation of the whole mystery flashed upon him! The forgotten passage in Houston’s letter about the stolen photograph stood clearly before him; the coincidence of his appearance in Shepherdstown, and the natural mistake of the children and their fair protector, were made perfectly plain. But with this relief and the certainty that he could confound her with an explanation came a certain mischievous desire to prolong the situation and

increase his triumph. She certainly had not shown him any favor.

“Have you got the letter also?” he asked quietly.

She whisked it impatiently from her pocket and handed it to him. As he read Daddy’s characteristic extravagance and recognized the familiar idiosyncrasies of his old companions, he was unable to restrain a smile. He raised his eyes, to meet with surprise the fair stranger’s leveled eyebrows and brightly indignant eyes, in which, however, the rain was fast gathering with the lightning.

“It may be amusing to you, and I reckon likely it was all a California joke,” she said with slightly trembling lips; “I don’t know No’thern gentlemen and their ways, and you seem to have forgotten our ways as you have your kindred. Perhaps all this may seem so funny to them: it may not seem funny to that boy who is now crying his heart out in the hall; it may not be very amusing to that poor Cissy in her sick-bed longing to see her brother. It may be so far from amusing to her, that I should hesitate to bring you there in her excited condition and subject her to the pain that you have caused him. But I have promised her; she is already expecting us, and the disappointment may be dangerous, and I can only implore you—for a few moments at least—to show a little more affection than you feel.” As he made an impulsive, deprecating gesture, yet without changing his look of restrained amusement, she stopped him hopelessly. “Oh, of course, yes, yes, I know it is years since you have seen them; they have no right to expect more; only—only— feeling as you do,” she burst impulsively, “why—oh, why did you come?”

Here was Bob’s chance. He turned to her politely; began gravely, “I simply came to”—when suddenly his face

changed; he stopped as if struck by a blow. His cheek flushed, and then paled! Good God! What had he come for? To tell them that this brother they were longing for—living for—perhaps even dying for—was dead! In his crass stupidity, his wounded vanity over the scorn of the young girl, his anticipation of triumph, he had forgotten—totally forgotten—what that triumph meant! Perhaps if he had felt more keenly the death of Lasham the thought of it would have been uppermost in his mind; but Lasham was not his partner or associate, only a brother miner, and his single act of generosity was in the ordinary routine of camp life. If she could think him cold and heartless before, what would she think of him now? The absurdity of her mistake had vanished in the grim tragedy he had seemed to have cruelly prepared for her. The thought struck him so keenly that he stammered, faltered, and sank helplessly into a chair.

The shock that he had received was so plain to her that her own indignation went out in the breath of it. Her lip quivered. “Don’t you mind,” she said hurriedly, dropping into her Southern speech; “I didn’t go to hurt you, but I was just that mad with the thought of those pickaninnies, and the easy way you took it, that I clean forgot I’d no call to catechise you! And you don’t know me from the Queen of Sheba. Well,” she went on, still more rapidly, and in odd distinction to her previous formal slow Southern delivery, “I’m the daughter of Colonel Boutelle, of Bayou Sara, Louisiana; and his paw, and his paw before him, had a plantation there since the time of Adam, but he lost it and six hundred [racial expletive]s during the Wah! We were pooh as pohverty—paw and maw and we four girls—and no more idea of work than a baby. But I had an education at the convent at New Orleans, and could play, and speak French, and I got a place as school-teacher here; I reckon the first Southern woman that has taught school in the No’th! Ricketts, who used to be our steward at Bayou Sara, told me

about the pickaninnies, and how helpless they were, with only a brother who occasionally sent them money from California. I suppose I cottoned to the poor little things at first because I knew what it was to be alone amongst strangers, Mr. Lasham; I used to teach them at odd times, and look after them, and go with them to the train to look for you. Perhaps Ricketts made me think you didn't care for them; perhaps I was wrong in thinking it was true, from the way you met Jimmy just now. But I've spoken my mind and you know why." She ceased and walked to the window.

Falloner rose. The storm that had swept through him was over. The quick determination, resolute purpose, and infinite patience which had made him what he was were all there, and with it a conscientiousness which his selfish independence had hitherto kept dormant. He accepted the situation, not passively—it was not in his nature—but threw himself into it with all his energy.

"You were quite right," he said, halting a moment beside her; "I don't blame you, and let me hope that later you may think me less to blame than you do now. Now, what's to be done? Clearly, I've first to make it right with Tommy—I mean Jimmy—and then we must make a straight dash over to the girl! Whoop!" Before she could understand from his face the strange change in his voice, he had dashed out of the room. In a moment he reappeared with the boy struggling in his arms. "Think of the little scamp not knowing his own brother!" he laughed, giving the boy a really affectionate, if slightly exaggerated hug, and expecting me to open my arms to the first little boy who jumps into them! I've a great mind not to give him the present I fetched all the way from California. Wait a moment." He dashed into the bedroom, opened his valise—where he providentially remembered he had kept, with a miner's superstition, the first little nugget of gold he

had ever found—seized the tiny bit of quartz of gold, and dashed out again to display it before Jimmy’s eager eyes.

If the heartiness, sympathy, and charming kindness of the man’s whole manner and face convinced, even while it slightly startled, the young girl, it was still more effective with the boy. Children are quick to detect the false ring of affected emotion, and Bob’s was so genuine—whatever its cause—that it might have easily passed for a fraternal expression with harder critics. The child trustfully nestled against him and would have grasped the gold, but the young man whisked it into his pocket. “Not until we’ve shown it to our little sister—where we’re going now! I’m off to order a sleigh.” He dashed out again to the office as if he found some relief in action, or, as it seemed to Miss Boutelle, to avoid embarrassing conversation. When he came back again he was carrying an immense bearskin from his luggage. He cast a critical look at the girl’s unseasonable attire.

“I shall wrap you and Jimmy in this—you know it’s snowing frightfully.”

Miss Boutelle flushed a little. “I’m warm enough when walking,” she said coldly. Bob glanced at her smart little French shoes, and thought otherwise. He said nothing, but hastily bundled his two guests downstairs and into the street. The whirlwind dance of the snow made the sleigh an indistinct bulk in the glittering darkness, and as the young girl for an instant stood dazedly still, Bob incontinently lifted her from her feet, deposited her in the vehicle, dropped Jimmy in her lap, and wrapped them both tightly in the bearskin. Her weight, which was scarcely more than a child’s, struck him in that moment as being tantalizingly incongruous to the matronly severity of her manner and its strange effect upon him. He then jumped in himself, taking

the direction from his companion, and drove off through the storm.

The wind and darkness were not favorable to conversation, and only once did he break the silence. "Is there any one who would be likely to remember—me—where we are going?" he asked, in a lull of the storm.

Miss Boutelle uncovered enough of her face to glance at him curiously. "Hardly! You know the children came here from the No'th after your mother's death, while you were in California."

"Of course," returned Bob hurriedly; "I was only thinking—you know that some of my old friends might have called," and then collapsed into silence.

After a pause a voice came icily, although under the furs: "Perhaps you'd prefer that your arrival be kept secret from the public? But they seem to have already recognized you at the hotel from your inquiry about Ricketts, and the photograph Jimmy had already shown them two weeks ago." Bob remembered the clerk's familiar manner and the omission to ask him to register. "But it need go no further, if you like," she added, with a slight return of her previous scorn.

"I've no reason for keeping it secret," said Bob stoutly.

No other words were exchanged until the sleigh drew up before a plain wooden house in the suburbs of the town. Bob could see at a glance that it represented the income of some careful artisan or small shopkeeper, and that it promised little for an invalid's luxurious comfort. They were

ushered into a chilly sitting-room and Miss Boutelle ran upstairs with Jimmy to prepare the invalid for Bob's appearance. He noticed that a word dropped by the woman who opened the door made the young girl's face grave again, and paled the color that the storm had buffeted to her cheek. He noticed also that these plain surroundings seemed only to enhance her own superiority, and that the woman treated her with a deference in odd contrast to the ill-concealed disfavor with which she regarded him. Strangely enough, this latter fact was a relief to his conscience. It would have been terrible to have received their kindness under false pretenses; to take their just blame of the man he personated seemed to mitigate the deceit.

The young girl rejoined him presently with troubled eyes. Cissy was worse, and only intermittently conscious, but had asked to see him. It was a short flight of stairs to the bedroom, but before he reached it Bob's heart beat faster than it had in any mountain climb. In one corner of the plainly furnished room stood a small truckle bed, and in it lay the invalid. It needed but a single glance at her flushed face in its aureole of yellow hair to recognize the likeness to Jimmy, although, added to that strange refinement produced by suffering, there was a spiritual exaltation in the child's look—possibly from delirium—that awed and frightened him; an awful feeling that he could not lie to this hopeless creature took possession of him, and his step faltered. But she lifted her small arms pathetically towards him as if she divined his trouble, and he sank on his knees beside her. With a tiny finger curled around his long mustache, she lay there silent. Her face was full of trustfulness, happiness, and consciousness— but she spoke no word.

There was a pause, and Falloner, slightly lifting his head without disturbing that faintly clasping finger,

beckoned Miss Boutelle to his side. "Can you drive?" he said, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Take my sleigh and get the best doctor in town to come here at once. Bring him with you if you can; if he can't come at once, drive home yourself. I will stay here."

"But"—hesitated Miss Boutelle.

"I will stay here," he repeated.

The door closed on the young girl, and Falloner, still bending over the child, presently heard the sleigh-bells pass away in the storm. He still sat with his bent head, held by the tiny clasp of those thin fingers. But the child's eyes were fixed so intently upon him that Mrs. Ricketts leaned over the strangely-assorted pair and said—

"It's your brother Dick, dearie. Don't you know him?"

The child's lips moved faintly. "Dick's dead," she whispered.

"She's wandering," said Mrs. Ricketts. "Speak to her." But Bob, with his eyes on the child's, lifted a protesting hand. The little sufferer's lips moved again. "It isn't Dick—it's the angel God sent to tell me."

She spoke no more. And when Miss Boutelle returned with the doctor she was beyond the reach of finite voices. Falloner would have remained all night with them, but he could see that his presence in the contracted household was not desired. Even his offer to take Jimmy

with him to the hotel was declined, and at midnight he returned alone.

What his thoughts were that night may be easily imagined. Cissy's death had removed the only cause he had for concealing his real identity. There was nothing more to prevent his revealing all to Miss Boutelle and to offer to adopt the boy. But he reflected this could not be done until after the funeral, for it was only due to Cissy's memory that he should still keep up the role of Dick Lasham as chief mourner. If it seems strange that Bob did not at this crucial moment take Miss Boutelle into his confidence, I fear it was because he dreaded the personal effect of the deceit he had practiced upon her more than any ethical consideration; she had softened considerably in her attitude towards him that night; he was human, after all, and while he felt his conduct had been unselfish in the main, he dared not confess to himself how much her opinion had influenced him. He resolved that after the funeral he would continue his journey, and write to her, en route, a full explanation of his conduct, inclosing Daddy's letter as corroborative evidence. But on searching his letter-case he found that he had lost even that evidence, and he must trust solely at present to her faith in his improbable story.

It seemed as if his greatest sacrifice was demanded at the funeral! For it could not be disguised that the neighbors were strongly prejudiced against him. Even the preacher improved the occasion to warn the congregation against the dangers of putting off duty until too late. And when Robert Falloner, pale, but self-restrained, left the church with Miss Boutelle, equally pale and reserved, on his arm, he could with difficulty restrain his fury at the passing of a significant smile across the faces of a few curious bystanders. "It was Amy Boutelle, that was the 'penitence' that fetched him, you bet!" he overheard, a barely concealed

whisper; and the reply, "And it's a good thing she's made out of it too, for he's mighty rich!"

At the church door he took her cold hand into his. "I am leaving to-morrow morning with Jimmy," he said, with a white face. "Good- by."

"You are quite right; good-by," she replied as briefly, but with the faintest color. He wondered if she had heard it too.

Whether she had heard it or not, she went home with Mrs. Ricketts in some righteous indignation, which found—after the young lady's habit—free expression. Whatever were Mr. Lasham's faults of omission it was most un-Christian to allude to them there, and an insult to the poor little dear's memory who had forgiven them. Were she in his shoes she would shake the dust of the town off her feet; and she hoped he would. She was a little softened on arriving to find Jimmy in tears. He had lost Dick's photograph—or Dick had forgotten to give it back at the hotel, for this was all he had in his pocket. And he produced a letter—the missing letter of Daddy, which by mistake Falloner had handed back instead of the photograph. Miss Boutelle saw the superscription and Californian postmark with a vague curiosity.

"Did you look inside, dear? Perhaps it slipped in."

Jimmy had not. Miss Boutelle did—and I grieve to say, ended by reading the whole letter.

Bob Falloner had finished packing his things the next morning, and was waiting for Mr. Ricketts and Jimmy. But when a tap came at the door, he opened it to find Miss Boutelle standing there. "I have sent Jimmy into the

bedroom,” she said with a faint smile, “to look for the photograph which you gave him in mistake for this. I think for the present he prefers his brother’s picture to this letter, which I have not explained to him or any one.” She stopped, and raising her eyes to his, said gently: “I think it would have only been a part of your goodness to have trusted me, Mr. Falloner.”

“Then you will forgive me?” he said eagerly.

She looked at him frankly, yet with a faint trace of coquetry that the angels might have pardoned. “Do you want me to say to you what Mrs. Ricketts says were the last words of poor Cissy?”

A year later, when the darkness and rain were creeping up Sawyer’s Ledge, and Houston and Daddy Folsom were sitting before their brushwood fire in the old Lasham cabin, the latter delivered himself oracularly.

“It’s a mighty queer thing, that news about Bob! It’s not that he’s married, for that might happen to any one; but this yer account in the paper of his wedding being attended by his ‘little brother.’ That gets me! To think all the while he was here he was lettin’ on to us that he hadn’t kith or kin! Well, sir, that accounts to me for one thing—the sing’ler way he tumbled to that letter of poor Dick Lasham’s little brother and sent him that draft! Don’t ye see? It was a feller feelin’! Knew how it was himself! I reckon ye all thought I was kinder soft reading that letter o’ Dick Lasham’s little brother to him, but ye see what it did.”

The Chatelaine of Burnt Ridge

CHAPTER ONE

It had grown dark on Burnt Ridge. Seen from below, the whole serrated crest that had glittered in the sunset as if its interstices were eaten by consuming fires, now, closed up its ranks of blackened shafts and became again harsh and sombre chevaux de frise against the sky. A faint glow still lingered over the red valley road, as if it were its own reflection, rather than any light from beyond the darkened ridge. Night was already creeping up out of remote canyons and along the furrowed flanks of the mountain, or settling on the nearer woods with the sound of home-coming and innumerable wings. At a point where the road began to encroach upon the mountain-side in its slow winding ascent the darkness had become so real that a young girl cantering along the rising terrace found difficulty in guiding her horse, with eyes still dazzled by the sunset fires.

In spite of her precautions, the animal suddenly shied at some object in the obscured roadway, and nearly unseated her. The accident disclosed not only the fact that she was riding in a man's saddle, but also a foot and ankle that her ordinary walking-dress was too short to hide. It was evident that her equestrian exercise was extempore, and that at that hour and on that road she had not expected to meet company. But she was apparently a good horsewoman, for the

mischance which might have thrown a less practical or more timid rider seemed of little moment to her. With a strong hand and determined gesture she wheeled her frightened horse back into the track, and rode him directly at the object. But here she herself slightly recoiled, for it was the body of a man lying in the road.

As she leaned forward over her horse's shoulder, she could see by the dim light that he was a miner, and that, though motionless, he was breathing stertorously. Drunk, no doubt!—an accident of the locality alarming only to her horse. But although she cantered impatiently forward, she had not proceeded a hundred yards before she stopped reflectively, and trotted back again. He had not moved. She could now see that his head and shoulders were covered with broken clods of earth and gravel, and smaller fragments lay at his side. A dozen feet above him on the hillside there was a foot trail which ran parallel with the bridle-road, and occasionally overhung it. It seemed possible that he might have fallen from the trail and been stunned.

Dismounting, she succeeded in dragging him to a safer position by the bank. The act discovered his face, which was young, and unknown to her. Wiping it with the silk handkerchief which was loosely slung around his neck after the fashion of his class, she gave a quick feminine glance around her and then approached her own and rather handsome face near his lips. There was no odor of alcohol in the thick and heavy respiration. Mounting again, she rode forward at an accelerated pace, and in twenty minutes had reached a higher tableland of the mountain, a cleared opening in the forest that showed signs of careful cultivation, and a large, rambling, yet picturesque-looking dwelling, whose unpainted red-wood walls were hidden in roses and creepers. Pushing open a swinging gate, she entered the inclosure as a brown-faced man, dressed as a vaquero, came

towards her as if to assist her to alight. But she had already leaped to the ground and thrown him the reins.

“Miguel,” she said, with a mistress’ quiet authority in her boyish contralto voice, “put Glory in the covered wagon, and drive down the road as far as the valley turning. There’s a man lying near the right bank, drunk, or sick, may be, or perhaps crippled by a fall. Bring him up here, unless somebody has found him already, or you happen to know who he is and where to take him.”

The vaquero raised his shoulders, half in disappointed expectation of some other command. “And your brother, senora, he has not himself arrived.”

A light shadow of impatience crossed her face. “No,” she said, bluntly. “Come, be quick.”

She turned towards the house as the man moved away. Already a gaunt-looking old man had appeared in the porch, and was awaiting her with his hand shadowing his angry, suspicious eyes, and his lips moving querulously.

“Of course, you’ve got to stand out there and give orders and ‘tend to your own business afore you think o’ speaking to your own flesh and blood,” he said aggrievedly. “That’s all YOU care!”

“There was a sick man lying in the road, and I’ve sent Miguel to look after him,” returned the girl, with a certain contemptuous resignation.

“Oh, yes!” struck in another voice, which seemed to belong to the female of the first speaker’s species, and to be its equal in age and temper, “and I reckon you saw a jay bird

on a tree, or a squirrel on the fence, and either of 'em was more important to you than your own brother.”

“Steve didn’t come by the stage, and didn’t send any message,” continued the young girl, with the same coldly resigned manner. “No one had any news of him, and, as I told you before, I didn’t expect any.”

“Why don’t you say right out you didn’t WANT any?” said the old man, sneeringly. “Much you inquired! No; I orter hev gone myself, and I would if I was master here, instead of me and your mother bein’ the dust of the yearth beneath your feet.”

The young girl entered the house, followed by the old man, passing an old woman seated by the window, who seemed to be nursing her resentment and a large Bible which she held clasped against her shawled bosom at the same moment. Going to the wall, she hung up her large hat and slightly shook the red dust from her skirts as she continued her explanation, in the same deep voice, with a certain monotony of logic and possibly of purpose and practice also.

“You and mother know as well as I do, father, that Stephen is no more to be depended upon than the wind that blows. It’s three years since he has been promising to come, and even getting money to come, and yet he has never showed his face, though he has been a dozen times within five miles of this house. He doesn’t come because he doesn’t want to come. As to YOUR going over to the stage-office, I went there myself at the last moment to save you the mortification of asking questions of strangers that they know have been a dozen times answered already.”

There was such a ring of absolute truthfulness, albeit worn by repetition, in the young girl’s deep honest voice that

for one instant her two more emotional relatives quailed before it; but only for a moment.

“That’s right!” shrilled the old woman. “Go on and abuse your own brother. It’s only the fear you have that he’ll make his fortune yet and shame you before the father and mother you despise.”

The young girl remained standing by the window, motionless and apparently passive, as if receiving an accepted and usual punishment. But here the elder woman gave way to sobs and some incoherent snuffling, at which the younger went away. Whether she recognized in her mother’s tears the ordinary deliquescence of emotion, or whether, as a woman herself, she knew that this mere feminine conventionality could not possibly be directed at her, and that the actual conflict between them had ceased, she passed slowly on to an inner hall, leaving the male victim, her unfortunate father, to succumb, as he always did sooner or later, to their influence. Crossing the hall, which was decorated with a few elk horns, Indian trophies, and mountain pelts, she entered another room, and closed the door behind her with a gesture of relief.

The room, which looked upon a porch, presented a singular combination of masculine business occupations and feminine taste and adornment. A desk covered with papers, a shelf displaying a ledger and account-books, another containing works of reference, a table with a vase of flowers and a lady’s riding-whip upon it, a map of California flanked on either side by an embroidered silken workbag and an oval mirror decked with grasses, a calendar and interest-table hanging below two school-girl crayons of classic heads with the legend, “Josephine Forsyth fecit,”—were part of its incongruous accessories. The young girl went to her desk, but presently moved and turned towards the window

thoughtfully. The last gleam had died from the steel-blue sky; a few lights like star points began to prick out the lower valley. The expression of monotonous restraint and endurance had not yet faded from her face.

Yet she had been accustomed to scenes like the one she had just passed through since her girlhood. Five years ago, Alexander Forsyth, her uncle, had brought her to this spot—then a mere log cabin on the hillside—as a refuge from the impoverished and shiftless home of his elder brother Thomas and his ill-tempered wife. Here Alexander Forsyth, by reason of his more dominant character and business capacity, had prospered until he became a rich and influential ranch owner. Notwithstanding her father's jealousy of Alexander's fortune, and the open rupture that followed between the brothers, Josephine retained her position in the heart and home of her uncle without espousing the cause of either; and her father was too prudent not to recognize the near and prospective advantages of such a mediator. Accustomed to her parents' extravagant denunciations, and her uncle's more repressed but practical contempt of them, the unfortunate girl early developed a cynical disbelief in the virtues of kinship in the abstract, and a philosophical resignation to its effects upon her personally. Believing that her father and uncle fairly represented the fraternal principle, she was quite prepared for the early defection and distrust of her vagabond and dissipated brother Stephen, and accepted it calmly. True to an odd standard of justice, which she had erected from the crumbling ruins of her own domestic life, she was tolerant of everything but human perfection. This quality, however fatal to her higher growth, had given her a peculiar capacity for business which endeared her to her uncle. Familiar with the strong passions and prejudices of men, she had none of those feminine meannesses, a wholesome distrust of which had kept her uncle a bachelor. It was not strange, therefore, that when he

died two years ago it was found that he had left her his entire property, real and personal, limited only by a single condition. She was to undertake the vocation of a "sole trader," and carry on the business under the name of "J. Forsyth." If she married, the estate and property was to be held distinct from her husband's, inalienable under the "Married Woman's Property Act," and subject during her life only to her own control and personal responsibilities as a trader.

The intense disgust and discomfiture of her parents, who had expected to more actively participate in their brother's fortune, may be imagined. But it was not equal to their fury when Josephine, instead of providing for them a separate maintenance out of her abundance, simply offered to transfer them and her brother to her own house on a domestic but not a business equality. There being no alternative but their former precarious shiftless life in their "played-out" claim in the valley, they wisely consented, reserving the sacred right of daily protest and objurgation. In the economy of Burnt Ridge Ranch they alone took it upon themselves to represent the shattered domestic altar and its outraged Lares and Penates. And so conscientiously did they perform their task as even occasionally to impede the business visitor to the ranch, and to cause some of the more practical neighbors seriously to doubt the young girl's commercial wisdom. But she was firm. Whether she thought her parents a necessity of respectable domesticity, or whether she regarded their presence in the light of a penitential atonement for some previous disregard of them, no one knew. Public opinion inclined to the latter.

The black line of ridge faded out with her abstraction, and she turned from the window and lit the lamp on her desk. The yellow light illuminated her face and figure. In their womanly graces there was no trace of what some people

believed to be a masculine character, except a singularly frank look of critical inquiry and patient attention in her dark eyes. Her long brown hair was somewhat rigidly twisted into a knot on the top of her head, as if more for security than ornament. Brown was also the prevailing tint of her eyebrows, thickly-set eyelashes, and eyes, and was even suggested in the slight sallowness of her complexion. But her lips were well-cut and fresh-colored and her hands and feet small and finely formed. She would have passed for a pretty girl, had she not suggested something more.

She sat down, and began to examine a pile of papers before her with that concentration and attention to detail which was characteristic of her eyes, pausing at times with prettily knit brows, and her penholder between her lips, in the semblance of a pout that was pleasant enough to see. Suddenly the rattle of hoofs and wheels struck her with the sense of something forgotten, and she put down her work quickly and stood up listening. The sound of rough voices and her father's querulous accents was broken upon by a cultivated and more familiar utterance: "All right; I'll speak to her at once. Wait there," and the door opened to the well-known physician of Burnt Ridge, Doctor Duchesne.

"Look here," he said, with an abruptness that was only saved from being brusque by a softer intonation and a reassuring smile, "I met Miguel helping an accident into your buggy. Your orders, eh?"

"Oh, yes," said Josephine, quietly. "A man I saw on the road."

"Well, it's a bad case, and wants prompt attention. And as your house is the nearest I came with him here."

“Certainly,” she said gravely. “Take him to the second room beyond—Steve’s room—it’s ready,” she explained to two dusky shadows in the hall behind the doctor.

“And look here,” said the doctor, partly closing the door behind him and regarding her with critical eyes, “you always said you’d like to see some of my queer cases. Well, this is one—a serious one, too; in fact, it’s just touch and go with him. There’s a piece of the bone pressing on the brain no bigger than that, but as much as if all Burnt Ridge was atop of him! I’m going to lift it. I want somebody here to stand by, some one who can lend a hand with a sponge, eh?—some one who isn’t going to faint or scream, or even shake a hair’s-breadth, eh?”

The color rose quickly to the girl’s cheek, and her eyes kindled. “I’ll come,” she said thoughtfully. “Who is he?”

The doctor stared slightly at the unessential query. “Don’t know—one of the river miners, I reckon. It’s an urgent case. I’ll go and get everything ready. You’d better,” he added, with an ominous glance at her gray frock, “put something over your dress.” The suggestion made her grave, but did not alter her color.

A moment later she entered the room. It was the one that had always been set apart for her brother: the very bed on which the unconscious man lay had been arranged that morning with her own hands. Something of this passed through her mind as she saw that the doctor had wheeled it beneath the strong light in the centre of the room, stripped its outer coverings with professional thoughtfulness, and rearranged the mattresses. But it did not seem like the same room. There was a pungent odor in the air from some

freshly-opened phial; an almost feminine neatness and luxury in an open morocco case like a jewel box on the table, shining with spotless steel. At the head of the bed one of her own servants, the powerful mill foreman, was assisting with the mingled curiosity and blase experience of one accustomed to smashed and lacerated digits. At first she did not look at the central unconscious figure on the bed, whose sufferings seemed to her to have been vicariously transferred to the concerned, eager, and drawn faces that looked down upon its immunity. Then she femininely recoiled before the bared white neck and shoulders displayed above the quilt, until, forcing herself to look upon the face half-concealed by bandages and the head from which the dark tangles of hair had been ruthlessly sheared, she began to share the doctor's unconcern in his personality. What mattered who or what HE was? It was—a case!

The operation began. With the same earnest intelligence that she had previously shown, she quickly and noiselessly obeyed the doctor's whispered orders, and even half anticipated them. She was conscious of a singular curiosity that, far from being mean or ignoble, seemed to lift her not only above the ordinary weaknesses of her own sex, but made her superior to the men around her. Almost before she knew it, the operation was over, and she regarded with equal curiosity the ostentatious solicitude with which the doctor seemed to be wiping his fateful instrument that bore an odd resemblance to a silver-handled centre-bit. The stertorous breathing below the bandages had given way to a fainter but more natural respiration. There was a moment of suspense. The doctor's hand left the pulse and lifted the closed eyelid of the sufferer. A slight movement passed over the figure. The sluggish face had cleared; life seemed to struggle back into it before even the dull eyes participated in the glow. Doctor Duchesne with a sudden gesture waved

aside his companions, but not before Josephine had bent her head eagerly forward.

“He is coming to,” she said.

At the sound of that deep clear voice—the first to break the hush of the room—the dull eyes leaped up, and the head turned in its direction. The lips moved and uttered a single rapid sentence. The girl recoiled.

“You’re all right now,” said the doctor, cheerfully, intent only upon the form before him.

The lips moved again, but this time feebly and vacantly; the eyes were staring vaguely around.

“What’s matter? What’s all about?” said the man, thickly.

“You’ve had a fall. Think a moment. Where do you live?”

Again the lips moved, but this time only to emit a confused, incoherent murmur. Doctor Duchesne looked grave, but recovered himself quickly.

“That will do. Leave him alone now,” he said brusquely to the others.

But Josephine lingered.

“He spoke well enough just now,” she said eagerly. “Did you hear what he said?”

“Not exactly,” said the doctor, abstractedly, gazing at the man.

“He said, ‘You’ll have to kill me first,’” said Josephine, slowly.

“Humph;” said the doctor, passing his hand backwards and forwards before the man’s eyes to note any change in the staring pupils.

“Yes,” continued Josephine, gravely. “I suppose,” she added, cautiously, “he was thinking of the operation—of what you had just done to him?”

“What I had done to him? Oh, yes!”

CHAPTER TWO

Before noon the next day it was known throughout Burnt Ridge Valley that Doctor Duchesne had performed a difficult operation upon an unknown man, who had been picked up unconscious from a fall, and carried to Burnt Ridge Ranch. But although the unfortunate man's life was saved by the operation, he had only momentarily recovered consciousness—relapsing into a semi-idiotic state, which effectively stopped the discovery of any clue to his friends or his identity. As it was evidently an ACCIDENT, which, in that rude community—and even in some more civilized ones—conveyed a vague impression of some contributory incapacity on the part of the victim, or some Providential interference of a retributive character, Burnt Ridge gave itself little trouble about it. It is unnecessary to say that Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth gave themselves and Josephine much more. They had a theory and a grievance. Satisfied from the first that the alleged victim was a drunken tramp, who submitted to have a hole bored in his head in order to foist himself upon the ranch, they were loud in their protests, even hinting at a conspiracy between Josephine and the stranger to supplant her brother in the property, as he had already in the spare bedroom. “Didn’t all that yer happen THE VERY NIGHT she pretended to go for Stephen—eh?” said Mrs. Forsyth. “Tell me that! And didn’t she have it all arranged with the buggy to bring him here, as that sneaking doctor let out—eh? Looks mighty curious, don’t it?” she muttered darkly to the old man. But although that gentleman, even from his own selfish view, would scarcely have submitted to a surgical operation and later idiocy as the price of insuring comfortable dependency, he had no doubt others were base enough to do it; and lent a willing ear to his wife’s suspicions.

Josephine's personal knowledge of the stranger went little further. Doctor Duchesne had confessed to her his professional disappointment at the incomplete results of the operation. He had saved the man's life, but as yet not his reason. There was still hope, however, for the diagnosis revealed nothing that might prejudice a favorable progress. It was a most interesting case. He would watch it carefully, and as soon as the patient could be removed would take him to the county hospital, where, under his own eyes, the poor fellow would have the benefit of the latest science and the highest specialists. Physically, he was doing remarkably well; indeed, he must have been a fine young chap, free from blood taint or vicious complication, whose flesh had healed like an infant's. It should be recorded that it was at this juncture that Mrs. Forsyth first learnt that a SILVER PLATE let into the artful stranger's skull was an adjunct of the healing process! Convinced that this infamous extravagance was part and parcel of the conspiracy, and was only the beginning of other assimilations of the Forsyths' metallic substance; that the plate was probably polished and burnished with a fulsome inscription to the doctor's skill, and would pass into the possession and adornment of a perfect stranger, her rage knew no bounds. He or his friends ought to be made to pay for it or work it out! In vain it was declared that a few dollars were all that was found in the man's pocket, and that no memoranda gave any indication of his name, friends, or history beyond the suggestion that he came from a distance. This was clearly a part of the conspiracy! Even Josephine's practical good sense was obliged to take note of this singular absence of all record regarding him, and the apparent obliteration of everything that might be responsible for his ultimate fate.

Homeless, friendless, helpless, and even nameless, the unfortunate man of twenty-five was thus left to the tender mercies of the mistress of Burnt Ridge Ranch, as if he had

been a new-born foundling laid at her door. But this mere claim of weakness was not all; it was supplemented by a singular personal appeal to Josephine's nature. From the time that he turned his head towards her voice on that fateful night, his eyes had always followed her around the room with a wondering, yearning, canine half-intelligence. Without being able to convince herself that he understood her better than his regular attendant furnished by the doctor, she could not fail to see that he obeyed her implicitly, and that whenever any difficulty arose between him and his nurse she was always appealed to. Her pride in this proof of her practical sovereignty WAS flattered; and when Doctor Duchesne finally admitted that although the patient was now physically able to be removed to the hospital, yet he would lose in the change that very strong factor which Josephine had become in his mental recovery, the young girl as frankly suggested that he should stay as long as there was any hope of restoring his reason. Doctor Duchesne was delighted. With all his enthusiasm for science, he had a professional distrust of some of its disciples, and perhaps was not sorry to keep this most interesting case in his own hands. To him her suggestion was only a womanly kindness, tempered with womanly curiosity. But the astonishment and stupefaction of her parents at this evident corroboration of suspicions they had as yet only half believed was tinged with superstitious dread. Had she fallen in love with this helpless stranger? or, more awful to contemplate, was he really no stranger, but a surreptitious lover thus strategically brought under her roof? For once they refrained from open criticism. The very magnitude of their suspicions left them dumb.

It was thus that the virgin Chatelaine of Burnt Ridge Ranch was left to gaze untrammelled upon her pale and handsome guest, whose silken, bearded lips and sad, childlike eyes might have suggested a more Exalted Sufferer in their absence of any suggestion of a grosser material

manhood. But even this imaginative appeal did not enter into her feelings. She felt for her good-looking, helpless patient a profound and honest pity. I do not know whether she had ever heard that "pity was akin to love." She would probably have resented that utterly untenable and atrocious commonplace. There was no suggestion, real or illusive, of any previous masterful quality in the man which might have made his present dependent condition picturesque by contrast. He had come to her handicapped by an unromantic accident and a practical want of energy and intellect. He would have to touch her interest anew if, indeed, he would ever succeed in dispelling the old impression. His beauty, in a community of picturesquely handsome men, had little weight with her, except to accent the contrast with their fuller manhood.

Her life had given her no illusions in regard to the other sex. She had found them, however, more congenial and safer companions than women, and more accessible to her own sense of justice and honor. In return, they had respected and admired rather than loved her, in spite of her womanly graces. If she had at times contemplated eventual marriage, it was only as a possible practical partnership in her business; but as she lived in a country where men thought it dishonorable and a proof of incompetency to rise by their wives' superior fortune, she had been free from that kind of mercenary persecution, even from men who might have worshiped her in hopeless and silent honor.

For this reason, there was nothing in the situation that suggested a single compromising speculation in the minds of the neighbors, or disturbed her own tranquillity. There seemed to be nothing in the future except a possible relief to her curiosity. Some day the unfortunate man's reason would be restored, and he would tell his simple history. Perhaps he might explain what was in his mind when he turned to her

the first evening with that singular sentence which had often recurred strangely to her, she knew not why. It did not strike her until later that it was because it had been the solitary indication of an energy and capacity that seemed unlike him. Nevertheless, after that explanation, she would have been quite willing to have shaken hands with him and parted.

And yet—for there was an unexpressed remainder in her thought—she was never entirely free or uninfluenced in his presence. The flickering vacancy of his sad eyes sometimes became fixed with a resolute immobility under the gentle questioning with which she had sought to draw out his faculties, that both piqued and exasperated her. He could say “Yes” and “No,” as she thought intelligently, but he could not utter a coherent sentence nor write a word, except like a child in imitation of his copy. She taught him to repeat after her the names of the inanimate objects in the room, then the names of the doctor, his attendant, the servant, and, finally, her own under her Christian prenomens, with frontier familiarity; but when she pointed to himself he waited for HER to name him! In vain she tried him with all the masculine names she knew; his was not one of them, or he would not or could not speak it. For at times she rejected the professional dictum of the doctor that the faculty of memory was wholly paralyzed or held in abeyance, even to the half-automatic recollection of his letters, yet she inconsistently began to teach him the alphabet with the same method, and—in her sublime unconsciousness of his manhood—with the same discipline as if he were a very child. When he had recovered sufficiently to leave his room, she would lead him to the porch before her window, and make him contented and happy by allowing him to watch her at work at her desk, occasionally answering his wondering eyes with a word, or stirring his faculties with a question. I grieve to say that her parents had taken advantage of this publicity and his supposed helpless condition to show their

disgust of his assumption, to the extreme of making faces at him—an act which he resented with such a furious glare that they retreated hurriedly to their own veranda. A fresh though somewhat inconsistent grievance was added to their previous indictment of him: “If we ain’t found dead in our bed with our throats cut by that woman’s crazy husband” (they had settled by this time that there had been a clandestine marriage), “we’ll be lucky,” groaned Mrs. Forsyth.

Meantime, the mountain summer waxed to its fullness of fire and fruition. There were days when the crowded forest seemed choked and impeded with its own foliage, and pungent and stifling with its own rank maturity; when the long hillside ranks of wild oats, thickset and impassable, filled the air with the heated dust of germination. In this quickening irritation of life it would be strange if the unfortunate man’s torpid intellect was not helped in its awakening, and he was allowed to ramble at will over the ranch; but with the instinct of a domestic animal he always returned to the house, and sat in the porch, where Josephine usually found him awaiting her when she herself returned from a visit to the mill. Coming thence one day she espied him on the mountain-side leaning against a projecting ledge in an attitude so rapt and immovable that she felt compelled to approach him. He appeared to be dumbly absorbed in the prospect, which might have intoxicated a saner mind.

Half veiled by the heat that rose quiveringly from the fiery canyon below, the domain of Burnt Ridge stretched away before him, until, lifted in successive terraces hearsed and plumed with pines, it was at last lost in the ghostly snow-peaks. But the practical Josephine seized the opportunity to try once more to awaken the slumbering memory of her pupil. Following his gaze with signs and questions, she sought to draw from him some indication of familiar

recollection of certain points of the map thus unrolled behind him. But in vain. She even pointed out the fateful shadow of the overhanging ledge on the road where she had picked him up—there was no response in his abstracted eyes. She bit her lips; she was becoming irritated again. Then it occurred to her that, instead of appealing to his hopeless memory, she had better trust to some unreflective automatic instinct independent of it, and she put the question a little forward: “When you leave us, where will you go from here?” He stirred slightly, and turned towards her. She repeated her query slowly and patiently, with signs and gestures recognized between them. A faint glow of intelligence struggled into his eyes: he lifted his arm slowly, and pointed.

“Ah! those white peaks—the Sierras?” she asked, eagerly. No reply. “Beyond them?”

“Yes.”

“The States?” No reply. “Further still?”

He remained so patiently quiet and still pointing that she leaned forward, and, following with her eyes the direction of his hand, saw that he was pointing to the sky!

Then a great quiet fell upon them. The whole mountain-side seemed to her to be hushed, as if to allow her to grasp and realize for the first time the pathos of the ruined life at her side, which IT had known so long, but which she had never felt till now. The tears came to her eyes; in her swift revulsion of feeling she caught the thin uplifted hand between her own. It seemed to her that he was about to raise them to his lips, but she withdrew them hastily, and moved away. She had a strange fear that if he had kissed them, it might seem as if some dumb animal had touched them—or—IT MIGHT NOT. The next day she felt a

consciousness of this in his presence, and a wish that he was well-cured and away. She determined to consult Doctor Duchesne on the subject when he next called.

But the doctor, secure in the welfare of his patient, had not visited him lately, and she found herself presently absorbed in the business of the ranch, which at this season was particularly trying. There had also been a quarrel between Dick Shipley, her mill foreman, and Miguel, her ablest and most trusted vaquero, and in her strict sense of impartial justice she was obliged to side on the merits of the case with Shipley against her oldest retainer. This troubled her, as she knew that with the Mexican nature, fidelity and loyalty were not unmingled with quick and unreasoning jealousy. For this reason she was somewhat watchful of the two men when work was over, and there was a chance of their being thrown together. Once or twice she had remained up late to meet Miguel returning from the posada at San Ramon, filled with aguardiente and a recollection of his wrongs, and to see him safely bestowed before she herself retired. It was on one of those occasions, however, that she learned that Dick Shipley, hearing that Miguel had disparaged him freely at the posada, had broken the discipline of the ranch, and absented himself the same night that Miguel "had leave," with a view of facing his antagonist on his own ground. To prevent this, the fearless girl at once secretly set out alone to overtake and bring back the delinquent.

For two or three hours the house was thus left to the sole occupancy of Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth and the invalid—a fact only dimly suspected by the latter, who had become vaguely conscious of Josephine's anxiety, and had noticed the absence of light and movement in her room. For this reason, therefore, having risen again and mechanically taken his seat in the porch to await her return, he was startled by

hearing HER voice in the shadow of the lower porch, accompanied by a hurried tapping against the door of the old couple. The half-reasoning man arose, and would have moved towards it, but suddenly he stopped rigidly, with white and parted lips and vacantly distended eyeballs.

Meantime the voice and muffled tapping had brought the tremulous fingers of old Forsyth to the door-latch. He opened the door partly; a slight figure that had been lurking in the shadow of the porch pushed rapidly through the opening. There was a faint outcry quickly hushed, and the door closed again. The rays of a single candle showed the two old people hysterically clasping in their arms the figure that had entered—a slight but vicious-looking young fellow of five-and-twenty.

“There, d——n it!” he said impatiently, in a voice whose rich depth was like Josephine’s, but whose querulous action was that of the two old people before him, “let me go, and quit that, I didn’t come here to be strangled! I want some money—money, you hear! Devilish quick, too, for I’ve got to be off again before daylight. So look sharp, will you?”

“But, Stevy dear, when you didn’t come that time three months ago, but wrote from Los Angeles, you said you’d made a strike at last, and”—

“What are you talking about?” he interrupted violently. “That was just my lyin’ to keep you from worryin’ me. Three months ago—three months ago! Why, you must have been crazy to have swallowed it; I hadn’t a cent.”

“Nor have we,” said the old woman, shrilly. “That hellish sister of yours still keeps us like beggars. Our only hope was you, our own boy. And now you only come to—to go again.”

“But SHE has money; SHE’S doing well, and SHE shall give it to me,” he went on, angrily. “She can’t bully me with her business airs and morality. Who else has got a right to share, if it is not her own brother?”

Alas for the fatuousness of human malevolence! Had the unhappy couple related only the simple facts they knew about the new guest of Burnt Ridge Ranch, and the manner of his introduction, they might have spared what followed.

But the old woman broke into a vindictive cry: “Who else, Steve—who else? Why, the slut has brought a MAN here—a sneaking, deceitful, underhanded, crazy lover!”

“Oh, has she?” said the young man, fiercely, yet secretly pleased at this promising evidence of his sister’s human weakness. “Where is she? I’ll go to her. She’s in her room, I suppose,” and before they could restrain him, he had thrown off their impeding embraces and darted across the hall.

The two old people stared doubtfully at each other. For even this powerful ally, whose strength, however, they were by no means sure of, might succumb before the determined Josephine! Prudence demanded a middle course. “Ain’t they brother and sister?” said the old man, with an air of virtuous toleration. “Let ‘em fight it out.”

The young man impatiently entered the room he remembered to have been his sister’s. By the light of the moon that streamed upon the window he could see she was not there. He passed hurriedly to the door of her bedroom; it was open; the room was empty, the bed unturned. She was not in the house—she had gone to the mill. Ah! What was that they had said? An infamous thought passed through the scoundrel’s mind. Then, in what he half believed was an

access of virtuous fury, he began by the dim light to rummage in the drawers of the desk for such loose coin or valuables as, in the perfect security of the ranch, were often left unguarded. Suddenly he heard a heavy footstep on the threshold, and turned.

An awful vision—a recollection, so unexpected, so ghostlike in that weird light that he thought he was losing his senses—stood before him. It moved forwards with staring eyeballs and white and open lips from which a horrible inarticulate sound issued that was the speech of no living man! With a single desperate, almost superhuman effort Stephen Forsyth bounded aside, leaped from the window, and ran like a madman from the house. Then the apparition trembled, collapsed, and sank in an undistinguishable heap to the ground.

When Josephine Forsyth returned an hour later with her mill foreman, she was startled to find her helpless patient in a fit on the floor of her room. With the assistance of her now converted and penitent employee, she had the unfortunate man conveyed to his room—but not until she had thoughtfully rearranged the disorder of her desk and closed the open drawers without attracting Dick Shipley's attention. In the morning, hearing that the patient was still in the semiconscious exhaustion of his late attack, but without seeing him, she sent for Doctor Duchesne. The doctor arrived while she was absent at the mill, where, after a careful examination of his patient, he sought her with some little excitement.

“Well?” she said, with eager gravity.

“Well, it looks as if your wish would be gratified. Your friend has had an epileptic fit, but the physical shock has started his mental machinery again. He has recovered his

faculties; his memory is returning: he thinks and speaks coherently; he is as sane as you and I.”

“And”—said Josephine, questioning the doctor’s knitted eyebrows.

“I am not yet sure whether it was the result of some shock he doesn’t remember; or an irritation of the brain, which would indicate that the operation had not been successful and that there was still some physical pressure or obstruction there—in which case he would be subject to these attacks all his life.”

“Do you think his reason came before the fit or after?” asked the girl, anxiously.

“I couldn’t say. Had anything happened?”

“I was away, and found him on the floor on my return,” she answered, half uneasily. After a pause she said, “Then he has told you his name and all about himself?”

“Yes, it’s nothing at all! He was a stranger just arrived from the States, going to the mines—the old story; had no near relations, of course; wasn’t missed or asked after; remembers walking along the ridge and falling over; name, John Baxter, of Maine.” He paused, and relaxing into a slight smile, added, “I haven’t spoiled your romance, have I?”

“No,” she said, with an answering smile. Then as the doctor walked briskly away she slightly knitted her pretty brows, hung her head, patted the ground with her little foot beyond the hem of her gown, and said to herself, “The man was lying to him.”

CHAPTER THREE

On her return to the house, Josephine apparently contented herself with receiving the bulletin of the stranger's condition from the servant, for she did not enter his room. She had obtained no theory of last night's incident from her parents, who, beyond a querulous agitation that was quickened by the news of his return to reason, refrained from even that insidious comment which she half feared would follow. When another day passed without her seeing him, she nevertheless was conscious of a little embarrassment when his attendant brought her the request that she would give him a moment's speech in the porch, whither he had been removed.

She found him physically weaker; indeed, so much so that she was fain, even in her embarrassment, to assist him back to the bench from which he had ceremoniously risen. But she was so struck with the change in his face and manner, a change so virile and masterful, in spite of its gentle sadness of manner, that she recoiled with a slight timidity as if he had been a stranger, although she was also conscious that he seemed to be more at his ease than she was. He began in a low exhausted voice, but before he had finished his first sentence, she felt herself in the presence of a superior.

"My thanks come very late, Miss Forsyth," he said, with a faint smile, "but no one knows better than yourself the reason why, or can better understand that they mean that the burden you have so generously taken on yourself is about to be lifted. I know all, Miss Forsyth. Since yesterday I have learned how much I owe you, even my life I believe, though I am afraid I must tell you in the same breath that THAT is of little worth to any one. You have kindly helped and

interested yourself in a poor stranger who turns out to be a nobody, without friends, without romance, and without even mystery. You found me lying in the road down yonder, after a stupid accident that might have happened to any other careless tramp, and which scarcely gave me a claim to a bed in the county hospital, much less under this kindly roof. It was not my fault, as you know, that all this did not come out sooner; but while it doesn't lessen your generosity, it doesn't lessen my debt, and although I cannot hope to ever repay you, I can at least keep the score from running on. Pardon my speaking so bluntly, but my excuse for speaking at all was to say 'Good-by' and 'God bless you.' Doctor Duchesne has promised to give me a lift on my way in his buggy when he goes."

There was a slight touch of consciousness in his voice in spite of its sadness, which struck the young girl as a weak and even ungentlemanly note in his otherwise self-abnegating and undemonstrative attitude. If he was a common tramp, he wouldn't talk in that way, and if he wasn't, why did he lie? Her practical good sense here asserted itself.

"But you are far from strong yet; in fact, the doctor says you might have a relapse at any moment, and you have—that is, you SEEM to have no money," she said gravely.

"That's true," he said, quickly. "I remember I was quite played out when I entered the settlement, and I think I had parted from even some little trifles I carried with me. I am afraid I was a poor find to those who picked me up, and you ought to have taken warning. But the doctor has offered to lend me enough to take me to San Francisco, if only to give a fair trial to the machine he has set once more a-going."

“Then you have friends in San Francisco?” said the young girl quickly. “Those who know you? Why not write to them first, and tell them you are here?”

“I don’t think your postmaster here would be preoccupied with letters for John Baxter, if I did,” he said, quietly. “But here is the doctor waiting. Good-by.”

He stood looking at her in a peculiar, yet half-resigned way, and held out his hand. For a moment she hesitated. Had he been less independent and strong, she would have refused to let him go—have offered him some slight employment at the ranch; for oddly enough, in spite of the suspicion that he was concealing something, she felt that she would have trusted him, and he would have been a help to her. But he was not only determined, but SHE was all the time conscious that he was a totally different man from the one she had taken care of, and merely ordinary prudence demanded that she should know something more of him first. She gave him her hand constrainedly; he pressed it warmly.

Doctor Duchesne drove up, helped him into the buggy, smiled a good-natured but half-perfunctory assurance that he would look after “her patient,” and drove away.

The whole thing was over, but so unexpectedly, so suddenly, so unromantically, so unsatisfactorily, that, although her common sense told her that it was perfectly natural, proper, business-like, and reasonable, and, above all, final and complete, she did not know whether to laugh or be angry. Yet this was her parting from the man who had but a few days ago moved her to tears with a single hopeless gesture. Well, this would teach her what to expect. Well, what had she expected? Nothing!

Yet for the rest of the day she was unreasonably irritable, and, if the conjointure be not paradoxical, severely practical, and inhumanly just. Falling foul of some presumption of Miguel's, based upon his prescriptive rights through long service on the estate, with the recollection of her severity towards his antagonist in her mind, she rated that trusted retainer with such pitiless equity and unfeminine logic that his hot Latin blood chilled in his veins, and he stood livid on the road. Then, informing Dick Shipley with equally relentless calm that she might feel it necessary to change ALL her foremen unless they could agree in harmony, she sought the dignified seclusion of her castle. But her respected parents, whose triumphant relief at the stranger's departure had emboldened them to await her return in their porch with bended bows of invective and lifted javelins of aggression, recoiled before the resistless helm of this cold-browed Minerva, who galloped contemptuously past them.

Nevertheless, she sat late that night at her desk. The cold moon looked down upon her window, and lit up the empty porch where her silent guest had mutely watched her. For a moment she regretted that he had recovered his reason, excusing herself on the practical ground that he would never have known his dependence, and he would have been better cared for by her. She felt restless and uneasy. This slight divergence from the practical groove in which her life had been set had disturbed her in many other things, and given her the first views of the narrowness of it.

Suddenly she heard a step in the porch. The lateness of the hour, perhaps some other reason, seemed to startle her, and she half rose. The next moment the figure of Miguel appeared at the doorway, and with a quick, hurried look around him, and at the open window, he approached her. He was evidently under great excitement, his hollow shaven

cheek looked like a waxen effigy in the mission church; his yellow, tobacco-stained eye glittered like phosphorescent amber, his lank gray hair was damp and perspiring; but more striking than this was the evident restraint he had put upon himself, pressing his broad-brimmed sombrero with both of his trembling yellow hands against his breast. The young girl cast a hurried glance at the open window and at the gun which stood in the corner, and then confronted him with clear and steady eyes, but a paler cheek.

Ah, he began in Spanish, which he himself had taught her as a child, it was a strange thing, his coming there to-night; but, then, mother of God! it was a strange, a terrible thing that she had done to him—old Miguel, her uncle's servant: he that had known her as a muchacha; he that had lived all his life at the ranch—ay, and whose fathers before him had lived there all THEIR lives and driven the cattle over the very spot where she now stood, before the thieving Americans came here! But he would be calm; yes, the senora should find him calm, even as she was when she told him to go. He would not speak. No, he—Miguel—would contain himself; yes, he HAD mastered himself, but could he restrain others? Ah, yes, OTHERS—that was it. Could he keep Manuel and Pepe and Dominguez from talking to the milkman—that leaking sieve, that gabbling brute of a Shipley, for whose sake she had cast off her old servant that very day?

She looked at him with cold astonishment, but without fear. Was he drunk with aguardiente, or had his jealousy turned his brain? He continued gasping, but still pressing his hat against his breast.

Ah, he saw it all! Yes, it was to-day, the day he left. Yes, she had thought it safe to cast Miguel off now—now that HE was gone!

Without in the least understanding him, the color had leaped to her cheek, and the consciousness of it made her furious.

“How dare you?” she said, passionately. “What has that stranger to do with my affairs or your insolence?”

He stopped and gazed at her with a certain admiring loyalty. “Ah! so,” he said, with a deep breath, “the senora is the niece of her uncle. She does well not to fear HIM—a dog,”—with a slight shrug—“who is more than repaid by the senora’s condescension. HE dare not speak!”

“Who dare not speak? Are you mad?” She stopped with a sudden terrible instinct of apprehension. “Miguel,” she said in her deepest voice, “answer me, I command you! Do you know anything of this man?”

It was Miguel’s turn to recoil from his mistress. “Ah, my God! is it possible the senora has not suspect?”

“Suspect!” said Josephine, haughtily, albeit her proud heart was beating quickly. “I SUSPECT nothing. I command you to tell me what you KNOW.”

Miguel turned with a rapid gesture and closed the door. Then, drawing her away from the window, he said in a hurried whisper—

“I know that that man has not the name of Baxter! I know that he has the name of Randolph, a young gambler, who have won a large sum at Sacramento, and, fearing to be robbed by those he won of, have walk to himself through the road in disguise of a miner. I know that your brother Esteban have decoyed him here, and have fallen on him.”

“Stop!” said the young girl, her eyes, which had been fixed with the agony of conviction, suddenly flashing with the energy of despair. “And you call yourself the servant of my uncle, and dare say this of his nephew?”

“Yes, senora,” broke out the old man, passionately. “It is because I am the servant of your uncle that I, and I ALONE, dare say it to you! It is because I perjured my soul, and have perjured my soul to deny it elsewhere, that I now dare to say it! It is because I, your servant, knew it from one of my countrymen, who was of the gang—because I, Miguel, knew that your brother was not far away that night, and because I, whom you would dismiss, have picked up this pocket-book of Randolph’s and your brother’s ring which he have dropped, and I have found beneath the body of the man you sent me to fetch.”

He drew a packet from his bosom, and tossed it on the desk before her.

“And why have you not told me this before?” said Josephine, passionately.

Miguel shrugged his shoulders.

“What good? Possibly this dog Randolph would die. Possibly he would live—as a lunatic. Possibly would happen what has happened! The senora is beautiful. The American has eyes. If the Dona Josephine’s beauty shall finish what the silly Don Esteban’s arm have begun—what matter?”

“Stop!” cried Josephine, pressing her hands across her shuddering eyes. Then, uncovering her white and set face, she said rapidly, “Saddle my horse and your own at once. Then take your choice! Come with me and repeat all that you have said in the presence of that man, or leave this

ranch forever. For if I live I shall go to him tonight, and tell the whole story.”

The old man cast a single glance at his mistress, shrugged his shoulders, and, without a word, left the room. But in ten minutes they were on their way to the county town.

Day was breaking over the distant Burnt Ridge—a faint, ghostly level, like a funeral pall, in the dim horizon—as they drew up before the gaunt, white-painted pile of the hospital building. Josephine uttered a cry. Doctor Duchesne’s buggy was before the door. On its very threshold they met the doctor, dark and irritated. “Then you heard the news?” he said, quickly.

Josephine turned her white face to the doctor’s. “What news?” she asked, in a voice that seemed strangely deep and resonant.

“The poor fellow had another attack last night, and died of exhaustion about an hour ago. I was too late to save him.”

“Did he say anything? Was he conscious?” asked the girl, hoarsely.

“No; incoherent! Now I think of it, he harped on the same string as he did the night of the operation. What was it he said? you remember.”

“You’ll have to kill me first,” repeated Josephine, in a choking voice.

“Yes; something about his dying before he’d tell. Well, he came back to it before he went off—they often do. You seem a little hoarse with your morning ride. You should

take care of that voice of yours. By the way, it's a good deal like your brother's."

* * * * *

The Chatelaine of Burnt Ridge never married.

The Indiscretion of Elsbeth

The American paused. He had evidently lost his way. For the last half hour he had been wandering in a medieval town, in a profound medieval dream. Only a few days had elapsed since he had left the steamship that carried him hither; and the accents of his own tongue, the idioms of his own people, and the sympathetic community of New World tastes and expressions still filled his mind until he woke up, or rather, as it seemed to him, was falling asleep in the past of this Old World town which had once held his ancestors. Although a republican, he had liked to think of them in quaint distinctive garb, representing state and importance—perhaps even aristocratic pre-eminence—content to let the responsibility of such “bad eminence” rest with them entirely, but a habit of conscientiousness and love for historic truth eventually led him also to regard an honest BAUER standing beside his cattle in the quaint market place, or a kindly-faced black-eyed DIENSTMADCHEN in a doorway, with a timid, respectful interest, as a possible type of his progenitors. For, unlike some of his traveling countrymen in Europe, he was not a snob, and it struck him—as an American—that it was, perhaps, better to think of his race as having improved than as having degenerated. In these ingenuous meditations he had passed the long rows of quaint, high houses, whose sagging roofs and unpatched dilapidations were yet far removed from squalor, until he had reached the road bordered by poplars, all so unlike his own country’s waysides—and knew that he had wandered far from his hotel.

He did not care, however, to retrace his steps and return by the way he had come. There was, he reasoned, some other street or turning that would eventually bring him to the market place and his hotel, and yet extend his experience of the town. He turned at right angles into a narrow grass lane, which was, however, as neatly kept and apparently as public as the highway. A few moments' walking convinced him that it was not a thoroughfare and that it led to the open gates of a park. This had something of a public look, which suggested that his intrusion might be at least a pardonable trespass, and he relied, like most strangers, on the exonerating quality of a stranger's ignorance. The park lay in the direction he wished to go, and yet it struck him as singular that a park of such extent should be still allowed to occupy such valuable urban space. Indeed, its length seemed to be illimitable as he wandered on, until he became conscious that he must have again lost his way, and he diverged toward the only boundary, a high, thickset hedge to the right, whose line he had been following.

As he neared it he heard the sound of voices on the other side, speaking in German, with which he was unfamiliar. Having, as yet, met no one, and being now impressed with the fact that for a public place the park was singularly deserted, he was conscious that his position was getting serious, and he determined to take this only chance of inquiring his way. The hedge was thinner in some places than in others, and at times he could see not only the light through it but even the moving figures of the speakers, and the occasional white flash of a summer gown. At last he determined to penetrate it, and with little difficulty emerged on the other side. But here he paused motionless. He found himself behind a somewhat formal and symmetrical group of figures with their backs toward him, but all stiffened into attitudes as motionless as his own, and all gazing with a monotonous intensity in the direction of a handsome

building, which had been invisible above the hedge but which now seemed to arise suddenly before him. Some of the figures were in uniform. Immediately before him, but so slightly separated from the others that he was enabled to see the house between her and her companions, he was confronted by the pretty back, shoulders, and blond braids of a young girl of twenty. Convinced that he had unwittingly intruded upon some august ceremonial, he instantly slipped back into the hedge, but so silently that his momentary presence was evidently undetected. When he regained the park side he glanced back through the interstices; there was no movement of the figures nor break in the silence to indicate that his intrusion had been observed. With a long breath of relief he hurried from the park.

It was late when he finally got back to his hotel. But his little modern adventure had, I fear, quite outrun his previous medieval reflections, and almost his first inquiry of the silver-chained porter in the courtyard was in regard to the park. There was no public park in Alstadt! The Herr possibly alluded to the Hof Gardens—the Schloss, which was in the direction he indicated. The Schloss was the residency of the hereditary Grand Duke. JA WOHL! He was stopping there with several Hoheiten. There was naturally a party there—a family reunion. But it was a private enclosure. At times, when the Grand Duke was not in residence,” it was open to the public. In point of fact, at such times tickets of admission were to be had at the hotel for fifty pfennige each. There was not, of truth, much to see except a model farm and dairy—the pretty toy of a previous Grand Duchess.

But he seemed destined to come into closer collision with the modern life of Alstadt. On entering the hotel, wearied by his long walk, he passed the landlord and a man in half-military uniform on the landing near his room. As he entered his apartment he had a vague impression, without

exactly knowing why, that the landlord and the military stranger had just left it. This feeling was deepened by the evident disarrangement of certain articles in his unlocked portmanteau and the disorganization of his writing case. A wave of indignation passed over him. It was followed by a knock at the door, and the landlord blandly appeared with the stranger.

“A thousand pardons,” said the former, smilingly, “but Herr Sanderman, the Ober-Inspector of Police, wishes to speak with you. I hope we are not intruding?”

“Not NOW,” said the American, dryly.

The two exchanged a vacant and deprecating smile.

“I have to ask only a few formal questions,” said the Ober-Inspector in excellent but somewhat precise English, “to supplement the report which, as a stranger, you may not know is required by the police from the landlord in regard to the names and quality of his guests who are foreign to the town. You have a passport?”

“I have,” said the American still more dryly. “But I do not keep it in an unlocked portmanteau or an open writing case.”

“An admirable precaution,” said Sanderman, with unmoved politeness. “May I see it? Thanks,” he added, glancing over the document which the American produced from his pocket. “I see that you are a born American citizen—and an earlier knowledge of that fact would have prevented this little contretemps. You are aware, Mr. Hoffman, that your name is German?”

“It was borne by my ancestors, who came from this country two centuries ago,” said Hoffman, curtly.

“We are indeed honored by your return to it,” returned Sanderman suavely, “but it was the circumstance of your name being a local one, and the possibility of your still being a German citizen liable to unperformed military duty, which has caused the trouble.” His manner was clearly civil and courteous, but Hoffman felt that all the time his own face and features were undergoing a profound scrutiny from the speaker.

“And you are making sure that you will know me again?” said Hoffman, with a smile.

“I trust, indeed, both,” returned Sanderman, with a bow, “although you will permit me to say that your description here,” pointing to the passport, “scarcely does you justice. ACH GOTT! it is the same in all countries; the official eye is not that of the young DAMEN.”

Hoffman, though not conceited, had not lived twenty years without knowing that he was very good-looking, yet there was something in the remark that caused him to color with a new uneasiness.

The Ober-Inspector rose with another bow, and moved toward the door. “I hope you will let me make amends for this intrusion by doing anything I can to render your visit here a pleasant one. Perhaps,” he added, “it is not for long.”

But Hoffman evaded the evident question, as he resented what he imagined was a possible sneer.

“I have not yet determined my movements,” he said.

The Ober-Inspector brought his heels together in a somewhat stiffer military salute and departed.

Nothing, however, could have exceeded the later almost servile urbanity of the landlord, who seemed to have been proud of the official visit to his guest. He was profuse in his attentions, and even introduced him to a singularly artistic-looking man of middle age, wearing an order in his buttonhole, whom he met casually in the hall.

“Our Court photographer,” explained the landlord with some fervor, “at whose studio, only a few houses distant, most of the Hoheiten and Prinzessinen of Germany have sat for their likenesses.”

“I should feel honored if the distinguished American Herr would give me a visit,” said the stranger gravely, as he gazed at Hoffman with an intensity which recalled the previous scrutiny of the Police Inspector, “and I would be charmed if he would avail himself of my poor skill to transmit his picturesque features to my unique collection.”

Hoffman returned a polite evasion to this invitation, although he was conscious of being struck with this second examination of his face, and the allusion to his personality.

The next morning the porter met him with a mysterious air. The Herr would still like to see the Schloss? Hoffman, who had quite forgotten his adventure in the park, looked vacant. JA WOHL—the Hof authorities had no doubt heard of his visit and had intimated to the hotel proprietor that he might have permission to visit the model farm and dairy. As the American still looked indifferent the porter pointed out with some importance that it was a Ducal courtesy not to be lightly treated; that few, indeed, of the burghers themselves had ever been admitted to this eccentric

whim of the late Grand Duchess. He would, of course, be silent about it; the Court would not like it known that they had made an exception to their rules in favor of a foreigner; he would enter quickly and boldly alone. There would be a housekeeper or a dairymaid to show him over the place.

More amused at this important mystery over what he, as an American, was inclined to classify as a “free pass” to a somewhat heavy “side show,” he gravely accepted the permission, and the next morning after breakfast set out to visit the model farm and dairy. Dismissing his driver, as he had been instructed, Hoffman entered the gateway with a mingling of expectancy and a certain amusement over the “boldness” which the porter had suggested should characterize his entrance. Before him was a beautifully kept lane bordered by arbored and trellised roses, which seemed to sink into the distance. He was instinctively following it when he became aware that he was mysteriously accompanied by a man in the livery of a chasseur, who was walking among the trees almost abreast of him, keeping pace with his step, and after the first introductory military salute preserving a ceremonious silence. There was something so ludicrous in this solemn procession toward a peaceful, rural industry that by the time they had reached the bottom of the lane the American had quite recovered his good humor. But here a new astonishment awaited him. Nestling before him in a green amphitheater lay a little wooden farm-yard and outbuildings, which irresistibly suggested that it had been recently unpacked and set up from a box of Nuremberg toys. The symmetrical trees, the galleried houses with preternaturally glazed windows, even the spotty, disproportionately sized cows in the white-fenced barnyards were all unreal, wooden and toylike.

Crossing a miniature bridge over a little stream, from which he was quite prepared to hook metallic fish with a

magnet their own size, he looked about him for some real being to dispel the illusion. The mysterious chasseur had disappeared. But under the arch of an arbor, which seemed to be composed of silk ribbons, green glass, and pink tissue paper, stood a quaint but delightful figure.

At first it seemed as if he had only dispelled one illusion for another. For the figure before him might have been made of Dresden china—so daintily delicate and unique it was in color and arrangement. It was that of a young girl dressed in some forgotten medieval peasant garb of velvet braids, silver-staylaced corsage, lace sleeves, and helmeted metallic comb. But, after the Dresden method, the pale yellow of her hair was repeated in her bodice, the pink of her cheeks was in the roses of her chintz overskirt. The blue of her eyes was the blue of her petticoat; the dazzling whiteness of her neck shone again in the sleeves and stockings. Nevertheless she was real and human, for the pink deepened in her cheeks as Hoffman's hat flew from his head, and she recognized the civility with a grave little curtsy.

“You have come to see the dairy,” she said in quaintly accurate English; “I will show you the way.”

“If you please,” said Hoffman, gaily, “but—”

“But what?” she said, facing him suddenly with absolutely astonished eyes.

Hoffman looked into them so long that their frank wonder presently contracted into an ominous mingling of restraint and resentment. Nothing daunted, however, he went on:

“Couldn't we shake all that?”

The look of wonder returned. "Shake all that?" she repeated. "I do not understand."

"Well! I'm not positively aching to see cows, and you must be sick of showing them. I think, too, I've about sized the whole show. Wouldn't it be better if we sat down in that arbor—supposing it won't fall down—and you told me all about the lot? It would save you a heap of trouble and keep your pretty frock cleaner than trapesing round. Of course," he said, with a quick transition to the gentlest courtesy, "if you're conscientious about this thing we'll go on and not spare a cow. Consider me in it with you for the whole morning."

She looked at him again, and then suddenly broke into a charming laugh. It revealed a set of strong white teeth, as well as a certain barbaric trace in its cadence which civilized restraint had not entirely overlaid.

"I suppose she really is a peasant, in spite of that pretty frock," he said to himself as he laughed too.

But her face presently took a shade of reserve, and with a gentle but singular significance she said:

"I think you must see the dairy."

Hoffman's hat was in his hand with a vivacity that tumbled the brown curls on his forehead. "By all means," he said instantly, and began walking by her side in modest but easy silence. Now that he thought her a conscientious peasant he was quiet and respectful.

Presently she lifted her eyes, which, despite her gravity, had not entirely lost their previous mirthfulness, and said:

“But you Americans—in your rich and prosperous country, with your large lands and your great harvests—you must know all about farming.”

“Never was in a dairy in my life,” said Hoffman gravely. “I’m from the city of New York, where the cows give swill milk, and are kept in cellars.”

Her eyebrows contracted prettily in an effort to understand. Then she apparently gave it up, and said with a slanting glint of mischief in her eyes:

“Then you come here like the other Americans in hope to see the Grand Duke and Duchess and the Princesses?”

“No. The fact is I almost tumbled into a lot of ‘em—standing like wax figures—the other side of the park lodge, the other day—and got away as soon as I could. I think I prefer the cows.”

Her head was slightly turned away. He had to content himself with looking down upon the strong feet in their serviceable but smartly buckled shoes that uplifted her upright figure as she moved beside him.

“Of course,” he added with boyish but unmistakable courtesy, “if it’s part of your show to trot out the family, why I’m in that, too. I dare say you could make them interesting.”

“But why,” she said with her head still slightly turned away toward a figure—a sturdy-looking woman, which, for the first time, Hoffman perceived was walking in a line with them as the chasseur had done—“why did you come here at all?”

“The first time was a fool accident,” he returned frankly. “I was making a short cut through what I thought was a public park. The second time was because I had been rude to a Police Inspector whom I found going through my things, but who apologized—as I suppose— by getting me an invitation from the Grand Duke to come here, and I thought it only the square thing to both of ‘em to accept it. But I’m mighty glad I came; I wouldn’t have missed YOU for a thousand dollars. You see I haven’t struck anyone I cared to talk to since.” Here he suddenly remarked that she hadn’t looked at him, and that the delicate whiteness of her neck was quite suffused with pink, and stopped instantly. Presently he said quite easily:

“Who’s the chorus?”

“The lady?”

“Yes. She’s watching us as if she didn’t quite approve, you know— just as if she didn’t catch on.”

“She’s the head housekeeper of the farm. Perhaps you would prefer to have her show you the dairy; shall I call her?”

The figure in question was very short and stout, with voluminous petticoats.

“Please don’t; I’ll stay without your setting that paperweight on me. But here’s the dairy. Don’t let her come inside among those pans of fresh milk with that smile, or there’ll be trouble.”

The young girl paused too, made a slight gesture with her hand, and the figure passed on as they entered the dairy. It was beautifully clean and fresh. With a persistence that he

quickly recognized as mischievous and ironical, and with his characteristic adaptability accepted with even greater gravity and assumption of interest, she showed him all the details. From thence they passed to the farmyard, where he hung with breathless attention over the names of the cows and made her repeat them. Although she was evidently familiar with the subject, he could see that her zeal was fitful and impatient.

“Suppose we sit down,” he said, pointing to an ostentatious rustic seat in the center of the green.

“Sir down?” she repeated wonderingly. “What for?”

“To talk. We’ll knock off and call it half a day.”

“But if you are not looking at the farm you are, of course, going,” she said quickly.

“Am I? I don’t think these particulars were in my invitation.”

She again broke into a fit of laughter, and at the same time cast a bright eye around the field.

“Come,” he said gently, “there are no other sightseers waiting, and your conscience is clear,” and he moved toward the rustic seat.

“Certainly not—there,” she added in a low voice.

They moved on slowly together to a copse of willows which overhung the miniature stream.

“You are not staying long in Alstadt?” she said.

“No; I only came to see the old town that my ancestors came from.”

They were walking so close together that her skirt brushed his trousers, but she suddenly drew away from him, and looking him fixedly in the eye said:

“Ah, you have relations here?”

“Yes, but they are dead two hundred years.”

She laughed again with a slight expression of relief. They had entered the copse and were walking in dense shadow when she suddenly stopped and sat down upon a rustic bench. To his surprise he found that they were quite alone.

“Tell me about these relatives,” she said, slightly drawing aside her skirt to make room for him on the seat.

He did not require a second invitation. He not only told her all about his ancestral progenitors, but, I fear, even about those more recent and more nearly related to him; about his own life, his vocation—he was a clever newspaper correspondent with a roving commission—his ambitions, his beliefs and his romance.

“And then, perhaps, of this visit—you will also make ‘copy’?”

He smiled at her quick adaptation of his professional slang, but shook his head.

“No,” he said gravely. “No—this is YOU. The CHICAGO INTERVIEWER is big pay and is rich, but it hasn’t capital enough to buy you from me.

He gently slid his hand toward hers and slipped his fingers softly around it. She made a slight movement of withdrawal, but even then—as if in forgetfulness or indifference—permitted her hand to rest unresponsively in his. It was scarcely an encouragement to gallantry, neither was it a rejection of an unconscious familiarity.

“But you haven’t told me about yourself,” he said.

“Oh, I”—she returned, with her first approach to coquetry in a laugh and a sidelong glance, “of what importance is that to you? It is the Grand Duchess and Her Highness the Princess that you Americans seek to know. I am—what I am—as you see.”

“You bet,” said Hoffman with charming decision.

“I WHAT?”

“You ARE, you know, and that’s good enough for me, but I don’t even know your name.”

She laughed again, and after a pause, said: “Elsbeth.”

“But I couldn’t call you by your first name on our first meeting, you know.”

“Then you Americans are really so very formal—eh?” she said slyly, looking at her imprisoned hand.

“Well, yes,” returned Hoffman, disengaging it. “I suppose we are respectful, or mean to be. But whom am I to inquire for? To write to?”

“You are neither to write nor inquire.”

“What?” She had moved in her seat so as to half-face him with eyes in which curiosity, mischief, and a certain seriousness alternated, but for the first time seemed conscious of his hand, and accented her words with a slight pressure.

“You are to return to your hotel presently, and say to your landlord: ‘Pack up my luggage. I have finished with this old town and my ancestors, and the Grand Duke, whom I do not care to see, and I shall leave Altstadt tomorrow!’”

“Thank you! I don’t catch on.”

“Of what necessity should you? I have said it. That should be enough for a chivalrous American like you.” She again significantly looked down at her hand.

“If you mean that you know the extent of the favor you ask of me, I can say no more,” he said seriously; “but give me some reason for it.”

“Ah so!” she said, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. “Then I must tell you. You say you do not know the Grand Duke and Duchess. Well! THEY KNOW YOU. The day before yesterday you were wandering in the park, as you admit. You say, also, you got through the hedge and interrupted some ceremony. That ceremony was not a Court function, Mr. Hoffman, but something equally sacred—the photographing of the Ducal family before the Schloss. You say that you instantly withdrew. But after the photograph was taken the plate revealed a stranger standing actually by the side of the Princess Alexandrine, and even taking the PAS of the Grand Duke himself. That stranger was you!”

“And the picture was spoiled,” said the American, with a quiet laugh.

“I should not say that,” returned the lady, with a demure glance at her companion’s handsome face, “and I do not believe that the Princess—who first saw the photograph—thought so either. But she is very young and willful, and has the reputation of being very indiscreet, and unfortunately she begged the photographer not to destroy the plate, but to give it to her, and to say nothing about it, except that the plate was defective, and to take another. Still it would have ended there if her curiosity had not led her to confide a description of the stranger to the Police Inspector, with the result you know.”

“Then I am expected to leave town because I accidentally stumbled into a family group that was being photographed?”

“Because a certain Princess was indiscreet enough to show her curiosity about you,” corrected the fair stranger.

“But look here! I’ll apologize to the Princess, and offer to pay for the plate.”

“Then you do want to see the Princess?” said the young girl smiling; “you are like the others.”

“Bother the Princess! I want to see YOU. And I don’t see how they can prevent it if I choose to remain.”

“Very easily. You will find that there is something wrong with your passport, and you will be sent on to Pumpnickel for examination. You will unwittingly transgress some of the laws of the town and be ordered to leave it. You will be shadowed by the police until you quarrel with them—like a free American—and you are conducted to the frontier. Perhaps you will strike an officer who has insulted you, and then you are finished on the spot.”

The American's crest rose palpably until it cocked his straw hat over his curls.

“Suppose I am content to risk it—having first laid the whole matter and its trivial cause before the American Minister, so that he could make it hot for this whole caboodle of a country if they happened to ‘down me.’ By Jove! I shouldn’t mind being the martyr of an international episode if they’d spare me long enough to let me get the first ‘copy’ over to the other side.” His eyes sparkled.

“You could expose them, but they would then deny the whole story, and you have no evidence. They would demand to know your informant, and I should be disgraced, and the Princess, who is already talked about, made a subject of scandal. But no matter! It is right that an American’s independence shall not be interfered with.”

She raised the hem of her handkerchief to her blue eyes and slightly turned her head aside. Hoffman gently drew the handkerchief away, and in so doing possessed himself of her other hand.

“Look here, Miss—Miss—Elsbeth. You know I wouldn’t give you away, whatever happened. But couldn’t I get hold of that photographer—I saw him, he wanted me to sit to him—and make him tell me?”

“He wanted you to sit to him,” she said hurriedly, “and did you?”

“No,” he replied. “He was a little too fresh and previous, though I thought he fancied some resemblance in me to somebody else.”

“Ah!” She said something to herself in German which he did not understand, and then added aloud:

“You did well; he is a bad man, this photographer. Promise me you shall not sit for him.”

“How can I if I’m fired out of the place like this?” He added ruefully, “But I’d like to make him give himself away to me somehow.”

“He will not, and if he did he would deny it afterward. Do not go near him nor see him. Be careful that he does not photograph you with his instantaneous instrument when you are passing. Now you must go. I must see the Princess.”

“Let me go, too. I will explain it to her,” said Hoffman.

She stopped, looked at him keenly, and attempted to withdraw her hands. “Ah, then it IS so. It is the Princess you wish to see. You are curious—you, too; you wish to see this lady who is interested in you. I ought to have known it. You are all alike.”

He met her gaze with laughing frankness, accepting her outburst as a charming feminine weakness, half jealousy, half coquetry—but retained her hands.

“Nonsense,” he said. “I wish to see her that I may have the right to see you—that you shall not lose your place here through me; that I may come again.”

“You must never come here again.”

“Then you must come where I am. We will meet somewhere when you have an afternoon off. You shall show me the town—the houses of my ancestors—their tombs; possibly—if the Grand Duke rampages—the probable site of my own.”

She looked into his laughing eyes with her clear, steadfast, gravely questioning blue ones. “Do not you Americans know that it is not the fashion here, in Germany, for the young men and the young women to walk together—unless they are VERLOBT?”

“VER—which?”

“Engaged.” She nodded her head thrice: viciously, decidedly, mischievously.

“So much the better.”

“ACH GOTT!” She made a gesture of hopelessness at his incorrigibility, and again attempted to withdraw her hands.

“I must go now.”

“Well then, good-by.”

It was easy to draw her closer by simply lowering her still captive hands. Then he suddenly kissed her coldly startled lips, and instantly released her. She as instantly vanished.

“Elsbeth,” he called quickly. “Elsbeth!”

Her now really frightened face reappeared with a heightened color from the dense foliage—quite to his astonishment.

“Hush,” she said, with her finger on her lips. “Are you mad?”

“I only wanted to remind you to square me with the Princess,” he laughed as her head disappeared.

He strolled back toward the gate. Scarcely had he quitted the shrubbery before the same chasseur made his appearance with precisely the same salute; and, keeping exactly the same distance, accompanied him to the gate. At the corner of the street he hailed a droshky and was driven to his hotel.

The landlord came up smiling. He trusted that the Herr had greatly enjoyed himself at the Schloss. It was a distinguished honor—in fact, quite unprecedented. Hoffman, while he determined not to commit himself, nor his late fair companion, was nevertheless anxious to learn something more of her relations to the Schloss. So pretty, so characteristic, and marked a figure must be well known to sightseers. Indeed, once or twice the idea had crossed his mind with a slightly jealous twinge that left him more conscious of the impression she had made on him than he had deemed possible. He asked if the model farm and dairy were always shown by the same attendants.

“ACH GOTT! no doubt, yes; His Royal Highness had quite a retinue when he was in residence.”

“And were these attendants in costume?”

“There was undoubtedly a livery for the servants.”

Hoffman felt a slight republican irritation at the epithet—he knew not why. But this costume was rather a historical one; surely it was not entrusted to everyday menials—and he briefly described it.

His host's blank curiosity suddenly changed to a look of mysterious and arch intelligence.

“ACH GOTT! yes!” He remembered now (with his finger on his nose) that when there was a fest at the Schloss the farm and dairy were filled with shepherdesses, in quaint costume worn by the ladies of the Grand Duke's own theatrical company, who assumed the characters with great vivacity. Surely it was the same, and the Grand Duke had treated the Herr to this special courtesy. Yes—there was one pretty, blonde young lady—the Fraulein Wimpfenbittel, a most popular soubrette, who would play it to the life! And the description fitted her to a hair! Ah, there was no doubt of it; many persons, indeed, had been so deceived.

But happily, now that he had given him the wink, the Herr could corroborate it himself by going to the theater tonight. Ah, it would be a great joke—quite colossal! if he took a front seat where she could see him. And the good man rubbed his hands in gleeful anticipation.

Hoffman had listened to him with a slow repugnance that was only equal to his gradual conviction that the explanation was a true one, and that he himself had been ridiculously deceived. The mystery of his fair companion's costume, which he had accepted as part of the “show”; the inconsistency of her manner and her evident occupation; her undeniable wish to terminate the whole episode with that single interview; her mingling of worldly aplomb and rustic innocence; her perfect self-control and experienced acceptance of his gallantry under the simulated attitude of

simplicity—all now struck him as perfectly comprehensible. He recalled the actress' inimitable touch in certain picturesque realistic details in the dairy—which she had not spared him; he recognized it now even in their bowered confidences (how like a pretty ballet scene their whole interview on the rustic bench was!), and it breathed through their entire conversation—to their theatrical parting at the close! And the whole story of the photograph was, no doubt, as pure a dramatic invention as the rest! The Princess' romantic interest in him—that Princess who had never appeared (why had he not detected the old, well-worn, sentimental situation here?)—was all a part of it. The dark, mysterious hint of his persecution by the police was a necessary culmination to the little farce. Thank Heaven! he had not “risen” at the Princess, even if he had given himself away to the clever actress in her own humble role. Then the humor of the whole situation predominated and he laughed until the tears came to his eyes, and his forgotten ancestors might have turned over in their graves without his heeding them. And with this humanizing influence upon him he went to the theater.

It was capacious even for the town, and although the performance was a special one he had no difficulty in getting a whole box to himself. He tried to avoid this public isolation by sitting close to the next box, where there was a solitary occupant—an officer— apparently as lonely as himself. He had made up his mind that when his fair deceiver appeared he would let her see by his significant applause that he recognized her, but bore no malice for the trick she had played on him. After all, he had kissed her—he had no right to complain. If she should recognize him, and this recognition led to a withdrawal of her prohibition, and their better acquaintance, he would be a fool to cavil at her pleasant artifice. Her vocation was certainly a more independent and original one than that he had supposed; for

its social quality and inequality he cared nothing. He found himself longing for the glance of her calm blue eyes, for the pleasant smile that broke the seriousness of her sweetly restrained lips. There was no doubt that he should know her even as the heroine of DER CZAR UND DER ZIMMERMANN on the bill before him. He was becoming impatient. And the performance evidently was waiting. A stir in the outer gallery, the clatter of sabers, the filing of uniforms into the royal box, and a triumphant burst from the orchestra showed the cause. As a few ladies and gentlemen in full evening dress emerged from the background of uniforms and took their places in the front of the box, Hoffman looked with some interest for the romantic Princess. Suddenly he saw a face and shoulders in a glitter of diamonds that startled him, and then a glance that transfixed him.

He leaned over to his neighbor. "Who is the young lady in the box?"

"The Princess Alexandrine."

"I mean the young lady in blue with blond hair and blue eyes."

"It is the Princess Alexandrine Elsbeth Marie Stephanie, the daughter of the Grand Duke—there is none other there."

"Thank you."

He sat silently looking at the rising curtain and the stage. Then he rose quietly, gathered his hat and coat, and left the box. When he reached the gallery he turned instinctively and looked back at the royal box. Her eyes had followed him, and as he remained a moment motionless in

the doorway her lips parted in a grateful smile, and she waved her fan with a faint but unmistakable gesture of farewell.

The next morning he left Alstadt. There was some little delay at the Zoll on the frontier, and when Hoffman received back his trunk it was accompanied by a little sealed packet which was handed to him by the Customhouse Inspector. Hoffman did not open it until he was alone.

There hangs upon the wall of his modest apartment in New York a narrow, irregular photograph ingeniously framed, of himself standing side by side with a young German girl, who, in the estimation of his compatriots, is by no means stylish and only passably good-looking. When he is joked by his friends about the post of honor given to this production, and questioned as to the lady, he remains silent. The Princess Alexandrine Elsbeth Marie Stephanie von Westphalen-Alstadt, among her other royal qualities, knew whom to trust.