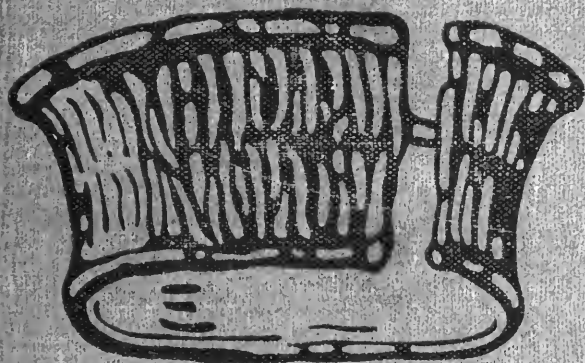


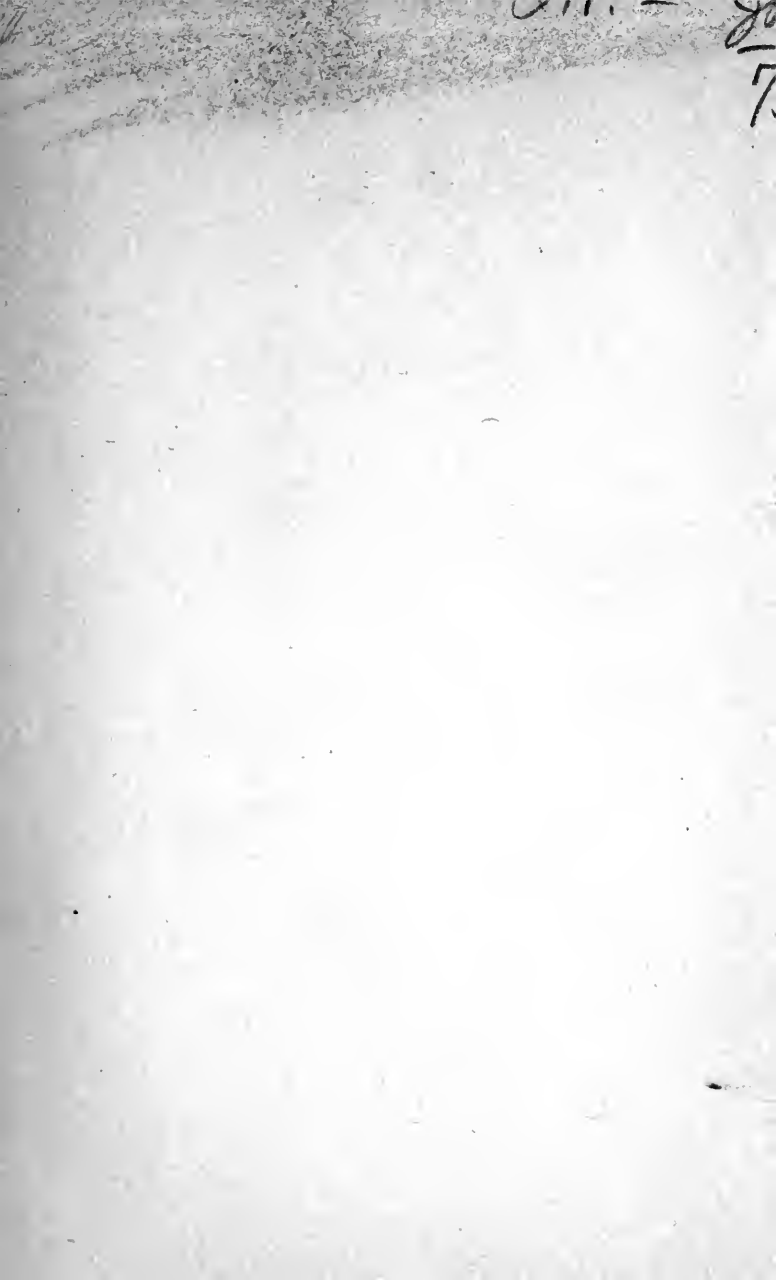
I FASTEN  
A  
BRACELET



DAVID  
POTTER

AN





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IT WAS MORE NEARLY A HANDCUFF THAN A BRACELET. I LOCKED  
IT AND DROPPED THE KEY INTO MY POCKET. *Page 45*



# I FASTEN A BRACELET

BY

**DAVID POTTER**

AUTHOR OF "THE LADY OF THE SPUR,"  
"AN ACCIDENTAL HONEYMOON," ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY  
MARTIN JUSTICE



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON  
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# I FASTEN A BRACELET

## I

### NELL POURS COFFEE

“MISS ELLEN won't be down to breakfast, sir,” said Theresa, humbly enough.

I stared at her. “Won't be down?”

“No, sir. She says for you not to wait breakfast for her, if you please.”

“Tell her I *am* waiting,” I rejoined. “And ask her to come at once.”

“But, sir——”

“Ask her to come at once,” I repeated.

The maid hurriedly withdrew. I turned to the window and gazed out across the valley to the rolling Berkshires. The mist of the autumn morning still hid the Westbrook place on the opposite slope, and the gravelled walks in front of “Red Cedars” were a little cracked by the frost. The day promised to be clear. The early crimson of the trees along the walks accorded with the violent color of my thoughts—thoughts as conflicting as they were violent.

“If you please, sir,” said the maid behind me, “Miss Ellen begs you to excuse her. Mrs. Sutphen will be down at once to pour coffee, sir.”

I faced her abruptly. "Tell Mrs. Sutphen, Miss Ellen and I will breakfast without her," I said with emphasis. "Say to Miss Sutphen I wish her to come immediately. Say I order her to come—order her, do you understand? And you needn't come back—we'll wait on ourselves."

For a moment Theresa's eyes met mine defiantly. "Miss Ellen says she——"

"That will do," I interrupted. "Carry my orders at once. And look here, Theresa! Don't think I don't see through *you*. You'd better not get in my way about here. I know very well you're as deep in this game as any one."

At my chance shot the girl's stubbornness vanished. Her eyes brimmed with tears and her chin trembled. She fumbled in her apron pocket for the handkerchief she could not find. A half sob escaped her.

"Oh, sir, if you please——" She fled from the room.

Again I strolled to the window and gazed across the valley, yet I had to pinch myself to realize that I was not dreaming.

This was Bannocks, there swelled the yellowing Berkshires, and it was the Year of Grace nineteen hundred and ten. These things were real. It was equally certain that I stood in the breakfast-room of "Red Cedars," master not only of the house, but also of Mrs. Constance Sutphen and, above all, of the much-admired Ellen Sutphen. I was master

and determined to take advantage of my mastery—no matter how ungenerously.

The whole situation gratified the underlying instinct of the savage inherent in every man.

I felt a sense of proprietorship as I glanced about. The room was one of the pleasantest in Bannocks. It jutted from a wing of the house in such fashion as to admit light and air on three sides of it. Windows, broad and low, ran about it, and through them the sight of the valley below and the slopes above gave one a mild feeling of floating in space, as in a balloon.

The breakfast table, its snowy doilies and sparkling silver most alluring to a healthy man, had been drawn cosily near a window. The *New York Herald*, duly unfolded and warmed, was spread at my place.

There was a light step in the hallway. I faced about as Ellen Sutphen entered. Without lifting her eyes to meet my glance, she crossed the room and sank into her seat behind the coffee-urn.

“Good-morning,” I said.

She made no answer. Her hands, busied with the breakfast things, shook as they moved. The lids of the eyes she held resolutely on the cups and saucers were rimmed with red.

“Good-morning,” I repeated.

Still she did not reply—a cup rattled against a saucer. I looked from cup to saucer with a surprised air, and spoke for the third time.

"Perhaps you didn't notice that I bade you good-morning, mademoiselle."

Her long lashes were lifted at last—scorn and protest showed in the eyes that met mine an instant.

"Good-morning," she said faintly. Again the lashes swept the white cheeks.

"That's right," I said. "Very well done, indeed. And now that the Sphinx has spoken, I want you to talk naturally, Nell. No sulking, you know. Play the game."

"It's a poor game for us, Mr. Schuyler."

"Craig," I corrected.

She was silent. I leaned a little forward.

"Craig," I insisted.

"Craig." Her voice was hardly audible.

"Good. Don't let's forget *all* the past. Will you pour me some coffee? Thank you."

I watched her without speaking until she had handed me my cup—her eyes did not meet mine. I stirred my coffee with an unconcern that was only apparent.

"Yes," I went on, "I want you not only to be natural, but I want you to be good-humored."

"Good-humored?" she protested.

"Certainly. Merry, debonair." I smiled amiably.

She shivered—I guessed that her hands were clasping each other beneath the table.

"Debonair!" she said almost in a whisper. "Oh, what a mockery! Merry? Debonair? How can I! Be a little reasonable, Craig."



“*You* must be reasonable.” I rested an elbow on the table, and assumed a manner of frank argument. “When one owns a girl, body and soul, he has a right to expect her to behave decently, hasn’t he?”

She raised her head with something of her old hauteur—the chin a little forward, the hazel eyes steady, the neck drawn proudly back. It was the famous “Sutphen look.”

“Own me!” she said. “No—never.”

“I beg your pardon,” I returned. “I didn’t mean that, of course—it was only a figure of speech. And yet, Nell, I do own you, too, in a way. Not the Greek hetaera way, of course—not Eliza and Simon Legree style—but as Aladdin owned the genii, you know. You’ll do as I say—you understand me?”

“Yes.” Her eyes fell.

“You’ll obey me as long as I like, mind! Laugh when I order you to, and cry, if I prefer it? Will you?”

“Yes—if I must.” Her lips barely framed the words.

“Oh, you must,” I said. “There isn’t any way out of it for you, really. I don’t mind saying I’m enjoying the situation, Nell. I’ve waited a good while for my turn—I dare say you don’t blame me for making good use of it now that it’s come.”

“I don’t suppose my blame matters to you—nor my approval.”

“Since you suggest it—perhaps not.”

Beneath the girl's white linen gown I could see her bosom rise tremulously. Her lips parted. The dainty collar about her throat swelled with the pulse that beat suffocatingly there. These things I saw and understood—shame or fear, or both, held her silent. She was in my power, and helpless. I eyed her critically.

She had changed much during the four years I had been absent from the country. Her figure was not quite the same as that which had haunted my dreams by a hundred campfires, yet it was fully as beautiful—more rounded, if not so willowy, more graceful, if not so ethereal.

Her face looked older. Not that a single line marred the texture of the cheek or drew the corners of the rather wide mouth—not that the dark-brown hair had lost one touch of its sheen. These charms were unaltered. But a look of unutterable care stamped the whole face. The slumberous glance of the eyes was gone, and in its place was an anxious questioning.

The indifferent smile that had so put me on my mettle in days gone by—that had so piqued and spurred me—had changed to a droop of the mouth almost pathetic in its wistfulness. The girl's spirit was broken, or at least near the point of breaking.

“Why so silent?” I said aloud. “I'm ready to have you sparkle a little, if you please.”

“Only a Nero could fiddle while Rome was burning,” she returned.

“Joan of Arc laughed when they set fire to the fagots that burned her.”

“But I’m not a Joan of Arc—I wish I were.”

“You mean you’d find a way to oust the enemy?”

“Yes.” Her tense attitude relaxed a little.

“May I ring for Theresa? There’s probably an egg and toast for you.”

“Yes, certainly, ring. Please don’t think I want to interfere with your management of the household—at any rate, under ordinary circumstances. It’s your goings-out and comings-in I must be consulted about. It will be—ah—rather satisfying to refuse you permission to make a call, if I like.”

She pressed the bell without replying. Theresa responded with a promptness I found amusing. As the pretty Swede placed the toastrack and egg-dish on the table, I watched her covertly.

She moved about me as if she were intruding on a tiger or treading near a powder magazine. When her eyes met mine, they were full of a sort of admiring submission. I knew I would have no more trouble with Theresa—her defiance was crumbled once for all.

I glanced over my newspaper until the maid had served us and departed—her eyes lingered on me as the door swung behind her. I chipped my egg.

“Now then,” I said expectantly, “you can go on, Nell.”

“Go on?”

“Yes—you can sparkle.”

She rested her chin on her hands, her elbows on the table, and looked at me. Her eyes were startlingly large in contrast with the dead-white of her cheeks.

"I'm afraid I can't."

"Oh, yes, you can, really. Tell me something about yourself. One moment—you aren't eating anything."

"Eat?" she said with loathing. "No, no—please don't make me do that. I simply can't eat—please, Craig."

"All right—only I don't want you to be ill."

"No such luck—for me."

"Come, don't be gloomy. If you would eat a little breakfast, I'm sure it would help the blues materially. Never mind! Tell me about yourself."

"Myself?" For the first time a ghost of a smile twitched her lips. "I'm not a very interesting subject of conversation."

"Oh, yes, you are—to me. What have you been doing with yourself all these years?"

"What do we all do?" she answered. "A little of Paris—a good deal of New York—more of Newport and—here. The same old round—teas, and all the rest."

"Late dinners, and morning cocktails?" I suggested.

"Late dinners, yes, but morning cocktails, no. I despise them."

"Good—so do I. But what about the human side of the same old round? Personalities are

what count in this sad world. Who have been your friends since I went over the horizon?"

A faint color crept into her cheeks. "My friends? I fancy the list would bore you."

"Your men friends I mean, of course."

"I haven't had any—not the sort you mean. Tom Bullitt and Harold Winston have been here occasionally and—and——"

"And who?"

"And Aleck Westbrook." She smiled faintly. "He's too young to count, though."

"A nice boy," I commented. "At any rate, he promised to be, when I last saw him. Is that all?"

"Ye-es, I think so."

"Not quite," I said. "I've read the newspapers, if I have been in Sumatra. Haven't you left out somebody, Nell?"

This time the color in her cheeks grew to a real blush.

"Well, Carlos Beauchamp was over last year."

"Carlos Beauchamp?" I repeated. It was only what I had expected to hear, yet I liked it none the more for that. I eyed her with an insolence that might well have reminded her of the gentleman in question.

"There's an acquaintance you're better without," I said.

"In your opinion."

"Certainly—and my opinion prevails here. Please understand you're through with *him*," I concluded rather savagely.

## II

### INVITATIONS ARE DECIDED UPON

A LONG silence followed my announcement anent Mr. Carlos Beauchamp—a silence doubtless painful enough to one of us, at least. Presently she made an effort to seem at ease.

“What about yourself?” she asked. “It’s fair you should confess a little, isn’t it? You can a tale unfold?”

“I don’t mind,” I said, “but it’s too long to tell. Six months on the Continent—three in Africa—two years or so in the far East, and the last part of the time back on the boulevards again.”

“You really explored things, didn’t you?”

“A little. Here!—The eagle-eyed and always-truthful Associated Press has had its eye on me apparently. See it for yourself.”

I handed her the *Herald*, my finger on the passage that had attracted my attention. She read it aloud—her voice was always soft and low—an English voice:

“Among the notable arrivals on the *Lusitania* yesterday morning were Count Nakimura, the Japanese general, Mr. Carlos Beau—” her voice faltered an instant—“Beauchamp of London and Havana, and Mr. Craig Schuyler of New York. Mr. Schuyler’s presence will be particularly welcomed by his friends in this city, his long absence abroad having given rise to the rumor that he had intended to become

a regular expatriate. As has been several times stated in these columns, Mr. Schuyler has been engaged in extensive travel and exploration in the Far East. It is said he has penetrated parts of Sumatra never before reached by a white man, and that he has participated in some of the battles between the Achinese and the Dutch."

Ellen looked up from her reading. "Did you?" she asked. "Were you really in the fighting? I hadn't heard that before."

"Yes. I fought all through one of their campaigns, such as they are. The war there is perpetual, you know."

She read on:

"We have the best authority for stating that there is no truth in the rumor extensively circulated in New York and Newport some months since, to the effect that Mr. Schuyler's prolonged stay in Sumatra has been due to the fascinations of a certain native princess. One who is close to Mr. Schuyler positively denies any knowledge of such a state of affairs."

"Good for Dirck!" I exclaimed.

She laid down the paper. "Who is Dirck?"

"Dirck DuBois, my man-of-all-talents—my hunter in Sumatra, just at present my chauffeur, and I'm not ashamed to call him my friend. He drove the car up last night. Probably you didn't know how I got here—in the excitement."

She evaded my allusion. "The Sumatran princess sounds interesting. Is she as interesting as she sounds?"

"If she is, she's ten thousand miles away."

“Then you won’t confess about her?”

“No, thank you. Let bygones be bygones.”

She let a long sigh escape her, as if she found it difficult to keep up a pretence of good-humored interest. She leaned her cheek on her left hand so that I could see only part of her face, and gazed out the window. It was a movement of dejection—almost of resignation. Her slender figure drooped a little—the girl was tired—tired not in body but in mind.

For a while I, too, was content to sit in silence. My eyes, roving the slope of the hill outside the window, hardly saw the tall elms that hedged “Westbrook Place,” nor the grocer’s electric delivery-wagon climbing the grade below it. They saw a stream slipping between reedy banks, green and gold sunbirds flashing above it, and where the river curved below a forest of feather-bamboo, a girl, black-haired and slim, waiting, waiting.

Our eyes roved absently from the window. We gazed blankly at each other, each striving to come back to the real world. She was the first to arouse herself.

“A penny for your thoughts,” she said faintly.

“Tuppence for yours. Suppose I should really insist upon them?”

“‘My mind to me a kingdom is,’” she quoted.

“Very well,” I rejoined. “There are some things I won’t demand of you.”

“Will you have another cup of coffee?” she asked.



“Thank you, no. I wish you felt like eating something, Nell.”

She gave me a look that was almost grateful. My answering smile must have encouraged her to express the thought uppermost in her mind.

“You won’t want me any more to-day, will you, Craig? My services can be dispensed with?”

I answered her question by another. “Have you a headache—honor bright?”

Her mouth was a little compressed, but she answered bravely. “I haven’t come to lying—yet.”

“I know it,” I said quickly. “I beg your pardon, Nell. I didn’t mean——”

“You’ve had cause enough to doubt me, I admit,” she returned. “No, I haven’t a headache. I suppose—on the stage—they’d call it a heart-ache.”

“I see. Then I won’t want you to-day, but I will to-night.”

“To-night?” Her eyes widened. Their deep hazel took on a sudden amber glow, steady and strong. Her chin was resolute.

“To-night at dinner, you know,” I explained carelessly.

“At dinner?”

“Yes—and have some people in, if you will. It needn’t be many—about three couples will be enough, don’t you think?”

“Three too many! A formal dinner—here—to-night!”

I affected to misunderstand her exclamation. "Oh, nothing formal. It's too short notice for that, isn't it? If you'll write the notes I'll just send Dirck around in the car—that'll be easy enough. If it's too sudden to suit anyone, he or she can decline, and we can try the next one. One can always pick up a spare man or girl somewhere."

"Craig!" she cried, almost in a wail, "you can't mean it! You can't be in earnest!"

"What? Certainly I am—why not? A very suitable occasion for a little impromptu dinner, isn't it? It will probably be in the *Herald* to-morrow: 'a welcome to the distinguished explorer, Mr. Craig Schuyler' and all that—a *recherché* little affair given by his hostesses, Mrs. Sutphen and her charming daughter.' I can fancy how it will run: 'It will be remembered that, before his abrupt departure from America some four years ago, Miss Sutphen and Mr. Schuyler——' and so forth, and so forth."

She stretched both hands toward me in a sudden gesture, imploring and passionate.

"Craig! Think! How can we sit at dinner—laugh and smile and *talk*, as if nothing had happened."

"Nothing has happened," I rejoined, "that is, so far as they're concerned—outsiders, I mean. They don't know anything, and I promise you they won't learn anything from what I'll say or do. You needn't be afraid of that."

“But a dinner with you there! I’m sure I can’t stand it.”

“I’ll be the skeleton at the feast? Well, I think you’ll have to endure it—I fancy you’ll survive.”

Her lips quivered ominously, and her eyes were suspiciously bright. She may have imagined that her pleading would move me—until the night before she had never had to ask anything of me twice. Now my careless indifference to her wishes crushed her. She put one hand to her cheek—I knew she was holding back the tears until she fairly ached with the pain of it.

“Craig,” she said, “please—don’t make me.”

For a moment I feared for my own resolution. I rose from the table and, walking to the fireplace, faced about toward her. She, too, had risen, and was standing in the middle of the room. The morning sunlight, glancing through the squares of glass, shone on her hair. Her slender figure swayed a little. She strove to keep her teeth from pressing her lower lip.

“Please, Craig, don’t make me,” she repeated.

But I had ceased to waver. “Really,” I said, “I thought I’d made my position clear. We arranged it all last night, didn’t we? What’s the use of fighting the battle over again! Don’t let’s have a scene, Nell—leave all that to your mother. As she remarked last night, my conduct isn’t generous, certainly—not even gentlemanly, perhaps—in fact, I believe she said I was an out-and-out

bounder. That wasn't a very judicious remark for a lady in her awkward position, by the way. But let it go—I admit I'm playing the bounder—and I don't care. I don't want to be brutal—at least, not any more brutal than necessary—but I've got you both in the hollow of my hand, and I don't intend to let you go—not easily. I'm perfectly willing to answer to your brother whenever he comes—I suppose you've sent for him, haven't you?"

"Ned? No!"

"You haven't had a chance? Well, I'll argue my conduct with Ned if he should turn up. In the meanwhile I want the dinner to come off. I want the pleasure of sitting at your table and feeling that it's really mine. That's my whim, and I'll gratify whatever whim I please just now."

"Please!"

"It's no use," I said. "I'll ask you to write the notes at once. Let's see—whom shall we ask? Aleck Westbrook and his sister are two—I'd almost forgotten poor Rex had a sister—she must be quite grown-up. Are the Willy Archers here?"

She nodded miserably.

"That'll make four. And John and Augusta Savarton—I saw by the papers they were here. There's our six. Yes, and old General Savarton for your mother. Do you think of anyone better? I'll go in to dinner with *you*, if you'll allow me the honor."

She spoke with difficulty, her face very white.

“I can see you’ve something back of this. Craig, you didn’t use to sneer so terribly!”

“I didn’t have cause.”

“Surely you don’t mean to tell them—everything—to-night.”

“Heaven forbid! I promise you I’ll behave decently in that direction. It would be no satisfaction to me to have them know. I’ll be more than polite—more than respectful—never fear!”

“What do you mean?”

“Wait and see,” I said airily.

She stared at me. Then the tears brimmed her eyes and slipped down her cheeks.

She did not sob, but stood so for a long moment. Then, not even lifting her hands to her face, she turned and left the room.

### III

#### A GIRL DISOBEYS ORDERS

I ROUSED myself from the comfortable chair in the library. I had been reading and musing a good hour since breakfast.

I fumbled through a pile of photographs on the table—there was Ellen, in a dozen different costumes at a dozen ages. At another time I might be interested in comparing the innocent looks of the older likenesses with those taken more recently—there was more than one of the former that had its memory for me. But now I felt restless, disposed to roam about the house, to play the troll with Mrs. Sutphen, or Ellen, or even with Theresa, if I happened to encounter her.

So presently I wandered into the drawing-room. It was a rather small apartment, for the library, dining-room and wide hall took up more than their share of the lower floor of "Red Cedars." But small as it was, it was well-lighted by broad windows, as were all the rooms in the house, and pleasantly garnished with divans, pillows, and a piano.

I seated myself, and struck a few chords—it was long since I had touched an instrument. My mind went back to other days, and I began to sing:

“ Here in wind-swept Balabac  
I look from my palm-tree dome,  
Southward o'er the ocean track  
Eyes and heart together roam—  
Eyes and heart with longing seek  
Your dear boat above the foam.  
Happy tears are on my cheek,  
Dreaming that my love is home.”

Just outside the window—opened for the morning airing—a man's subdued voice repeated the chorus of the song—his tenor chiming with my bass as it had done a hundred times before:

“ Happy tears are on my cheek,  
Dreaming that my love is home.”

I struck the final chord, then strolled to the window and looked out.

Dirck DuBois was polishing my car, humming as he worked. He was a man of twenty-eight or thirty, deep-chested and stocky. On first consideration of his straight, fair hair and blue eyes—not to mention his tenor voice—a stranger might think him a model of peasant simplicity—an impression by no means justified by the man's real character. He had been in more than one tight place with me, and had the courage of one of Napoleon's grenadiers.

While he wrestled with an erring carbureter, Theresa stood as close to him as the imminent danger of soiling her white apron would permit. Her eyes watched him admiringly, and her clever little tongue plied him with flattery.

“You’re awful smart to do all that, Mr. DuBois. You handle all those—those things like I would a needle.”

Dirck was halfway under the car by this time, and only grunted pleasantly in acknowledgment of her compliment.

“I don’t see how you can do it so. My! I wish I was strong like a man. I wish I was a man anyhow, if I could be like you.”

Dirck took a screw from his mouth. “I prefer you as you are ma’am’selle, if you please. You’re far more charming as you are, I assure you.”

“Do you think so really, Mr. DuBois? You’re just guyin’ me, ain’t you? I guess I ain’t half as nice as lots of girls you’ve seen travelling. You’ve been everywheres, haven’t you?”

“Everywhere except heaven and hell, Ma’am’selle Theresa, and I have no doubt I will visit one or the other in good time—probably——” His conclusion was lost in the clatter of his monkey-wrench.

The maid smoothed her apron. “Have you always been with Mr. Schuyler, Mr. DuBois?”

“Not always. I was born, perhaps, two years before monsieur. He failed to employ me during those years—such thoughtlessness is not like monsieur.” The fellow never moved a muscle of his face.

Theresa dropped her voice insinuatingly, and smoothed her apron afresh. “Is it true what they



say of him, Mr. DuBois? Is he married to one of those savages out there?"

"Oh, no, ma'am'selle," returned Dirck deprecatingly, "not married."

"You know what I mean. Did he have—was he—did he *pretend* to be married to anybody? Of course, their heathen ways ain't the same as a real wedding. I suppose he called it that, though. They say here he's been real wicked out in—China, wasn't it?"

Dirck laid down the monkey-wrench and handful of waste, and rose to his knees.

"Ma'am'selle," he said solemnly, "will you promise never to tell as long as you live?"

"Oh, yes," said Theresa eagerly.

"Ah, you promise, but can a woman keep a secret?"

"I can—I'll never tell. What is it?"

Dirck looked about with a great air of caution.

"Well, then, monsieur had seven wives."

"Seven!"

"Yes, ma'am'selle—all at the same time."

"Oh, my!"

"I assure you. And every evening they dined with him, extremely décolletée."

"Oh, Mr. DuBois!"

"It is quite true." His face assumed an expression of pleased recollection. "They were a lovely sight, ma'am'selle. First one would see their seven smooth necks——"

But Theresa waited to hear no more. With a horrified giggle she snatched up her skirt and ran for it.

Dirck stared after her open-mouthed. I declare the man did not even smile, until I hailed him.

“Good-morning, Dirck. That’s a frightful reputation you’ve been giving me. Theresa will think I’m a real Bluebeard.”

He faced about and touched his cap, his eyes twinkling, his lips on a broad grin.

“Good-morning, monsieur. That little piece wants to know more than is good for her, perhaps. I gave you as many wives as a Solomon.”

“You shocked her.”

“Ah, no—she was not so shocked as she pretended. Hardly, monsieur, I think. Ma’am’selle Theresa has a certain light in the back of her eyes—she was not born yesterday. It is well to play the innocent, however, until it is time to do otherwise. I like a woman none the less for that.”

“You’re a cynic, Dirck.”

“I have been three years with monsieur.”

“You have me there. Well, we’ve been here ten hours or so—how do you like the place so far?”

“The *chef* is French, the butler is English, one of the maids is Irish, and the other is Theresa. I am satisfied.”

“I’m glad of it. I may stay here some time.”

“As monsieur pleases.” His eyes lighted and he waved his hand toward the surrounding hills. “The

forest, is it not charming? It is not the jungle we know, but yet charming in its way. Is there game, perhaps? I would like to feel a rifle in my hands again."

"A few rabbits, I suppose. Maybe a fox or two has escaped the Hunt and the natives' poison. By the way, I think Miss Sutphen and I will take a turn in the hills, after you've delivered some notes she's writing."

"Yes, monsieur. Theresa brought them to me just now." He touched the pocket of his leather coat. "Where shall I meet monsieur and mademoiselle? Mademoiselle Sutphen went out nearly an hour ago, as monsieur knows."

"Eh! What?" I exclaimed. "She went out? What the devil——" I checked myself. "Oh, of course, I'd forgotten. Yes, about an hour ago. Which way did she go?"

Although I tried to control myself, my face must have betrayed my exasperation at Ellen's defiance of my orders. I had told her expressly that she was to go nowhere without my permission.

Dirck averted his eyes and adjusted his wrench with elaborate care. He knew he had touched the nerve of some serious matter, and strove to put me at my ease. He answered carelessly.

"Mademoiselle went as if for a walk—up the hill, I think. I hardly noticed." He stooped and pulled at the emergency-brake. "This clutch—it is a little awkward of late."

“Well,” I said, “deliver the notes as soon as you can.” I was about to turn from the window. “Oh, by the way, Dirck, come to my room to-night—after dinner sometime. I’ve a little business to talk over with you.”

“Yes, monsieur. At twelve o’clock?”

“Thereabouts. Up the hill, you said?”

“Yes, monsieur.”

I returned to the library—to think. Why had Ellen disobeyed me, and how had she dared to act against my wishes even in the smallest degree? Surely she could not have so chafed under my yoke—so recently imposed—as to have determined to let me do my worst, regardless of consequences. She would shrink from them for her mother’s sake if not for her own. Disobedience for the mere sake of defiance was impossible.

I had told her that she must consult me about her goings-out and comings-in, and that I would refuse her permission to make a call, if I so desired. And yet she had left the house without my knowledge. She had disobeyed me in this little matter, she might do so in a greater—it was necessary to call a halt at once. I would find her and punish her forthwith in a way she could not forget.

To make this resolution was easy, but to carry it out was a different matter. She had gone for a walk, with or without an objective, but whither?—into the hills, or simply to make a morning call at any one of half a dozen cottages within the radius of a mile or so? I would chance it.

In my dressing-room I speedily got myself into my favorite walking togs—laced half-boots, flexible and fitting like a glove—a design of my own; army khaki trousers, not too tight; a loose coat, cut very short, and a soft hat. I had tramped many a mile through the dank Sumatran jungle in that rig.

From the bottom of my dressing case I drew a certain African curio. It was a bracelet of iron, not very thick but nearly two inches broad. Being native-wrought, the quality of the work was so crude that the ore had retained almost its original color—a dark red. It was quite plain in design, except where it clasped, or rather locked, for the thing was secured by a regular key of considerable size.

The lock was the most curious part of the bracelet. It was shaped into the face of a Nubian. The face, expressive of a thousand years of uncomplaining submission, looked up at one as if momentarily expecting to feel the sting of the lash or the blow of the slave-driver's fist. The native smith who had wrought that face must himself have marched many a weary mile yoked in the slave caravan.

I dropped bracelet and key into my coat-pocket. Then I picked up my gloves, found a stick, and sallied out of the house.

## IV

### APPLE-PIE WITH CREAM

AT a sheer venture I struck into the road that wound up the hill. I had gone only a few rods when a slim blonde girl on horseback appeared around the curve, followed by a groom.

I lifted my hat as she trotted past. She returned the bow but so distantly that I knew she had not recognized me. Small wonder! I had not seen Norah Westbrook for nearly four years, and my face, burned by tropic suns, was well-nigh as dark as a Malay's.

I glanced after her, admiring the easy swing of her body and the curve of the boot beneath the dark-blue riding habit. Presently she turned her head to look back at me—the sight of me had puzzled her. I could see recognition dawning in her eyes. At another time I would have relished a chat with her, but at present I was too absorbed in running down my fugitive—a fugitive from justice, I reflected grimly.

Yet, as I walked briskly into the hills, my thoughts returned to Norah Westbrook. She had been only a long-legged, rangey girl when I had left home—a very fair counterpart of her brother, Aleck, as I remembered him. Now, my brief glimpse had found her a charming woman. I

reckoned over the time—she must be twenty, and probably had been out a year or two.

She was one of the guests invited for the dinner that night—I began to feel impatient to make acquaintance with this new embodiment of a childish fancy. I had given Norah toys when she was a baby, and candy as she grew into a schoolgirl. Her older brother, Rex, had been one of my dearest friends. Poor fellow! typhoid fever had taken him off four years before—not long before my last interview with the Sutphens, that interview which had driven me wandering.

Norah's eyes had fallen on me, blue and clear and steady—her face had begun to lighten as she looked. I could swear she would be worth the knowing.

I wondered what I would read in those eyes if the heart beneath them could know of my attitude toward Ellen Sutphen. Perhaps they would be filled with scorn of me—me ungenerous, unkind, lacking in chivalry and decency. Perhaps, however, they would not speak until they had had a chance to see more, to find the just cause of my brutal attitude. Even as a child, Norah had had a certain serenity of judgment, the more conspicuous since it was in contrast to Aleck's headlong character. I brought myself up with a jerk—here was a pretty to-do over a pair of eyes!

It was one thing for me to start out at a venture to find my runaway, but it was quite another to have

that venture bring any satisfactory result. That afternoon I found Berkshire Township uncomfortably large.

I tramped to the Halfway House on the road to Mount Airy, and then to Mount Airy Inn itself. Ellen was in neither place, nor had anyone seen her. I had no better luck at the Tollgate along the Stockwell road.

Oak Leaf Lodge on Tulquam Lake, the only other place I could think of, was destitute of guests. The boathouse keeper complained mournfully that not a single canoe had been launched that day—"he reckoned as ha-ow it was a lee-tle cold for boat-tin'."

I realized at last that I was on the wildest of wild-goose chases, but I did not greatly care. I walked steadily, if at random, until the day was nearly over—I had gotten a bite of lunch at Oak Leaf Lodge.

My exasperation against Ellen, instead of increasing with the realization that I was searching for a needle in a haystack, diminished with every mile I walked. I was more and more able to enjoy the crimsoning maples, the red-cheeked apples in the orchards beside the road, and the scarlet banners of the sumac flaming across bits of swampy ground.

Unless Ellen were really in a frenzy of fear and remorse, I knew she could no longer be roaming about the countryside. She must have returned home and, by this time, was making her household



preparations for the dinner to-night. I fancied her lips were trembling even as she ordered matters, and her hazel eyes widening as she thought of the inevitable meeting with me.

My heart softened a little at thought of the appealing glance she would be sure to give me. I promised myself that I would not be harsh with her after all. Perhaps I would even forego the purpose with which I had dropped the iron bracelet in my pocket. If I relented, she might be bound more helplessly than if I carried matters with a high hand.

She had looked very tired at breakfast. Tired and pitiful, too, I confessed. Well, it was the way I had hoped to make her look—hoped it ever since I had received a cablegram from the United States, in Paris a month before.

The afternoon was nearly spent before I could make up my mind to abandon my idle ramble. Finally a glance at my watch proved that, if I expected to reach "Red Cedars" in time to dress for dinner without hurrying, I must start homeward at once.

I came to this determination at a point where a sizable river brawled down a gorge whose sides flamed in autumn colors. It was a neighborhood wholly new to me—I was rather at a loss to determine in what direction Bannocks and "Red Cedars" lay.

At the highest point of the road that skirted the

valley, a cottage peeped from an apple-orchard. No doubt its occupant would be able to point out my homeward course.

I ascended the road, lured almost as much by the blushing cheeks of the apples in the orchard, and the cozy shyness of the nestling cottage, as by the desire to learn my way. Glancing back as I gained the higher ground, I saw that a village straggled in the hollow below me—the cottage in the apple-trees sat like a vidette upon the hill above it.

A low stone wall surrounded the cottage and its grove. The house—white-clapboarded and green-shuttered—was set on a tiny plateau close to the edge of the gorge. The wind sighed through the apple-trees, and from far below I caught the ceaseless murmur of the river. It was a quiet rustic home, yet I thought—not at all relevantly—of the Dark Tower to which Rolande came.

Over the gate swung a little sign, neatly painted in white letters on a black board:

FRESH APPLE-PIE  
WITH CREAM  
SOLD HERE.

The sight of this legend cheered me immensely. I would be certain to find a person of some intelligence in the house—a farmer's wife or daughter—who would know where and how far off Bannocks

lay; and furthermore, I promised myself a goodly slice of homemade pie, "with cream," to sustain me on my homeward tramp.

With this pleasing prospect in my mind's eye, I turned through the gateway, mounted the steps, and knocked at the cottage door.

Silence followed my knock. Then arose a skurry of feet within, and sounds that might have been hurried whispers.

"A stranger disturbs these rustics," I reflected. "Probably they don't see a customer after their pie and cream more than once a week."

I repeated my knock with sufficient emphasis. "Come, patient Mariana," I muttered aloud, "your faithless lover is here at last." There was no response. "Come, Phyllis," I urged, "come, fairest maiden of the wood, and open to your wandering shepherd lad." A door slammed within—I beat lustily on the portal. "What, Phyllis, unkind——"

The door opened and a girl stood before me. She was not the usual type of country lass, round-cheeked, plump and rosy. On the contrary, she was thin and rather pale, and her eyes, large and soft, had dark shadows beneath them. She wore a plain muslin gown, but I noticed it was freshly starched. Her hair lay in neat coils about her head.

"Good afternoon," I said.

She spoke in a confusion that accorded with her frightened eyes. "Good afternoon—sir."

I was at once aware that something beyond mere rustic embarrassment at sight of a stranger had produced the girl's pallor and cramped her tongue—she did not look like one to be upset so easily. Instantly I was on edge for a new experience, perhaps for a real adventure.

I lifted my hat and summoned my most engaging smile.

"I see you sell apple-pies," I said. "I haven't eaten one since I was a boy, and I feel I need one immediately. Will you——"

"Oh, apple-pie!" interrupted the girl in what was almost an exclamation of relief. "Is that all? Pies? Oh, yes, sir. No, sir, I mean."

"But you have the sign up," I protested.

She followed my pointing finger as if she had never seen the words before. "Fresh apple-pie, with cream, sold here," I repeated.

"Oh, I mean we're all out of them."

"Out of them?" I answered laughing. "Then you ought to take that sign down. I'd my mind all made up for an apple-pie—with cream."

The girl smiled faintly. "I'm sorry, sir. We're—we're all out to-day. We—haven't baked this week."

I stepped quietly past her. "There's one you've overlooked," I said. "You mean you haven't baked any for sale, of course. I see there's a fresh one on the table there."

The girl had half extended her arm as if she

would have prevented my entrance. She blushed to the eyes at my inquiring glance. I pointed to the delectable concoction on the table of the small room. Its rich brown surface was still smoking from the oven.

“I hope even if you were saving it for your own supper,” I went on, “you’ll surrender it to me.”

To my surprise she began to wrap the pie without a word and in evident haste. While she was thus engaged I gazed about the place.

We were in the living-room, plainly but neatly furnished. At one side, as I now saw, was a row of shelves fairly-well garnished with pies. A little earlier in the day the room would have been flooded in sunlight, but at that hour, the sun, lowering across the valley, merely touched the shelves, the girl’s pale face, and the very apple-pie, with crimson fingers.

To my right a door stood a trifle ajar—through the crack I caught a glimpse of a sort of gallery that seemed to overlook the gorge.

I happened to glance at the girl. She was watching me furtively. A sunbeam made a scarlet gash across her cheek.

I strolled carelessly toward the door ajar. The girl, pretending to devote her whole attention to wrapping the precious pie, could hardly contain her anxiety.

“Do you want anything, sir? You can get a drink of water at the pump, in the kitchen.”

“I was wondering what you have here,” I said, moving toward the inner door. “It looks like a summer garden.”

“No, sir. The door doesn’t lead anywhere.”

“A door that doesn’t lead anywhere?” I laughed. “That *is* unusual, isn’t it?”

“Of course—my room,” she stammered with increasing agitation. “That’s private, sir—you can’t go there—oh!” I had pushed the door wide.

Before I could wink a man stepped past me, and crossing the room in two strides, disappeared down a back hall.

On the balcony, the slender figure and white face of Ellen Sutphen confronted me. I had found the fugitive.

## V

### I FASTEN A BRACELET

FOR a moment Ellen and I faced each other—neither moved nor spoke. A door slammed at the end of a passageway—her eyes widened.

No doubt she expected me to assail her with a savage or sarcastic remark. If she had been defiant, I might, indeed, have adopted the former tone; if pleading, perhaps the latter—but she was neither the one nor the other.

Her cheeks were very white, but she displayed neither scorn nor fear of me. A sort of listlessness held her whole body, like that which pervades a prisoner who has been tortured to the last extremity and is indifferent to further suffering. Utter apathy was all I could read in her pale face.

Through the open doorway I could see the country girl staring in our direction, her lips parted as if she were straining every nerve to listen, her hands still mechanically wrapping the apple-pie.

Across the valley, the brilliant colors of the maples and hickories and chestnuts had begun to soften with the declining sun. Far below, the river murmured against its rocks.

I looked at Ellen. She still stood motionless, her eyes unfathomable, her hands clasping a little swaggerstick she carried. The curve of cheek, neck

and shoulder was outlined in gold by the sunlight behind her.

I motioned toward the door—she started at my gesture. I held the door open and she passed me with lowered head and faintly-flushing cheeks. I followed close.

“You needn’t mind about the pie,” I said to the staring girl. “We won’t stop to eat it.”

Her glance swept from me to Ellen. “I suppose—you’ll be back, Ellen?”

“I—I think not, Mary,” answered my captive. “Not to-day.”

“I think not, too,” I volunteered.

The country girl ignored me. “When can you come?” she asked.

“I—don’t know—when.” A look of understanding passed between the two women.

It was only when Ellen and I were climbing the rough path up the hill that I remembered I had forgotten to inquire the way home. I spoke to her for the first time that afternoon.

“It’s getting rather late. Do you know the road to Bannocks?”

“Yes,” she answered in a low tone. “We’re going in the right direction. This is a short cut.”

I followed her without further remark. She walked steadily, her body bending from the waist to meet the stiff ascent. I congratulated myself, that in spite of my ever-smouldering resentment against the girl, I was able to appreciate the deli-



cate curves of her figure—the straightness of her back, the soft slope of her shoulders.

So we emerged from the woods and followed the path across a down. Only the rustle of the grass and the sound of our footsteps broke the evening stillness.

Suddenly Ellen whirled about. Her eyes met mine defiantly, and her cheeks were scarlet.

“Well,” she said, “you haven’t asked me his name!”

“His name?” I answered stupidly. “Whose?”

“The man you saw——”

“The man I saw with you in the cottage,” I finished. “No, so I haven’t. What’s the use?”

The color began to fade from her cheeks. “You mean—I’d lie to you?”

“No, not at all. I’m not afraid of that—I know you wouldn’t lie. You’ve already committed all the deception you’re capable of. I know that.”

“But I’ve just deceived you by coming to Mary Finney’s cottage.”

Half-whimsically I defended the girl against herself. “No, I don’t call that deception—it’s disobedience, flat disobedience. Not so bad as deception, but bad enough. I told you I didn’t want you to leave the house without my permission, but I don’t remember that you promised anything.”

“No-o-o. Then—you don’t know who he is?”

“I haven’t the least idea—I never saw him before.”

She seemed strangely pertinacious of a subject one might have supposed she would be glad to drop as soon as possible.

“You aren’t going to make me tell who he is?”

“I scorn to force a lady’s confidence. I’m not interested in the man—it’s you I’m after.”

“Oh.”

“Yes. You left the house against my express orders, didn’t you?”

“Yes—I did.”

“You’ll have to be punished for it then.”

She gave me a quick glance. “Am I not being punished—every minute?” she said.

“For past offenses, yes. You must have a particular punishment for disobedience. Give me your stick.”

She was quite pale by this time. She yielded me the silver-tipped cane with a singular gesture, half-imploing, half-menacing.

“If—if you——” Her voice died away. With an effort she began again. “If you strike me with that——”

“Heaven forbid!” I exclaimed. “It hasn’t come to that. No, I merely want your left arm free so that I can put my mark on it. A mark you won’t soon forget.”

“Not—not with the swaggerstick?”

“I promise you, no. Hold out your arm.”

She obeyed, watching the motions of my fingers as a bird watches the snake that holds it fascinated.

“What are you doing?” she said at last.

I felt in my pocket and drew out the iron bracelet.

“This,” I answered, and slipped the trinket on her arm—it was more nearly a handcuff than a bracelet. I locked it with a single turn of the key, and dropped the key into my pocket.

“You can disobey me, but you’ll have to wear the badge to pay for it.”

“The badge?”

“Yes—of servitude. In Africa they put that thing on slaves.”

She looked at the two-inch band of iron that gripped her arm so lightly yet so irrevocably. The submissive, abject face—the face of the Nubian bondsman—gazed up at her from the quaint lock.

I could not see her eyes, but I knew she was watching me through the veiling lashes.

“So a slave has worn this—in Africa?”

“I took it from one myself.”

“And a slave is to wear it here?”

“You have the point exactly.”

“That’s fair.”

In spite of myself I felt a thrill of admiration.

“By Jove, Nell, you’re game!”

Again—as at breakfast that morning—she gave me the little ghost of a smile.

“Now,” I said, “we must hurry, if we want to reach home in good time, in fact in any time at all. Don’t forget you’ve a dinner on to-night.”

She led the way at once, and we hurried across the downs. Her right hand furtively touched the bracelet from time to time. Presently her soft profile was turned toward me as she walked.

“At dinner to-night—how can I explain—this?” She held up her left hand.

“Don’t explain it.”

“But someone will be sure to ask me where I got it, and what it means. Dot Archer probes into everything, and Augusta is worse, if possible. This—is rather unusual, you know.”

“It *is* unusual,” I agreed.

“You don’t mean to tell them——”

“No, nothing. If anyone inquires about it, say it’s a gift from me—that’s true. They’ll probably take it for Grecian hammered copper—you see its reddish color.”

“Yes. It isn’t a nasty black like most iron. It is iron, isn’t it?”

“Yes—native manufacture. That’s why the red shows so plainly. Leave impertinent questioners to me. I’ll tell them it’s a bit of Egyptian bronze I received as a love-token from the Queen of Sheba. That ought to satisfy the most exacting.”

“You aren’t as cruel as you might be—Craig.”

“Thank you, ma’am—don’t count on that, though. I could be worse if I tried. You wear that bracelet for *my* satisfaction, not for others’—that’s all.”

She was silent. I saw only the white neck, and the darkly-shining hair waving to her soft gray hat.

I wondered what she was thinking about, and could have laughed aloud when presently a defiant declaration floated back to me.

“At any rate, I vow I *won't* wear short sleeves to-night.”

“I never could presume to act as arbiter of a woman's gowns,” I assured her. “Do you still wear white a good deal, Nell?”

She gave me a glimpse of her profile—the curve of her cheek a little hard.

“No. I wear black mostly now. It's more suitable, isn't it?”

“You're only twenty-three.”

“I'm not thinking of my age.”

“Oh, I see,” I returned. “Perhaps you're right.”

By this time we had crossed the upland and were following the path about a hill. The deepening shadows made me glance at my watch.

“It's nearly six o'clock. How far are we from 'Red Cedars'?”

“Nearly five miles, I think. We'll be in good time, but we must hurry.”

“Are you sure you know the way?” I persisted.

“Perfectly. I've come this path very often——”

She broke off abruptly. The frightened glance

she stole at me showed that she was aware she had said too much. I did not fail to take advantage of her slip.

“So you come often to that cottage? Whose is it—Mary Finney’s? A charming pie-woman. I’ve a notion to come this path very often myself.”

“Mary *is* pretty.”

“But not the sole attraction, perhaps,” I returned airily. “The next time you go to the cottage I think I’ll have to get you to take me with you.”

“If you like.”

“Oh, certainly. But will *you* like it and will *he* like it?”

She stopped short.

“What do you mean?”

“It’s plain enough. You can’t imagine I’ve forgotten that I found you sitting at a table with a man who ran when he saw me. I don’t like a man who runs.”

“He didn’t run.”

“Well, walked, then—in quick time.”

“You told me just now you weren’t interested in him.”

“I thought I wasn’t, but he’s a hard fact that *will* obtrude himself. As I say, I don’t like cowards.”

“He *isn’t* a coward,” she flashed. Her defiant mood changed abruptly. She drew a little shuddering breath. “You’re right—he *is*.”

“For the present, *requiescat in pace*,” I said with an attempt at jocularly.

She turned from me impatiently.

Notwithstanding her assurances that we would reach “Red Cedars” in good time for dinner, I was beginning to have my doubts in the matter, when a familiar sound set my suspicions at rest—a quick “chug-chug” that broke out around the curve of the hill.

“By Jove!” I exclaimed. “That’s my car. Dirck must be out looking for us. Is there a road there?”

“Yes. Rendezvous Lane runs along the other side of the hill.”

Responding to my impatience she ran lightly down the path, with me in close pursuit. Side by side we sprang into a sunken road. Dirck was driving slowly along between its shaly sides.

“Hello, Dirck,” I called. “Are you lost?”

He betrayed no surprise. “I was looking for monsieur,” he responded. “I thought mademoiselle might have wandered farther than she had intended, and would be tired.”

“Right!” I said. “Thank you, Dirck. We *are* tired. Home it is, as quick as you can get us there.”

“Yes, monsieur.”

In spite of his admirable composure, he gave a slight start as I helped Ellen into the car. He had caught sight of the bracelet on her arm. The

carved head peered out from the cuff of her shirt-waist—a head peculiar to itself, of a sort whose African significance he well understood. His glance swept like lightning across my face—I flatter myself it was devoid of expression. With a slight smile on his lips as if in contempt of his own folly, he gave his attention to the steering-wheel.

I tucked a rug snugly about my companion, nodded to Dirck, and away we flew.



## VI

### THROUGH THE DARKNESS

WE covered a mile or two at a good speed. Then the darkness and the intricacies of the by-roads compelled Dirck to slow down.

The car lamps had not been lighted. I preferred the suggestion of mystery in walls and trees half-glimpsed through the darkness to the raw revelation of them by the glaring cone of light usually projected before the car at night.

I let myself dream a little—Nell and I were back in the old days bound for a supper at Oak Leaf Lodge with Will Archer and poor Rex Westbrook and half a dozen others. Or she and I alone were off for a lark among the country lads and lasses at Tarnsdale—a rehearsal of tableaux, with a hearty country dance to follow. Or we were wandering in the dusk up the lanes about “Red Cedars,” our faces toward the stars, and our hearts in our eyes when we looked at each other as we drew near home.

I felt her stir beside me.

“Craig—I think I must explain.”

“No, don’t. Didn’t we agree just now to let the fellow rest in peace?”

“The fellow?”

“Certainly. Aren’t you talking about your entertainer at Miss Finney’s?”

“Oh-h! He’s only a part of it—a part of what I want to tell you.”

“Do as you like, Nell, but I don’t see that there can be any explanation.”

She was silent. The lap-rug had slipped a little, and I stooped to replace it. She shivered as I touched her through the covering. After a while she spoke again, her voice monotonous but distinct, as if she were forcing herself to a task she abhorred.

“I thought I could stand it—the situation—your position here—but I can’t. It’s intolerable!”

“Some people who aren’t sensitive to dishonor are sensitive to injury.”

“Can’t you conceive of a person sacrificing himself—yes, herself—for another?—doing a thing she didn’t believe in?”

“You mean you sacrificed yourself, of course?”

“If you like.”

I laughed shortly. “For your mother, to keep her comfortable, to keep her luxurious—and for yourself, too! Do you call that self-sacrifice? Good Lord, Nell! to live as you live, to keep up ‘Red Cedars’ this minute—Jordan and Theresa and the rest—to do it by the means you’ve taken—Good Lord!” I broke off at a loss for words.

The car still moved cautiously along black lanes. The chug of the machinery shut us off from Dirck, the sound echoing back from the slopes of the hills about us. We seemed to be lost in a strange world of darkness and shadows and mists.

“You’ve never been tried in the way I—we—

were," Ellen went on monotonously. "If you'll put yourself in my place a moment, you'll understand. I must tell you——"

"You could have worked," I broke in, "worked as thousands of women do, hundreds of them as well born as yourself."

"You don't understand, Craig."

"I understand enough—too much, I'm afraid. You claim credit for self-sacrifice on account of what you did? Real self-sacrifice would mean that you must be a stenographer, exposed to the familiarities of office routine—or a shop girl, kowtowing to the floor-walker—or a cloak-model, stared at by other women—or a governess, annoyed all day long by spoiled children. You preferred to sacrifice yourself in another and an easier way."

My bitterness of heart had led me to speak with a brutality I at once regretted. But she clapped her hands applaudingly.

"Quite a harangue! I hadn't given you credit for so much imagination."

My self-reproach vanished.

"Imagination!"

"All that about the stenographer and the shop girl and the governess. Really, it was quite pathetic."

I tried to make out her face through the darkness, but could see little more than the curve of chin and cheek half turned toward me.

"Nell," I said, "are you incorrigible, or are you only bluffing?"

"You may take your choice."

"I wish to God I knew what to make of you," I returned, not at all piously.

We were topping a ridge, and all at once a cluster of lights twinkled into view below us, glimmering in the velvety blackness of the valley, like a handful of stars reflected in a pool.

"The lights o' Bannocks Town—and home," I said.

"Such a home!" Her tone was neither faint nor bitter, but quite grave as if stating a fact accepted beyond question. "Such a home—now!"

"In my mind's eye I've seen those lights a hundred times during the last four years," I said musingly. "That light there, nearest us—isn't that 'Red Cedars'?"

"Yes."

"I've seen that light flare up, glow a while, and then go out suddenly—half round the world I've seen it. 'Such a home—now'? The cocoon is all right, Nell, only if the butterfly is sound inside it."

"A parable?"

"Something like it."

"We've given up the motor car, at least—mother and I," she said half mockingly. "That's something."

"Yes; that's something."

"And Johnson, our chauffeur, too. He was almost as clever as DuBois there."

Her eyes rested with interest on the square shoul-

ders and straight back in front of her. Dirck's leather cap set off his close-cropped head to advantage. His ears, placed at the right distance between jaw and crown, were small and well-shaped. The neck was strong but not too thick. He began to hum softly to himself in his pleasant tenor tones—the humming grew into words, floating faintly back to us with the rushing wind:

“ ‘Vous aurez beau faire et beau dire  
L'oubli me serait odieux—  
Et je vois toujours son sourire,  
Des adieux—des adieux.’ ”

“ Is that your man? ” asked Ellen. “ He's a very superior-looking person. ”

“ Oh, yes, ” I returned, carelessly, “ people often say so. Change his get-up a little and he would pass muster anywhere. ”

“ Yes—he really would. ” She sank back against the cushions with a tired sigh—her eyes closed.

It was quite dark when we descended the winding road above “ Red Cedars. ” Ellen had not opened her eyes nor I my lips the latter part of the way. I was busy going over in my mind the events of the last two days, and was willing to let her rest for a while. Suddenly the lights of the house flashed before us.

“ We're home, ” I said. “ Have you been asleep? ”

Dark as it was I could see the flash of her eyes.

“Asleep? No—I’ve been thinking. It seems to me I *can’t* sleep any more. I wish one didn’t have to *think*,” she added under her breath.

I swung aside the rug and lifted her gently to the ground.

“Thinking is one form of Tophet,” I said. “I know that, pretty well. I’ve had my share of it in my time—on your account, too, fair lady.”

The lights under the porte-cochère fell full upon her. She straightened herself proudly as I looked up at her from the lower step. Dirck and the car chug-chugged away toward the garage.

“You’ve been in Tophet—on my account—really?”

“Yes—in my time. That time is long past, I promise you.”

“I know it.” Her face, which had been wistful, changed marvellously—her brows drawn firmly and her chin a little forward. “Oh! of all the things you’ve ever said, that—*that* is the most caddish.”

I endeavored to laugh. “Don’t forget you wear my bracelet.”

“Forget it? No.” Her breast rose flutteringly and her voice shook. “But don’t *you* forget that sometimes, even in Africa, a *master* is kind.”

She made me a bow—whether scornful or pleading I vow I could not tell—and slipped into the house.

She had called me a cad, but if she thought I played the part with any satisfaction she knew me ill.

## VII

### A DOMESTIC DISCUSSION

I DRESSED for dinner leisurely. My trunks had arrived in the course of the day, and I found my things laid out for me.

When I had finished I contemplated myself in the tall pier-glass. I fancied I made a rather formidable figure, which was precisely what I wished to make.

My eyes are naturally deep-sunken, and years of outdoor life had somehow accentuated this characteristic. My mouth was not encouraging to one who knew herself guilty, and my face, darkly-tanned, had a certain immobility of expression. Altogether, even had there not been good reason, I did not wonder that Ellen Sutphen had shrunk before me from the moment of my re-entrance upon her life.

I was still viewing myself in the glass when I heard a sound at the door of my dressing-room. It was not a knock but a slight grating noise—the faintest of faint noises, but I am keen-eared and knew I could not be mistaken. I wheeled about and waited.

The sound was not repeated, but as I stood staring at the door, the glass knob turned slowly to the reverse position. Someone had tried to enter and

had found the door locked. There was a moment's silence, then a light footstep went stealing up the hall.

In two strides I could have crossed the room, flung open the door, and caught the would-be intruder. But to what end?

I knew as surely as if I held her, shamed and trembling, in my grasp, that it could only be one of two persons—Ellen or Mrs. Sutphen. In my present humor I had no desire to precipitate a scene with either. It was my intention to have the approaching dinner go off smoothly. It would not do to precede it by a stormy interview with my hostesses.

So I refrained from making any effort to seize the person who had stealthily tried my door. But the attempt reminded me that some precautions were advisable.

Accordingly I removed my wallet from the dressing-table to the inside pocket of my coat. Its contents were necessary to maintain my position at "Red Cedars"—it would be safest about my person.

These preparations being completed, I turned to go downstairs. To reach the door from the dressing-table I had to pass in front of the pier-glass—I made a mental note of the fact.

I turned back and passing from the dressing-room into the bedroom, lifted a window. The lights from an ell of the house shone up at me.



Leaning out I gave a peculiar whistle two or three times—then waited.

In a moment or two, the whistle was answered beneath my window—a man's shadowy form appeared out of the darkness.

“Can you hear me?” I called in Malayan.

“Yes,” answered Dirck in the same tongue.

“When you come to my room after dinner, bring a pair of pincers and a yard or two of soft wire. Keep them out of sight, under your coat—understand?”

I did not wait for his answer, but closed the window and sought the drawing-room.

It was in sole possession of the head of the house—Mrs. Sutphen herself. I had not seen her since late the night before. She was sitting languidly in an arm-chair, and inclined her head to me with an attempt at her usual affectionate manner.

She was a small, pussy-cat sort of woman, retroussé-nosed and fair-browed. Her rather near-sighted eyes ordinarily met one through their pince-nez with a sort of confiding affection that had—I reflected savagely—long deluded her social world. Her hair rose light and abundant above a complexion infantile in its soft pink and whiteness.

A well-gowned, pleasant-faced, easy-mannered woman, yet when I had last seen her, the night before, one whose poise had completely vanished, whose falsely-gentle mask had been broken through at last, and whose trembling limbs could hardly

support her body, shaken with fear and anger and shame.

Her nod, desperate attempt to appear at ease as I knew it to be, set my nerves on edge at once. I made her a gay bow.

“Good-evening. It’s awfully good of you to give this dinner. It’s in my honor, isn’t it? You oughtn’t to have tried to amuse me by asking people in—after your nasty headache last night. You and Nell are amusement enough for anyone. I hope the head’s better.” My tone and manner were intensely sympathetic.

I could see the eyes narrow behind the pince-nez. The handkerchief, decorously edged with black, that she was holding in her lap, became a shapeless ball. One slippered foot was projected, withdrawn, and projected again from beneath the gray folds of her skirt.

“I hope the headache’s better,” I repeated.

“Craig, you—are execrable!”

“My dear lady,” I answered blandly, “I am expressing my deep interest in your health. Is there anything in my respectful solicitude to cause you to treat me so unkindly?”

The black-bordered handkerchief made a dab at the near-sighted eyes with such violence that the pince-nez was precipitated to the floor. I recovered it and handed it to her deferentially.

“The strain of your household cares is getting to be too much for you. I’m afraid you’re a little nervous.”

The pink in her cheeks became spots of angry crimson.

“How a man born a gentleman——” she began.

I interrupted. “For that matter, how a woman born a lady——” My pause was full of significance to her.

Her foot again tapped the floor while I, smiling politely, awaited her next remark.

We were in this attitude when Ellen entered the room. The situation—her mother and I eyeing each other in a sort of armed truce—evidently caused her an unpleasant shock. She halted, glancing from the tell-tale red in her mother’s cheeks to my formal smile, and touched her hair with dainty fingers in order to hide her embarrassment.

I surveyed her. “Nell,” I said, “do you mind my saying you are looking exceedingly charming to-night?”

She gave me a little eager smile, as if imploring me not to jeer, but my earnest glance reassured her, and made her lower her eyes as well.

“Would any woman mind a man’s telling her that?” she answered.

She wore a gown of some soft stuff. It was devoid of all glittering lights—I hate shimmers in a woman’s frock as much as I like them in her hair—but fell dull-black from throat to instep.

As she had threatened, it was not *décolletée*, but the superb white throat above the black yoke gave promise of the shoulders beneath. The mass of

chestnut hair swept smoothly from neck to crown, not a lock astray nor yet one devoid of its own iridescent light.

For some reason—perhaps on account of the kindness of my greeting—the look of anxiety had a little faded from her face. There was even a faint trace of archness in the turn of her head and the droop of her shoulders. For the moment—for me—she was an exceedingly charming woman.

My eyes lingered on her hair.

“‘This is the hair that launched a thousand ships,  
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium,’”

I paraphrased.

“Thank you, sir. I’ll try to think of something nice to quote about *you*.”

“A hopeless effort, I’m afraid.”

“I suppose you aren’t fishing?”

“Certainly not. If you *do* think of anything, be sure to let me know.”

“*Mais oui, monsieur.*”

As we carried on this decidedly feeble badinage, the crimson spots faded from Mrs. Sutphen’s cheeks. Such conversation was of a sort to which she had been accustomed—until lately. Possibly, as she watched us from the arm-chair, she was trying to delude herself into the belief that her own and her daughter’s life still ran on normal lines, that my presence was merely a hazy dream that a good dinner would dissipate, or at most that I was

but a casual week-end guest instead of a tyrant and enemy.

“Won’t you sit down, Nell?” I asked. “You must be tired after our tramp.”

“Have you been out walking, Ellen?” queried Mrs. Sutphen. “I hope you didn’t go too far. These autumn days are *so* trying.”

“It wasn’t far.” Ellen’s reply was evasive. “I met Mr. Schuyler and—we came back together.”

“Where did you go?” said her mother with the dull persistence a weak nature often displays.

“Only three or four miles, perhaps.”

“But where?”

“It was—only to Mary Finney’s.” She spoke hesitantly, with a sidelong glance at me, as if begging me to be silent.

I manifested a great interest in a painting on the wall above the piano.

“To Mary Finney’s?” repeated Mrs. Sutphen querulously. “That girl! I wish you would pay some attention to my wishes, Ellen.” Doubtless on account of our peculiar relations she seemed to be heedless of preserving the amenities before me. “You know I’ve told you again and again——”

Ellen made a gesture. “Please, mother—not now.”

“Why not now?” retorted Mrs. Sutphen, rather raising than lowering her tone. “Craig knows the worst about us, doesn’t he? He might as well see our other family skeletons, and——”

“Mother!”

“Please don’t interrupt me. I——”

It was useless for me to pretend any longer that I was oblivious of the discussion. I felt a glow of anger at the older woman’s bad taste.

“Mrs. Sutphen, I don’t care to hear anything that Nell doesn’t wish me to hear.”

The black-bordered handkerchief promptly hovered over the pince-nez, and there was a painful silence in the room.

“Nell,” I said, “this is a quaint picture here. What’s the idea? I don’t mind telling you,” I muttered as she joined me. “I won’t have anybody abuse you but myself.”

“Small favors thankfully received,” she answered in the same low tone.

We were standing close together, in what must have seemed to an outsider a very friendly attitude, when the Savartons and the Westbrooks were announced together.

The Savartons—John and Augusta and the old general—were people without much individuality. The two men, except for the general’s white hair and Civil War goatee, looked as much alike as two peas. Augusta was a placid person of neutral coloring, tastes and opinions.

Norah Westbrook and her brother interested me more. The former held out her hand to me impulsively.

“Mr. Schuyler! I knew it was you. After I’d

passed you this morning, I racked my brains to think who you were. It came to me in a flash, but you were out of sight by that time."

"Very much offended because you had cut me dead.

"'Norah, Norah, of gay Glencora,  
Where did you get the gold in your hair?'"

She capped my verse instantly:

"'Faith! it came from the White Witch of Dunmora,  
The dust o' the stars for me to wear.'

Oh, do you remember how you taught me that, and the fairy stories you used to tell me—and the candy you gave me? Really, the very last of my first teeth was accounted for by a delicious piece of molasses candy you gave me on my birthday. This is my brother, Aleck—you remember him, don't you?"

"Of course." I shook hands with the young fellow heartily.

Like his sister he was straight and slim, and his eyes were blue. But where Norah's eyes were thoughtful, his sparkled on slight provocation. His cheekbones were rather high, and the skin was a little too tightly drawn along the line of the jaw. The face of an enthusiast, I fancied,—yet certainly a very manly one.

"You were a schoolboy when I saw you last, Aleck," I said. "I suppose you're about finishing college now."

“Out of Princeton last year,” he returned.

“Are you building a bonfire under the world now, or is it plain loaf? You’d better travel than do that.”

“I’d like to be an explorer like you, Schuyler—that *would* be living. But Norah wants me to stick to her a year or two yet—there are only aunt and ourselves, you know.” His eyes wandered to Ellen Sutphen.

“Quite right, of course,” I declared warmly. “If there were enough Norahs to go ’round, there wouldn’t be any explorers.”

“Ha, ha! very good,” said John Savarton.

“Awfully,” agreed Augusta, as she would have agreed if he had said “very bad.”

Just then the Willy Archers arrived, barely in time to escape being late. Dot Archer, with Willy in tow, sailed in as if she were a majestic dowager instead of a decidedly diminutive person of twenty-two or three.

“I’m here,” she cried, snapping her black eyes about on every man present. “I’m *not* late. Don’t say I am or I shall die of mortification. I *told* Willy to hurry but he—Craig Schuyler! How are you? So you’ve really condescended to return to civilization at last.” She menaced me with a tiny finger. “O-oh, ho! We know why you stayed so long. I’ve *heard*—the *tales* about your doings in the jungles of—of—where was it, Willy?”

“The tropical fastnesses of Kamschatka,”



grinned her husband, who thought everything his wife did delightful.

“Of course—in Kamschatka. Wicked, wicked man! Ellen, we *aren't* late, are we, dear?”

“No—just in time,” smiled Ellen, motioning toward the door. “There’s Jordan now.”

“Aleck will take you in, Dot,” said Mrs. Sutphen. “And Willy will you look after Augusta? Norah and Mr. Savarton, and Craig and Ellen. General, you and I.”

As Ellen and I led the way to the dining-room, I repeated the verse Norah Westbrook and I had quoted:

“‘Norah, Norah of gay Glencora,  
Where did you get the gold in your hair?’  
‘Faith it came from the White Witch of Dunmora,  
The dust o’ the stars for me to wear.’

Rather pretty, isn’t it?” I said.

## VIII

### A DINNER ENFORCED

IT had been upwards of four years since I had sat down to dinner at "Red Cedars"—it seemed to be a score. I recalled what my feelings had been the last time I had sat there, and did not find the recollection pleasant.

I glanced at Ellen. She, too, was thinking of that unhappy time, for she avoided my eyes, and the knuckles of her hands, clasped on the table's edge, showed white.

I felt a sort of contemptuous pity for the outraged and overwhelmed young man who, four years before, had found himself so impotent before these women. Now it was they—Mrs. Sutphen and Ellen—who were helpless before me—me, grown immeasurably in coolness, and mercilessly hardened by experience.

In my grim enjoyment of the change in our situations, I could almost have called aloud: "I am master here! I can in one instant send this easy hostess, and this girl, for all her apparent hauteur, weeping to their knees before me!" I found a certain dubious pleasure in the sight of Ellen's straining knuckles and her mother's frequent anxious glances in my direction.

While Dot Archer rattled on, and General Savar-

ton dealt in solemn platitudes with Mrs. Sutphen, I stared rather vaguely down the table. My glance rested on Aleck Westbrook—his earnest face attracted me.

I became aware that he was gazing in our direction—at Ellen. His eyes studied her face, lowered toward her plate, with a strange light in their eager depths. His mouth assumed a peculiar expression, absorbed, tender, protecting. I started, at least mentally. I had seen such a look in other eyes—in another land.

“Good Heavens! the boy’s really in love with her,” I reflected. “This is a pretty go! How far has it gone—that’s the question?”

Too far I was afraid—far enough to work woe for one of them at any rate. I studied him again—that mouth and eye were not of a spirit to take things lightly.

Had Ellen read his soul as easily as I? One might trust a woman for that! Was she leading him on to dizzy heights whence she might cast him down at last as she had cast another? For that matter, it was not unlikely that he had already declared his passion for her. On the surface a right and proper procedure!—they were about of the same age—an honorable passion expressed for an honorable woman. I laughed to myself—painfully enough.

Young Westbrook’s eye was fixed upon me with a sudden challenge. He had caught my sarcastic smile and, so it seemed, divined my sneering

thought. No doubt the lad was young and quixotic enough, perhaps also enough in love, to resent any slight toward his chosen lady, even if the slight were only a twitch of the lips.

I was ready to like the boy, so I bent gallantly over Ellen.

“You’ve an admirer, I see.”

She looked up quickly. “Oh, scores of them. Did you ever doubt it?”

“But I hope you don’t count everything fish that comes to your net. That would be too cruel.”

“That sounds like another parable—you’ll have to interpret it yourself.”

“Young Westbrook there! He’s absolutely scowling at me—because I’ve had the honor to take you in, perhaps.”

“How absurd!” She glanced down the table, and, meeting Aleck’s eye, smiled frankly. His face lightened and he returned her an eager nod.

“We were talking about you, Aleck,” I said. “Which ear is burning?”

“Whichever means nice things, of course.” His suspicion of me vanished on the instant.

“No one ever *can* remember which ear burns for scandal,” cried Dot Archer, “or which for praise. Isn’t it provoking! I really do believe in signs. I’m awfully interested in all—all this—this New Thought, you know. I want to belong to the Society for Some-kind of Research. You know *what* kind of Research?—of——”

“Orthopedic,” suggested Willy gravely.

“Oh, yes, of Orthopedic Research, but *you* won’t let me. Willy says I’d be consulting mediums and spiritualistic old women, and—and Circassian princesses and things, until he’d be driven crazy. But it *is* annoying not to remember which ear *ought* to burn, isn’t it? Norah, which is it?—the right or the left?”

“I suppose you want me to say the *right* ear always burns,” said Norah. “But I scorn such a pun. One of my Irish forebears might have said: ‘*Erin go Bragh!*’”

“Awful,” I groaned. “The only proper answer to that is: ‘*’Ear! ’Ear!*’”

“Yes, or ‘*’Ere endeth the first lesson,*’” quoth old General Savarton, rising unexpectedly to the occasion.

“Schuyler,” said John Savarton, “apropos of psychic research, I fancy you must have seen some queer things in the East, haven’t you?”

“I don’t recall anything very mysterious. Most of the mystic Oriental is all nonsense, you know. What I mean is that the esoteric East is talked about mainly by the type of mind that would find just as much mystery on Fifth Avenue or the Bowery, if it ever bothered to look at it. It’s the Cook’s tourist who has put an impenetrable haze over half the world. Your *savant* knows that human nature is about the same in one place as in another——”

"Meaning, of course——" began Ellen slyly.

"That did sound rather inflated, didn't it?" I laughed. "No, I don't pretend to understand the workings of the East Indian mind, but I could if I could learn to think primitively enough—if you see what I mean."

"You mean as a savage thinks?" asked Norah Westbrook. "Close to nature—raw, as it were?"

"Precisely. One must think raw—bare—down to the bone of things, to get a savage's point of view."

"Sounds a bit barbaric," commented Willy Archer. "Sort of cannibalistic. No doubt savage life is rather—*bare*."

"*Willy!*" cried Dot.

"Craig, of course, you're too modest—you're really quite able to think—ah—raw," said Mrs. Sutphen sweetly. "I'm sure you're a real barbarian, when you like."

I smiled at the pince-nez. "I'm learning at any rate. It's really very useful to be a savage—sometimes. It helps one lift the mask most people wear, and see the secrets underneath."

"That sounds rather—rather scandalous," said Dot Archer. "Like the introduction to one of those delightfully wicked *Memoirs* everybody used to write in the time of Napoleon or Louis Quatorze or somebody."

"Not at all," said Norah. "I see what you mean, Mr. Schuyler. You want the truth of life at all hazards."

I regarded her appreciatively. "I do—in theory, at any rate. When it comes to practice, I'm willing to temper the wind to the shorn lamb, for a while, at least." My glance shifted to Ellen Sutphen.

She met it steadily. "Aren't you getting a little mixed in your metaphors?"

"Perhaps I am."

"We're getting off the subject, aren't we?" said Augusta Savarton. "Didn't you ever run across any mystery in—where was it?—Borneo?"

"Sumatra. Yes, but the mystery was usually connected with the snake-charmer's basket or the conjurer's bag. I've found more strange happenings right here in America than I ever did east of Suez."

"Oh, don't you *love* Kipling?" cried Dot. "It must be awfully interesting to live where there 'aren't no Ten Commandments.'"

Her husband intervened. "Ah, ha! Schuyler. Don't you see what Dot's after? She fishing for a *chronique scandaleuse*. You'd better watch out, or she'll have you confessing all about that 'neater, sweeter maiden, in a cleaner, greener land,' before you know it."

During the laughter Norah Westbrook spoke to me in an undertone.

"That's a rather horrid remark of Willy Archer's. What does he mean by it?"

"I fancy he's been reading some newspaper gos-

sip," I returned. "A man who's lived among savages much can't escape slander. They told all sorts of tales about Stanley in Africa, you know. Our glorious press has given Schuyler in Sumatra a few coats of lurid paint, too."

"Why should they tell—tales about some men and not about others?" She crumbled a bit of bread absently. "One couldn't imagine any coats of paint on John Savarton there." Her blue eyes dwelt on me. "Perhaps some men give people cause for—tales."

"Is that a cruel dig at me?"

"I saw an interesting-looking man in the driveway, when we came in," she said, evading my question. "Who was that, Ellen? He stared at me very hard."

"Perhaps it was Craig's chauffeur."

"Yes, probably it was my man, DuBois."

"Really? I thought I must have seen—he didn't appear to be——"

"He's quite an unusual sort. He's saved my life several times. But the best thing I ever saw him do——" I stopped. "I beg your pardon. Of course, the deeds of my mechanic don't interest you."

"Oh, but they do," she cried eagerly. "I was very much impressed by—by——" The faint color crept into her cheek.

"By his stare, eh?" chuckled Archer. "Fine blue eyes the fellow has, Norah—I noticed 'em



myself. Go ahead, Schuyler, we all want to hear the story—if it's exciting."

"It isn't."

But I had to yield to the general demand.

"Well, he happened to get in a railway train full of miserable emigrants—on their way to America, you know—this was in Austria. The emigrants were some of those hideous South European hordes that will be the ruin of this land of the free and home of the brave, if we aren't careful. There were half-drunken men, and squalling babies, and dirty, ailing women.

"The windows in the carriages were shut, of course, although it was a hot summer day. Did you ever see a guard who would open a carriage window of his own accord? The fellow on this line wouldn't do it even when he was asked, though it was clear the babies were stifling for want of air. DuBois had to get hold of the ruffian, and threaten to report him to the Conductor-General before the windows were opened.

"Of course, over there, there wasn't any drinking-water, much less any ice. DuBois got some pails of water at a town they passed through and by a miracle found some ice. Then he carried a drink to all the babies, and to all the mothers too."

"Is this a nursery tale?" queried Archer sarcastically.

Norah gave him an indignant glance. I went on.

“Then he took to amusing the children, and chatting with the mothers to draw their minds off their miseries. When a lot of the men got to quarrelling among themselves, he took their liquor away from them—and it needed a cool hand to do that.

“When they would come to a station where they were to stop a few minutes, he would take a baby in his arms and walk up and down the platform in the shade of the carriages—to give the child a chance to breathe, you know. He must have had half the children in the train in his arms at different times before the day was over.”

“Did he tell you all this himself?” interpolated the scornful Archer.

“No, he didn’t. I heard it from one of the women a year or two later. There was one miserable Bohemian six-months’-old who was really sick. He held her for a couple of hours, fanning her with his hat and keeping the little face cool by wiping it with his damp handkerchief. Then when the child had fallen asleep, he sat and fanned the tired mother for another hour.

“By and by, he got out a guitar he had with him, and perched himself up on the back of a seat, and sang some little quiet German songs—softly so as not to wake the babies—those German songs that make you weepy and make you brave at the same time.

“Well, I know you girls will understand, even if Archer there doesn’t. It was the Bohemian woman

who told me about it afterward. She said she would always believe he was an angel sent from Heaven, and that she prayed for him every night." I glanced about the table. "Now, really, I think that's better than many a more spectacular performance."

Norah's voice was very soft. "So do I—a thousand times."

I turned to Ellen Sutphen. I was startled by the paleness of her cheeks and by the dark circles under her eyes.

"Are you very tired?"

"No—yes—I think I am."

I leaned toward her, pretending to select the fork for the next course.

"Nell, I don't want to make you ill. I'm sorry now I insisted upon this dinner."

"I'll pull through all right."

"I'm sorry, though. It was downright brutal of me."

She gave me her ghost of a smile. Her eyes lifted to mine were a misty gray.

"Have you only just recognized one of your most prominent characteristics? *I've* known it for some time."

"Brutality, you mean?"

"Yes. You've given it vigorous exercise the last few days."

"The last few days? I only came last night."

"It seems a month—to me. You know what

the little darky said: 'If you goes by what mammy says I'm on'y six, but if you goes by the troubles I been in I'm most a hundred.'" She gazed up at me mockingly. "I heard you say just now that a man who has lived among savages is bound to be slandered. Does Schuyler certify that Schuyler the explorer is immaculate!"

"Oh, no. He isn't as black as he's been painted, that's all."

"In spite of his seven wives?"

"Ah, ha! You've heard that dreadful story? Theresa's consternation was delightful."

"She was still wild-eyed when she came to me with it."

"You'd hardly expected to hear anything so bad as that, I fancy."

"Hardly *expected*?" She spoke with suppressed indignation. "You don't mean that you think I set her to find——"

Augusta Savarton leaned across the table and stared at Ellen's wrist.

"Nell, where did you get that pretty bracelet? I don't think I ever noticed it before. What is it—the metal? Pull up your sleeve a little, dear."

Ellen gave me a covert glance. With her right hand she involuntarily twitched down the sleeve of the left. A motion that was checked before it was perceptible to anyone but me.

"It's just an odd bit," she explained.

But by this time Dot Archer was interested.

“Do pull up your sleeve, Nell. It’s awfully cute.”

It was impossible to refuse. She turned back the sleeve, and the reddish band gleamed against her white wrist. The face of the Nubian looked up from a lock of almost formidable proportions.

“How perfectly fascinating!” exclaimed Dot. “Oh, what a queer clasp! And what a lovely shade of red! Is it some new kind of gold, Nell? Willy, you must get me one just like it. Tiffany’s, I suppose, Nell, of course.”

“Hardly Tiffany’s,” I remarked. “The king of Uganda is barbarian enough never to have heard of New York even.”

“The king of——” began Dot. “O-o-h, it’s something *you* brought her. Isn’t it lovely to be an explorer and bring home things like that! Willy, I wish *you* were an explorer.”

Mrs. Sutphen settled her pince-nez and peered at Ellen.

“Take it off will you, Ellen, and let me see it. I can’t make it out from here.”

“It isn’t worth while, mother,” protested Ellen. “After dinner, if you like.”

But Mrs. Sutphen was not one to be thwarted in her least desire—if she could prevent it.

“But I want to see it. Do slip it off, and let Norah pass it up to me.”

“I can’t take it off just now.” Ellen’s reply was rather weak. “I’ve—mis-laid the key somehow. It locks, you know.”

All eyes were bent upon her, then from her to me. For a barely perceptible instant, a conscious silence fell on the circle—one doesn't mislay the key of a bracelet. Norah Westbrook came to the rescue, too clever to change the subject.

"Those African jewels *are* puzzling. Augusta don't you remember that Egyptian scarab Evelyn Fleming had made into a brooch? It never worked properly. Mr. Schuyler, isn't there a story about that bracelet? How did you get hold of it. Now, don't tell us you bought it at a bazaar."

"No, I didn't. It's a captive to my bow and spear. It took some violence to get that piece of native work."

"Fighting?" General Savarton's professional interest was aroused.

"Well, sir, you Loyal Legion men wouldn't have called it even a skirmish, but at the time we thought it was rather lively."

"Begin at the beginning," commanded Archer. "Don't shy, Schuyler. Let's have the whole of it."

"It doesn't amount to much. Mohammed Akbar Bey of the Upper Nile Egyptian Force, with a battalion of fellaheen soldiers, waylaid a slave caravan. My man, Dirck DuBois, and I went along as volunteers. It was all over in ten minutes, though a native tribe took a hand in the game against us, and made things warm. That bracelet was part of the loot."

"Did it belong to a beautiful Arab princess?"

asked Dot. "And when you bore her away to your tent in the palm-trees, did she look at you with melting almond eyes and velvety—velvety—is it velvet lips or cheeks they always have?"

"I'm sure I don't know. But it wasn't an Arab princess who was wearing the thing. It was a Uganda slave. As I remember her she looked about like the ogress in Grimm's Fairy Tales."

"How do you suppose the slave-dealers came to trust a slave with a gold bracelet?" asked John Savarton in his ponderous manner. "You said it was native gold, didn't you?"

"Perhaps she was somebody's favorite," I evaded. "Their tastes are different from ours, you know. General, it would have made you feel at home to see how those misguided barbarians—spearmen, you know—tried to rush our breech-loaders. It was a sort of thumbnail sketch of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg. By the way, sir, who was responsible for that assault? Longstreet or Lee?"

"Lee, undoubtedly," said the General. "He was the commanding general, present in person on the battlefield. To say he didn't order the charge is simply ridiculous to any unprejudiced military man. The greatest Lee worshipper never dared to raise the question until Lee himself was dead."

I had steered the conversation away from the dangerous subject of the bracelet, yet not without

ostentatious effort. Ellen's downcast eyes, her reddening cheeks and conscious air, had had all the effect I had hoped for. It was strange, indeed, if the entire dinner-circle were not half-convinced that there was something of a romantic nature between Ellen and me.

Between courses I glanced covertly at Aleck Westbrook. His face was white, and his eyes had a puzzled look when they fell on Ellen, but the lad was game. If he feared I was ahead of him, his frequent laughter and animated talk did not betray him to anyone but me, and possibly to Ellen.

In a little while he addressed me directly. "Mr. Schuyler, are you too much of a big game hunter to care for a little home sport?"

"I'd like nothing better. What sort?"

"What do you say to a run with my bloodhound to-morrow?"

"That sounds like strenuous enough sport for anybody. Bloodhounds? Are the days of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' back again?"

"I've got a Cuban," he explained, "a real beauty. He's as gentle as a kitten. I'm training him to track, you know. I get someone to make a trail, then I run him down with the hound. It's quite like the real thing."

"Oh, yes, awfully good sport," said Archer. "Dot and I were the unhappy fugitives one day last week. But Dot can't run—the dog drove us to bay in half a mile."



“It wasn’t *my* fault at all,” protested Dot. “Willy *would* sit on a fence to smoke a cigarette. Of *course*, they caught us.”

“It sounds interesting,” I said. “Ellen, what do you say? Will you play Eliza to my Uncle Tom, and let Aleck be Simon Legree?”

“A runaway slave?” Her words came slowly. “If you think I can run well enough. I hope I won’t quite disgrace you—I’ve been out with Aleck two or three times.”

“Will nine o’clock be too early?” asked Aleck.

“Not for me.” Her eyes met mine an instant. “I’ll be awake early, I fancy.”

“Why, Ellen?” said Norah. “Aren’t you sleeping well, dear?”

“Not very. Mother and I—neither of us sleeps well lately.”

Norah nodded sympathetically. “Of course—I’d forgotten. You’ve had a good deal to worry you, haven’t you?”

I wondered what she was talking about. Perhaps she was alluding to Ellen’s affair with Carlos Beauchamp. I wondered if he were really serious in his attentions—what was far more important, if she received them seriously.

Then I remembered something else—for one whole hour I had almost forgotten it! Who the devil was the man I had surprised with Ellen in Mary Finney’s cottage?

## IX

### A SHARPENED SPOON

THE ladies rose at Mrs. Sutphen's signal, and left us to our liqueurs and cigars.

Willy Archer loosened a button of his waistcoat, and crossed his legs with what courtesy might have called a sigh.

"Now, we can take it easy. If it weren't for the girls, we'd be brutes, I dare say; but it's mighty comfortable with just ourselves sometimes. Eh, John?"

"Schuyler can tell us about that," rejoined the younger Savarton. "What do you say, Schuyler—would you prefer to be back among your savages?"

"No, thank you. I'm very well content. Besides, they aren't *my* savages, you know."

Archer grinned. "Oh, come. One or two belonged to you, I fancy. How about the Malayan beauties? You've 'taken your fun where you found it, you've rogued and you've ranged in your time,' haven't you?"

"One doesn't kiss and tell, you know—not even among savages."

"Oh, I beg your pardon—of course not."

"The Malay fighting man's weapon is a kris, isn't it?" asked the General.

“Yes, that or a heavy, sabre-shaped knife they call a barong. I’ve seen some frightful work done with that.”

“For instance?”

“For instance, a head and shoulders cut off at a single blow. That was for roguing and ranging, Archer.”

“Well, somebody had to pay, I suppose.”

“Somebody always has to pay,” said Aleck Westbrook. “It’s generally the woman, though.”

“She paid, too, in this case. A woman more or less doesn’t count out there.”

He regarded me steadily. “Do you find it hard to adjust your point of view again—to the fact that a woman *does* count back here?”

My glance swept over him. “A worthy woman counts. The other kind doesn’t, not even in America.”

“What’s all that?” cried Archer. “That sounds like an extract from one of Henry James’ damnable stories—one of those things you think *might* make sense, only it never can. Come, Schuyler, give us an Arabian Nights’ Adventure—no, by George! a Sumatran Nights’ Adventure.”

“I don’t know any.”

“Oh, well, if you won’t, I’m going into the drawing-room.”

“Let’s all go,” I suggested.

I was about to follow the Savartons and Archer when young Westbrook stopped me.

“Will you wait a minute, Mr. Schuyler? I want to ask you something.”

I glanced at him. His face was pale, his mouth closed firmly, and his eyes had again their look of challenge.

“Certainly.” I sank back in my chair. “Anything you like, Aleck.”

He did not take a seat, but planted himself squarely in front of me. My wilderness training had made me alert to the possibilities of a situation. The latent fire in the boy’s eye was apparent enough to me—I saw that he stood within easy striking distance of my chin.

Although eyeing me steadily, he seemed to find it difficult to speak. Once or twice he swallowed painfully.

“Anything in particular, Aleck? I don’t suppose you left any debts behind you at Princeton, did you?—if you did, I’ll be very glad to——”

“It isn’t anything of that sort.”

“*You* don’t want to hear a Sumatran Nights’ Adventure.”

“Adventure!” His voice had a sudden harshness. “No, I don’t want to hear any of your vile adventures.”

“Hold on!” I interrupted gravely. “Are you saying what you mean?”

“I beg your pardon. I didn’t mean that, of course. I beg your pardon, Schuyler.”

“It’s all right, then. You were about to say——”

“ Mr. Schuyler, to-night—just a little while ago—you and Miss Sutphen——” He paused a moment, then went on more evenly. “ I don’t understand your attitude toward her—I don’t like it. Why should you act as you do toward Miss Sutphen? ”

“ You’ll have to be more explicit, Aleck. Have I *acted* toward Miss Sutphen? ”

His face reddened. “ I mean you talk to her and look at her as if—as if you didn’t respect her. A while ago—at dinner—you were positively *sneering* at her.”

“ Didn’t you imagine it? ”

“ You looked it. And then, just now, what did you mean by that talk about a ‘ worthy woman ’? I tell you, Schuyler, I don’t like it.”

“ I believe you noticed that she was wearing a bracelet I’d given her.”

He stared—then his face flushed hotly. “ Are you engaged to Ellen? ”

Then I did a foolish thing. I had meant to create in the minds of the dinner guests the very impression that Aleck’s question proved I had created, yet when he put the question so rawly, it stirred my sense of the ridiculous. The bitter humor of it lay not in the lad’s eager, defiant demand, but in my knowledge of Ellen’s real character and of the tragic situation of the household.

I burst out laughing. Before I could wink he struck me across the mouth with his open hand.

“Sneer, will you!”

I sprang to my feet. Involuntarily he recoiled before the anger blazing in my eyes—his hands clenched. I got a grip on myself in time.

“You oughtn’t to have done that.”

“I’d do it again,” cried the young fellow undauntedly.

“Take a look at me, my boy,” I said. “I’m two inches taller than you. I’m as much bigger around the chest. I’ve fought all over the world—and you struck me.”

“Yes, I did.”

“I’m quite able to beat you to a pulp,” I went on, “but I’m not going to do it. Do you know why?”

“Because you’re in the wrong!”

“No. It’s for Rex’s sake—and Norah’s. But I warn you, Aleck, next time I won’t be so patient with you.”

He stuck to his point with a courage for which I admired him. “You haven’t answered my question. Are you engaged to marry Miss Sutphen, Mr. Schuyler?”

“Don’t let what you imagine to be righteous anger carry you away,” I returned. “Do I understand that, in the absence of her brother—of Ned Sutphen—you’re asking me that question on Mrs. Sutphen’s authority?”

“No-o. What do you mean?”

“Then the fact that you ask at all shows you have no right to ask.”

“No right?” he faltered, seeing my drift.

“No. Whether or not Miss Sutphen and I are engaged only concerns ourselves, and her mother.”

He was silent, his eyes fell before mine. “I—I beg your pardon,” he said at last.

“That being clear, I don’t mind telling you that Ellen and I are *not* engaged.”

“You aren’t!” He stepped toward me, his hand half outstretched. But my lip still smarted—I shoved back my chair, and made my way into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Sutphen and the three Savartons were already lost in a game of bridge. The catch-phrases of the players—as solemn as if a divine revelation—harassed my ears as I entered the room.

Ellen was at the piano, the Archers hovering over her. I joined Norah Westbrook, for the moment alone on the window seat, her hands toying with a bronze paper cutter. She brandished it at me playfully as I drew a chair beside her.

“Woman-hater! The other men have been here for—*minutes*. Were you fighting your battles over with my baby brother?”

“You may call it that.”

“Isn’t he a boy? He enjoys all that sort of thing so. By the way, where is he?”

“In the dining-room. He’ll be here pretty soon, I fancy.”

“I do hope you haven’t been stirring him up to go into exploring. He admires you so much I’m afraid he’ll want to follow your example.”

"No fear," I returned, so dryly that her eyes sought my face.

"Don't you think so?" I felt her searching glance rest on my mouth. "Mr. Schuyler, do you know your lip is bleeding?"

I was annoyed. "No, I didn't."

I pressed my handkerchief to my mouth hastily—it held a stain or two of blood when I drew it away. "It's nothing. The edge of that coffee spoon was as sharp as a razor. I'll tell Mrs. Sutphen so when I get a chance."

My desire to pass the matter over was too evident. The girl was quick-witted—besides, she knew her brother's impetuous character. Her troubled eyes questioned me insistently.

"Is Aleck's lip cut, too? Perhaps that's why he's staying so long over his cigar—it isn't like him."

"I think I had the only sharp spoon," I rejoined as carelessly as I could.

"Oh! You say Aleck isn't cut—or—bruised?"

"No. Why should he be?"

I regarded her calmly—her eyes cleared.

"Thank you," she said softly.

Just then Theresa entered and stood near Mrs. Sutphen's chair. Mrs. Sutphen looked up from her cards.

"What is it, Theresa?"

The maid arched her blonde eyebrows. Her mistress gave her a sharp glance, then quietly laid down her cards.



“Will you take my hand, Norah? This being housekeeper, you know——”

She resigned her place to Miss Westbrook, and followed Theresa from the room. General Savarton glared after her, mildly contemptuous.

“To abandon bridge in the middle of a deal—for a household matter! Well, well! And yet she aspires to be a devotee—a real pundit! I was afraid she had something on her mind when she led from the short suit on the third round and *finessed* for the ace. It’s your play, Norah.”

As I strolled toward the group at the piano, Ellen detached herself and moved toward the door. Her glance went past me—Theresa was standing in the doorway, her eyebrows again arching significantly.

“Now what the devil’s up?” I mused, as Ellen left the room. “Does it take all three to see if the carriages are ordered for the right time, or to make sure the servants have had enough dinner?” I felt for my wallet and was relieved to find it in my pocket. “That’s safe, at any rate.”

As the Archers and I clustered at the piano, trying to badger each other into singing, Aleck Westbrook joined us. Norah glanced at him as he came in, frank relief in her eyes.

“We’re trying to get Craig to sing a Hindoo song,” explained Dot Archer. “He’s an awfully obstinate man. I’m sure he must sing beautifully—he’s so indifferent about it.”

“ I don’t know any Hindoo song,” I protested.

“ A Sumatran song then.” Norah was oblivious of General Savarton’s sniff of protest.

“ Yes, yes,” cried Dot. “ Sing the one you used to sing to *her*.”

I started. “ To her? ”

“ Yes, there must have been a Her, sometime—in the East.”

“ Nonsense! ”

“ Sing it, at any rate.”

I felt Norah’s eyes upon me, and the demon of mischief woke within me.

“ Very well.” I sang to my own accompaniment:

“ The keenest spears that warriors own,  
The bright gems in a Raja’s throne,  
Twin stars that shine for me alone—  
Her eyes to me.

“ A golden sunbeam in the sun,  
Sweet-scented dusk when day is done,  
More luscious night when night’s begun—  
Her hair to me.

“ The white moon peeping through a cloud,  
A lily-bud, serenely proud,  
But cold as snow that drapes a shroud—  
Her breast to me.”

It *was* a song I had sung to Her. But she had not been cold. Thank Heaven! she had not been cold!

Perhaps, as I sang on, I had put more feeling

into my voice than I had intended, for Norah's eyes fell before mine when I looked up, and the blood came and went in her cheek.

I was finishing when Ellen reëntered. She murmured some apology to Augusta and Norah for her mother's absence—I caught the words: "mother" and "very sorry."

A moment later she joined me at the window seat.

"Craig, mother wished me to say she's been taken with a headache," she began timidly. "I hope you'll let her off."

For once I found no pleasure in her deprecatory, not to say fearful, tone. I had a sudden desire to meet her on equal ground again—to cast off for a moment the attitude of mastery I had thus far revelled in.

"My dear girl, you don't need to apologize."

To my astonishment she flashed out at me. "I will ask you to keep your adjectives to yourself. Endearments I *won't* stand." Her voice was low but shaking with anger and shame.

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to be presumptuous, Nell. It wasn't a term of endearment—only a *facon de parler*, on my honor."

I think the humility of my reply astonished her even more than her sudden spirit had surprised me. The passion died out of her voice.

"Of course. I oughtn't to be so foolish. But—but I never quite know what you mean, Craig."

"I'm not sure I know myself. By the way, do

you realize that Westbrook is your ardent champion, as well as admirer? He breaks a lance for you in reckless style."

"Does he? What do you mean?"

I leaned toward her. "Do you see anything unusual—about my mouth?"

She studied me curiously. "Yes. Your lip looks bruised. It's been bleeding, hasn't it?"

"A little."

Her eyes widened—she questioned me mutely.

"Yes," I nodded. "Aleck has been breaking lances."

"Why—did he strike you?"

"I laughed at the wrong time."

"Why?"

"We were discussing you—and I laughed."

I received another surprise. If I expected anything, I expected her to blush with shame and impotent anger—perhaps to press her teeth against her trembling lower lip. But she did neither. She spoke in an even tone.

"Did you—strike back?"

"No—he's only a hot-headed boy."

"I—I wish you had."

"What!"

"I can fight my own battles," she flashed. Her look, proud, disdainful, haughty, lingers yet in my mind.

## X

### A POINT OF HONOR

I WAS bidding Norah good-night under the portecochère when Dirck passed us on his way to the garage. His eyes lingered persistently on Norah and I caught the color mounting to her cheeks. She moved toward him, holding out her hand impulsively.

“DuBois!”

He stopped and bowed profoundly. “Mademoiselle?” Her hand was swallowed up in his.

“Mr. Schuyler has been telling us about you,” she said sweetly. “What you did for those women and babies—in the Austrian railway train.”

He gave me a quick glance. “Yes, mademoiselle?”

She seemed suddenly to realize that he still held her hand—she withdrew it with a touch of hauteur that left him quite unembarrassed.

“I just wanted to tell you—I think it was—very fine of you.” By this time the crimson had mounted to her hair, for his admiring eyes never left her face.

“Mademoiselle!” His voice was a murmur.

For a moment they looked at each other—she with her lips parted, he with his white teeth showing in a faint smile. Then he bowed again and moved away.

“What a strange man,” she said.

After the guests were gone I exchanged good-nights with Ellen—her pale face glanced back at me over her shoulder as I stood watching her up the stairway—and proceeded to my room.

The day had been a busy one. I was well content to get myself into dressing-gown and slippers, and to lounge idly in an armchair while waiting for Dirck.

I wondered what Aleck Westbrook's thoughts were that night, and what Norah's, and what Nell's. I took it for granted Aleck would not care to carry out his project of running with his bloodhound the next day. I laughed to think that, perhaps, he was that moment wishing the dog had been trained to attack man.

I stretched myself out luxuriously, my mind dwelling upon Ellen. How haughty she had been when she declared herself able to fight her own battles! And how pale she had turned when I clasped the iron bracelet on her wrist; and again how she had flushed when I found her with the shabby-looking man at Mary Finney's! There was a problem that chafed me more every minute. It was absurd to suspect—impossible that she—yet who the devil was the fellow!

I craned my neck to see my watch on the dressing-table. Nearly midnight. It was hardly twenty-four hours since I had arrived in my car at “Red Cedars”—like a thunderbolt from a clear

sky. "*Deus ex machina*," I chuckled, "an avenging god at that."

It had been late for a call—only Theresa had been awake when I rang the bell peremptorily, Dirck in the meanwhile finding his way unconcernedly to the garage.

I amused myself with the recollection of Theresa's frank astonishment when I had insisted upon seeing the ladies at once.

"They aren't at home."

"I think they will be—to me."

"But they've retired, sir."

"No matter—wake them up."

"Perhaps, if you can give me the message, it will do as well."

"I must see them personally—it is absolutely imperative."

"Please, sir, it's nearly twelve o'clock."

To cut short discussion I had given her my name, previously withheld, and marked how she had returned one long stare, then had fallen a-trembling through all her plump, pretty figure. It was this shakiness that had first led me to suspect that she shared her mistress's guilty secret.

A wait of half an hour—I could picture the consternation above stairs—and then had followed the interview—stormy on Mrs. Sutphen's part, coldly contemptuous and emphatic on mine, distressed and miserable on Ellen's.

In the end I had been left the master, as I had

known I must be. My position was impregnable to all assault. Mrs. Sutphen's alternate pleadings and reproaches had dashed themselves in vain against the wall of my indifference.

And Ellen? She had not pleaded—had hardly spoken—only faced me palely, as much in wonder as in fear—wonder that the man whom she had last seen almost literally at her feet could now loom so bitterly dominant.

Norah Westbrook? There was a different sort. One might go a four years' journey without finding anything to compare with her hair—"the dust o' the stars for her to wear." Dirck had stared at her outrageously, yet I was not sure that he dreamed of impertinence.

As I sat musing I heard his knock at the door. I bade him come in.

"Is that you, Dirck? By Jove! I believe I was nearly asleep. What time is it?"

"Only twelve o'clock, if you please, monsieur."

"Drop it, man!" I exclaimed.

"I am monsieur's servant."

"Oh, all right, confound it! Lucky it isn't a hundred years ago, or I'd give you a caning while I was about it! Well, the dinner was over sooner than I'd expected it to be. Something or other went wrong—Mrs. Sutphen withdrew on the plea of a headache—and then, of course, everybody melted away a little later. Strange! I wonder what it really was."



I was thinking aloud rather than talking to my man. The good fellow understood my mood and made no answer.

“Sit down, Dirck. I want to talk to you a bit. You brought the wire and pincers?”

“Yes monsieur.” He seated himself without diffidence. “You wish me to repair something?”

“We’ll get to that pretty soon. First I want to discuss my affairs with you a little—personal affairs.”

He touched his close-cropped moustache with powerful fingers and fixed his innocent blue eyes upon me.

I hesitated, rather at a loss where to begin. What I wanted to say did not come so easily as I had thought.

“You remember where you picked up Miss Sutphen and me this evening?—in the sunken lane?”

“Returning from your walk? Of course.”

“Over that hill and across a meadow—on the brink of quite a gorge—is a farmhouse where they sell apple-pies. You follow me?”

“Without doubt.”

“A few minutes before you met us I’d surprised Miss Sutphen in that farmhouse.”

The shrewd fellow caught the vital word. “You surprised her?”

“Yes. She’d gone out walking without my knowledge—in fact against my wishes. So, as I say, I stumbled on her quite unexpectedly in a

sort of outdoor gallery of this farmhouse and—there was a man with her.”

Dirck’s eyes snapped. “Ah!”

“A man brushed past me as I entered the place—and Miss Sutphen was standing by a table as if she had been talking to him. The fellow was evidently scared away by my unexpected appearance.”

“Truly, it would seem so.”

“Now I want you to go out there the first thing to-morrow and see if you can get track of the fellow. Mary Finney’s cottage is the place. You can’t very well miss it. Just follow the road up from the village to where you’ll see an apple-orchard over the river gorge. Find out, if you can, who the man is and what the devil he was doing there.”

Dirck’s fingers ceased to smoothe his moustache. They now tapped the arm of his chair and his eyes avoided mine. I felt vaguely that something was wrong.

“You understand what I want?”

“Certainly. Of course, you wish me to discover who the man is in order that you may send him a challenge. Is it not so?”

“No, that’s not it. One can’t fight a duel in America, you know—one can only murder a man when he becomes intolerable—nothing so uncivilized as a duel. I simply want you to learn who——” Then I saw his point. “Oh!” I muttered, and was silent.

“Dirck,” I went on after a moment, “you’re right as usual. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

“Monsieur——”

“What could I have been thinking of? To spy deliberately on a woman or a woman’s friends—of all the caddish ideas!”

“Ah,” he said deprecatingly.

“Let’s try to forget it.”

I was silent so long that Dirck finally aroused me with a question.

“Is there anything else, monsieur?”

“Yes. Have you noticed anything peculiar about my visit here?—the attitude my hostesses have toward me, and that I have toward them?”

He studied me shrewdly. “Monsieur seems to be very much at home.”

“Precisely, Dirck. I *am* at home—I’m master here, against their wills. I mention this so you won’t come to any wrong conclusions from what you see going on. Thank Heaven! they are above reproach in *that* direction, at any rate.”

“In other directions then?”

“They aren’t—that’s it. I hold a sword over them, Dirck—I’m using it mercilessly, too, because they used me mercilessly years ago.”

“That was the reason monsieur went to Sumatra? I have seen monsieur gaze into the fire hours at a time.”

“Yes, that’s the reason.”

“Is it permitted to ask the shape of the sword monsieur carries? Madame and mademoiselle are women of the great world—not easily alarmed. Monsieur’s sword must be as sharp as a barong.”

“So it is. Just give me that wallet, will you? Look here.”

From its inner fold I produced a narrow slip of buff-colored paper. “There you are—look that over.”

He scanned it with open interest. “A cheque—a cheque for twenty-five thousand dollars on your bank.”

“Yes, but look at the signature.”

“It is your name, and—ah!” In spite of his self-possession I saw his eyes widen.

“You see?”

“The name is yours but the handwriting is——”

“Is not mine, most emphatically.”

“Ah?” he breathed slowly, then: “Impossible!”

“Read the endorsements.”

He studied the back of the slip, then handed it to me. “Impossible—but true.”

“Oh, yes, it’s true—it’s true. God knows I wish it weren’t”—I grew bitter—“but since it is, I’ll get my pay for it.”

“But the préfecture—the law—it would act for you.”

“No, no. I don’t want *that* for them. I’ll get better pay than putting a delicate woman behind bars.”

He nodded comprehendingly. "Monsieur is right, of course." He gave a sigh of almost personal regret. "Yet, I would have believed it impossible. So charming, so gentle!"

"You and I have seen fair faces go with bad deeds before this."

"True." He stroked his blonde moustache, his eyes thoughtful.

I replaced the cheque in the wallet and tossed the latter onto the dressing-table. Dirck's eyes glanced from it to the door.

"They're not far apart."

"True enough. That's why I got you to bring your tools. You see that pier-glass? Anybody trying to reach the wallet would naturally pass in front of the glass."

"Without doubt."

"You'll notice the thing has a firm base—solid mahogany. You can use that as an anchor." I proceeded to explain to him what I had in mind.

He drew his tools from his pocket and went to work. A few twists of the wire between his strong fingers, a clenching here and there with the pincers, and the thing was done.

"Are you sure it will work?"

"My life on it, monsieur. And yet I would not leave the paper in the wallet, if I were monsieur."

"Right, you are!" I slipped the cheque into the pocket of my dressing-gown and replaced the wallet on the table. "Now, if anyone does get past the

pier-glass, she'll—he'll only make a few dollars by it. Well, that's all, I think, Dirck."

He bade me good-night, but turned at the door.

"Monsieur was wondering why it was that Madame Sutphen left the drawing-room suddenly."

"Yes—something was said about a headache."

"To-night, while I was talking to Theresa in the kitchen, someone knocked at the outside door. Theresa opened it—a man was there. She stepped out at once, and when she came back she said it was only a vagrant she had sent away. I thought nothing of it then, but I remember now her face was flushed and she did not meet my eyes. A little time after, also, she went toward the front of the house and was gone a quarter of an hour."

"You think the man brought a message for Mrs. Sutphen?"

"I don't know—I mention it only."

"What did he look like?"

"I saw only that he was mean-looking and young—as young as monsieur."

"Hum! all right. Thank you, Dirck."

He lingered, his eyes held away from me, a faint color showing in his bronzed cheek.

"One thing more. The girl—the blonde—she who spoke to me in the porte-cochère—who is she?"

"That's Miss Westbrook—Miss Norah Westbrook, who lives across the valley there."

"She has been in France?"

“I’m not sure—I think it’s likely though. But every charming girl hasn’t necessarily acquired her charm in France, you know. You’re a provincial—of Paris, man, in spite of all your travels.”

“She is—very lovely.”

“I noticed that you thought so—you showed it pretty plainly when she spoke to you.”

“Good-night, monsieur.”

I finished my preparations for the night, wrapping the buff-colored slip of paper in a little jewel-bag I happened to discover in a drawer, and hanging the bag about my neck.

I turned off the lights, left open the door between my bedroom and the dressing-room, and in gown, slippers, and pajamas, stretched myself on the bed.

I meant to keep awake, but while I was wondering why Norah had blushed when Dirck stared at her, I fell asleep.

## XI

### I SURPRISE A PURITAN

MY sleep, although heavy enough, was rather a troubled dream than restful slumber.

I thought I was again in the smoking-room of the *Lusitania*, homeward bound. The smooth-faced, insolent-eyed man I had known a few years before—"Mr. Carlos Beauchamp of London and Havana," as the *Herald* put it—renewed acquaintance with me, and joined our game of cards.

Beauchamp's appearance was particularly interesting to me because of the fact that I had lately seen his name connected in the newspapers with that of Ellen Sutphen.

I dreamed over what had actually happened on the steamer. The first day I had tolerated him, half-amused by his easy flow of talk about himself—the second day I was not so sure that I was being amused. The third day his talk—everlasting, damnably perpetual talk about himself—had again made plain to me the utterly selfish soul of the man.

By hearsay and reputation—by the naked truth men learn at their clubs and women never hear or, if they do, never believe, provided the man concerned is personally charming—by these things I knew Carlos Beauchamp was a cad, unfit to look at Ellen Sutphen.



Nor was my dislike based on hearsay alone—my personal experience included at least one damning fact against him. Yet this was long past, and I was aware that a man may err greatly, and later live greatly—may sin, and afterward grow to higher manhood.

I dreamed, but I could in reality have slept only a few minutes, when into my dream broke a sudden rasping sound, then a low exclamation, followed by a noise of dragging.

I was off my bed, into the dressing-room, and had pressed the button of the electric lights in no time.

Blinking in the raw glare, but still struggling with Dirck's wire trap that held her to the pier-glass, was a girl. Her face—the face of a trapped creature—turned half toward me in terror, half away in shame. Once her hand made a little fluttering gesture, then fell at her side. Once she stooped and wrenched desperately at the clutching wire. Then she straightened up and stood, her head drooping, her lips trembling.

All this was only what I had expected. But I had expected to see, caught in the spring wire, either Mrs. Sutphen or Ellen. I had even pictured the latter, cowering, her kimono drawn close about her.

But who was this? The slim body was plainly clad, although the gown was very dainty. The hair was coiled in braids about her head, and the dark-brown eyes entreated me from under lashes

whose length was added to by the shadows beneath.

She stood before me, her head still hanging—I stared at her. Then I remembered.

“Well, I’ll be hanged!”

She made no answer, except to draw in her lower lip like a frightened child.

“Miss Mary Finney, isn’t it?” I asked politely.

Still she said nothing.

“May I ask what in the world you are doing here? Are you walking in your sleep?”

Her silence persisted, but I noted the involuntary straying of her eyes toward the dressing-table. A light broke upon me.

“Ah, ho! I think I understand to what I owe the honor of your visit. Miss Sutphen called at your cottage this afternoon to engage the services of a thief—wasn’t that it? Strange that you should have accepted her offer, Miss Finney! If it had been the fellow who ran away when I came in, it would have seemed more reasonable—he looked the part.”

The girl in the trap flushed darkly. She raised her head and faced toward me as if about to make a sharp retort.

“Well?” I urged affably.

“I shall say—nothing.” Her voice if husky was soft and well-toned.

“You’d better. Is there any reason why I shouldn’t turn you over to the police? I fancy your visit would look odd even to the town constables. You came here to steal, didn’t you?”

I paused, but she kept an obstinate silence.

"I could hardly expect you to admit it, but one doesn't go into a stranger's room late at night for the fun of the thing. Isn't that so? Look here! did you need money so much that Miss Sutphen could bribe you for a few dollars to be a thief? It's enough to make your ancestors turn in their graves. You're of honest Puritan stock, aren't you, Miss Finney?"

Still she preserved her marvellous silence. I moved past her to the table and took a bill from my wallet.

"Here!" I held it out to her. "I won't be hard on you, if you need money so badly that you have to steal. Take this, if that's what you're after."

For a moment she stared at me. "Keep your—your hateful money! Oh," she went on tremulously, "it's true, what they said—you *are* hard—a man that's always sneering."

Drawing in her trembling lip, she pulled so frantically at her captured foot that the heavy pier-glass fairly tottered.

"Don't, don't," I said. "You'll hurt yourself." I leant and released her foot from the wire. "That's better. Now you're free."

She repeated the word. "Free?"

"Yes. Not only your foot, but you're free to go."

Beneath the dark eyelashes I caught the gleam of unutterable amazement. I went on.

"You deserve freedom for your masterly silence.

Only a police judge could get anything out of you, and the police sha'n't have anything to do with this."

Although the wire no longer held her and I took care to stand clear of the door, she made no effort to escape. The thoughts of a hopeless animal suddenly released from a fatal trap would be interesting to the hunter.

"Before I let you out of the back door, let me give you some advice, Miss Finney, if that's really your name. The advice is—keep clear of matters that don't concern you."

The girl wrung her hands—a despairing gesture I had supposed unused since the Middle Ages. "Oh! but they do, they do!"

"In what way?"

She was on her guard again. "I'm sorry, Mr. Schuyler. I can't answer you."

"Very well. I suppose you know the way to the back door—you aren't staying in the house, are you?" She shook her head. "Then lead the way, —I'll see you safely out."

I followed her from the room, closing the door behind me. Thence we traversed the hall, descended a rear stairway, threaded a passage or two and paused at a back door. The key was in the lock—I turned it and swung the door softly open.

We looked out on a night rather dark and with a hint of frost in the air. If there was a moon, it was overcast. A few stars glittered here and

there—the red claw of Scorpio curling brilliantly against the black sky.

“Here we are. Where you are going now?”

“Home,” she answered huskily.

“It’s several miles—part of the way through woods. Even in peaceful New England that won’t be very pleasant for a woman. If you’ll wait a moment I’ll rouse my man, DuBois, and have him take you in the car.”

“No, no—please! It’s perfectly safe. There’s—I’m——” Her distress was evident.

“All right,” I hastened to assure her. “Just as you like.”

She lingered half in, half out, the door. I waited for her to speak.

“Mr. Schuyler, please don’t think I don’t know that you’ve treated me—a thousand times better than I deserve. You aren’t—so hard—as they said.” She was lost in the darkness before I could answer.

I stared up at Scorpio’s crimson claw. “Now, isn’t this a go! Doesn’t this fairly beat the Dutch! A little Puritan country girl like that breaking into my room at night! And silent? General Grant was positively garrulous compared to her.”

Red Scorpio returned no answer to my amazed appeal. I shut and locked the door, and started to make my way back to my rooms.

The passageways through which I had to find my way, were only dimly lighted, and I had followed

Mary Finney so intent on the problem her presence presented that I had hardly observed the course we took. I was feeling my way toward my room, with due caution of a wrong turn or a lurking chair, when I noticed a strange thing.

The door of my room was ajar and the light from within was streaming into the hall!

Without a sound I pushed it wider—until there was space to intrude my head.

My wallet, wide open, lay on the floor where it had been flung in exasperation, and at the dressing-table a woman was rifling the drawer with frantic haste.

She whirled about as I stepped quietly into the room. It was Theresa, the pretty Swede.

She gave a gasping cry, and made as if to rush through me and the door I had shut behind me. I held up my hand.

“Not so fast.”

“Oh!” she cried. “Let me out! Please, sir, I didn’t mean any harm. I just came in because I saw the door open and——”

“The door wasn’t open.”

“Oh, sir, if you’ll please let me go—I only wanted to see——”

“Tut, tut, my dear. You don’t need to explain why you came.”

I spoke so easily that perhaps the maid took me for another sort than I was. A portion of her terror seemed to vanish. Her clasped hands parted.

“Did you find what you were looking for, Theresa?” I asked. “Probably not, judging from the careless way you’ve thrown things about. Perhaps you’ll have a chance to think it over for a year or two—in the Massachusetts Penitentiary.”

She began to whimper at once. “Oh, Mr. Schuyler, please, sir, I didn’t mean any harm. I came in here because——”

Again I interrupted her, in disgust of what I knew her about to say. I had no desire to hear her disclose her mistress’s plot.

“Never mind. I’m not blaming *you*. But Theresa, if I ever catch you at this sort of thing again, I swear I’ll send you to jail. Understand?”

“Yes, sir,” she whimpered.

“Then clean up that mess you’ve made, and clear out—I want to go to bed.”

Her tears vanished on the instant. I seated myself in the armchair and watched her while she put the drawer in order and restored the wallet to its place on the table.

“Here’s another situation to beat the Dutch,” I mused. “They’re having a regular succession of defeats. If any of my friends could look in here on this highly—hum!—domestic scene, they’d be rather shocked, I fancy. Imagine, if Norah Westbrook should hear of this—just this scene without any of its reasons or causes! No doubt she’d cut my acquaintance in short order.”

Something of my enjoyment of the situation

must have showed in my smile as I watched the pretty Swede. She began to move more slowly at the work of straightening my ties and shirts and glanced at me over her shoulder.

“It seems awful funny me being here, don’t it, Mr. Schuyler?”

“It certainly does,” I agreed.

She smiled at herself in the glass. The little witch saw I saw her, and smiled mischievously at my reflection.

“Mirrors are funny things, aren’t they, sir?”

“Very—almost as funny as your being here.”

She pretended to hang her head, but I could see her watching me from the corners of her eyes. Now and then she stole a glance of satisfaction at herself in the mirror.

“Have you finished?” I demanded peremptorily.

“Yes, sir. Everything looks fine now.”

“Then you can go. And, Theresa, tell—ah—tell the person who sent you here that I say the business would be a little less wretched if she would do her own robbing.”

“Sir? I don’t think I know what you mean, sir.”

“Nonsense. Tell her I said that. Now, run along.”

In another moment I had shut and locked the door behind her.

I switched off the lights, but before slipping into bed, went to the open window. The scorpion star waved a red claw at me through the frosty air.



## XII

### A PROPOSAL IS MENTIONED

IT was morning when I was awakened by Dirck's knock on the door. I hastened to respond to it.

"Good-morning, monsieur. It is half-past eight, and Mademoiselle Sutphen wishes to say Monsieur Westbrook sends word he will start with his hound at nine."

"So Aleck isn't in the sulks after all."

"What, monsieur?"

"I say it's all right, Dirck. I'll be there in a jiffy. No—half-past eight already, you say? I'll never make it. Ask Miss Sutphen please to send word to Mr. Westbrook to hold off half an hour or so. Give her my apologies and say I'll be down as soon as I can. And then hustle back and help me dress, Dirck."

As he hastened away I reflected on his message. "By Jove! she's cool! She must know by this time that her brace of burglars failed last night, yet she has me called as serenely as you please. She can't possibly imagine that I believe they acted of their own accord. Humph! for the time being I'm perfectly willing to ignore their attempts." Dirck's return interrupted my meditations.

In forty minutes, with his able assistance, I had bathed, shaved, and donned my walking togs, had

had my eggs and coffee in my room, and descended to find Ellen awaiting me on the lawn.

She greeted me gaily—I searched in vain for any trace of embarrassment in her eyes. “Good-morning, Uncle Tom.”

“Whah, good-mawnin’, Eliza. Ah d’clah, I’s ’bliged to ast yo’ to ’scuse me fo’ sort a keepin’ yo’ waitin’ this mawnin’.”

“Sut’nly Ah’ll ’scuse yo’, Unc’ Tom,” she laughed. “Ain’t we all got a fine mawnin’ fo’ ouah ’scape!”

“Glorious! I don’t wonder Legree is about to pursue you with bloodhounds. I’d run you down with an airship if necessary just to see you this morning.” I swept the grass with my cap in a low bow.

Indeed, I had very good grounds for my heroics. Her Adirondack running costume became her wonderfully. Coat, knickerbockers, and stockings were not of the usual gray tweed, but were made of some black stuff, quite as serviceable and infinitely more charming, I thought. The little half-boots were black as was the cap that crowned her closely-coiled hair—a cap that reminded me of nothing so much as the bonnet of one of Robin Hood’s merry men.

The only spots of color in her costume were touches of white at wrists and neck, and at her throat a soft scarlet tie, loosely knotted.

Her face, pricked by the morning air, or possibly by the flavor of genuineness in my bit of gallantry,

had a tinge of red in each cheek. Cheeks curved to throat, and throat swelled to lines beneath, as delicate as a wood-pigeon's. Her hazel eyes laughed back at me as I continued to gaze at her admiringly.

"You didn't really think I'd come prepared to run to the last gasp, did you? You thought I'd only be able to take a few languid steps."

"To tell the truth, I didn't expect much in the running line from you, Nell, but I can see I totally misjudged your powers—more shame to me. Hum-m, it's hard to tell."

"Hard to tell what?"

"Whether you look more cherub than boy, or——"

"Oh. You can make up your mind as we go—it's high time for us to be miles from here. Aleck will be bringing over the hound in a few minutes—it would be disgraceful to be caught before we were fairly started."

"Very good, ma'am. Which way?"

"Right over the hill, and then *au large*."

"Good!"

At the last moment Dirck slipped a lunch-pouch over my shoulder. "If monsieur and mademoiselle need refreshment."

"Right, Dirck. Now, then, Nell. Off and away by the light of the moon, straight across the border where the Fugitive Slave Law doesn't count."

"It seems to count nowadays." She broke into

an easy trot, and together we began our cross-country run.

We made our way smoothly up the hill and through the open grove of oaks along its crest. At its end a few score shafts and slabs of marble huddled within a square of evergreens. It was a country graveyard—I remembered it well.

Beyond this we were out of sight of both “Red Cedars” and “Westbrook Place,” and what was even more to the point, came at once upon a stone wall, extending diagonally right and left.

“Let’s go along the top,” said my leader. “It runs quite a distance in that direction.”

She pointed with her left hand, and a ring of iron showed suddenly beneath the white of her sleeve. I started—I had forgotten the bracelet I had locked on her arm.

“On the wall?” I asked stupidly.

“Yes. The scent doesn’t lie well on rock, you know. The hound will lose the trail a while very likely—that’ll give us a good start. Dear me, if he doesn’t lose it, we’re ‘gone coons’ in five minutes.”

Disdaining to make use of my proffered arm, she leaped upon the wall and began to walk rapidly along it. I followed.

It must have carried us four hundred yards before we came to a corner. Here she paused.

“We must jump off here—jump as far as we possibly can—to make a break in our trail. But if

Aleck is feeling really clever to-day, he'll just make the hound circle about a little and he'll find us in no time—I mean, after he's made up his mind which way we've gone, right or left from the evergreens there. Hark! what's that?" She clapped her hands excitedly. "Oh, they've started. Listen, Craig! Isn't it *music!*"

It *was* music. A single note of a deep-toned bell sounded far behind us—then another. Then, slowly drawing nearer, ravishingly deep and clear, a cadenced peal of bells, the voice of the bloodhound rang in the autumn air. A thrill went through us. We stared at each other, our eyes wide with the wonder of it—and on me, at least, the gooseflesh fairly rose.

"Wonderful! Terrible! Is my hair on end?"

"Not quite. Oh, I'm all prickly! Isn't this fun, and aren't you glad you came, Uncle Tom? Jump now, as far out as you can."

"One minute," I exclaimed. "Can you step onto that hickory—the one with the branch that runs straight out from the wall? That's it—good! I'm right behind you. That's five yards cleared without a trail. Let me see." I glanced about for more worlds to conquer.

"Ah, ha! into the next one just like it. Swing yourself into the sapling—never mind if it does bend—I won't get on till you're off it. You see it lets you right onto that upland gumberry. They always have long branches."

“Jolly! Here *is* a great long limb, Craig.”

“What did I tell you? Follow it out. That’s another fifteen yards clear again. And by Jove! there’s a wild grapevine hanging right across that path! If we were only monkeys now—but it’s too much for you. We’re several rods from the wall, at any rate.”

Ellen, imbued with the spirit of the game, had been working her way through the lower branches of the trees as easily as a boy, and far more gracefully. Now her exclamation stopped me as I was about to drop from the gumberry bough into the path.

“Wait, Craig! I can do it—hand over hand—*voilà!*”

As good as her word, she swung herself out from the gumberry and hand over hand, her body swaying like a charming pendulum, cleared the path and dropped into the copse beyond. In a moment I was beside her.

We crouched breathless against the trunk of an oak.

“Great!” I chuckled. “We’ll make Aleck think we’ve escaped in a balloon. Listen! They’ve lost our trail.”

Sure enough, the chime of bells broke its perfect time, jumbled doubtfully once or twice, then ceased to sound.

“They’ve reached the wall,” declared Ellen. “Of course Aleck will have the dog upon it in a

minute, but I'm sure the scent won't lie. We ought to gain thirty minutes on them, at least."

But instead of making use of our hard-earned half hour to throw a mile or two between ourselves and "Legree," "Eliza" and I sat chatting in the copse.

It was a thicket of sapling oak and ash, down whose slender shafts the sun's rays here and there stretched a finger of light. In the little open space where we sat the rays seemed to focus, making a pleasant warmth about us.

"'Under the greenwood tree,'" I began.

"Please go on."

"I like the second verse best; you remember?"

"'Who doth ambition shun,  
And loves to lie i' the sun,  
Seeking the food he eats,  
And pleased with what he gets,  
Come hither, come hither, come hither;  
Here shall he see  
No enemy  
But winter and rough weather.'"

She glanced sidelong at me. "'No enemy, but winter and rough weather.'" I fancied she spoke a little plaintively, but it may have been fancy only, for she went on brightly enough. "Does your coming back to America mean that you do ambition shun? Exploring *is* your ambition, isn't it?"

"Exploring *is* my resource. I'm not here be-

cause I'm giving up travelling—not at all. I came back expressly for that—delightful interview we had—you and I and your mother. Otherwise, I would have been on the Bois this very minute.”

Again her voice was plaintive. “It doesn't look as if we—mother and I—would get to Paris this year.”

“No, it doesn't.”

A golden-brown oak leaf fluttered waveringly down to her knee. She blew it gaily away. “Fly away, Dull Care! Are you rested enough to go on, Craig?”

I crossed my legs and linked my fingers behind my head in luxurious content.

“Not quite. Why hurry? Haven't we ages before us?”

“Ages before, but a bloodhound close behind.”

“Never mind. We'll lie *perdu* here in this—this yew copse, and I'll shoot the bloodhound through and through with my clothyard shaft.”

“Then I'll wind your horn for you—of course, you'll be too proud to do it yourself—and Little John and Allan-a-Dale——”

“And Friar Tuck.”

“And Friar Tuck, of course, and Will Scarlett, and seven score tall fellows in Lincoln green, will come leaping through Sherwood to overwhelm—Legree.”

“Well said, Maid Marian Eliza.”

We laughed together. I, for one, would have



been well content had the hound been ten miles behind us instead of where he was.

Ellen's eyes ran over me, from the smooth-fitting leather of my boots to the hair of my bared head. "She held him with her glittering eye," I laughed.

"You're thinner, Craig." Her face was sober. "And there's really a trace—a tiniest shadow—of gray over your temples."

"Hundreds of miles of tramping through jungles! Tropic miasma! What little fighting I saw in Sumatra, too! War always saddens a man, I fancy—if it doesn't hopelessly harden him."

"I—think it has done both to you."

"Perhaps it has—that and other things."

"As for myself, I'm afraid I'm like Falstaff, growing old and waxing fat."

I straightened up to express my protest. "You? Nonsense! Nell, you're prettier a hundred times than you were four years ago. You were only a child then, and a woman is always lovelier than a child. That's an artist's axiom."

"Is it?"

"Certainly. In Paris, the other day, I saw the picture that took the Grand Prix this year—a portrait. I give you my word you might have sat for it yourself—it gave me quite a start when I saw it. The face had the same delicate coloring as yours—the cheeks just a shade thin, like yours. And the curves of the throat and shoulders melted into each other in the same way yours do."

“And the hair?” she insinuated very demurely.

“Oh, it’s impossible to put the sheen of your hair onto canvas. The picture was gloriously done, but, of course——”

Her laughter interrupted me, and I sat back against the tree conscious that I had been led to display an enthusiasm I should have preferred to hide.

“I’m much obliged to you—really and truly,” she said. “I’ll look at myself with a little satisfaction in the next mirror I come to. I wanted something like that—from somebody, even if I did have to fish for it. I need all the self-respect I can muster.”

A cricket marched into view from its fortress in a patch of moss at Ellen’s heel, and climbed to the toe of her boot. Thence, pausing a moment to collect its powers, it leaped the mighty four-inch chasm to my foot, and so into its mossy fastness again. Its pæan of victory rang valiantly forth while Ellen gave me a smile as merry as the cricket’s song. “It hasn’t a care in the world.” She broke off, and turned her head to listen.

“Did you hear anything? I’d quite forgotten that we are supposed to be panting fugitives.”

“I thought I heard a faint crashing—perhaps not. ‘Gomez’ would certainly bay as soon as he found the trail again.”

“The bloodhound’s name?”

“Yes. He’s a poor finder, although he follows well enough.”

“You know a deal about bloodhounds, Nell.”

My words seemed to cause her some confusion. She glanced at me as if to detect any hidden significance in my remark. I could see the color creeping to her cheek.

“Where did you learn your bloodhound lore?” I urged.

“I’ve been out with Aleck before, you know.” She hesitated palpably, then went on. “And Mr. Beauchamp taught me a little, too.”

“Ah! Mr. Beauchamp?”

“Yes. ‘Gomez’ belonged to him. He sold him to Aleck last spring.”

“Beauchamp was here last spring, was he?” My tone was cold.

She felt the approaching rending of the veil that had thus far separated the day’s delights from the hard facts of yesterday. She spoke with effort.

“Yes.”

“Staying at your house, I suppose?”

“He’d been looking after his sugar plantation, you know, and mother asked him to stop over for the week-end on his way back from Havana. ‘Gomez’ followed him about like a kitten, and——”

I rent the veil with sudden violence. “Nell, I won’t let you have anything to do with a scoundrel like Beauchamp.”

She deliberately pulled up her left sleeve until the red of the Nubian bracelet showed about her wrist.

“I thought I felt a pain coming here,” she said flippantly.

For a moment I was amazed—then I detected the hint of tears behind the flippancy. “A brute like Beauchamp isn’t fit for you to put your foot on.”

“He seems—very agreeable.”

“Certainly he *seems* so—if he didn’t he wouldn’t be dangerous. I wish I could tell you—things, but one can’t tell a girl—even for her own good.”

“Thank you for nothing. Are you aware that you may be spoiling—my chances?”

“Very likely.”

“Mr. Beauchamp—is—substantial; and, as *you* have proof, mother and I were badly pinched last year—in stocks. If you keep him away——”

“I don’t care. Look here, Nell! I’m not going to let you have anything to do with him hereafter.”

“Do you mean to stay here ‘hereafter’—forever—to make sure your order is obeyed?”

“I’ll stay long enough, I fancy.”

Her eyes widened. “What do you mean?”

I meant nothing—it was a wholly chance shot, but I smiled grimly. “Never mind!”

She studied me, her lips a little apart, a latent fire in her hazel eyes. The sunlight crept through the saplings and made golden lights in her hair. As I gazed I felt myself softening—she looked like an innocent and beautiful boy.

The copse where we sat concealed was separated

from the main grove by a woodland path. Reclining against a tree, but screened by the dense undergrowth, we could see without being seen.

Into the path, from the opposite side, suddenly broke a tremendous hound.

Never in my life had I seen such a creature! He stood as high as Ellen's waist, and must have weighed a hundred and fifty pounds. As he snuffed up and down the path, his forehead, profoundly wrinkled, his hanging ears and dewlapped muzzle, and his tawny skin, showed the best Cuban breed.

"The bloodhound," I whispered—quite needlessly.

Ellen nodded, laying a finger on her lip for silence.

Aleck Westbrook's voice sounded in the grove. "Come on! the dog's got away from me. He's as strong as a bull. He can't have gone far though. Ah ha, here he is."

Aleck stepped into the path as he spoke, and turned to hold aside the bushes for a companion.

"Willy Archer must have gotten up his courage," I murmured. "He's stopped smoking cigarettes long enough to——"

Ellen's intent look made the words die on my lips. The man who entered the path behind Aleck was Carlos Beauchamp.

He was a clean-limbed, active man of about thirty. His Spanish mother—she to whom he owed the sugar estates in Cuba—showed in his black hair

and long nose, but his English father had given him his blue eyes and fresh-colored face. Clad in a gray walking costume, immaculately correct, he bounded into the path beside Aleck—I had to admit to myself that he made an attractive figure.

“Hello! Sure enough, there’s old ‘Gomez’ now. Smell ’em out, old fellow. No go, Westbrook—they’ve called the turn on us this time.”

Ellen, her finger still on her lip, looked from our pursuers to me, and back again. Her breast rose slowly.

“They can’t have flown,” said Aleck.

“Oh, of course not. Let’s get back to the wall and have a try in the other direction. We’re bound to pick ’em up somewhere. Here, old fellow.”

He whistled to the great hound—it came fawning about him. All three plunged back into the grove.

Ellen and I got to our feet. For a moment neither spoke.

“Did you know *he* was here?” I asked at last.

“Yes—since last night, but I didn’t dream he would be with Aleck this morning—not after—after——”

“Nell, are you engaged to be married to Carlos Beauchamp?”

Her chin was tilted a little forward in her old defiant attitude, but she spoke hesitantly.

“Craig, I want to tell you—I’m trying to be honest with you, you see——. You’re—master, you say, so perhaps you’ll have to know.”

“Out with it, Nell. I’m not going to bite you.”

“Not with your teeth, perhaps. I wanted to say—Mr. Beauchamp is at the Westbrooks’ waiting for my answer.”

“Your answer?”

“My answer to his——. Well, this morning he sent me a letter asking me to marry him.”

We eyed each other steadfastly for an instant—then a single deep bay sounded in the opposite wood. She whirled about.

“Quick! Let’s run for it!”

Instinctively I obeyed.

## XIII

### THE BLOODHOUND

THE chase was now on in earnest. I took the lead in half a dozen strides.

“Speak, if I go too fast,” I cried in Ellen’s ear as I sprang in front of her.

She nodded, the excitement of the game, and the fear of my displeasure struggling in her sidelong glance.

With her at my heels, I broke through the copse for several rods in a line parallel to the path. Then, turning a corner, we sprang into the path and ran along it for a hundred yards or more. I conjectured others—farmers rabbit-hunting or their daughters carrying milk—might have gone that way earlier that morning, in which event the hound might confuse our scent. As we learned afterward, I was right, and it was this manœuvre only that saved us from being overhauled within the next five minutes.

After running a hundred yards we turned into the woods again—they were more open here and we trotted briskly through them. Beyond the woods lay a meadow that we crossed at top speed. Over the shoulder of a hill we fell into a trot along a cow-path.

All this time the baying of the hound, muffled



first by the woods and then by the intervening hill-crest, sounded behind us.

I glanced back at my companion. She was running easily. Her cheeks were a little flushed, but no more than my own. Her shoulders and head were held well forward, her mouth closed without effort and—most wonderful in a woman!—she was running on the balls of her feet.

“I see you’re holding your own.”

“Yes. You can go faster, if you like—I have my second wind.”

“Steady does it. The dog has stopped again—I can’t hear him now.”

“The wind may be the other way. Besides, sometimes ‘Gomez’ runs mute.”

The cow-path dipped down a rocky slope to a little valley where the grass had withered to a lawn-like shortness in the autumn air. We fairly raced along this bottom-land for a good quarter mile, then we jog-trotted up the opposite hill. On a plateau beyond we dropped to a fast walk.

The weather was glorious. The sun was dispersing the frosty net work from the grass. The sky domed blue as steel. All along the tops of distant ridges lay a shimmering mist—the haze of Saint Martin’s Summer—as mysterious as the lights in Ellen’s eyes.

We were walking side by side—the mist on the mountains, the film in the grass, and the lights in her eyes were all of the same color—and as false,

I reflected; one as trustworthy as the other but no more so.

The rushing wind had loosened a little strand of hair just over her ear. She felt it and tucked it in with a quick turn of her fingers. Her wrist, curving against her cheek, showed again the badge of her servitude.

Her breast rose and fell evenly. Her feet, slim and not too short, held her well-poised body without stumbling. The mental fatigue that I knew possessed her—intolerable fatigue of my presence—had no physical counterpart in her motions. I doubted if one I had known among the bamboos of Sumatra would have endured our run as well as this twentieth-century product of a very different civilization.

A late bit of golden-rod peered from a tussock of grass. I plucked it as we passed and held it out to her. She took it, smiling doubtfully.

“A flower in your cap. A golden staff for the staunchest runner I ever saw.”

“Are you making fun of me?”

“I mean it—I never saw a woman run so well, not even in the East. I’ll wager you’re less breathed than I am now.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Beyond the plateau we struck a winding road and, as the country was growing hillier, we held it for a mile or more, covering the ground at a smart trot. We met only one man—a white-whiskered

farmer driving a market wagon. He eyed us as we drew near as if he thought us quite mad. I noticed the plain bronze of the G. A. R. button in the lapel of his coat.

“If the bloodhound happens to strike the road just as he’s passing,” I chuckled, “the old fellow’ll think war times are come again.”

When we were abreast of the horses’ heads, the farmer pulled in. We stopped to answer his friendly hail.

“Say, you folks, what are you up to?”

“S-sh!” I returned dramatically, “we’re being pursued by bloodhounds.”

“Eh?”

“Bloodhounds are on our trail.”

“You don’t say? You’re foolin’, boys.”

“No, I mean it.”

He eyed us, his shrewd glance resting on Ellen. He started, stared again, then broke into a chuckle. He lifted his felt hat.

“’Scuse me, ma’am. I didn’t see at first you *was* a ma’am.” He chuckled again, so heartily that I feared he would fall from his seat. “Say, you two folks is elopin’, I reckon—eh?”

Ellen blushed, and I laughed with the old man.

“’Scuse me sayin’ so, ma’am,” he went on, “but you make a mighty purty boy—you cert’ny do so.”

“She certainly does.”

“Yes, o’ course, *you* think so,” retorted the old farmer. “I jings! boy, if I was forty years

younger I'd git out and run you a few miles myself. You folks from Bannocks, I reckon—eh? ”

“ Yes.”

“ There ain't nothin' you ain't up to down there. Say, they ain't after you with bloodhoun's sure enough? ”

“ Yes—with one bloodhound, sure enough.”

“ Where? ”

“ Down the road a mile or so.”

“ I jings! I ain't seen a bloodhoun' since I got away from Andersonville in '63. G'long there!” He clucked to his horses. “ Good-mornin', ma'am. I want to see that houn', sure.” His last words floated back half smothered by his hearty chuckle. “ A mighty purty boy she makes—eh? ”

We ran on down the road for another half mile. Then I noticed a path issuing from a gully almost hidden by a dense growth of laurel. Up this we went for a furlong or more, following the bank of a little stream.

A rocky bluff split the gully abruptly into two parts. The path went straight up the dividing hill. Right and left, a branch of the main stream came tinkling down toward us. Over each branch the tangled laurel made a tunnel.

“ Are you game for a wade, Eliza? ”

“ Of course.”

“ It'll mean wet boots and stockings, you know.”

For answer, she leaped fair into the left hand stream. A tiny shower was thrown up about her.

Standing mid-calf deep in the tinkling brown water, she looked up at me roguishly.

“Come on! Are you afraid, Uncle Tom? There isn’t any ice.”

I was beside her at the word, though with caution lest I should splash her.

Stooping beneath the overhanging laurel, we began to ascend the stream, moving in a half twilight. From the country road, came the deep baying of the bloodhound—my mind dwelt on Carlos Beauchamp and his abominably good form.

Ellen stumbled and I caught her arm. “Shall we climb out, Nell? The water’s rather deep for you.”

“No. I’m all right. ‘Water leaves no trail’—Legree will——”

“The two Legrees.”

“Yes. They’ll never catch us now.”

I still held her arm. My grip must have reminded her of my dominance over her, for she twitched away with evident resentment.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you.”

“No—you simply can’t help it, I suppose.”

“Perhaps not.” My tone had a sadness that she may have taken for indifference.

The brown water sang about our feet. A black-bird called sweetly from a patch of cat-tails. We waded side by side, now shadowed by the overhanging thicket, now speckled by the sunshine filtering through.

Suddenly she flared out at me. "I'll marry whom I like."

I was taken aback, and only stared.

"I'll marry Carlos Beauchamp, if I like," she went on hotly. "My husband will protect me—yes, even from you."

"He'll protect you from everyone except himself."

"What do you mean?"

"When a woman marries she gives everything but her soul, you know—and sometimes that, if she marries the wrong man."

"Mr. Beauchamp is a gentleman."

"Externally, yes."

"I'll marry him, if I wish."

"I suppose by marrying Beauchamp, you are defying me to do my worst."

"You may put it that way, if you like. What will you do?—turn me over to the Law?"

"No. If you marry Beauchamp, you'll be punished enough, Nell—too much."

My gravity, my certitude, impressed her. She stood stock-still and stared at me, the water rippling against her little black boots. We would have made a strange picture for an onlooker.

"Why shouldn't I be punished?" she said. "I'm a—a thief."

"I've never said so."

"A forger, then—that's the same thing, or worse. If I suffer by my marriage, won't it be only what I deserve?"

"I hate to think so."

"But you *do* think so."

"I don't think you deserve a man like him."

"What do you *know* against Mr. Beauchamp?"

"I can't tell you what I know—but I know a brute when I see him."

"Oh!"

"I'm truly sorry you're going to marry Beauchamp, Nell. But what must be, must be! Shall we move on?"

She held her ground. "I didn't say I intended to marry him. I never said so."

"But you said——"

"I said I will if I like, but I certainly don't like."

"What!"

"He's been coming to 'Red Cedars' for two or three years. I'm glad he's asked me at last—any woman would want *that*, for her own self-respect. But I sent back his messenger this morning—promptly—declining the honor of becoming his wife."

"You did?"

"Yes, I did. I've never liked him—much. I wrote him 'no' this morning—before you were up. That's the reason I was so surprised to see him on our trail with Aleck. One would think a man—a man who——"

"A man who has just been rejected."

"Well, yes. One would think he wouldn't care about thrusting himself in on—on——"

“On the girl who’d just rejected him,” I finished. “Nell, will you shake hands?”

The red crept slowly into her cheeks. “Shake hands? Why?”

“In token of my approval of your conduct.”

“No. Your approval is nothing to me, is it?” She resumed her wading.

There seemed to be nothing for me to do but to follow her example.

By this time, the slope of the hill was steadily increasing, and both the undergrowth and the stream grew thinner and thinner. After a little we came to the beginning of things—a pool no bigger than a dinner table, and an oak growing over this nest of springs. The one made a variegated reflection in the other.

We climbed out of the stream’s bed, and shook the “dust of the water,” as Ellen expressed it, from our dripping feet.

“I believe we’ve thrown off the dog for good,” I said. “If he can track us up half a mile of mountain burn, he deserves to get us. Nell, I’m almost sorry I dared you into this. You look rather wet—I hope you don’t catch cold.”

“No-o.”

“Do you *feel* cold?”

“No. A little, perhaps.”

I consulted my watch, and then the sun. “It’s nearly noon—that’s north—and we’re within half a mile of a chance to get dry—yes, and of apple-pie, with cream.”



Ellen started. "Apple-pie?"

"Yes. Don't you know where you are? That down up there looks familiar even to me."

She stared about her, paling. "Well?" she said at last.

"Half a mile from Mary Finney's cottage."

"Why have you brought me—why have we come here?"

"For some of Mary's pie. Besides you ought to get on some dry things as soon as you can—I can see you're shivering." She *was* shivering, but I thought it was not from cold.

"But——"

"Come on. I fairly yearn for some of that apple-pie—with cream."

"Oh, of course, with cream," she echoed, faintly-satirical.

We gained the top of the down, and followed along the edge of a gully that led toward the river gorge in the distance. Mary Finney's cottage peered from its perch among the apple-trees above the river.

"I should think Miss Finney would be afraid to live there alone. It's a good distance to the village. Somebody might annoy her—a tramp or"—I spoke deliberately—"or a sneak-thief. It wouldn't be pleasant if she woke up and found someone plundering her wardrobe."

Ellen shivered again—the wind blew a bit stiffly. "I don't think—she's afraid."

We held our course along the gully. On our side was only the down, bare save for the crisp, autumn-nipped grass; on the other, a forest of second-growth hemlock and pine grew to the edge of the cliff.

I stopped and peered down into this ravine. Forty feet below a stream, similar to the one we had just been wading, hurried to join the river in the gorge.

I heard a sound behind me, and turned about sharply. "Nell, you *are* cold. You're getting a chill."

"I—I think not."

"You surely are, child. Let's get to Mary Finney's and there you can——"

She was looking at me, smiling bravely and trying to keep her teeth from chattering. Suddenly she gave a little scream.

"Oh, Craig! Look! Behind you!"

Even as I wheeled, I heard the deep bay of the bloodhound.

The great dog, "Gomez," was coming along the brink of the gully at a swift lope. His nose was well up as if the scent were too hot to doubt. Now and then he bayed profoundly.

"He looks as big as a mountain. A regular rhinoceros! I've a strong inclination to climb a tree, only there isn't any on this side."

"No," she laughed, although the excitement of the situation showed in her eyes. "Shall we run?"

“ I fancy it’s too late—he’ll see us in a minute.”

“ Isn’t it thrilling! When one thinks what that enormous creature could do——”

“ What *will* he do? ”

“ He usually stops and gambols about—or fawns like a puppy.”

The tawny head and chest, the dewlapped muzzle and wrinkled forehead, were now within a few yards of us. As “ Gomez ” threw up his head to bay, he caught sight of us.

Planting one lion-like paw in front, he brought himself to a halt. For a moment he eyed us, amiably enough—Ellen and I were already advancing with outstretched hands to make his acquaintance, when a singular interruption occurred.

As I have said, the other side of the gully was a mere wilderness of hemlock and pine. Thence a peculiar noise sounded—the crack of a rotten twig, the cry of a wild bird, the flat note of a human voice.

“ Gomez ” had been striding grandly toward us as if willing to meet our “ good dogs ” and “ here, old fellows,” half way.

Now, coincident with the peculiar sound, his manner underwent an appalling change. He gave a thrilling bay, the lips fell away from the muzzle, disclosing a frightful array of fangs—before I could believe my horrified senses, he took one tremendous stride and leaped at Ellen.

One instant she was down. The next I had the

dog furiously by the throat and had whirled him clear.

He rose on his hind-legs to meet my attack, his dripping muzzle on a level with my eyes. He snapped at me as my fingers worked for a hold through his folds of skin—an inch farther and I would have had no face. His enormous paws weighed like lead on my shoulder as he wrestled with me like a man. We were both growling—I as much of a beast as he—both furious, both raving.

Through the red mist of the struggle a voice sounded, very far away.

“Craig! The cliff!”

I understood—the gully yawned behind me. With what strength and resolution I had left I stood fast within six inches of the brink. Then inch by inch I swung the great dog’s head and shoulders to the right. I flung him from me.

He fell grandly, without a struggle or a sound, to the rocks below.

Ellen stood beside me. “Nell”—I did my best to repress my heavy breathing,—“are you hurt?”

She was very pale and trembling excessively, but she shook her head. “No—he only struck me with his paw. I was hardly down before you dragged him off. But, Craig, it was frightful to see you and——”

“I always feel ashamed of myself after a row, Nell. I’m afraid I’m a real savage at bottom.”

“I didn’t mean that. Craig, you saved——”

Her voice died away and she stared fixedly across the narrow gully.

“Don’t think of it, Nell. I’m mighty glad you aren’t hurt. It’s all over now.”

She turned toward me. Her face was slow in regaining its color. “‘Gomez’—do you suppose it killed him?”

A mournful bay reassured us. In a bush at the bottom of the gully the late-ferocious bloodhound struggled and bayed disconsolately.

I could not help laughing. “He’s all right. Aleck will be along pretty soon—no doubt he’ll get him out somehow.” I dusted my hands on the sides of my coat. “Now, Nell, what do you say? Let’s get to Mary Finney’s. Now for apple-pie.”

“With cream,” she said a little hysterically.

## XIV

### THE PRINCESS LETS DOWN HER HAIR

WHEN Mary Finney opened her cottage door to my peremptory knock, her face turned even paler at sight of me than it had the night before.

“Mr. Schuyler!” Her glance shifted to my companion. “Ellen!”

I did not give her time to voice her fear, whatever it may have been.

“Good-morning,” I said breezily, half supporting Ellen into the room. “Here we are, Miss Finney—two weary wanderers. Miss Sutphen has gotten rather wet and needs some dry things—yes, and a warm fire.”

The girl looked eagerly at Ellen who was stoutly endeavoring to still her chattering teeth. “I’ve a good fire in the kitchen. Why, Ellen, you’ve got a real chill, surely. Poor dear! And your feet are *that* wet! How in the world?”

“We were running across country from Mr. Aleck Westbrook’s bloodhound,” I explained.

“Oh! Come right out to the kitchen, Ellen, and sit right down by the stove—it’s nice and warm out there. I’ll give you some dry clothes and make you a fine hot cup of tea. Poor dear!”

“I don’t feel the least bit badly,” insisted Ellen as Mary led her away, “but it *is* rather nice to be fussed over.”

I found myself gazing at the closed door of the kitchen, whence not even the voices of the two girls reached me. It was not for me to intrude on the mystery of "dry clothes." For a moment I felt a bit disconsolate.

Then the experience of an old campaigner came to my rescue. Taking in the situation at a glance, I made a foray on the little table and the shelves behind it. Results: one delicious apple-pie, not ten minutes from the oven; one pint of cream in a yellow crock; item—a paper bag half full of powdered sugar; item—one pewter tablespoon.

Equipped with these fruits of my raid, I was looking about for the best place in which to begin an onslaught on the same, when Mary opened the kitchen door a few inches.

"Mr. Schuyler."

I whirled at the word and involuntarily tried to conceal my loot behind me. "Miss Finney——"

Notwithstanding her aversion toward me, the shadow of a smile flickered in her eyes at my school-boy fright.

"Mr. Schuyler, Miss Sutphen will be ready in a few minutes. She says you're as wet as she is and must change your clothes too, and——"

"Change?" I laughed. "You'd have a hard time fitting me out in this house, wouldn't you?"

"No, sir. Oh—ah!" She stopped in embarrassment, and blushed faintly. "I think I could find—find an old pair of—of——"

I came to her relief. "I don't need a change. I'm nearly dry now—I'll finish off by the kitchen stove when Miss Sutphen is out of the way. You're putting her to bed, aren't you?"

"No, indeed, she isn't," called Ellen's voice within. "What an idea! I'm not such a baby as that, Craig. Wait a minute. Mary, Mary—come here, will you?"

The girl hurried to her, luckily leaving the door an inch or two ajar. I could hear their voices.

There were murmurs, interspersed with much soft laughter and the noise of scraping chair and table-legs. Snatches of sentences came to my ears: "Tuck it in carefully, Mary"—"now, you see, the screen'll go all across"—"a man never notices things anyway"—"you certainly do look pretty Ellen"—"now I'm all ready." And then in a horrified whisper: "Mary, Mary, come back! I know one of my toes is peeking."

The obstinate member must have been satisfactorily disposed of, for after a brief interval Mary opened the door and invited me to enter. I did so, pie and all. Ellen hailed me merrily.

"Ah ha, naughty boy! You've been in the jam-pot."

"Sweets to the sweet."

"Egotist!"

"No, altruist! I'm bringing pie and sugar to you."

"Schuyler was a Welshman,  
Schuyler was a thief,"



She chanted. I broke in:

“Schuyler brought an apple-pie  
To soothe sweet Ellen's grief.”

The kitchen was the real living-room of the house—a room in which everything sparkled with cleanliness in genuine New England fashion. Ellen sat in a rocking-chair at a table close to the stove. She was wrapped from feet to waist in a rose-colored “down” quilt that effectually concealed any toe that might have been inclined to “peek.”

Her cap had been removed—the braids of her hair were as smooth as Mary Finney's own. Her teeth had ceased to chatter, and the color had crept back to her cheeks. Her fingers were drumming a gay little tune on the table.

On the other side of the stove a screen, placed at a crafty angle, concealed whatever may have been hung on the clothes-rack behind.

“Are you feeling better, Nell?”

“Fine. It was silly of me to get a chill. Don't you want to shift your things, really?”

“No. They'll dry on me perfectly well. It's too much trouble besides. I'll just put my plunder on the table and—— Hello! the table's set!”

She laughed at my shout of discovery. “Yes. Was there ever a man in this world who didn't cheer at the sight of food? That's your place there. There's the tea in the pot, but Mary says she hasn't another thing in the house. She's going down to the village now to get something.”

“I can’t wait.” I sank into my seat. “Let’s see what’s in my lunch-pouch—Dirck usually shines in a case like this.” I turned toward the door. “Miss Finney, please don’t bother about—Hello! she’s gone.”

“Yes—she’s probably halfway down the hill by this time.”

“Well, then, we’ll open Pandora’s box.”

“All the troubles are already out,” she said with a little sigh. “Even Hope isn’t left.”

“Nell, I admit I’m revengeful, but let it all go—for this afternoon. Hope *is* in the box—Hope in the way of deviled eggs”—I produced them as I spoke—“lettuce-sandwiches, cold chicken, and—what’s this in this thermos-bottle? Ah, piping-hot chocolate! Now, do you recognize Hope when you see her?”

“Yes. Everything looks simply delicious, doesn’t it? And don’t forget the tea, too, Craig. Don’t burn yourself.”

“Never fear.” I swept the teapot from the stove and poured Ellen a cup with a skill that made her clap her hands in mock admiration. “Do you prefer tea to chocolate? The thermos has held it just as hot, you know. Well, then, here’s to you, Nell, and may you never be attacked by another bloodhound.”

She sipped her tea in acknowledgment of my toast. Her eyes were full of hazel lights, lights that dimmed a little as the grateful tea warmed her body and made her a wee bit drowsy.

“The bloodhound, ugh! What do you suppose made him fly at us so?” she asked.

“I don’t know—natural bloodhoundishness, perhaps—unless it was that odd sound from the woods.”

“Did you hear that, too?”

“Yes. It seemed to drive him quite wild, didn’t it? I never saw such automatic action in my life. From his eyes I thought he meant to attack me—I was the stranger and he naturally would go for me—but you were a step nearer and perhaps he confused us.”

“What sort of noise did it seem to you?”

“All sorts—any sort. A breaking tree-limb, perhaps, as much as anything. Possibly a plough-boy happened to call at his horse on the other side of that strip of woods.”

When we had finished the deviled eggs and chicken, I moved the table away. Then I turned Ellen, chair and all, until she faced the fire, managing to do so without disturbing the delicate arrangement of the rose quilt. I raked down the stove until the red coals winked between the grate-bars. Then I moved my chair beside hers.

She had watched all my motions with quiet amusement. “‘You’re a’ ’andy man to ’ave about the ’ouse.’”

“Am I not? Dirck and I used to keep house in Sumatra—keep bungalow rather. That’s a good deal easier, I admit. I learned to do things almost as well as Dirck.”

“He’s a very intelligent man, isn’t he? I don’t think he’s at all servant-like.”

“I hope he hasn’t been impertinent in any way.”

“Oh, no, not in the least. He has a rather attractive way about him, I think. What I mean is—he looks at one quite frankly, as if he were an equal, but not at all impertinently.”

“Dirck does respect himself profoundly, there’s no doubt about that—in fact, he has a distinctly good opinion of himself. I don’t mind it, though—I hate cringing.”

“So do I. His face reminds me of one of those in Meissonier’s battle pictures—the Guards’ faces, you know—self-possessed and haughty-looking.”

She propped both elbows on one arm of the rocker and, putting her hands together, leaned her cheek against them. The firelight threw quaint patterns on the rose quilt.

It was a moment of lassitude, even of weakness, for both of us. Her lashes swept her cheek as her eyes fell before the softening light in mine. In spite of myself I felt a dryness come into my throat and a pulse beat heavily there. My hand shook as I affected to smooth a wrinkle of my coat.

“You look like a little girl.”

She smiled dreamily. “Do I? I feel like one—almost—like the little girl in a fairy story.”

“The be-yew-tiful princess captured by the ogre.”

“Not such a bad ogre—always.”

“The ogre’s glad he isn’t utterly hateful. Yes, you’re the beautiful golden-haired princess lost in the wood—in a dark and dismal Doré wood—and beguiled by the ogre to his castle. Do you remember the cry of the rescuing prince: ‘Rappunzel, Rappunzel, let down your hair?’”

“Yes, that was it.”

“Well—will the princess do it?”

“Do it? What? O-oh, you mean——”

“Yes. Will the princess let down her hair—please?”

“Really—Craig?”

“Do!”

“You funny man. What a thing to ask!”

“Please!” I urged again.

She gave me a shy glance then, sweetly submissive, busied herself with the braids of her hair. In a moment a shining mass fell all about her.

I held back my eager hands. Her hair, as smooth and bright as the skin of an October chestnut, went shimmering to the rose quilt. Little lights and sparkles played over it. Fays danced on moonlit lawns; thrushes peered between fallen leaves; stars glimmered in the dusk of a winter twilight.

“Lovely,” I said in a hushed voice. “It’s lovely, Nell.”

Her answering smile was as wistful and kind as that of a pleased child.

“You know I’ve never seen it—that way—be-

fore. I've often wished I might see you—like this. I knew it—you—would be charming. I think I've never told you I once wrote some verses about your hair, long ago:

“Oh, to be swung 'twixt the envying stars,  
In the folds of her glorious hair!”

“The prince is satisfied then?”

I leaned forward, staring at her. “Nell, you and I oughtn't to be enemies. There's something unnatural, something monstrous, about our treating each other so.”

“I'm glad if you're beginning to feel that—at last.”

“I've felt it all along. Is it too late to be friends again?”

Her hand pressed her cheek. “Craig, if you really think—if you're sure that what's happened——”

“The flood of your hair can sweep away—what's happened. I don't know that anything in the world matters but beauty—your loveliness.”

My hands had taken the strands of her hair, very reverently, and had pressed them back until her face was clear before me, small, rosy, appealing.

“Nell,” I said huskily.

The sense of profound intimacy induced by her loosened hair, the influence of our reawakened emotions, had brought our physical powers of resistance, perhaps our moral as well, perilously near

the breaking-point. There is a temptation in physical contact beyond the will and inclination, beyond all the strength of reason.

A slow tremor went through her body—my hands shook as they slipped from her hair to her shoulders—I leaned slowly toward her.

As if awakening from a dream, she shrank from my outstretched arms. She laughed uncertainly, yet with evident determination to thrust back herself as well as me to a normal plane.

“What a pair of actors we are!” she said.

I could only nod. Her fingers were again busied with her hair, I watching her silently, until it had been made to resume its usual place and fashion.

I made a gesture. “I hate to see it go back.”

“But—it must.”

That she might not read my thoughts my eyes went quickly from her to the fire.

## XV

### WE TALK OF SUMATRA

AFTER a long while Ellen spoke, studied indifference in her tone.

“Craig, you said something about Sumatra, while we were running through the woods—tell me about it.”

“That’s a large order. Sumatra is quite a sizable island.” A certain earnestness behind the dreamy lights in her eyes caught my attention. “Anything in particular about Sumatra, Nell?”

“About your keeping house there.”

“Well, Dirck and I kept house together. You see, out there, he and I were nearer friends than we were master and servant.”

“Just you two?”

“Just ourselves and Mina. I made a song about her.” I hummed a verse:

“Don’t you mind the honey-bear  
Little Mina used to drill—  
The parrot that we taught to swear,  
In the hut on Landak hill?  
Mina, too, I wonder where  
Now she keeps her bungalow.  
Has she still the honey-bear?  
Let’s go back to Borneo!”

“I had to say ‘Borneo,’ instead of ‘Sumatra,’ for the sake of the rhyme.”



“Who was Mina?”

“Mina? She was a native Sumatran—an Achinese, you know.”

“It’s a pretty name—was she pretty?”

“Heavens! no. As ugly as sin! She looked about like one of those awful little images they put at one’s place for a dinner favor. She was about forty years old, too—that corresponds to sixty or seventy here.”

“Was it Mina whose daughter was so charming?”

“Mina’s daughter?” Suddenly a light broke upon me. “What are you driving at, Nell? Have you heard some of the fool yarns about me?”

She nodded without lifting her eyes from the coals that winked between the grate-bars—I could not tell whether her listlessness were real or affected.

“*Are* they fool yarns, Craig?”

“Certainly. At least—they—the conclusions people always come to are fool ones.” I knew my own conclusion was lame.

“I see.” She was silent a moment. “No, I think I *don’t* see.”

She lifted her cheek from her folded hands and regarded me deprecatingly. “Would you mind—please, don’t be angry, Craig. People say such nasty things sometimes. We’ve heard something about you—about you and a Sumatran beauty—a princess or duchess who——”

“I know. That story was spread by a con-

temptible German trader I drove out of my district for—well, for trying to buy up girls for the Sultan of Brunei. That's what that silly ass, Archer, was referring to last night, I suppose. He was urging me to tell him a Sumatran Nights' Adventure. Confound his drivelling mind!"

"Craig—I'd like to hear the truth about it—one way or the other. Are you angry?"

"No, no. I'll tell you. I'd like you to know about Tawa, Nell."

"Tawa. Was that her name?"

"Yes. She was a datu's daughter—about what you would call a native princess. You won't think me a cad? It's not a thing I'd care to tell most people."

"Please go on."

"It's not a very long tale. I'll skip the hows and the wherefores as much as I can."

"I'd like to hear everything."

"The Datu of Larang—Medac was his name—had a big bamboo stockade on the river. I met Tawa there—at a supper the old fellow gave me. His wives waited on us—he had three or four regular ones. They aren't very strict Mohammedans and don't make a fuss about their women going about unveiled and all that. Old Medac had half a dozen sons but only one daughter—he was immensely proud of her."

"That was Tawa?"

"Yes. She didn't wait on us but she came in,

unveiled, when the meal was half over and sat down on the cushions between her father and me. The old man made her feed me sweetmeats out of a brass jar."

"Was she pretty?"

"For a Sumatran, yes, very—she would have passed muster anywhere. Clear, olive skin, large, dark eyes, and all that. She didn't chew betel-nut either, so her mouth was as sweet and well-shaped as anybody's. I was attracted to her at once—all the more because she spoke to me in English."

"In English? Wasn't that unusual?"

"Yes, almost unique. You see, she'd made several long visits to Singapore, and then she had a Chinese maid who spoke English very well, real English—*she'd* learned it at a mission school in Hongkong."

"I see."

"That was the way of it. She laughed and joked like an American girl—we took to each other at once—Tawa and I. I was a white man and therefore a great lord from the native point of view, and as for her—well, I was lonely, Nell, desperately lonely—you know why."

She said nothing, nor would she meet my glance. I went on.

"Old Datu Medac was rather pleased than otherwise by Tawa's—by our taking such a fancy to each other. In fact, I suppose I may say he did all he could to encourage it."

“It?”

“Our fondness for each other, you know.”

“Oh.”

“After that night we saw each other every day—usually on the slope of a hill overlooking the river. There was a shady place there in a clump of feather-bamboo—the slopes below us and on both sides were covered with white-plumed grass. The river wound along at the foot of the hill—dark and with something sinister about it, the way tropical rivers have.”

“Wasn’t it dangerous for her to meet you like that? Don’t those natives carry dreadful knives?—her father and brothers?”

“I didn’t make myself clear. Old Medac was willing to let us get acquainted, and two or three women always came with Tawa—the Chinese maid for one, and I’ve no doubt one of the others was her mother. I never got Medac’s wives straight. Tawa and I would sit down on a little knoll, and the others would stroll off a few yards.”

“It sounds as if you had to—to make love under difficulties.”

“I couldn’t call it that, although I suppose it was that in a way. At any rate, I never saw her alone for a second—up to the very last.”

I was silent, my mind crowded with images of that time—the darkly-glancing river, mysterious and sinister below the white-plumed grass—the setting sun driving a column of crimson through

the shafts of feather-bamboo—the bronze-colored faces of the attendants—and, above all, Tawa's large eyes fixed earnestly on my face as I talked.

“Well,” I went on, “in spite of what you hear about the apathy of the East, matters move fast in some ways. Anger and hate are swifter than anywhere else—and so is love, perhaps. I don't know why it is—probably because the spirit of the country gets into one's veins—the hot-blooded people, the climate, the gorgeousness of the jungle, and all that. And then people expect violence and hurry in *those* things just as they expect slowness and unchangeableness in everything else—it's what they're used to. I don't want to philosophize—the point is, it wasn't more than a month after I met Tawa that the date was set for our wedding.”

“O-oh! You were married!”

“The wedding was to be at the end of the next month. The night after old Medac and Tawa and I had talked it all over, I couldn't sleep—for thinking. Do you remember we agreed yesterday that thinking is one form of Tophet?”

“I remember.”

“Two days afterward, I told Tawa I was going on a hunting trip. I said I was simply bound to give her a rhinoceros horn for a wedding present—you know a rhinoceros horn is supposed to bring good luck.

“At first Tawa only laughed, then when she saw I was in earnest, she begged me not to go.

But I felt I must get away for a while or I'd go crazy. I thought if I could hunt, and hunt, and hunt, I could wear off the thinking and come back to her contented.

“At last she cried—she said she knew some harm would happen to me, if I left her. But somehow I couldn't give way even when she was so pitiful about it. I told her my jinn—that's what they call their personal guardian spirit—my jinn had put it into my heart that I must get the horn or our marriage would be unfortunate.

“We'd been sitting at our favorite spot on the knoll by the river—when I told her that about my jinn, she stopped trying to persuade me at once. ‘Go then, Tuan,’ she said—Tuan means lord in Malayan—‘Go, Tuan, and I will stand here, every night, and look down the river for you.’

“Well, I went the very next day, with Dirck and thirty of Medac's best hunters and three or four of Tawa's brothers—you see, they thought my idea of getting a present for Tawa was very natural.

“We'd been gone only five days when one night a runner came into our camp from Larang—Tawa was very ill with fever.

“I travelled night and day. But those tropical fevers run like wildfire—when I got back to her she was dying. At sunset, every night, she'd looked for me from the hill above the river. The worst of it is she'd probably caught the fever from the

river mists—waiting for me. The harm had come to her, not to me as she had had a foreboding.

“I got to her in time for her to recognize me—I’ve always been thankful for that. She was able to talk to me a little—before the end. She rested in my arms—at the very last.”

I was leaning forward, my chin in my hands, staring at the red coals between the grate-bars. I sat so for a long time. Ellen, too, was silent, and I did not look at her.

At last a door that slammed faintly in a distant part of the house recalled me to the present—its own problems and difficulties. Ellen knew the truth of the story that had filled more than one column of German and American papers—after all, the truth was nothing to be ashamed of. I was not sorry I had told her all. I glanced at her silent figure.

The firelight wrought quaint patterns on the rose quilt. Her head was still propped on her folded hands—she looked very small and rather pitiful. Her eyes were closed and she sat without perceptible motion. Tired out by the day’s experiences and lulled by the sound of my voice, it seemed she had fallen asleep.

I got to my feet and slipped quietly from the room.

## XVI

### ALECK EXPLAINS

THE outer room was devoid of occupants, but I was sure I had heard a door slam. There had been a peculiarly incisive quality to that slam, as if there had been more strength behind it than Mary Finney would have been likely to employ.

I stepped quietly to the door that led onto the gallery above the gorge, and pushed it open. As I had half expected, a shabby-looking man was sitting talking to Miss Finney. At sight of me he sprang to his feet—it was the same fellow I had surprised with Ellen the day before. My blood pounded in my throat!

Without a second glance at me, the man took a couple of hasty steps toward a door farther down the gallery. Then I had him by the shoulder, dragged him sharply back, and flung him into a chair.

“I want to see you, my friend,” I snapped.

He made no resistance, apparently overwhelmed by the fierceness of my attack. Not so Mary Finney.

“Mr. Schuyler! Mr. Schuyler!” Her face flushing and paling, her tears starting, she pulled at my hands like a dove defending her young. “Let go of him! You sha’n’t do it. You sha’n’t take my Ned!”



I released the man—my coolness returned—and looked down at him. He sat crouched in his chair, without lifting his eyes.

He was a thin, almost cadaverous fellow of twenty-eight or thirty. His hair was brown and wavy, and his face was smooth-shaven. I noticed the hands, lifted to straighten the worn tie, were not those of a workingman. There was something vaguely familiar about the lines of his face.

Mary Finney hovered distressfully about him. "So this is your Ned, is it?" I said. "I don't congratulate you on your Ned—he oughtn't to run every time he sees me."

She wrung her hands in her mediæval gesture of despair. "Oh, don't be hard on him. He didn't mean any harm."

I stared, then my eyes going abruptly to the fellow, surprised his own fixed upon my face. They were gray eyes, with hazel lights in them.

Catching my glance, he threw back his head with an air half haughty, half indifferent.

"Ned Sutphen!"

"Well, what of it?" The man's voice was infinitely sullen. "Who did you think I was?"

"You sha'n't hurt him!" cried Mary again. "You sha'n't have him!"

"Good Lord! Who wants him? If he hadn't run I wouldn't have laid hands on him. Ned, what are you doing here?—like this."

"I've only been home a month—from Nevada."

I turned to the girl. "Miss Finney, I want to talk to Mr. Sutphen. I left Miss Sutphen asleep by the fire—suppose you see if she's in need of anything."

"Go ahead, Mary," said Ned. "I'm all right."

I waited until Miss Finney had closed the door behind her, then I faced Sutphen.

I saw the deep lines from nostrils to mouth-corners, the eyes a little reddened by hard living, and the weak contour of the jaw. This was not the well-groomed, self-possessed man of the world I had expected to see in Ellen's brother. The mystery of the situation was beyond all comprehension! I moved a chair and sat down square in front of him. He started, and eyed me uneasily.

"Why was Miss Finney so afraid I would harm you? You don't look as if you'd been kept in a china-closet all your life."

"What? Oh, I don't know. Women are fools—foolish, I mean."

"If women weren't foolish, it would be bad for us men in the next world, wouldn't it?"

"Are you going to preach, Schuyler?"

"Preach? Far from it." I groped for a further explanation of the scene I had just witnessed. "What in the world is all this about! She called you 'Ned' rather familiarly."

"She has a right to—I'm her husband."

I gasped a little. "What!"

"We've been married a month," he returned doggedly.

“ You needn’t apologize—I’m mighty glad of it, Sutphen—I was afraid it was something else. Does your sister know it? ”

“ Of course. Nell was a witness—she and Norah Westbrook.”

“ A-ah, I see. What about your mother? ”

“ She didn’t know until last night—didn’t know I was home even.”

“ It was you who called her out from the drawing-room last night? ”

“ Yes. I made up my mind to tell her—about my marriage and all—and have it over with.”

“ Very thoughtful of you.”

“ Look here, Schuyler,”—he made a feeble attempt to browbeat me,—“ what are you putting me through this damned cross-examination for? ”

“ Because I want to know. Because I choose—that’s why, Sutphen. I’m staying at your mother’s house—you know that.”

He nodded sullenly.

“ Very good. I’m a guest of the family and I find the son of the family has become a scapegrace. That fits you, I suppose? ”

“ I don’t say it doesn’t.”

“ The scapegrace son of the family dodging in and out a country girl’s cottage. Furthermore, he declares he has married the country girl.”

“ It’s true.”

“ I believe you. Well, I’m interested, and if you ask me why, I’ll tell you.”

His lips barely framed the word.

“Because you helped to persuade your wife to try to burglarize my room last night. Do you wonder I’m interested?”

He had seen what was coming so could turn no paler than he was.

“Never mind,” I continued. “I’m quite capable of taking care of myself. Let all that go. Ned, I’d never heard of it, but you’ve evidently been down on your luck for a while—you look the part, at any rate. What’s the matter, man? You can’t be thirty yet.”

“Twenty-seven,” muttered the other.

“How far down are you?” I demanded. “And how did it happen?”

He gave a short laugh. “Oh, I’m not kicking. It happened as it always does, I suppose—because a man’s a fool. I was, at any rate.”

“But how?”

“Do you really want to know? Well, after I left Yale—fired in my Sophomore year, you know—I tried stocks a little—with Sheepshead and Gravesend and Saratoga on the side. The same old story. From that it was only a step to Haly’s and Danfield’s—one of Nell’s friends, a chap named Beauchamp, first started me *there*.”

“I know him.”

“He’s a smooth article, isn’t he? But if it hadn’t been Beauchamp, it would have been somebody else for me—I’m not kicking. Everywhere—

Wall Street and all—I lost—I kept on losing.”

“ You did? ”

“ You see, I was supposed to be a business man—I had the greater part of Nell’s and mother’s money in my charge.” He drew a long breath, and went on painfully. “ It went—they have hardly enough to get along on this minute—it went and then—I had to tell them—then I went West.”

He talked, his eyes half shut, but his face held steadily toward me as if he found relief in going over his sordid story. I nodded at the closed door.

“ How about——? ”

“ Mary? I don’t suppose that was different from other cases you’ve heard about. She’s pretty—you can see that for yourself, and I—I was a brute, as a man always is when he sees the girl cares for him.”

“ You’re married, you say.”

“ Yes. That’s why I’m here now. She went to Nell and—and told her everything. Nell’s a brick! She wrote me to come home at once—she sent a cheque to cover my fare, too. When the letter reached me I was knocked out with typhoid in Tona-pah—they didn’t even tell me about it for weeks. Then I started home.”

“ Were you—in time? ”

“ When I reached here—the baby had been born and—and had died. Mary and I were married the day I got here. The baby is—over there, in the old graveyard.”

He drew another long breath.

"Well," I said, "you did right to come home. You acted like a man, there."

"It was about time I should," he returned bitterly. "I've done enough of the other thing."

His reference to the old graveyard stirred my memory. "Sutphen, you weren't about here at the time, but did you ever hear of Kitty Willetts?"

He gave me a sharp glance. "Yes, of course—we all remember—that affair."

"What became of her child, do you know?"

"Died two or three months after the mother, I believe—just about the time you sailed."

"Did it ever come out who the father was?"

"No-o. That is, most people never knew—some guessed."

I nodded. "Ned, give me time to think your case over—a couple of days, say. Perhaps I can help put you on your feet again."

"You!" he exclaimed. "Oh, yes, I suppose so—you!" His manner underwent a sudden change. "Look here, Schuyler, don't you sit there and sneer at me. Damn it! I won't stand it—not if you kill me for it!"

"What the devil are you talking about? I say I'll help you, if I can—if I can think out a way to do you any good. You're your own worst enemy, but as long as drink isn't the trouble, and you don't look far gone enough for that, I fancy I can find a way out for you."

“You don’t mean it,” he faltered.

“Yes, I do.” I rose to my feet, and shook hands with him, vastly to his surprise. “Give my good wishes to your wife. I’ll see you in a day or two.”

“Is Nell ready to go? Mary was telling me she got wet——”

“Yes. She was dreaming by the kitchen stove a little while ago. I won’t disturb her. Please tell her I’ll send my car over for her by five o’clock. That’ll get her home comfortably.”

“All right. I’m sure, Schuyler, I’m much obliged for——”

I cut short his thanks. “And, Ned, let Ellen know I won’t appear at dinner to-night. I’ll get my man to bring me up a bite, and then, I won’t have to dress—I’m feeling lazy.”

He saw through my little subterfuge. “You’re a good sort, Schuyler.”

I left the house without more ado, and started briskly homeward across the downs. I glanced into the gully as I passed—the bloodhound was nowhere visible and I knew young Westbrook or Beauchamp must have rescued the brute. It made me shudder to picture how Ellen had lain, if only for an instant, beneath his enormous paw. I desired to punish her in my own way, with all the refinements of torture that our positions made possible, not to see her mangled by a mad hound. Strange how he had leaped at us so abruptly!

It was not yet three o'clock—the afternoon was still young. I stepped out merrily, whistling to myself, and half wishing I had the morning's run to go over again. I thought of a wily trick or two whereby we might have thrown our pursuers off the scent. How innocent and boyish Ellen had looked as we waded the stream.

Thus meditating, the miles slipped behind me unawares—I almost stumbled over Beauchamp and young Westbrook at that same corner of the stone wall from which Ellen and I had taken to the trees.

“Hello, Schuyler,” said the Englishman. “Awfully glad to see you again, old chap. Schuyler and I came over together, the other day,” he explained to Aleck. “We had some capital bridge in the smoking-room. Wot cheer, matie!”

We shook hands with, on his part at least, a semblance of cordiality. I tried in vain to detect in his face or bearing any chagrin over Ellen's rejection of him that morning—he was too much a man-of-the-world to betray himself.

“You've been on our trail with Aleck?” I asked.

“Yes. You and Miss Sutphen made proper duffers of us!” His eyes had been searching the grove behind me. “By the way, old man, where *is* Miss Sutphen?”

“She was pretty well done up. She's resting at a cottage back there. Aleck, what's become of ‘Gomez’?”

“We let him find his own way home. He's a



good deal knocked about, too. I'll be hanged if we didn't find him at the bottom of a thirty-foot gully. How in the world the idiot fell into that I don't know. Have you any idea, Schuyler?"

"I threw him there."

"What!"

"Come, that's good," said Beauchamp. "Do you mean it—really?"

I gave them a brief account of our *contretemps* with the bloodhound. Aleck was visibly distressed.

"Good Heavens! he might have killed her! Suppose he had scarred her for life!"

"It was a close call," I agreed.

Beauchamp, however, was inclined to scoff at the danger. "Don't you fancy the brute was only trying to be playful, Schuyler? Bally poor style of play, of course, but that's about it."

"Hardly. It wasn't a mere idle gambol, I promise you, Beauchamp—I've seen wild animals charge, you know. 'Gomez' was in earnest."

"Come, old chap! You don't mean to say an owl hooting, or whatever that sound was, could have set him on so. That's rather stiff, don't you think?"

"I don't say it was that—but he certainly charged for us at that time. He'd been good-natured enough before that."

"I fancy it was only his play—really. 'Gomez' wouldn't hurt a fly."

He had hoisted himself to a seat on the stone

wall, and sat softly drumming his heels against the side. I noticed that his forehead sloped almost in the Hapsburg manner. His eyes regarded me with the characteristic British aloofness.

Aleck stood near, idly beating his dog-leash against his leg, apparently in a taciturn mood.

By an indefinable air of embarrassment about the two men—by Beauchamp's unusual talkativeness even more than by Aleck's moroseness—I knew they had been discussing me just before I stumbled upon them. I was not the more disposed to hurry away on that account.

“Wot cheer, matie!” Beauchamp rattled on. “Let the dogs go to the dogs! I say, Schuyler, it's been a long while since we chivied the girls together about here, hasn't it, now?”

I did not like his tone. “I wouldn't call it chivying. Squired them a little, if you like, but chivied, no. It has an unpleasant sound.”

“Oh, come, now. Why so high and mighty! Women are fair game, aren't they? To hunt one down now and again—that's living. *You* ought to know that, old fellow—they say you were a real Bashaw in the East, you know.”

“Who says so?”

He waved his hand expansively. “The world, my boy—Berlin, Paris, London, New York—and Bannocks.”

“Nonsense! I don't claim to be a saint, Beauchamp, but I'm not a Bashaw. You can set down

any such tales you hear about me as downright lies."

"Really? Oh, come! It's no disgrace to own up—all strictly *entre nous*, you know. Besides, you won't shock us—you left a bit of a trail behind you here, I remember—before you started for the wild and woolly East." He laughed relishingly.

"What do you mean?" He did not realize the significance of my increasing quiet.

"No post mortems, old fellow."

"What do you mean?" I repeated.

"Why everybody knows about that little affair, you know. I don't blame you."

"What affair?"

"Oh, come! Kitty Willetts, of course."

His barefaced effrontery amazed me. "Kitty Willetts?" I repeated stupidly.

"Yes. I'm not saying anything, you know, but it's a strong *on dit* that it was you who looked out for her comfort."

I glanced at Aleck Westbrook. He was listening with averted face.

"I did," I said, "afterward—after the child was born."

"Afterward?" repeated Beauchamp. "Oh, of course—very properly managed, too. Of course a girl like that wouldn't accept anything from you except for the child's sake."

"Why should she? I was almost a stranger to her."

“A stranger?” he smiled. “Now, that’s absurd, Schuyler.”

Then at last I saw the point of all this. More, I understood Ned Sutphen’s scarcely-veiled surprise at my question about poor Kitty Willetts. I understood the meaning of half a dozen innuendoes of the last thirty-six hours—Willy Archer’s insistence upon a Sumatran Nights’ story, Aleck Westbrook’s reference to my “vile adventures,” Dot Archer’s admonitory forefinger and her: “Wicked, wicked man!” It was not only the German harem-supplier’s slander of me that had inspired these thrusts. It was, also, the devil’s page that the Englishman had just turned for my perusal.

The shamelessness of the man woke a red rage within me. I took a step forward.

“Get off that wall.”

He was on his feet in an instant, facing me with perfect coolness. “Wot cheer, matie! What’s the row?”

“Damn you!” I said. “Do you think I don’t know the *truth*?”

With my left fist I struck at his eye. He back-stepped, bringing himself up short against the wall, as I had calculated. On the instant I uppercut him smartly with my right.

He tottered, hung for a breath, then slid weakly down against the wall. It was a clean knock-out.

Aleck Westbrook started forward. I whirled upon him like a flash, my fury unabated. He re-

coiled before my set face, throwing up his arms to ward off the expected blow. Utterly disregarding his motion, I gripped him by the collar with my left hand—my right threatened him.

“What do *you* know about this?” I shook him to and fro furiously. “I let you off last night, but you’ve got to speak up now or I’ll put you beside *him*.”

His boyish pride struggled with his fear and shame. “I—you—I’m not afraid of you, Schuyler.”

“Oh, yes, you are. And you’re afraid to lie—you wouldn’t be Norah’s brother, if you weren’t.” I let go his collar and stood squarely before him. “You’ve heard what he said—heard it said before?”

“Yes—it’s an old story,” he muttered, now beginning to be awed by my resolute behavior—perhaps, also, by a glimpse over my shoulder of the still unconscious Englishman.

“An old story, is it? How old?”

“I first heard it three or four years ago—I suppose it must have been about the time—you left the United States.”

“Did you ever hear your brother—did you ever hear Rex speak of it?”

“I don’t remember. No-o, I don’t think I ever did.”

“I don’t think you ever did either. Did Norah ever hear of this?”

His eyes fell. "I—I think so. I'm sure of it."

"Who told you?—who told Norah?"

"I don't know—no one in particular—it was in the air."

"I see. Did she believe it?"

"I—I'm afraid she did." He gathered assurance at my silence. "Why, look here, Schuyler, everybody believed it—except Rex, may be. I don't think he ever knew. You were such great friends, and he was so fond of you, nobody ever dared tell him about it—it was near the end, you remember. Everybody believes it—Norah, and the Archers, and Ellen and——"

"What!"

"Of course. We all guessed that you and she quarrelled over—that is, that you left the country because——"

His voice died away before my stricken stare. He shrank a little as if he again thought I was about to strike him. But I hardly saw the boy.

What I saw was the drawing-room at "Red Cedars," four years before. I felt again Mrs. Sutphen's hot indignation and Ellen's coldly-hurt contempt. I knew again my maddened groping for the reasons they had so contemptuously refused to give.

My eyes, staring stonily about, swept over Beauchamp,—now partly aroused and sitting with his aching head in his hands,—and came back to young Westbrook.

"Aleck," I said thickly, "do a man's own friends believe such a thing as that when his whole life has been decent?"

He was moved by my evident distress. "But everything looked so dead against you, Schuyler," he explained eagerly. "I remember myself, when I was just a boy, seeing you go in and out of the Willetts' house. And then—the night the—the baby was born, you roused up Willy Archer and made him get out his car to go for the doctor. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. Rex was already down with typhoid and——"

"Rex?"

"I mean that explains my excitement that night."

"Hum-m. Then you were almost the only mourner at the funeral—at any rate, so I've heard—you and old Mr. Willetts."

I nodded. "I helped him carry the coffin."

"And you placed five thousand dollars to Willetts' account in the Bannocks National Bank—after the funeral. General Savarton is a director, you know," he explained ingenuously.

"Ellen Sutphen learned all this—and believed the worst?"

"How could she help it? We all did."

"You all *do*?" I demanded.

He moved uneasily. "I suppose so."

To his amazement and, I think, to his horror, I burst out laughing.

“Thanks for your frankness, Aleck. I wish someone had been as frank four years ago. You’ve explained several things to me. Look after your friend, Beauchamp—he’s in need of kind treatment, I fancy. Much obliged to you. Good-by, I’ll be going.”

I laughed again, and turned away, leaving Aleck gazing after me as if he thought me mad. For the moment, perhaps I was.



## XVII

### OVER A GRAVE

FROM the corner of the stone wall, where I had left Aleck Westbrook and Beauchamp, to the line of evergreens that marked the point where my route diverged toward "Red Cedars" was fully four hundred yards. I covered the distance rapidly, my mind in an angry maze. Now and then I felt the knuckles of my right hand with infinite satisfaction.

When the evergreens reared stark before me, I came to a halt, seized by a sudden impulse. I glanced back along the wall—Aleck was helping the Englishman to his feet. Neither's eyes were for me. I shouldered aside the low trees and stood in the graveyard.

It was a pitiful place enough, covering only a few acres and those for the most part unkempt and neglected. It had changed not at all since I last saw it.

On all sides it was hedged with trees—the side opposite the one I had entered being pierced by a narrow gateway. The high board gate was closed now, and this, together with the sharp fall of the ground beyond, hid the shabby road that climbed to the place. How interminable the drive up that road had been—long ago!

The tangled grass was mown only by the autumn frosts—the thrift or poverty of the country folk

prevented the employment of a caretaker. Oak and ash trees stood irregularly here and there as if the graves were those of pioneers, dug in a virgin wilderness and left to take care of themselves. A few rusty rosebushes trailed naked and thorny limbs across half-levelled mounds.

Yet in spite of these signs of indifference, the old graveyard had a dignity of its own. The sunshine lay in yellow patches on the moss-covered slabs, the wind sighed through the cedars, the mystery of the ragged acres spoke of peace. The place filled my moment's need—I felt grateful for the brooding hush and the restfulness.

But I had not come to moralize—rather to revive old memories.

In the far corner, screened by its own line of evergreens, slept the one whose grave I had come to see once more. I sought the spot, picking my way across forsaken memorials, my feet stumbling now and then over broken tombstones hidden in the weeds and grass.

I stepped between the two cedars that formed the entrance of the enclosure I was seeking. It was there her father had stumbled and, for a moment, I had borne the whole weight.

A woman was arranging some flowers on the grave by which she knelt. At the sound of my footsteps she spoke without looking up.

“Is that you, Aunt Caroline? See how the sun brings out the colors on those asters.”

“It’s I, Norah—Craig Schuyler.”

She looked up with a low: “Oh!” of surprise and alarm. Then the fear died from her voice and eyes. “Mr. Schuyler!”

She half arose from her knees, spilling lilies-of-the-valley and asters all about her in a shower of white and gold. As if fearful of bruising the scattered blossoms she sank slowly back, one hand steadying herself by the stone at the head of the grave. My eyes mechanically read the inscription beneath her fingers, then returned to her vivid face.

“You—here?” she said.

“Yes.”

Her eyes showed the surprise—it may be the disapproval—her training forbade her to express in words. I met her look gravely.

“Do you supply the flowers for the cemetery?”

“Only—for this grave.”

“You know whose it is?”

“Of course.”

I read aloud the words carved on the stone where her hand rested. “‘Katharine Willets. Born August 15, 1882—died October 12, 1906.’ Just four years ago to-day.”

“Yes.” She did not lift her eyes.

“Only four years—it seems four hundred since we carried her in that gate. It was a day about like this, too. Her father and I were the only mourners.”

“I—have heard.”

“We were the only pall-bearers, too. Her father wouldn’t let anyone else touch her. Poor Kitty! she was light enough. Did you know her, Norah?”

“Very slightly.”

“Yes, you were too young, at the time, to have known her well, even if the Willetts hadn’t been—rather different. The Willetts family have stood still all the years the rest of us were going on.”

She did not answer. Her eyes were still fixed on the scattered flowers, but as yet she made no move to collect them. Her averted face, her flushed cheeks—in the light of my talk with Beauchamp and Aleck—enabled me to read only too well what was passing in her mind.

She was thinking me a hard-hearted, ice-brained *flaneur* in the world—a reformed gallant, at best, who had come, perhaps not to gloat over but, at any rate, to view with indifference the grave of one he had ruined.

I knew that her first impulse must have been to fly from my contaminating presence, her second to repulse me indignantly from the grave. Only the trained repression of a woman of the world was enabling her to endure the situation quietly. Those blue eyes of hers could hold a bitter scorn—I would have given much had they not held it when they were bent upon me.

I looked at the grave, neatly turfed and kept,—at the tiny mound at its foot.

At last my eyes went back to Norah. She was watching me, and blushed from chin to brow. I eyed her, deliberately and gravely, until her head drooped again.

I had seen not only scorn but pain in those blue eyes. I felt a sudden desire to tell her everything, but what use to go over the story! Why attempt to explain away so miserable an episode! It was not a thing one could talk over freely with a girl—and besides she would not believe me. What was my unsupported word against a score of damning facts—Aleck Westbrook had proved me guilty by my own testimony.

Above all, a profound melancholy possessed me, the result not of the day's revelations only but of the conflict so long waged within me between my sense of what was due to justice and a still more poignant feeling.

The blonde head drooped as if in sorrow that it must believe me such a scoundrel. I longed to know if the swelling breast held a hope of my repentance and contrition—if the heart beat heavily for my shame.

The cedars drew a green curtain behind the yellow of the asters and of her hair, behind the gleaming white of the headstone and of the heaped-up lilies-of-the-valley. A picture for a man to dream of! Projected against the evergreens, I must have loomed to her a dark and repellent figure.

I spoke at last. "No doubt you're surprised to see me here, Norah."

“I *was*—but I don’t know why I should have been. I suppose it’s natural, after all, that you should want to see the grave again.”

“She had a sad life.”

“You know best about that.”

“You think me a scoundrel?”

“I’m trying not to judge you, Mr. Schuyler. I think you’ve judged yourself.”

“Judged and condemned, you mean?”

“It seems to me there can be only one verdict even with yourself as judge. I’m trying not to condemn you more harshly than you’ve probably condemned yourself.”

“I haven’t condemned myself. Things aren’t as you think, at all. Norah, there’s a lot to be said about this. You can’t condemn a man without a hearing—even a woman can’t do that—and I want to tell you——”

“Stop!” She drew herself up, her face flushing but very firm. “I don’t wish to hear you. Not—not because I’m afraid to listen to things, but I don’t care to hear—a confession.”

“You’re taking it for granted I’m guilty.”

“You don’t deny *that*, do you? Oh, I know the other side—the woman—often deserves her share of the blame, too. But she”—her hand fluttered over the headstone—“*she* has paid already, and it would be cowardly for you to tell your side—now.”

In all my life, never but once had I received so

cutting a blow. Her cruel stab pierced to my very soul. A woman's blow, often delivered without due consideration and even without aim as it is, nevertheless wounds terribly—the question of sex has a thousand subtleties and intensifies the agony of all unkindness. I could have wept with sheer pain of it.

“Norah you're young and intolerant. I think you'll realize, sometime, the intolerance of good women has ruined many a man.”

“Men don't need tolerance—they're so big and strong and—evil. I feel sorry—for *her*.”

“So do I—God knows I do. But, Norah, think how men are—think of the wild thoughts that come smashing into our minds every hour of the day. When I remember that, I think the harm we don't do when we could do it, makes up just a little for the harm we do do. That terrible story of Stevenson's—Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—that isn't fiction—it isn't even a parable. It's the plain everyday truth that exists in every man you ever knew.”

“I don't understand.”

“I suppose not. A girl's life—of our sort—is usually so sheltered that she hardly ever meets a cad who's determined to do things he thinks he'd like to do—yet there's one visiting you now.”

“You mean——”

“Yes, Carlos Beauchamp. He's not a good friend for you, Norah.”

“Mr. Beauchamp is Aleck's friend, not mine. Besides, he isn't here to answer for himself.”

I made a hopeless gesture. "I see you're convinced *I'm* the cad."

"Oh, no, no, Mr. Schuyler. I don't think so—I don't want to think so."

"I'm glad of that, at least."

"I don't, really. Please believe me." Her armor of scornful judgment seemed to fall away from her. Her eyes shone as she looked up at me, the flower-strewn grave between us. "Perhaps I've been too—hard with you. But I didn't start in that way—I wasn't yesterday, you know that. Last night, at dinner, I took you at your face value. But just now when I saw you here—at *her* grave—I was—I felt——"

"Shocked."

"Yes, I did. But I'm trying not to feel so." Her eyes and voice were wistful. "I don't want you to think I'm preaching or—or interfering, but I know people honestly do repent sometimes."

She finished with a little eager catch of the breath. I was silent. When she found I meant to return no answer the light died out of her face, and her hands began to gather the scattered flowers. The sunlight formed little pools of gold in her hair and in the asters.

"Just four years ago to-day," I said absently. "That's a curious coincidence. It's mighty good of you to come here like this, Norah."

She made no reply—I went on. "You said you'd brought flowers only for this grave, didn't you?"



“ Yes.”

“ You’ve come before? ”

“ No.”

“ I don’t understand,” I said frankly.

“ Does it matter? ”

“ A little. It’s mighty good of you.”

She blushed vividly. “ Oh, no, it isn’t I. I see I’d better tell you. It’s Ellen Sutphen.”

“ Nell? What’s she to do with it? ”

“ I brought them to-day for her. Every year—on the anniversary of Kitty’s death—Ellen puts flowers here. She has the lot kept trimmed all the year round, too. This morning she wrote me a note, asking me to attend to it for her. She knew she’d probably be with you all day and wouldn’t get a chance to see to things herself.”

She had not lifted her eyes as she spoke, and now busied herself with the flowers.

“ Let me help you,” I said after a moment’s silence.

“ You may sort the asters, if you like.”

I knelt opposite her, and she handed me the asters without looking at me. Once when her fingers touched mine, she drew them hastily away.

By and by we had them all arranged—the lilies-of-the-valley at the head close to the white marble, and the yellow asters at the foot. I placed a cluster of each on the smaller mound. Each received the sun into itself and took a more vivid color—the asters a delicate gold and the lilies a cream-and-ivory.

Our task done, we rose to our feet.

“Did you walk up?”

“No. Aunt Caroline is waiting for me in the carriage—outside the gate.”

“May I see you that far?”

“Of course.”

We left the little enclosure to the warm sunlight and the flowers. Half-way to the gate we came to a halt as if by mutual consent.

“I hope I haven’t been intolerant.” She must have been engaged in argument with herself.

“It isn’t your fault. Someone was saying something last night that hit the nail on the head—about tales being told about some men and not about others. I suppose I must have a lurking devil in my eyes or a fling in my walk or a sneer on my lips—something of the sort, haven’t I, that lets everyone know I’m a moral leper?”

“No,” she said seriously, “you haven’t. You oughtn’t to talk so about yourself.”

“It’s bad enough to have other people doing it, you mean? You’re right. Poor Kitty Willetts, there—it was the biting gossip that killed her, not what she did or didn’t do. It always takes a third person to make a thing a sin, and the third person is generally the world—sometimes it’s a father or mother or another lover, but usually it’s only the leering old world. Isn’t that so?”

“It seems so. Until just now, or yesterday, perhaps, I thought sin was sin and goodness was

goodness—I thought they didn't depend upon circumstances. But now—oh, it's all so uncertain in my mind. I don't know what to think."

Her seriousness—the puzzled, wistful look she bent upon me—gave me a strange sensation. As if for the first time, I took in the thoughtful eyes, the small, oval face, and the girlish bosom, just now very still—so still that all at once I understood it must take a conscious effort to keep it so. My own seriousness fell from me instantly.

"Life itself is uncertain," I said lightly. "That's what gives it spice. Change, relief, uncertainty—that's what I live for—that's an explorer's reward."

We had resumed our course toward the gate—she eyed me curiously as I went on. "You know someone said the other day that only two kinds of Greek philosophy appeal to the modern man—Stoic and Epicurean. But Stoicism is only grim endurance, so I go in for the live-while-we-live creed."

She made no answer—in a moment we reached the gate. I held out my hand.

"Good-by, Norah. Will you shake hands?"

"Of course." She gave me a little hand whose fingers felt warm against my own. "*Au revoir.*" She slipped through the gateway, leaving me the memory of a shy smile.

I struck back across the graveyard, shouldered my way through the outer line of evergreens, and walked moodily homeward.

## XVIII

### NORAH IS PUZZLED

As I made my way toward "Red Cedars" two things became clear in my mind. One—by far the more important in my present mood—was the reason Ellen and her mother had dismissed me with such peremptory contempt four years before. My talk with Aleck Westbrook and Carlos Beauchamp, reinforced by my conversation with Norah, had explained what I had long since come to regard as inexplicable. I smiled grimly as I thought how Norah, striving to be just, had yet taken the worst for granted. Such was the way of the leering old world!

The other fact that I at last understood was the reason for the forgery. Ellen's fortune had been wasted by her scapegrace brother—she herself had admitted casually that they had been badly pinched in Wall Street. Driven by what seemed to her approaching poverty, she had taken advantage of the easy opportunity afforded by my prolonged absence in the East to—bah! I disdained even to formulate the thought in my mind.

So much for my two important discoveries. Other matters filled in the background of my meditations: Beauchamp's contemptible and astounding effrontery—I thought with infinite satisfaction of

how I had left him tottering wretchedly between Aleck and the stone wall; Mary Finney's—I begged her pardon!—Mary Sutphen's attempted recovery of the incriminating check—she must have been induced to undertake the theft by her husband, instigated in his turn by the guilty sister. Theresa's effort in the same direction puzzled me—unless, indeed, it was genuine devotion to her mistress that had led her on.

I came back to poor Kitty Willetts and my own blackened name. Thanks to the force of unhappy circumstances—circumstances damning enough on the surface, I had to admit—my reputation was hopelessly ruined. I thought with gratitude of the shy smile Norah Westbrook had given me as I left her—and of the lingering warmth of her fingers. She had been kind to me notwithstanding her opinion of my early peccadilloes.

It was probably Beauchamp's sly suggestions that had helped to make the proof against me unassailable. Only one man's evidence could have helped me, and that man was dead. I cursed the fever that had carried off my faithful friend, Rex Westbrook—he would have stood by me. But, thank Heaven! I had knocked Carlos Beauchamp senseless.

A chipmunk, suddenly whisking into view from under a cedar hedge, gave a whimsical and welcome diversion to my thoughts. If one might be as carefree as the squirrel! Yet, perhaps it was only

seeming. To gather his store of nuts against the winter, to guard his home from weasel and snake, must be serious matters enough. Possibly he frisked about so gaily to hide beneath that sleek pelt the beating of an anxious heart.

The hedge served to arouse me to the fact that I had wandered a little from my homeward course. Instead of bearing down the slope to the lawn of "Red Cedars," I was at a point near the road that led to "Westbrook Place."

Emerging from the hedge above the highway, I came upon an odd scene.

The carriage containing Norah Westbrook and her aunt had outstripped me a little on the homeward route, and was now moving along the road below me. The horses were held to a walk by the coachman, and beside the carriage-step paced my man, Dirck, hat in hand and talking earnestly.

This in itself did not excite my wonder, for Norah might have signalled him in order to make some inquiry as to Ellen or her mother. But from the roadside slope upon which I stood I looked fair into the faces of the three, and what I saw in each puzzled me not a little. Miss Caroline Westbrook was eying Dirck with an amused smile—the man's blue eyes were dancing, and Norah sat listening as he talked, her lips parted as if in a dream.

Whether or not Dirck saw me I do not know, but while I stood motionless a few rods beyond them, he bowed profoundly and fell back from the car-

riage-step. Then he faced about and tramped away toward the house.

By this time the horses, still moving at a sedate walk, had come opposite my position. Norah, glancing up suddenly, recognized me—with a blush, I fancied—and signalled the coachman to pull up.

I quitted the slope and, in my turn, approached the carriage, hat in hand.

“‘Like master, like man,’” I said.

“A very interesting man as well as master.” Norah’s smile was frank, although I was now sure of the blush. “But I don’t understand him at all. He—he positively *burns* one.”

“‘Look at his independent air,  
And his penetrating glare!’”

I hummed.

“Well, he *has*,” she declared. “I don’t understand him.”

Miss Westbrook laughed easily. “It’s not at all hard to understand, my dear. Mr. Schuyler will bear me out.”

“If I may hear the details,” I said with curiosity. “I don’t quite know what this is about.”

“He overtook us—appeared from nowhere—and asked about you,” explained Norah. “He asked if Aleck and Mr. Beauchamp had overtaken you. He seemed much interested for a moment.”

“Very naturally. Dirck is a sportsman through and through.”

“Yes, but in the same breath he asked me if I hadn’t once been run over by a fiacre in Paris. I once was, you know, but how in the world did *he* know that!”

“Oh, he didn’t,” smiled Aunt Caroline. “Norah, if I *must* say it to your face, you’re very pretty and attractive even to a chauffeur. He wanted an excuse to talk to you, that’s all. Very impertinent of him, but very natural.”

“But about the fiacre? You remember, Aunt Caroline, how——”

“Of course I do. Goodness, child! Can I ever forget it? I was never so frightened in my life! DuBois simply happened to hit on that. It’s easy to guess by looking at you that you’ve been in Paris in your time.”

“But why?”

“Why, indeed!” laughed the older lady. “What do you think, Mr. Schuyler?”

“Oh, the vanity of this daughter of Eve! Why, indeed, Norah! That hat—that coiffure under that hat—the heels of those shoes, those little devils of shoes, as Dirck might say—that *chic* air of yours! Norah, I stand amazed that you should dare to fish for compliments in such a brazen way!”

“Oh, well——”

“You found Dirck interesting even if—ah—peculiar, didn’t you? You rather encouraged his natural forwardness the other night, you know, when you praised him about that emigrant matter.



So you must forgive him now, if he has annoyed you."

"He hasn't—not in the least. A strong clean-looking Frenchman is—is——"

"Is one of the finest types of men in the world," I finished for her.

"Ye-es."

"Dirck would be charmed to know you think so."

"You won't tell him!" she exclaimed in dismay.

"Norah!" said Miss Westbrook rather severely. "Of course he won't. What are you thinking of, child! Can't you see he is only teasing you?"

"Oh, of course. How silly of me." Norah's explanation seemed a bit forced. "I—I think I'm so silly because it's hours since luncheon, and I didn't eat much then. The tea and sandwiches will be ready at home. Sha'n't we go on, Aunt Caroline? You'll come with us, won't you, Craig?"

"Thank you. I must be getting to 'Red Cedars'."

"Good-by, then." She turned toward me as the horses began to move off. "He—*is* rather burning, you know. You must have noticed it yourself."

The two women were whirled away. I watched the turnout up the hill—the carriage, the horses, the harness, and the coachman's livery, very black and very smart.

Was it possible that Norah Westbrook had allowed her equanimity to be disturbed by Dirck?

I had never seen her so fluttered. She seemed a different girl from the one who had gravely reproached me among the cedars not twenty minutes earlier.

The look in her eyes that had stirred me so strangely—the shy smile that even now lingered in my memory—were they really not meant for me, for my own personality, but merely for a fellow-being evidently unhappy and therefore to be pitied and soothed?

At the top of the slope a handkerchief fluttered above the carriage-back—Norah was waving me good-by. Or could her signal be an involuntary answer to——

I whirled about—but there was no one in sight!

## XIX

### LETTERS FROM REX

ARRIVED at the house, I promptly sought the garage.

Dirck was sitting at its entrance, polishing the lens of a searchlight to a marvellous brightness, and, incidentally, chatting easily with the fair Theresa, who was ensconced on a nearby bench. She stood up at my approach.

“Don’t go away, Theresa. Dirck, I feel that I can put your shoulders on the mat two times out of three in ten minutes.”

“Ah ha!” said the Frenchman, grinning with pleasure. “Monsieur feels himself a Samson this afternoon. We shall see—we shall see! I myself am a Hercules.” He proceeded to divest himself of his coat.

As I removed my own, I saw Theresa gazing in genuine fright at our formidable preparations. Her Northern-blue eyes were big and round.

“Sit down, Theresa. You shall be referee—Dirck and I often wrestle like this—we don’t intend to hurt each other.”

Dirck laughed outright at Theresa’s relieved face.

“What, ma’am’selle, did you really think monsieur and I were about to fight? If we were to box, I would not stand long before monsieur. Wrestling? Sometimes it is I who win. You shall see.”

Stripped to our undershirts and trousers, we faced each other across a blanket spread on the garage floor. True to the traditions of her race Theresa had athletic tastes and she now entered into the duties of a referee with great zest. No Brunhild or Gudrun of the North could have been more interested in a feat of arms than she was in our modern combat. During our three bouts she flitted about our intertwined forms very knowingly, the respect she thought due me vying ludicrously with her ardent desire to see Dirck win.

“Oh, gracious!” she cried as I gave Dirck a very pretty “hip” that threw him to the mat with me on top. “That’s too bad—fine, sir!” Dirck evaded my attempt at a half-Nelson and gripping my arm nearly rolled me under. “Good, good, Dirck! Oh, that was hard on you, sir, I do think.”

At the end of twenty minutes Dirck had thrown me twice out of three times, and what was more to the point, I had wrestled myself to exhaustion, if not altogether to contentment and happiness.

“There you are, Theresa,” I said as I put on my coat, “you see what you’ve done. Hercules has beaten Samson. Dirck could never have thrown me if you hadn’t been here to inspire him.”

She blushed very prettily. “I’m sure I tried to be fair to both of you, sir.”

“You were fair enough, but I don’t think you *looked* at me as you looked at Dirck. It was your looks that made him win. Eh, Dirck?”

Dirck grinned placidly.

I gave him instructions to go for Miss Sutphen with the car at five o'clock, and sought my room.

A delicious bath and vigorous rub-down, followed by a good nap, put me in a frame of mind to appreciate the dinner Dirck brought up to me at seven.

"You brought Miss Sutphen back all right?" I asked as he spread the cloth on a little table and set out the dinner things.

"Yes, surely, monsieur. We were in the house an hour ago."

"How is she?"

"She seemed well, monsieur—a little tired, perhaps."

"We had a fairly hard day of it. It's lively work having a bloodhound on one's trail."

"Yes, monsieur."

He poured me a cup of the strong coffee I had asked for, and watched me thoughtfully as I sipped it.

"No one can make coffee like yours, Dirck. Do you remember how you had to teach Mina how to brew a decent cup?"

"Yes, yes. Are the old days gone forever?"

"I don't see why they should be—they're there waiting for us. You're willing to go back, I suppose?"

"If you are."

"Speak up, Dirck. I can see you've something weighing on your mind."

“Yes. Monsieur was wondering last night what it was that called Madame from her guests.”

“I’ve heard since. The man you thought Theresa sent away from the kitchen door was young Mr. Sutphen.”

“Ah, you have heard the truth, then. Theresa carried a message from Monsieur Edouard Sutphen to Madame his mother.”

“Hum, just so. Did you learn anything else?”

He twisted his blonde moustache, and looked as knowing as only a Frenchman can.

“I hear Monsieur Sutphen is a gay boy.”

“I hope that’s over with, Dirck, and that he’s ready to settle down. He’s sown wild oats enough.”

“Yes.” His blue eyes met my questioning glance. “Also, I heard that monsieur had a charming visitor last night.”

“The deuce you did! You mustn’t believe all you hear, Dirck.”

“Monsieur keeps silence, but, Theresa herself told me that she visited your room last night.”

“She said that!”

“*Mais oui*, monsieur.”

“It was a crazy thing for her to do, Dirck. Did Theresa tell you what she was after?”

Laughter shone in my man’s eyes. “Theresa has told me her soul.”

“Dirck, are you up to your old tricks? You’ve gone pretty fast in two days.”

He gave his moustache a final satisfied twist. "I find Theresa amusing. She is more *spirituelle* than I had thought her at first. She is one to be counted on."

"How so?"

"Theresa tried to obtain the cheque from your room only because of her devotion to Mademoiselle."

"You believe that, do you? If that's so, it certainly speaks well for her loyalty."

"Without doubt. She has been with Mademoiselle Sutphen several years and she loves her. Mademoiselle confides everything to her."

I noted the conviction in his tone. "Look here, man. Be careful how you carry on with Theresa. You don't want to break a susceptible heart, you know."

"No fear. *She* thinks she is breaking *my* heart. Hers has been broken a thousand times already. To tell the truth, I think that she and the good Jordan are *fiancée*. She makes a pastime of me—and I am but devoted enough to make her talk."

"All right—but don't burn your fingers—or hers."

"Impossible!"

When he had removed the dinner things, I had him bring up a book from the library—I wanted to keep from thinking of my own affairs. I drew up an easy chair close to the little table and had Dirck shade the electric reading-lamp to a proper softness.

“Who was at dinner to-night?”

“Only Madame and Mademoiselle, I believe. Monsieur Westbrook called just now—he stayed but a few minutes. Theresa says he brought a note for Mademoiselle.”

I let him go reluctantly—his presence was at least a partial distraction. When he had gone at last, I sat down in smoking jacket and lounging shoes to read.

Although I was determined not to think of what I had learned that day, yet in spite of the charming pages of “The Last of the Mohicans,” the great fact persistently presented itself—Ellen Sutphen had thrust me from her life, four years before, because she had believed me unworthy the love of a pure woman.

Hawkeye’s faithful Killdeer might pour its fatal contents on the Mingo knaves, Le Cerf Agile might come bounding like a deer, Cora’s dark tresses might arouse the passion of all the redskins of the Horicon, yet I could not escape the conclusion that my life had been distorted—it was no use mincing matters!—ruined! because of the hasty judgment of a high-spirited girl. And that judgment—that headlong conclusion—could not be altered—for what was my bare word against the fatal logic of circumstances! Nothing, and worse than nothing.

Three times I read doggedly that stirring chapter where Hawkeye and his companions hold the island against Magua and the Iroquois. On the



third reading the words at last conveyed some meaning to my mind—I read on triumphant.

I had dived with Chingachcook through the rapids below the island, waddled with Hawkeye in the bear's fur to the rescue of Alice, and bounded with Uncas amid the wigwams of the enemy, when I heard a light tap at the door.

As I laid down my book in response, I glanced at my watch—it was past ten o'clock. The knock was repeated.

“Is that you, Dirck?” I called. “Come in.”

No one came in, but again the tap sounded—gentle, insistent, appealing. I had the door open in an instant—Ellen Sutphen was standing in the dim light of the hall.

Her eyes met mine, but it was too dark for me to make out their expression. The band of light from my opened door illumined only the lower part of her face—her lips were parted, and her breath came a little pantingly. One of her hands held something to her breast, the other was outstretched as I swung the door wider.

“Craig, I only wanted to——”

I caught her extended hand. “Is anything the matter, Nell?”

An instant her fingers touched mine, then fluttered away from me and fell to her side.

“Craig—I couldn't sleep without giving you *these*.” She thrust a couple of letters into my hand and was gone before I could speak.

At the far end of the hall, she stood an instant, looking back. Something in her attitude—the inclination of the neck, the foot not yet firmly planted—told me that she had half a mind to return. The doorway of her room framed her—the white neck, the delicate curve of the cheek. Then she moved forward and the closing door shut off my view.

I examined the letters under the reading-lamp. One was addressed in a man's handwriting, simply: "Norah." The other bore the direction: "Miss Ellen Sutphen, Red Cedars." I chose to open the latter first.

"DEAR ELLEN:

"This afternoon Aleck came home with Mr. Beauchamp from the run after you, and after that gentleman(?) was out of the way, Aleck told me the strangest thing—indeed, several strange things. Did you know Craig Schuyler knocked Mr. Beauchamp senseless this afternoon? But of course you don't, for *he* would never tell you. Aleck says Craig struck him a terrible blow—and it served him right. But that's what I'm trying to tell you about. Aleck told me all about how it happened and what Craig said to him afterward—Craig was splendidly angry. Something Aleck told me Craig said to him set me thinking about dear Rex.

"You know since Rex died we've never had the heart to disturb any of his private papers—his writing desk in his 'den' has always stood just as it was the last time he sat there—I mean it did until two hours ago. Well, what Aleck said set me thinking. Nell, I went straight to Rex's desk and in the very first drawer I opened I found a letter addressed to me—it had been waiting for me all these years, and oh! how sorry I am I didn't find it long ago. I send you the letter—it's for you to read more than anyone else, dear. To think how we've wronged Craig, in our thoughts,

at least, all these years, and he's been so silent about it all. Aunt Caroline has already had a talk with Mr. Beauchamp, and he left the house—and our acquaintance—half an hour ago. How fine Craig has been. I feel so very, very humbled.

“NORAH.”

My mind in a whirl, I opened the other letter—addressed in Rex's handwriting to Norah. It read as follows:

“DEAR LITTLE SISTER:

“I've felt rather mopey for several days and Dr. Hudson has just told me that I've got a touch of fever. I could see by his manner that it's going to be more than a touch, so I'm writing you this in case anything happens. I'm writing you because it's a queer world and sometime people may say unpleasant things about the finest chap that ever lived—I mean Craig Schuyler.

“You're still in school, Chicken, but I think you know who Miss Katherine Willetts is—the daughter of Mr. Elwood Willetts. Will you be surprised when I tell you I was once in love with Kitty Willetts? Perhaps I am yet—I'm not sure. The Willetts aren't quite our sort, but Kitty is the sweetest, most lovable girl in the world—I mean she used to be. Well, I won't talk about that.

“Three years ago I asked her to marry me. She flatly refused—she talked about a difference in our social position and all that. I asked her again and again but she always refused me—besides, she would never admit she cared for me at all. So I gave her up, and we haven't even been friends for a long time.

“It isn't easy to tell a schoolgirl like you—but a year ago a man named Carlos Beauchamp—an Englishman—got to be friends with Kitty. Chicken, he got to be too friendly—do you understand me?—and then he deserted her like the scoundrel he is. If you don't quite understand, get Aunt Caroline to explain to you.

“Here is where dear old Craig Schuyler comes in. I was a good deal cut up when I heard about Kitty and Beauchamp, but I couldn’t do anything. I hadn’t any claim on her—besides, after what had happened I felt as if I never wanted to see her. I spoke to Craig about how I felt and he’s been true blue. He’s seen old Mr. Willetts and Kitty for me—he’s made things comfortable for them, and I know if anything happens he won’t let Kitty suffer.

“I can see now that what Craig’s done for me may put him in a bad light, if it ever comes out. That’s the reason I’m telling you all this—so you’ll know that what Craig has done he’s done because he’s a real friend—the most loyal one that ever breathed. Chicken, I’ve been glad so often that you and he are such chums. When you grow up, if Craig ever wants you to be more than his chum, I hope you’ll give him a chance.

“Your just-now-rather-droopy  
 “but always-affectionate  
 “magnus frater,

“REX.”

Below this was pencilled a single line in a different handwriting:

“If Norah is humbled, what am I?

“ELLEN.”

I read through both letters again, and sat staring long at the line in Ellen’s handwriting. Then, my mind still in a whirl, I slowly undressed. I went to bed, but not to sleep.

## XX

### ASHES OF THE STARS

AFTER tossing for an hour or more, with sleep as far from me as ever, I resolved to make a raid on the library and read myself into a comatose condition, if not into a somnolent one.

Acting on the thought, I arose, got into some clothes, and slipped downstairs. A single light was burning in the hallway, my shadow danced weirdly on the wall, the house was very still. I had somewhat the feelings of a burglar as I stole from step to step.

The light shed a yellow glow over a small marble Venus—a copy of one of Benvenuto Cellini's—set on a table in the wide hall. The figure seemed to shrink from the bold eyes of the stranger who came stealthily down the stairs. I smiled to think how much the redoubtable Benvenuto would have felt at home in my situation, with all its suggestion of gallant adventure. Doubtless he would have made brisk use of the stillness and the night, perhaps, also, of his power—had he had such means to enforce his will as I had.

As I entered the library my eye was caught by the red glow from the open fire-place. A fire of oak logs had been laid earlier in the evening, and a goodly pile of embers was still left from the slow-

burning wood. It turned a ruddy face invitingly toward me.

Two or three armchairs, deep-seated and high-backed, stood about the hearth where, perhaps, they had been drawn during Aleck Westbrook's call. Here was a place to muse and drowse.

I approached and was about to sink into a seat when the shifting embers threw a sudden light on the chair next mine. I stared—the rosy glow was reflected from what seemed a curtain. As I gazed the curtain took shape—I recognized Ellen Sutphen.

At the same instant she must have seen my shadow dancing grotesquely on the wall—she glanced up. Her low cry of terror was changed into a gasp of consternation as she realized I was not a burglar. She sprang to her feet.

I saw the firelight sparkle upon neck and arms, and upon little feet—all as hot with blushes as the embers with flame.

“Sit down, sit down!” I cautioned. “That big chair will make your best hiding-place. If you run, Nell, I vow I'll watch you every step of the way—I'm human enough to take advantage of what the gods throw in my way, you know. I *ought* to let you stand there where the light can shine on you, but I'm honest enough to tell you the chair will make you a regular tent.”

She had already sunk into her seat, consternation in every motion.

"If—if you have any decency, you'll go away—at once, and you won't look back."

"Decency isn't supposed to be my strong point. No, no, if you *will* wander about the house late at night in fluffy *négligée* you must abide the consequences."

"It isn't very late," she returned defensively. "I couldn't sleep, so I just came down here to get a book, and then I saw the fire and——"

"Precisely my case! Lucky we met! Now we can entertain each other—that's ever so much nicer than being alone, isn't it?"

"Will you go away?"

"Quite impossible."

"Well, then, will you shut your eyes and promise not to open them for five minutes?"

"Eyes are for use. You know what the old wolf said to Red Riding-Hood: 'The better to see you with, my dear.'"

"You *are* a wolf!" She caught her breath sharply. "Oh, no, Craig, I don't mean that, indeed I don't!"

"So you withdraw the accusation that I'm a wolf? You're thinking about those letters—Rex's?"

"Ye-es. I was only nineteen, Craig."

"Don't bring the matter up—yet. I don't know what to think. Four years of torture on account of a shameful——"

"Craig, I want to tell you——"

“I think we’d better let it drop, for the present, at any rate. I might say something desperate—something that would disgrace me in my own eyes as well as in yours—and I want to be half-way decent—if I *won’t* close my eyes.”

I could hear her settling herself more snugly into her chair. “I don’t believe you can see me, at any rate.” There was a note of defiance in her voice.

“Well, not *you*, exactly.”

“Not—— What do you mean?”

“Oh, nothing. ‘This little pig went to market,’” I quoted gravely.

“What?”

“‘*This* little pig stayed at home.’”

“I never heard such nonsense.”

“‘*This* little pig had rare roast beef—*this* little pig had none.’”

“Are you crazy, Craig?”

“‘*This* little pig cried——’”

“O-o-h!” It was a horrified gurgle. Her foot scrambled desperately under cover. “Craig! you didn’t see them really?”

“I was merely quoting some poetry acquired in my early youth.”

“These Turkish sandals haven’t any tops to them,” she said plaintively. “It isn’t *my* fault.”

“I should say not—not even your misfortune. I assure you they looked very pretty.”

“Please—I wish you wouldn’t tease me so.”

“It’s too good a chance to lose. It isn’t every



day—night, I mean—I can catch a charming girl in—ah—evening dress, sitting by the light of the library fire.”

“It’s very improper for us to be here—this way. You know it is.”

“Madam Grundy is asleep upstairs, I fancy—no disrespect to your mother.”

“Yes. But what about Mademoiselle Grundy?”

“You don’t mean the fair Theresa?”

“Of course. What would she think if she should find us? She’s as formal as anyone and——”

My laughter interrupted her. “Theresa in the rôle of Miss Grundy!” I paused long enough to let the significance of my tone sink into her mind. “Nell, don’t you imagine Theresa has floated around in airy costume in her time? Mind, I say ‘imagine’—of course, you don’t *know* anything about it.”

“She has never been in any such situation as this, I hope.”

If I could have seen her face, doubtless I would have detected a telltale flush or pallor, but save for an elbow and forearm, she was hidden in the recesses of the great chair. I would have defied the most acute ear to detect in her words any knowledge that Theresa had ever invaded my room. Her duplicity was of a consummate sort.

A few drops of sap surviving in an oak log hissed as the heat parched it at last. A piece of bark fell away with a purring crackle, and was

received into the fiery embrace of the embers below it. A white line, where the ashes had cooled, began to form on the fire's periphery.

I leaned forward and took the poker from the brass stand.

"Craig!" she said, indignantly slewing round her chair. "Don't be mean!"

"What's the matter? I really want to poke up the fire."

"It's quite bright enough."

"All right," I said resignedly. I drew idle figures in the widening rim of ashes. "The Malays believe one can find out things in the ashes, you know—the future and all that."

"That's very interesting, but if you don't mind waiting till to-morrow——"

"Oh, don't go." I glanced around far enough to make her cower back in her chair. "Hum-m! as I was saying, the Malays think Truth lies in the ashes."

"Poor thing! I should fancy she would smother there—or perhaps sneeze."

"I sha'n't be put off by sarcasms. I'm trying to tell you what a Sumatran *anting*—an *anting* is a sort of 'conjure woman'—what she prophesied about me—and you."

"About me? What nonsense, Craig!"

"You can judge for yourself. You won't slip away, if I go on?"

"No-o—I think I won't."

“Well, then, this *anting* wasn't a hideous old hag—yellow as clay, shaggy eyebrows, eyes like pieces of coal, face all seamed with wrinkles—such as you read about. She wasn't that sort at all. She was very pretty in her way, not more than eighteen or twenty, and lived in a palmleaf hut on a mountain.”

“It sounds very romantic. No wonder you consulted her about your fortune.”

“Naturally. A friend of mine and I made a pilgrimage to her hut to learn what we could.”

“A girl?”

“I said she was a young woman of twenty or so.”

“I mean the friend who went with you.”

“Yes—Tawa—and her attendants.”

“Oh.”

“When we got to the hut, it was night. The *anting* built a little fire of dry sticks, and let it burn to ashes—like these.”

I made a smooth surface to the ashes with my poker, and drew some lines on it. “There. Can you make that out, Nell?”

She lifted her head cautiously, her feet tucked well in. “What is it?—a triangle?”

“Yes. She told me to look along one side of the triangle and continue the line right out into space until it reached a star—we were on a mountain, you remember. I did as she told me and my line struck the evening star.” I paused a moment. “The evening star, Nell.”

“Ye-es—I remember,” she said faintly.

“I pointed out the star to her, and she carefully examined it. Then Tawa followed out her side of the triangle, but it didn’t touch any star at all—I could see that puzzled the *anting* girl. She smoothed out the ashes and drew another triangle and made Tawa try again. But it turned out the same way—her line simply reached into space.”

“It must have been a queer scene. I can see it—the starlit valley, and the dark faces over the fire. Didn’t they wear the most fascinating costumes?”

“Hum! They were dressed even a trifle more lightly than you are now.”

“Dreadful!”

“Not at all. It was strictly the custom, and the costume, of the country. Anything more would have been rank affectation.”

“I see. What happened?”

“The *anting* pondered a long time. Then she said something about like this: ‘The Tuan’—that was I, you know—‘the Tuan has had one great sorrow in his life—he will have another very soon. After the Tuan’s second sorrow he will return whence he came, and there his first sorrow may become his third—no one knows, not even the ashes of the stars.’”

“The ashes of the stars! What a pretty idea. I suppose you are making up all this as you go along, Craig?”

"I give you my word everything happened exactly as I'm telling it."

"But what did the woman say about Tawa?"

"At first she refused to say anything, but when we insisted she led me aside and said: 'I have told the Tuan he would have a second great sorrow very soon.' That was all I could get out of her."

Ellen gave a long sigh. "And it turned out just as she said. Poor Tawa!"

I demolished the triangle of ashes by a sweep of the poker. "At any rate, the first sorrow can't become a third sorrow—that's already proved."

"The prophecy was silly, of course."

"The third sorrow meant you. Well, you're in a position—I mean I'm in an attitude of mind where——"

"It'll sound better if I say it," she interrupted sweetly. "You mean anything I may say or do is totally indifferent to you."

"Not that at all. I only mean that I'm enjoying so much grinding you down that the first sorrow has become a pleasure. The ashes of the stars, do you see?"

"Yes."

We were silent for a while, both sunk in the depths of our chairs and gazing absently at the fire.

"Craig," she said at last, "how long do you intend to keep me here. It's dreadfully late—if anyone should come down I don't know what I'd do."

"I don't believe it's twelve o'clock yet—ridiculously early."

"But—I'm cold, Craig."

"Honest and true, now! Are you?"

"We-ell, perhaps not so very."

Again we were silent. Into the silence stole a faint sound. My hearing, from years of outdoor life, is unusually acute—what I heard, or fancied I heard, was a scraping outside one of the long windows.

"What's that?" I asked carelessly. "That noise?"

"What noise? I didn't hear anything. Goodness! I hope mother isn't prowling about."

"No, it seemed to be on the porch out there."

"Maybe it was a cat."

"Of course," I assured her. "I don't hear anything now, at any rate."

Nor did I at the moment, but a little later, listening intently, I heard the sound again, unmistakable to my trained senses—the fall of a stealthy foot on the porch just outside the long window.

Sinking deeper than ever into my chair, and turning my head with the utmost caution, I stared at the window. The long curtains left a triangle of dark pane exposed. Although there was no moon the stars were out and the night was clear.

Between the stars and the window-pane a dark bulk loomed—or did I only imagine it? Was there or was there not a white smudge—a human face—

set close against the glass in an effort to peer into the room? I could not have sworn either way. The shadow of the porch hid what the starlight might have revealed.

If there were a face, it could see nothing—the fire was only a red eye that made the room darker by contrast—Ellen and I were concealed by the high backs of the chairs. A footstep—or the wind—sounded as if moving away from the window.

By and by Ellen spoke softly—she could have heard or seen nothing. “Are you asleep, Craig?”

“Not quite. On the way, though.”

“If only you’d been dreaming, I would have escaped.”

“I thought you were suspiciously quiet.”

“Yes—perhaps. I was thinking of your *anting* girl and the ashes of the stars.”

“We climbed toward the stars in our time, Nell.”

“Do you remember?—how we vowed we’d find the little gold ball that lies under the evening star?”

“*Per aspera ad astra*, you know—but our *aspera* have come since—after we had reached the stars, or thought we’d reached them, I mean.”

“Yes. What a long time ago!”

“That night? Do you remember how we walked for hours and somehow we couldn’t get fairly under the one star? On top of that hill near Tarnsdale we had to give it up.”

“That was in another world, Craig.”

“We gave it up, but we didn’t care. When we were through laughing over it, our faces were very close together. We leaned toward each other, and——”

“Don’t! Oh, don’t!”

“The ashes of the stars, Nell.”

We were silent a long time. At last I heard a rustle, and then cautious footsteps. I waited, and when I looked around her chair was empty.



## XXI

### A COLD BATH

WHEN I had allowed Ellen time to reach her room, I hurried to my own. There I pressed the bell that communicated with Dirck's quarters at the rear of the house, and pending his arrival, I rummaged through my things.

Dirck did not appear, and I rang for him again and again. I was drawing my pair of Colt's revolvers from their case, when I heard his discreet knock. I opened the door.

"Gad! you must have been sleeping like a log," I said. "I've been ringing ten minutes, more or less."

"I am sorry, monsieur." His eyes fell on the blued steel in my hand. "You clean your pistols late."

I waved the barrel toward the table. "There's the other for you. Don't clean it—load it. It may be more useful that way."

"Ah?" He spun the cylinder with a skilful thumb, and deftly slipped the cartridges in place. "Is there a hope of using these—perhaps a chance of something of interest in this peaceful country?"

"There's a bare possibility."

His delighted eyes questioned me. "Without doubt, Monsieur Beauchamp has sent his challenge for the breaking of his jaw this afternoon."

“Where did you hear about that?” I asked curiously.

“Theresa heard it from Mademoiselle Westbrook’s maid, monsieur—and *she* heard a discussion between the aunt of mademoiselle and Monsieur Beauchamp. But surely the meeting cannot be before dawn.”

“You’re on the wrong tack, Dirck. It isn’t Beauchamp we’re going after. I saw a man lurking about the front of the house a few minutes ago. I was in the library and caught a glimpse of him on the porch, or thought I did.”

“Ah, a robber?”

“It looks that way. Now, if you’re ready, we’ll see what we can see. Let’s try the library first—he seemed to be interested in a window there.”

As quietly as if we ourselves had been a pair of burglars, we stole downstairs and into the library. Here even the red eye of the fire had faded to blackness. I almost stumbled over the armchair, empty of the white-robed figure that had lately occupied it.

We listened and peered by the long window. No shape shut off the starlight, and no sound disturbed the night except the sighing of the chill autumn wind about the corners of the house. The loneliest sound in the world!

“I wonder if I could have been mistaken. What do you think, Dirck?”

“I do not think so. Monsieur’s eyes and ears are good.”

“I hardly think I could myself. We’ll try the other rooms.”

Holding our breath, our revolvers ready, we searched the drawing-room—without result. Then we slipped across the hall and felt about the other rooms, penetrating every alcove and shaking every window curtain. Still no sign of any night marauder.

“I think there isn’t any use trying the back of the house. One of these long windows would be the natural thing to use a jimmy on—or a diamond.”

“Yes, monsieur. Even if not, to climb a column of the porch would be easy—it would need but a short ladder.”

“The second story! I hadn’t thought of that. By Jove! suppose some thug with a mask and blackjack and red pepper is poking about up there now!”

“If we go outside the house we can soon tell. If the robber has entered an upper window, without doubt he has left a ladder so that he can escape if anything should alarm him. The stars are out—we can soon see.”

We went back to the library, unlocked and opened a window, and stepped out on the porch. In another minute we were on the gravelled walk in front of the house.

The night was clear and the stars twinkled in frosty aloofness. My ruddy-faced friend, Scorpio, waved a jovial claw at me. Obeying his motion I turned until I saw, very pure and bright, the evening star at an infinite distance—Nell and I had once sought the little gold ball beneath it. The midnight wind suddenly bit keenly through my somewhat scanty attire.

The house was sunk in slumber. The windows of the upper stories looked darkly down, everyone plain enough in the clear starlight—the length of the porch was bare of ladder or pole. For the first time I began to have serious doubts that I had heard footsteps on the porch, or had seen the white smudge of a face against the window-pane.

We moved cautiously along the grassy border of the walk to the corner of the house. There we halted in the shadow of a blue spruce, and examined the north side.

Dirck touched my arm and pointed upward. A light was burning behind the closed curtains of a second-story room—Ellen's. Perhaps she was slowly preparing for bed, her mind running over our adventure in the library and—I liked to think—brooding over the ashes of the stars.

As on the other face of the house, there was no indication of any would-be violator of its sanctity. I was about to continue our patrol when I felt Dirck's earnest pressure of my arm. He was nodding emphatically toward a box hedge a few paces

from us—something was stirring its stiff foliage.

A man broke deliberately through the box, and stood in the gravelled walk beneath the lighted window.

We shrank deep into the shadow of the blue spruce. Then the barrel of Dirck's revolver crossed the line of my vision. I gripped his wrist.

"No, no, man," I muttered. "We must see who he is. He may be only some harmless straggler from the town."

The night-walker, having stood a moment in the path, now began an extraordinary performance. Facing toward the house he moved a step to the right, then to the left, backward and forward. Had it been a schoolgirl and on the street I would have called it skipping. His arms, too, fluttered about his head in an ascending and descending calisthenic. For the time and place it was truly bewildering behavior.

"What the devil!" I muttered in Dirck's ear. His returning "*Que diable!*" expressed an astonishment as great as my own.

"It may be he signals a confederate."

"But he's facing toward the house."

"Truly, and looking up to the window—the one with the light."

We stared at each other.

The strange pantomime still continued. The man would place both hands to his mouth as if he were about to call up to Ellen. Then he would

apparently think better of it, for the hands would be flung up and outward in what seemed almost a gesture of despair.

“Can it be Ned Sutphen, trying to attract his sister’s attention? But why should he make such a secret of it, now?”

“Ah, the gaillard? It must be the one.”

“He must be throwing gravel at the window.”

“But he takes it from his mouth.”

“No, he probably has his hands full of pebbles and happens to find it easiest to toss them up in that style. He certainly never played baseball, though—and I don’t hear anything rattle against the pane either.”

Again the intruder applied his hands indubitably to his mouth, and flung them upward. I gasped.

“Kisses! by Heaven! *Kisses!*”

“Kisses!”

“It can’t be Sutphen, after all. He wouldn’t throw kisses to his sister at one o’clock in the morning. Yes, by Jove! the damned idiot *is* skipping—and throwing kisses! Humph! he’s stopped at last.”

The fellow had, indeed, come to a halt fair in the little patch of light that fell from Ellen’s window. For the first time his face was illumined. I looked—rubbed my eyes—and stared with all my soul.

“I say, Ellen,” called a drawling voice, “you ought to give a chap back his kisses—you ought, you know, really. It isn’t fair to keep them.”

“Beauchamp, by Gad! Drunk!”

The light fell on the hither side of his face, and I saw it clearly. His prominent nose showed ridge-like against the blackness behind it, and his insolent mouth was directed upward as he renewed his appeal.

“Don’t keep a chap waiting here forever—it’s deuced cold out here.”

The light in Ellen’s room suddenly diminished, yet did not go out. Involuntary fear must have led her to switch off the lights, then pride had come in time to prevent their complete extinguishing.

“That’s right, my dear,” called Beauchamp. “Turn ’em out! Turn the little sparkly devils out. We don’t need the ’lectrics while the stars are so bright.”

“Drunk! cold drunk,” I muttered again.

As I learned afterward, he had spent half the night at the Club, going there direct from the Westbrooks’. In the Club he had proceeded to take one drink on another, doubtless to drown his rage and chagrin over the day’s occurrences. When at last the steward had given orders that he should be served nothing more, Beauchamp was in the state men of his cool temperament sometimes reach—his brain on fire, but his speech coherent, and his limbs fairly steady.

He began to sing:

“‘Under your window I play my guitar,  
Play my guitar, play my gui—’

Gad! I don't remember the rest. It's a bally poor song, at any rate."

"Shall we rush upon him?" whispered Dirck eagerly. "We can send him to a hospital in three minutes' time. You can again break his jaw."

The prospect was enticing, but I was in a cold fury that impelled me to endure the drunken cad a while longer.

"No, not yet. I want to give him rope enough to hang himself."

He was paying out the rope fast enough, there was no doubt about that.

"Little Tommy Tucker  
Sang for his supper,"

he chanted. "I say, Nell, it isn't my supper I'm singing for, though—it's just you, my dear." He chuckled. "Had my supper at the Club. By Gad! I didn't either. Their chow wasn't fit to eat, you know. I had something to drink instead."

He paused and shook his head at the window as if he had received an interrogation thence. "Too much to drink? Oh, no, my dear, I promise you—just a few refreshers—I needed 'em, really, after the nasty way old Miss Westbrook talked to me. A real cat—I never had such a wiggling in my life. And then *your* letter, my dear, this morning—that *was* a blow. You want to know what I had to drink? Let's see, I'll tell you."

He checked them solemnly on his fingers. "First



I had some of your American cocktails. Then I had a Scotch and an Irish. After that I tried a gin-ricky—no, it was a silver fizz. By Gad! I don't know which was first—had 'em both, at any rate. Then a little more usquebaugh, I think. I don't suppose you ever drank a shandy-gaff, did you, my dear? I did, and next to that a whiskey-sour. Your American drinks are delightful. Nell, are you listening, my dear? You ought to listen, really."

The dim light burned steadily above. The wind moaned about the corners of the house. The frosty stars twinkled on the ridiculous and saddening spectacle of a man reduced to the verge of the lachrymose.

"I say, Nell, you ought to take me in. What's the use of being nasty about it?" He paused and a new idea seemed to strike him. "Oh, is it on account of the row I had with that fellow, Schuyler? The chap has a fist like a blacksmith's. No gentleman ought to have a fist like that, by Gad!"

He stared up at the window, holding his head at a comical side-cock, as if he again had a communication from above. "Oh, on account of little Kitty Willetts, is it? That's the same thing—the row with Schuyler was over her, you know. I tried to be 'slim' about that, and by Gad! how he did bowl me over. Come now, don't be stiffish over a thing like that. I'm no worse than any other chap, I fancy. If Rex Westbrook—a good

old chap he was, too—if Westbrook was such an ass as to give her up, why shouldn't——”

“Come on, Dirck,” I growled.

We were on him in an instant—so quickly that he was only half able to face my rush. But this very unpreparedness helped him, for I checked my blow at his jaw and it fell heavily on his shoulder. Nevertheless, he went down full-length on the gravelled walk. Dirck dealt him a kick in the ribs as he lay.

“Go easy!” I said. “He’s down, worse luck. I wish he’d kept his feet a minute longer.”

“Wot cheer, maties!” came from the figure at our feet. “Do you mean fight? I’ll take you on, if you like.”

“That’s what I want,” I returned. “Help him up, Dirck.”

With some difficulty, Beauchamp was restored to an upright position. However, one look at him as he threw himself into a grotesque attempt at a boxing attitude was enough. A fight with him would be only a slaughter—desirous as I was of punishing him I could not take such an advantage.

“The brute’s too drunk to fight.”

“By Gad! is that you, Schuyler? You lie, Schuyler.”

“Do I? I’ve a notion to beat you to a pulp—you drunken blackguard!”

“Craig!”

My name floated down from midair. I glanced

up. The curtain of the window above was parted ever so slightly. Through the crack a sentence was thrown like bits of ice.

“Craig—there’s a pond—across the road!”

The icy voice ceased—the curtain showed an unbroken surface—the light was abruptly extinguished.

A pond—across the road! In a flash I remembered that a recent rain had washed away an edge of the road in front of “Red Cedars.” The local roadmaster had neglected to repair it promptly, and it now lay a black and nauseating pool, not a hundred yards from where we stood.

I shouted directions to Dirck. We whirled Beauchamp about in spite of his energetic: “Wot cheer, matie!” and one on each side of him, hustled him across the lawn. Although probably he did not divine our intentions, he struggled vigorously. But he was a child in the grasp of two men, either one of whom would have been more than his match even had he been sober. As it was, his drunken condition made him well-nigh helpless.

In a trice we had rushed him over the lawn, had crossed the road, and halted on the edge of the filthy water.

“I say, you chaps, what the devil——”

“In you go!”

We flung him headlong into the pool—a thin scum of ice crackled as he went down.

There was a tremendous splashing in the freez-

ing fluid—a storm of curses as a figure, face, hair and shoulders grotesquely plastered with black clay, found a footing in four feet of water. Then Carlos Beauchamp, shivering, filth-marked, sobered, furious but impotent, made his way to the farther bank of the pool, and out of my life.

As we returned past the house, I studied Ellen's window. All was dark.

By the blue spruce I halted and looked back. The evening star, very bright and pure, gleamed coldly at me from an infinite distance.

## XXII

### EAVESDROPPING

DIRCK was awaiting me when I gained the porch-steps. We regarded each other with the sober satisfaction of men who have done their plain duty.

“How he splashed, monsieur!”

“Fairly wallowed! I hope he gulped down a good mouthful of mud.”

“It was impossible not to.”

Above our relishing laughter I heard the crunch of gravel behind me. Dirck peered over my shoulder as I turned.

“Some one is coming up the path, monsieur.”

“Beauchamp would never have the nerve—unless he’s ready to shoot.”

“He walks too steadily for a drunken man.”

From where we stood, the path followed the curve of the house in one direction, and in the other wound away beneath a row of elms to the public road. Just now the elms formed a tunnel, so shot with stars that the ground mist was kicked up in silvery sparkles about the feet of an advancing man.

Whoever he might be, he was making no effort to conceal his approach. On the contrary he came forward boldly until within a few yards of us. My greeting apprised him of our presence.

“ Good-evening. A fine night.”

He threw up his head and came to a halt.

“ Hello! who’s that? ”

“ Is that you, Aleck? ” I returned. “ Have you lost your way, my boy? ”

“ Oh, Schuyler! No, I’m all right. You’re just the man I want to see, Schuyler.”

“ Good-night, monsieur,” murmured Dirck behind me.

Aleck stared over my head as the Frenchman slipped into the house through the open window.

“ Who was that with you—DuBois? ”

“ Yes.”

“ He’s out late.”

“ So am I. For that matter, so are you, aren’t you? ” My question was superfluous, and I went on. “ Dirck and I have been rounding up a man we took for a burglar, at first.”

“ A tramp? ”

“ No, only a trespasser—Carlos Beauchamp.”

“ The devil! ”

“ Pretty nearly. We sobered him up by giving him a swim in the pond over there.”

“ Good! ” Although his exclamation of satisfaction was genuine yet, to my surprise, he displayed no further interest in Beauchamp’s fate. He went on in a significant tone. “ Is that everything your man—DuBois—has been up to to-night? ”

“ Hello! what’s up, Aleck? I don’t flatter my-

self you came over here at this hour simply for the pleasure of a call."

"No-o, that's true. Can I have a talk with you, Schuyler—about something confidential?"

"If you want to say anything about Kitty Willetts and Beauchamp and me, I'd rather not Aleck—I've seen Norah's letter, and Rex's. I'll take your apologies for granted."

"It isn't that—though the Lord knows I feel like apologizing. You could kick me from here home and I wouldn't complain. But it isn't that. It's something about—well, about Norah."

"Norah?" I turned matters swiftly in my mind. "Ought you to talk to me about your sister, Aleck? You're young—I beg your pardon, but you are!—and perhaps you think offhand it's your duty to talk to me about her. I don't know what it's about, of course, but, at a venture, I should say don't try to handle your sister's affairs. Sleep on it, at any rate."

We were standing close together, and even in the darkness I could make out his puzzled face. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other as a schoolboy might have done.

Behind him a star or two twinkled through the top of the blue spruce. A rabbit—a mere fluffy ball of gray—leaped the box-hedge and landed within six feet of us. One horrified stare, then it sprang frantically down the path, its cotton-tail flickering like a meteor in the dark.

“I think—if you don’t mind, Schuyler—I’m the only man in the family—it’s a point of honor.”

My mind groped for his meaning—I tried to remember what word or deed of mine might have been construed amiss by Norah. His next words bewildered me more than ever.

“You’re the cleanest-minded man I know, Schuyler. I can follow your advice—you’ll know what I ought to do—what’s right for me to do.”

I resigned myself to the issue. “Come in. We can talk better inside.”

He followed me across the porch and through the window into the library. Here he stood motionless until I had stirred the half-smothered embers of the fire. Presently I had a cheerful blaze going.

“Sit down, Aleck.”

He sank into a chair—the one where Ellen had lately crouched. The firelight revealed his face—I saw that it wore a troubled look rather than a puzzled one. As he leaned forward, his elbows propped on his knees and his chin in his hands, the skin over his temples seemed more tightly drawn than usual—the sparkle in his blue eyes was a little quenched.

“I don’t know what to think,” he began. “If it were anyone else—I mean if it were any other man’s sister—I’m afraid I would feel out-and-out disgusted. But Norah! She couldn’t do anything a girl of our sort isn’t supposed to do.”

“Never!” I said emphatically. “That’s certain.”



“But girls are queer,” he returned with all the cynic philosophy of youth and inexperience. “After all, I don’t suppose *my* sister is so very different from any other fellow’s.”

“What’s the point, Aleck?”

“I beg your pardon—I’m a bit upset, I suppose. You see——” He leaned still further forward, his fingers tight about his rigid jaw. “Well, it’s like this. About eight o’clock I brought those letters over here to Ellen from Norah.”

I nodded.

“We’re all mighty sorry, Schuyler, and ashamed of ourselves——”

“Never mind!”

“Well, then, when I got home, I lay down on the lounge in the library. Do you remember?—it’s next to the ‘den’—each has a door onto the porch, a good deal like this.”

“I know.”

“I lay down and got to thinking about things until the place seemed so stuffy I put up a window for air.”

I felt inclined to smile, but managed to nod gravely.

“I could see a light shining from the ‘den’ onto the porch. Norah was in there going over Rex’s papers.”

“One minute, Aleck. Is all this material?”

“Oh, yes. You’ll see in a minute. I—I overheard something. I don’t want you to think I’m a cad, so I have to explain——”

“Go ahead.”

“I stared at Norah’s light, and thought about her and—and so forth, until I fell asleep.”

“Hum-m!”

“The next I knew I woke up feeling mighty cold—the open window let the wind blow across me. Before I was really awake I heard voices outside the window. When I *did* get awake, it was too late to move. Do you see?”

“I understand perfectly. You thought you would make more of a mess of things by moving than you would by keeping quiet.”

“That’s it exactly.”

My apprehension of his dilemma seemed to relieve his mind of a heavy load. His rigid attitude relaxed. He lifted his face from his hands.

“I knew you’d understand. Well, of course, I recognized Norah’s voice soon enough, but it took me a minute or two to make out whose the other’s was, and when I did, it gave me a start, I can tell you.”

“It was Beauchamp, of course.”

“Beauchamp! Good Lord! no—I wish it had been. I would know where I stand then. It was your man—DuBois.”

“Ah!”

I had not been in the least prepared for this revelation, yet I did not doubt its truth. After my one exclamation of surprise, I fell back on silence to conceal my thoughts.

I remembered that Norah had been struck by her first sight of Dirck. At dinner she had been deeply interested in my little story of his kindness to the Hungarian emigrants. He had returned without embarrassment her impulsive hand-clasp that same night—she had blushed beneath his glance. Later, too, he had asked me about her. And that very afternoon he had contrived to speak to her at her carriage step—his heart in his eyes. I knew that, under certain conditions, there might be no limit to his audacity. But was it possible that there could be such a thing as love at first sight between a lady and a chauffeur—between Norah and Dirck!

Aleck continued, his voice deliberate as if he were conscientiously trying not to be hasty in his judgments.

“They must have been talking a few minutes before I woke up—long enough for Norah to have gotten over the first shock of the man’s ‘nerve,’ at any rate. I made out somehow that he’d seen her through the window—tapped on the pane and beckoned her to come out, you know. The Lord knows why she’d come! I wonder she didn’t scream instead.”

“She isn’t the screaming sort.”

“That’s true. She’d come out to see what in the world the fellow wanted, I suppose—perhaps she’d thought he had a message from Ellen. Once out, she’d been fascinated before she knew it.”

“He’s a good talker when he tries.”

Aleck struck his fist on the wide arm of his chair. "Schuyler, I give you my word, I didn't dream a man could talk so—so charmingly, I mean—outside of a book."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, it wasn't what he said but the way he said it—his voice and manner and all that. I'm a man, but by George! hearing that damned Frenchman talk, I felt as weak as a woman—as weak as Norah, maybe. I'd never understood before how it was Napoleon could handle men the way he did—I see now. It was *in* him, that's all there was to it. And it's the same with DuBois."

"What were they talking about?"

"He was—yes, confound him! he was telling her he loved her. Think of it! And she was standing there listening as if she were a statue—at least, she didn't seem to be making any protest that I could hear—not for some time."

He shook his head amazedly at me, as if even yet unable to believe what he himself had heard, or failed to hear.

"It doesn't seem possible, does it?" he went on, "but it's true. Of course, he didn't say: 'I love you,' flat out like that, but he might as well have said it—except that his way was a good deal better.

"The first words I really got into my head Norah was saying—she was trying to keep herself from sinking, so to speak. 'It can't be true,' she said. 'Perhaps you're walking in your sleep, DuBois. This is absurd.'

“ ‘Mademoiselle,’ he said—You ought to have heard his voice, Schuyler— ‘Mademoiselle, it may be absurd to you, but it is life and death to me.’

“ ‘This—it’s all—impossible!’ she said.

“ ‘You only think so because you think we have known each other so short a time,’ he told her. ‘If it had been a year ago you gave me that look instead of a day, would it seem to you so impossible?’

“I don’t know what they were talking about, Schuyler, but she gave a little gasp and said: ‘I didn’t—I didn’t—not the way you mean! Besides, it isn’t the *time* that’s wrong—it’s *you*.’

“He only laughed at that. ‘You mean to remind me that I am a servant,’ he said as cool as ice. ‘But, mademoiselle, that is nothing to me—nor to you.’

“That’s what he said, Schuyler—he acknowledged he was a servant, and told her to her face that *he knew she didn’t care if he was*. And by George! she didn’t—she didn’t. Mind you, instead of ordering him off the place, she was arguing with him—she was lost already, if she’d only realized it. Can anybody understand a woman?” he finished ruefully.

“One man apparently,” I returned.

“DuBois himself? Yes, *he* does—no doubt about that. And Lord! how fast he went—it took my breath away to listen to him. By this time he’d asked her—no, he’d told her he was going to kiss her. It’s true, though you may not believe it.

Fancy my sister, standing there arguing with a French chauffeur about whether or not she should give him—should let him take—whew!”

“Rather,” I agreed.

“And the point is, she wasn’t arguing about the kiss itself. No, she was objecting because he wasn’t her equal.”

“That was reason enough.”

“Of course. But that was the only reason that occurred to her. Don’t you see, that was as good as telling him she cared for him. He was sharp enough to see that.”

“I’m afraid he was.”

“Well, when he told her he knew she didn’t care if he was a chauffeur, she didn’t say a word—just as if she were frightened at herself—as if she really understood herself for the first time.

“When she couldn’t answer him, he said to her: ‘Do I look like a servant, mademoiselle?’

“‘You look like a gentleman,’ she told him. And he does, Schuyler, that’s a fact, isn’t it?

“‘Do I talk like a servant?’ he asked her.

“‘No,’ she said.

“‘Then what does it matter, if I am a servant?’ he said, very quietly, you know.

“Neither of them said anything more for a second, then she made a little sound in her throat. ‘Why are you with Mr. Schuyler,’ she said, ‘as a chauffeur, when you are a gentleman?’

“‘I have not said so,’ he told her.

“ ‘But I *know* you are,’ she said.”

Aleck crossed one leg over the other and sank back in his chair. His eyes sought my face as if to make sure of my sympathy.

“Women are sort of appealing, aren’t they, Schuyler? Have you ever noticed that? A girl believes in a man, if she likes him, no matter what he is. I suppose that’s real faith, isn’t it? It’s rather touching, I think.”

The firelight lit his earnest face as he aired his re-discovery of woman’s faith in man.

“After that,” he went on, “DuBois began to talk in French. I don’t know it any too well, but Norah is rather clever at it—the year after you left home, Aunt Caroline and she spent in France—Norah went to school there.

“From what I made out, DuBois asked Norah if she remembered how a lovely, blonde ‘jeune fille’ was nearly run over by a drunken cabman one day on the Champs Elysees. Did she remember how a stranger—a passer-by—had dragged back the young girl just in time to save her, and how he had carried her to the sidewalk—out of harm’s way?

“Of course the girl was Norah and DuBois said he was the man who’d saved her. Norah remembered the affair—who wouldn’t?—but, as near as I could follow their talk, she couldn’t reconcile her recollection of her hero as he was then with the man as he is now. But she believed in him—she *had* to believe in him.

“He told her he’d loved her ever since that day—he’d had the memory of her in his heart—in his dreams he was always carrying her just as he had three or four years ago, her arm about his neck.

“And then all at once, his voice began to sound fierce and tender at the same time. I suppose he was very close to her, for her answers were muffled, and grew weaker and weaker. She was trying to tell him that he must leave the house—that she would never let him kiss her—but she was giving way.

“Schuyler, I couldn’t stand it any longer—I sat up suddenly—the whole lounge creaked like the very devil! I just had one glimpse of Norah’s white dress, then she slipped out of sight. Your Frenchman and I were within two feet of each other, he standing outside the window, and I kneeling inside on the lounge, ready to leap out.

“I’d meant to knock the man down, to thrash him within an inch of his life—if I could. But when he looked at me, I couldn’t move. It wasn’t funk, Schuyler—I’m sure of that. No, there was something about that look of his that seemed to say he had a right there. Not the least bit threatening or sullen—not that at all, thoroughly self-possessed and indifferent, and as cool as ice.

“He waited for me to move or speak—and I couldn’t. Then he walked quietly down the steps and—and the next I saw of him he was here with you.”



Through the latter part of young Westbrook's story I had sat silent, my brain busy. Now as he softly pounded the arm of his chair, I spoke.

"Are you here after Dirck?"

"I don't know. That's why I want your advice, Schuyler. Oughtn't I to be after him? It seems to me I ought to have him out here on the lawn and pound him to pieces, if I can. If he were an ordinary sort, I'd ask you to discharge him, and then I'd horsewhip him. But he isn't an ordinary sort—anybody who looks at him twice can see that. What do you know about him, Schuyler? Who is he?—or what is he?—or is it only a case of damnable impertinence?"

I regarded him gravely. "You say you'll take my advice, whatever it may be?"

"Yes," he returned eagerly. "Whatever you say I'll do, Schuyler. I know you won't stand for anything disgraceful happening to Norah."

"To any of you—nor to myself either. It would be a disgrace to me if I allowed a man in my employ to misbehave. But he isn't misbehaving—precisely."

Aleck almost leaped from his seat. "He isn't!"

"No. Misbehavior is a matter of intention. I'm sure Dirck doesn't have any such intention."

"At midnight—on the front porch—with my sister!"

"It's the only chance and place he had to see her."

“But good Lord! Schuyler, you’re missing the point altogether. He’s your chauffeur—a common servant.”

“Look here, Aleck, this is my advice—this isn’t the time for a row with DuBois. You can go back home and sleep on that. You won’t be compromising your honor—or anyone’s—by waiting—by letting matters take their course.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely. You say you can trust me? Then don’t follow this thing any further—for the present, at any rate.”

In spite of himself he let go a long breath of relief. “I’ll do whatever you say.” We rose and shook hands. “I won’t keep you up any longer, then, and—and I’m much obliged to you, Schuyler. I’m glad you ducked Beauchamp—we were a lot of blind moles about you and—her.”

“All that’s to be forgotten.”

I held aside the curtain and he stepped through the open window. Outside he came to an abrupt halt.

“Good Lord!” he groaned. “I wonder if Norah is waiting up to interview me for meddling?” His feet lagged like a schoolboy’s as he moved away.

Laughing to myself, I closed and locked the long window.

## XXIII

### I DEMAND PAYMENT

WHEN I entered the breakfast-room the next morning, Ellen was standing by a window, looking out over the valley. She turned at my footstep.

“Good-morning, Little Nell. Here comes Quilp, the dwarf, you see—in a moderately good humor, though, so you needn’t run—yet.”

Her smile seemed to thank me for the lightness of my greeting. Possibly she was half-regretful of her apologetic attitude in delivering me the letters the night before. Or again, she may have been relieved that I did not bring up the subject of Carlos Beauchamp’s antics—it is not pleasant to think of a lover, even though a rejected one, in so pitiable a light.

“You don’t look as if you would beat and pinch me this morning,” she returned.

“We shall see. Besides, it wasn’t Little Nell Quilp pinched, was it? It was his wife.”

“That’s true.” With a wave of her hand she invited me to the view across the valley. “It’s a glorious day. Just see how those clouds pile up above ‘Westbrook Place,’—real castles in the air.”

“It’s a day for a good long ride in the car,” I suggested. “Let’s go aroaming by the light o’ the sun. After breakfast—what do you say?”

"The eyes have it unanimously. A ride will be rather restful, after our strenuous time yesterday." Her glance swept hastily from me to the window as if she repented the opening she had given me.

I did not take advantage of it. Her morning gown of brown linen fitted her perfectly—her brown boots matched it. The broad collar with its knot of brown ribbon gave her an almost schoolgirlish appearance.

She gazed absently out the window and I could not see her eyes nor guess what was in her thoughts. Was she profoundly contrite for her years-long misjudgment of me, or was she only overpoweringly afraid of me? Last night, before the library fire with her, I had been content to forget the real problems of life in the glamor of our position, but now, as she must be aware, life was to be faced again.

"Are we waiting for your mother?"

She turned to the breakfast-table, laughing up at me as I drew back her chair. "Oh, I was dreaming. No, mother won't be down. How naughty of me to keep a *man* waiting for something to eat. I might easily have had my head bitten off."

"Yes—a perilous performance."

We sat down and she began to pour my coffee. "I hope you aren't any the worse for wear yesterday, Nell—the wetting and the hound, and all that."

"Not the least bit, thank you. Two lumps, Craig?"

“Please. You didn’t have another chill? I didn’t reflect when I dared you into that stream that you are a foot or two shorter than I am.”

“I’m not so very small, sir! No, I didn’t feel cold—after Mary Finney’s.” She handed me the cup, and grasped the handle of the coffee-pot as if to pour for herself, but the motion died there. “Craig, I think I’m only just beginning to realize you saved my life—from that dreadful dog.”

“Dee-lighted—if I did.”

“You saved me from being frightfully bitten, at any rate.”

“You’re forgetting your breakfast.”

She drew a long breath and the hazel lights began to sparkle in her eyes. She spoke through teeth that were almost clenched.

“It’s—an intolerable—obligation. Any obligation—to you—is intolerable.”

“I’m glad to hear you say so—I shall put you under every obligation I can,” I returned, only half in jest.

As she filled her cup at last, she gave me a queer little smile.

“About ‘Gomez’,” she said after a little.

“The dog has had his day.”

“But I think I know why he attacked us.”

“That’s interesting. Why?”

“That sound we heard in the woods—you remember, we both heard it—the other side of the ravine?”

“ Yes.”

“ I think—I’m almost sure—it was Carlos Beauchamp’s voice.”

I stared. “ By Jove! you don’t mean it!”

“ Yes. ‘ Gomez ’ used to belong to him, you know. He could always control him much better than anyone else. Aleck thought ‘ Gomez ’ hadn’t been trained to attack people, but perhaps he had—when he heard the right signal.”

“ By Jove!” I exclaimed again. “ But why?”

She was silent and I was forced to answer my own question. “ Hum-m! he’s certainly a big enough scoundrel for anything—a crafty devil, too. He’d just received your note giving him his *congé* and he knew from Aleck I was here and would be with you yesterday morning. He put two and two together and added up wrong—thought I was responsible for his dismissal, I suppose. Yes, a crafty devil!”

Ellen’s face was a delicate pink. “ You aren’t very resentful.”

“ I knocked him down—twice—and ducked him once.”

“ I wonder—you had him at your mercy—such a beast—I wonder you didn’t *kick* him.”

“ I believe Dirck did attend to that in a casual way. Besides, time is a great healer of old wounds.” I glanced at her stealthily as I spoke—the pink in her cheeks grew to a deep red that was long in dying out.

“You’ll go for the ride?” I asked, when we had finished breakfast.

“Yes, of course. I’ll put on my hat and be down in five minutes.”

When she had gone I sent Theresa out with instructions to Dirck. By the time I was ready, he had the car waiting under the porte-cochere.

“I’ll drive, Dirck. You needn’t come.”

He whipped out his monkey-wrench and knocked about the emergency-brake a little. “It is stiff,” he explained, “if monsieur will wait a few minutes——”

“Oh, never mind. I can manage it well enough as it is.”

“Very well, monsieur.”

He drew a step nearer and spoke in an undertone.

“Last night I learned from Theresa the last word of a matter that has troubled us.”

I knew that the shrewd fellow was not easily misled. “What is it now?”

I heard the front door open behind me as Dirck pretended to test the steering-wheel. “There is Mademoiselle. Do not look round. Theresa told me—last night—Ah, Mademoiselle is coming! Another time.” He removed his cap and stepped back as Ellen ran down the steps.

“All ready?” I asked.

“All ready. Where are we going? I hope it’s to be a good long ride.”

“ ‘Over the hills and far away,’ ” I chanted.

I helped her in while Dirck took a last turn or two at the emergency-brake. “ Monsieur will bear in mind it works badly,” he cautioned.

“ We’re not likely to have any use for it. Expect us when you see us, Dirck. All ready, Nell? Away we go.”

As we slid smoothly off, a messenger boy turned his bicycle into the driveway. I slowed down.

“ A telegram boy? ”

“ Yes, sir.” He touched his cap to Ellen, his wheel barely turning. “ For Monseer Somebody—some dago name.” He was passing us with skilful slowness. “ He stayin’ here? ”

“ Monsieur DuBois,” I suggested, jerking my head back toward the house. “ That man by the porte-cochere there.”

“ ‘Taint DuBois!” cried the lad, a trace of resentment in his tone. “ Guess I can read all right, all right.”

Guiding his bicycle with one hand, he snatched off his cap with the other, and peered into its recesses, where doubtless the telegram was reposing.

“ The boy must have made a mistake,” said Ellen.

We were pounding up the hill at a leisurely pace. “ Where would you like to go, Nell? ”

“ Anywhere—it’s such a glorious day—anywhere in the world! ”

I shoved throttle and spark to a thirty-mile speed, and away we flew.



For a long time neither of us spoke. The wind rushed against our faces, tugging in vain at Ellen's trim veil and shining hair. On the perfect New England road hardly any dust was disturbed by our flight. Trees, stone walls, and houses flitted by like images in a dream.

A rock-crowned hill I well remembered loomed on our left. It was there Nell and I had abandoned our search for the golden ball that lies beneath the evening star. A little farther on we flashed past the familiar white-painted meeting-house. Beyond, a quaint hamlet straggled down an elm-shaded street. I slowed down to the legal ten miles.

"We don't want the village 'constabule' to stretch a chain across at the other end of the street."

"No," she agreed. "This is Tarnsdale, isn't it?"

"You saw the old Unitarian Church? Do you remember that Sunday night when we sang 'Softly now the light of day'—in the gallery with the village boys and girls?"

"Yes. Are we going anywhere in particular, Craig?"

"Right down to the Sound, if you like. We can cross Connecticut in short order, you know."

"Good! The seashore and the air will be perfect to-day."

We were almost clear of Tarnsdale when a man,

wearing a sort of uniform, ran out from an official-looking building, and held up his hand peremptorily.

“Hey, there, mister! Hey, stop!”

Protesting energetically, I obeyed.

“Look here, officer! This is an outrage! My wheels were barely turning over. If you arrest us, it’ll be sheer robbery. You can walk faster than we were going. Now, I’ll be hanged if I’ll stand——”

“Hold on, hold on!” he interrupted, grinning. “I ain’t an officer. I’m the operator.”

“Oh, you are.” For the first time I noticed the yellow paper in his hand. “What is it?” I asked.

“Party o’ the name of Schuyler?” he demanded.

“Yes. I’m Mr. Schuyler—Craig Schuyler.”

“You’re the one. I got a call from Bannocks not five minutes ago—said you was heading this way and to stop you. Telegram for you.” He handed me the yellow slip which he had not even had time to enclose in the usual envelope.

I took in its contents at a glance, thanked the man, then—to his evident disappointment—started the car.

“No answer, eh?” he asked.

“No—thank you.”

When we were again rolling slowly along in the open country, I handed the telegram to Ellen. She read it aloud:

“ ‘ Bannocks, Massachusetts, October 13, 1910.

“ ‘ To Craig Schuyler, Esq., in an automobile near Tarnsdale.

“ ‘ News Luisne’s death received. Accept my resignation. You win. Am *en route* this instant to ask Mademoiselle W. to become countess.

“ ‘ H. de T.’ ”

“ What does it mean? ” she asked. “ I don’t understand a word of it. ”

“ It means that Henri de Trouville has fallen heir to a title and estate by the unexpected death of his uncle and that he is ‘ this instant ’ on his way to ask Norah Westbrook to become the Countess de Luisne. ”

“ What! ”

“ Also, it means I’ve lost the best chauffeur I ever had. ”

“ What—it isn’t possible—— ”

“ It’s true. Exit Dirck DuBois. Enter—no, *re-enter* Henri de Trouville, cadet of his house and recently without expectations, but just now made Count de Luisne. ”

She clasped her hands excitedly.

“ Tell me, tell me, Craig! Don’t be mean. Tell me *everything*. Oh, you must be joking! ”

“ It isn’t so very wonderful. Henri and I had a bet—that’s about all there is to it. ”

“ What *do* you mean? ”

“ He and I have been chums for years—in Sumatra and everywhere. But he’d never been in America, and he had some of those confounded Con-

tinental notions about our American girls—the worst of it is they're true often, although I'd never admit it to him."

"You mean——"

"He thought all our girls were mercenary—tuffhunters and all that. He believed no foreigner without a title had a chance with one of our sort—at any rate, he pretended to believe that. We argued over it so much that finally I badgered him into coming over here disguised as my chauffeur—just to see if he could find an American girl who would consider him on his merits. It was part of the bargain that I should treat him as a servant in every way—it hasn't been easy to keep up the farce sometimes. How he did 'monsieur' me until all was blue, didn't he? Of course, it was only a lark. Now that he's 'resigned' I want to get at him and find out how he's been enjoying life in the servants' quarters. Anybody but Henri would have found it rather difficult to conduct a campaign from there—but he's nothing if not resourceful."

"It wasn't a fair test at all."

"No, so it wasn't. But I see now the sly dog had some particular one in mind all along."

"Norah?"

"Yes—I think he was captivated from the start."

"But how did he meet her, Craig? Do you think *she's* in love with *him*? She wouldn't allow herself to be, surely. She didn't know he wasn't really a servant?"

“I think she'd begun to suspect it.” I related the story I had heard from Aleck the night before. “Any young woman might jump at the chance of becoming the Countess de Luisne,” I ended.

“I suppose so.” She gave me a sidelong glance. “But what do you say about it?” There was the slightest possible accent on the personal pronoun.

“I say: ‘God bless you, my children,’ of course.”

She was silent. Dirck's—I begged his pardon—Henri's affairs seemed disposed of.

I put speed on the car—thirty, forty, fifty miles an hour! Too fast for safety, but I was reckless. The exhilaration of it got into my blood, and I shouted and sang like a madman. Ellen, too, caught the contagion of the motion—she sang in broken snatches, or uttered little cries as wild as my own.

So we flew steadily southward. Like Ellen I had a craving for the salt air and the far stretches of the sea—we had been too long in the hills.

When I next glanced at the clock dancing at my feet, it was one o'clock. The speedometer showed we had covered nearly ninety miles.

We ran up a long hill and all at once the ocean shimmered before us. I marked a noble oak on a cliff, and turning the car off the unfenced road, drove slowly across the downs toward it.

The salt grass crunched crisply under the wheels. The air blew fresh but not too keen. Here and

there the sail of a swordfish hunter shone almost white against the blue. It was a day in a thousand.

"Glorious!" said Ellen, and I echoed the word.

She regarded me with clear eyes from which all trouble had disappeared, at least for the moment. Her smile was as frank and innocent of guilt as a child's. She even laid a friendly hand on my arm to attract my attention to a soaring fish-eagle.

I brought the car to a halt under the oak, rather jerkily. I looked about. The downs stretched a mile behind us and twice that in either direction without a break. In front was the sea, the surf beating at the foot of a forty-foot cliff. The drooping boughs of the oak shielded us from the sun, and broke the force of the strong sea wind. No living soul, other than ourselves, was visible on land or sea.

I sprang to the ground. Ellen lifted her veil and pinned it clear of her face.

"Shall I get out?"

"Not yet."

I watched her fingers playing over her hair with light touches—now and then the red bracelet showed below her cuff—the pathetic face of the Nubian looked dumbly out at me.

"The grass looks very inviting," she suggested.

"If you don't mind keeping your seat a while, I want to talk to you. I've a good deal to say—and I think it'll be easier to say it if I can look up to you."

She gave me her curious sidelong glance. I thrust my hands in the pockets of my short coat—I did not care that she should see how they trembled—and began to walk up and down the length of the car. Her eyes followed me, wistful and perplexed. The red blood crept into her cheek as I began to speak.

“Are you getting used to that bracelet, Nell?”

“I shall never get used to it.”

“You can’t expect to get rid of it so long as you let things go on as you do—so long as you persuade people to burglarize my room.”

“To burglarize—I don’t understand.”

She gazed at me with a blankness that, if assumed, was a masterpiece of acting. I met her eyes an instant, then continued my slow pacing.

“You don’t? Come, Nell—didn’t you persuade Ned’s wife to search my papers night before last, when she thought I was asleep?”

“What! Certainly not!”

“Didn’t you get Theresa to have a try for the same thing only a few minutes later?”

“No.” Indignation and astonishment vied in her tones. “I never heard of it. She didn’t dare!”

“Oh, yes, she did—I caught her in the act. And I caught Mary Finney in a wire trap!” I gave a short laugh. “You never heard of it? I know you don’t lie, Nell.”

“I’m glad you believe that. Did you think for

a moment I would stoop as low as *that*—to rob your room? I haven't lost all self-respect, Craig."

"I didn't suppose you had."

"Mary must have done it because she's Ned's wife. They told me they'd told you about their being married, but they didn't tell me *that*. And Theresa! I'll have a talk with *her*." Her indignant tones died—she sighed, hopelessly. "She's a loyal soul—I think she really loves me. I suppose she only did what she thought would help me."

I had come to her side of the car and planted myself square in front of her, my hands gripping the top of the closed door. I looked up—she shrank visibly before my burning eyes.

"Nell—the letters last night—Norah's and Rex's."

She was aware that some crisis was at hand. "Yes," she said almost in a whisper.

"You know you have misjudged me all these years, don't you?"

"I know it now—but, Craig, I was only nineteen."

"You were old enough to pretend to love me. You ought never to have believed it. You ought to have given me a chance to explain." I struck the top of the door with my clenched fist in a sudden rage. "You didn't even tell me your reasons—I never *dreamed*, until yesterday!"

She nodded miserably.

"Nell, you were abominably cruel to me."



Her eyelashes were suddenly wet. Her lips parted, but only an inaudible whisper came from them. I went on.

“You’re sorry for all this?”

“Desperately sorry—Craig. It’s a poor excuse, but I was so young. I didn’t really understand—a man’s love.”

“You owe me every reparation a woman can make a man—isn’t that so?”

“Ye-es.”

“Remember, I’ve the cheque too—I’ll use it if you make me. Whatever I ask of you, you’re bound to do—you admit that?”

My eyes frightened her, telling her more than my words. She buried her face in her hands.

For a moment I looked up at her exultant—exultant of the tips of the ears and the neck that burned like fire—exultant of the tears that slipped between her close-pressed fingers. Then something snapped within me. I extended a shaking arm toward her.

“Nell,” I cried, “I want you to marry me!”

“I can’t—believe——”

“Yes. Will you marry me, Nell?”

She stared at me a long time—so long that I heard the roar of the surf at the cliff foot, and the very wind sighing through the oak-leaves overhead. The tears slipped unnoticed down her burning cheeks.

“I love you, Nell,” I said. “I’ve loved you

every minute since you broke our engagement. That was cruel! You've haunted me all these years, wherever I've been—in Sumatra, and everywhere. I've been so brutal to you the last three days because I love you. Do you think I'd have threatened you over that cheque business if I hadn't cared for you? I don't say I came home—to your home—with any idea of winning you back again. I admit I only meant to get revenge. But I wouldn't have cared about revenge, if I hadn't loved you. Can't you see that? You yourself had smashed my ideal of you—an ideal I'd cherished above everything else in the world. I've been trying to make you feel some of the pain I've felt ever since I learned you weren't what I had thought you were for so long—the loveliest and best in the world. Dear, when I saw you again the other day, I knew I loved you more than ever. Will you marry me, Nell? ”

I had not dared to look at her as I spoke. Now, as I did so, I saw that her face had lost its burning color, and her eyes were veiled by their long lashes. Her self-possession had returned.

“Are you aware that you are asking a—thief to become your wife? ”

“Oh, don't! Let all that go. What's the cheque to me! It's nothing compared to *you*.”

“Craig, you are doing me a great honor, but——”

Something in the studied monotony of her tone alarmed me. “What do you mean? ” I began.

She made an imperious gesture for silence. "A forger could never be your wife."

"Why not?"

"A wife must have respect."

"I don't understand what you're driving at," I said doggedly.

She gave me a little whimsical smile. "Ah, yes, you do, Craig. Listen! You say you love me?"

"Yes, with all my heart."

"You think you do, perhaps—now. But on your honor—do you respect me?"

"Oh come! Let all that go! What's all this got to do with——"

Again she made her imperious gesture. "Do you respect me?"

I met her gaze stubbornly—only for a moment, then my eyes fell before hers.

"Of course not," she said softly. "How could you? No, Craig, I'll never marry you without respect." She gave a little laugh. "Besides—I don't love you."

## XXIV

### THE CHURCH AT TARNSDALE

I LEFT her sitting in the car, her eyes veiled by their inscrutable lashes, the half-whimsical smile on her lips. The shadow of the oak fell behind me like a curtain.

I walked to the edge of the cliff, and stared over the Sound. Some distance out, a dazzling point of light darted from a swordfish hunter's harpoon. A steamer trailed a line of smoke along the horizon. A flock of kildees fluttered and called where a sandy point, running tongue-like from a little coomb, afforded a hunting ground. At my feet the surf roared sullenly distinct.

Although Ellen's refusal had given me a heavy blow, yet I had had some premonition of it. The Sutphen pride had been famous for eight generations—it had been my fear that her high temper, rebounding from its submission of the last few days, might spur her to desperation, that had led me to lay such stress on the obligations she owed me. I fancied that if I could make her feel the enormity of the injustice she had long done me, she might be willing to recompense me by herself!

Her spirit completely baffled me. Her contempt of herself in one light was overwhelmed by her desire for respect in another. "Besides," she had

said, "I don't love you." There was the explanation. My hands crumpled the lining of my pockets.

I remembered that, after all, our relative positions were absolutely unchanged. She still wore the slave's bracelet on her arm—I still held the cheque slung about my neck. She was as much in my power as ever, and I could exercise that power as ruthlessly as I liked. Or would it be better to be a good loser?

I stared gloomily before me. I felt resentful of the monotonous roar of the surf—its relentlessness, its implacability annoyed me.

Half-unconsciously I noticed a little drama of the sands. A kildee, at the mouth of the coomb, had lifted a shrimp in his bill. At that distance the shrimp, waving helpless antennæ, looked startlingly like a tiny human form, imploring mercy of its destroyer. As I watched, the capricious kildee dropped his victim, apparently uninjured, and flew calling derisively above the foam. At the same time, well out on the Sound, I saw a harpoon flash downward—a predatory swordfish must have been struck through and through.

When I returned to the car, the oak threw its heavy shadow over it. Coming into its circle from the brilliant sunshine without, I saw Ellen with difficulty—a figure mysterious and dim. When at last our eyes met, it would have been hard to tell whose were the more defiant. She faced me with the same tantalizing half smile.

I spoke abruptly. "Hold out your hand."

She obeyed me silently. "No, the left," I said. "That's it. Don't think I want to put another bracelet on you." My fingers fumbled in my pocket. "I fancy that iron has weighed a good many more pounds than its weight sometimes, Nell."

"Sometimes," she said.

The sleeve, falling back from the outstretched wrist, let the perplexed, submissive face of the Nubian appear.

"Here's the key to the thing." I produced it as I spoke, and fitted it in the lock. "I'll unlock it." My lightness began to return to me and I was able to smile up at her with an indifference equal to her own. "I can't control your soul—you've just made that plain to me—so I won't iron your body."

I unlocked the trinket and let key and all fall into her lap. She stared from it to me.

"What shall I do with it?"

"Do with it? I don't care. Throw it away if you like. I fancy it hasn't any pleasant memories connected with it, has it? You might give it to Dot Archer for a dog collar. You don't suppose I'll let you put it on me, do you?"

"Turn about is fair play."

Her words, mechanically soothing, such as one tosses to a fretful child, warned me that I was in danger of becoming ridiculous. I drummed on the

tonneau with my fingertips—as gay a rataplan as I could muster.

“Well, Nell,” I said, “there’s nothing but a sea in front of us—we can’t go any farther in this direction.”

She took my meaning. “Then there’s nothing to do but go back. It’s hard to travel the back-road, though, Craig.”

“Yes. It’ll be all the harder on you—after a glimpse—of the open.”

She took off her hat and veil and dropped them on the bracelet in her lap. “I think the wind will be soothing.” A little sigh escaped her. “I’m all ready.”

I cranked the car, tucked in the rugs about her, and jumped into my seat. Yet once there I felt in no hurry to move. To do so was to go back to the period of tyranny and submission we had escaped for a while. I did not yearn for my former masterful position. For a moment, I was inclined to temporize.

I gazed straight before me. “Nell, if we go back, I sha’n’t have any mercy on you.”

“Do you intend to abuse us indefinitely?”

“I don’t see why I shouldn’t—if there isn’t any other way.”

I looked at her boldly. Her eyes fell before mine and her lip trembled.

“You’re sure you can’t agree to the other way, Nell?”

"I'm sure."

"On your own head be it, then."

With a half-articulate curse at my folly, I started the car. I had put on at least three quarters power, and absorbed in my chagrin, had headed out toward the cliff.

The car was unpleasantly near the brink when I brought it about with a swoop, and held a course parallel to the sea. The hazard we had escaped acted on me like a heady wine—I was suddenly able to take a cheerful view of life.

"Another two seconds and our troubles might have been over," I laughed, slowing down to half-speed.

"A dreadful way to die."

"Oh, I don't know. I never could agree with the prayer-book: 'From battle, murder, and sudden death, good Lord! deliver us.' A sudden death is the kind I pray for."

"Yes—but to die without explanations? Wouldn't that be horrible?"

"You evidently think so. But it would be a good deal more horrible to linger on, a burden to one's friends and a horror to one's self. I can't imagine anything more ghastly. In fact, I'm all for euthanasia."

"But not to explain!"

"Explain? Explain what?" I glanced at her sharply. "Are you speaking generally, or do you mean to apply it to you and me?"



She lifted me a pair of eyes so dewy, so mysteriously tender, that I fairly caught my breath.

"There *is* something in particular," I began, but got no further.

My eyes had been on her rather than on our course. Now I felt the car take a sudden dip—as a duck squatters for a flight. I glanced up.

A break in the downs, half slope, half crevasse, lay right across our path. The coomb, at whose mouth I had seen the kildees playing, ran inland far enough to have set a deadly trap for us.

We had been moving at a fair rate of speed—already we were swooping down a slope that ended in a sheer thirty-foot drop.

I threw off the power, stamped down the foot-brake and, knowing this would not check our impetus in time, half turned in my seat and with both hands dragged at the emergency-brake. It refused to work!

I gave a cry—half curse and half groan—and threw one arm about Ellen—my other hand clutched despairingly at the accursed brake-handle. But I knew we would be in mid-air in a breath. I leaned far forward in a frantic effort to break her fall with my own body.

Then with a heavy jolt, the car stopped at the very brink of the cliff. An arc of the wheels was actually suspended over the steep. The brake had acted at the last possible fraction of time, and the tragedy had become a comedy.

We stared at each other, both a little pale. A slow shiver ran through her from head to foot.

“I think you’d better get out,” I said gently. “Well, well—it was nearly too late for explanations that time.”

She slipped from her seat to the ground. There she stood swaying. She tried to steady herself by a hand against the side of the car but, even as I sprang down to help her, she sank on the running-board.

I bent anxiously over her. “Are you faint?”

“No, no. Oh, Craig!”

To my amazement, she put her arms against the curve of the mud-dasher, buried her face in their hollow, and broke into pitiful weeping.

“Nell! Nell, did it frighten you so? I ought to have been more careful.”

“No—no. It isn’t that. I’m not frightened—not for myself.”

In her position on the running-board she was very close to me. In the broad collar and brown tie, with her tear-wet eyes and shining hair, she looked like a child lost on the moor. The brown hat and veil had slipped from her lap when she had sprung out and now lay where they had fallen. The red bracelet, the key still in the lock, twinkled in the grass nearby.

I sat down beside her and touched her hair softly. “What is it, Nell? Tell me.”

“If—if we had gone over—without a chance to explain!”

I slipped my arm about her shoulders. "Look at me, Nell."

She started, half arose, then sank to her knees in front of me, her eyes very wide. I put both hands on her shoulders and looked at her sternly.

"Nell—listen to me! I understand one thing at last. I know you never forged that cheque."

She turned very white. The lashes hid her eyes, and her voice when she spoke was barely audible.

"What makes you say that? How do—you know?"

"Because I do. When a man loves a girl—when he loves her truly—he knows her. I know *you*, Nell. I don't know the how or the why of things, but I know you didn't touch that cheque. Now, I think of it, you've never really said you did. I dare you to say so."

Her face was buried in her hands—the tears stole between her fingers. I undid a button of my coat and drew out the packet.

"There it is. Let it all go. Tear the vile thing up."

She made no move to do so. On the contrary, she gave me her quaint smile and to my surprise proceeded to open it. She paused to dash away her tears.

"If—if I hadn't lost my handkerchief, I—I wouldn't look so silly."

"Tear up the—the confounded mischief-maker," I repeated. "I never want to see it again."

Still she did not obey, but slowly unfolded the buff-colored slip of paper.

“So this is it?” She stared at it as if she had never seen it before. “‘First National Bank of New York,’” she read. “‘May 12, 1910.’”

“Oh, don’t,” I interrupted. “Let it all go, Nell. What’s the use!”

She read on serenely in an even tone. “‘Pay to the order of Ellen Sutphen twenty-five thousand dollars. Craig Schuyler.’” She reversed the cheque, and went on. “‘Endorsed: ‘Ellen Sutphen.’” She drew a long breath and looked at me. “‘You don’t believe I wrote it?’”

“No, I don’t,” I declared doggedly. “I don’t believe a word of it.”

Suddenly her face was very close to mine, full of the laughing, wistful light I had seen a few moments before.

“Craig Schuyler,” she said a little brokenly, “do you know, sir, you’re a very—noble—person? Don’t interrupt me—please! You believe in me now and—and I’m going to tell you—everything. I’ve been wicked not to tell you long ago, but you were so *violent*—you fell on mother and me like a whirlwind. You didn’t give us a chance. Craig, I never saw that thing before and I didn’t write it—neither did mother. No, no—*don’t* interrupt!”

She snatched up the packet and drew out another paper I had carried in it—Rex’s letter to Norah.

“Craig, compare the last line here—the one I

wrote, and my name—with the writing on the cheque. Yes—please do. Do you think they look alike?”

I gave a triumphant shout. “No, no, they aren’t the same! If I’d seen your handwriting any time these four years, I would have known that signature wasn’t yours. Hallelujah!” I scrutinized letter and endorsement. “Somebody was imitating your hand pretty closely, Nell.”

She nodded. The light died out of her eyes and she blushed painfully. “Craig, mother and I didn’t know anything about the cheque until it was too late—but—Ned did.”

“O-o-h!” I said in long-drawn enlightenment. “It was Ned!”

“Yes. The wretched boy took advantage of your being in Sumatra. It was easy enough for him to see your signature—it’s on the fly-leaves of several books in the library. He did it. He thought, of course, you wouldn’t know about it for months, away off there in the East. And of course he meant to make it up somehow, before you got back. Then he saw by the papers that you were in Paris on the way home.”

“The cashier of the First National sent me a cablegram there—in Paris—about the cheque,” I said. “I cabled him it was all right, although, of course, I knew something was all wrong.”

“When Ned saw you were so near home, he came and confessed to mother and me. Then he went

West—he went into hiding out there. He would have been there yet—if I hadn't written him—about Mary.”

I nodded.

“Ned ran away, but we couldn't undo the harm he'd done. You see, he'd had the money placed to my account—he thought he'd use it to make up the money of mine he'd lost, you know. After we'd found out—after Ned had gone—we didn't dare put the money back to your credit—it would have looked so queer. Besides, we didn't know how to go about it, and we were afraid to ask any one—horribly afraid to move. Of course—you know—we've never touched a cent of it.”

“You poor child!”

“That's all, I think. Except that when you appeared, mother was determined to shield Ned—and I—I——”

“Well, why did *you* pretend to be guilty?” I demanded. “Surely Ned wasn't worth that.”

“Because—because you *hurt* me so by believing for a minute——”

“But you hurt *me* by believing that I was a Carlos Beauchamp.”

She gave a little sob. “Oh, Craig! when you asked me—a little while ago—when you asked me to marry you, you admitted you couldn't respect me, and so—so I said—I didn't love you.”

I turned my face against the side of the car. “Nell,” I said huskily. “You're right—how can

you love me! I'm a beast! I'm not fit to associate with anybody but savages—I'll go back where I belong. Dear heart, can you ever forgive me for making you wear *that?* ” I pointed to the bracelet in the grass at her knee.

She gave me a look, marvellously dewy and bewildering. With a quick motion she picked up the bracelet and locked it on her wrist. She tossed the key into a wave that broke just below us. Her eyes were deep and her lips were very tremulous.

“If you wish—we'll never unlock it,” she whispered.

“Nell!” I cried. “Do you mean it?”

I put both hands on her shoulders and drew her to me. Our lips met with a passion that shook us through and through.

After a little she held me from her. “Oh, how cruel I've been to you, Craig—all these years.”

“You're making up for it now. Poor Aleck! I can almost say, poor Beauchamp!”

She blushed adorably. “Poor Norah!” she whispered, “even if she does become a countess.”

“The church at Tarnsdale would do,” I said irrelevantly.

“Oh, Craig!”

The surf roared at the mouth of the coomb. The kildees called above it. The shrimps swam in the little pools. And Nell and I rested contentedly against the car, the grass whispering about us.





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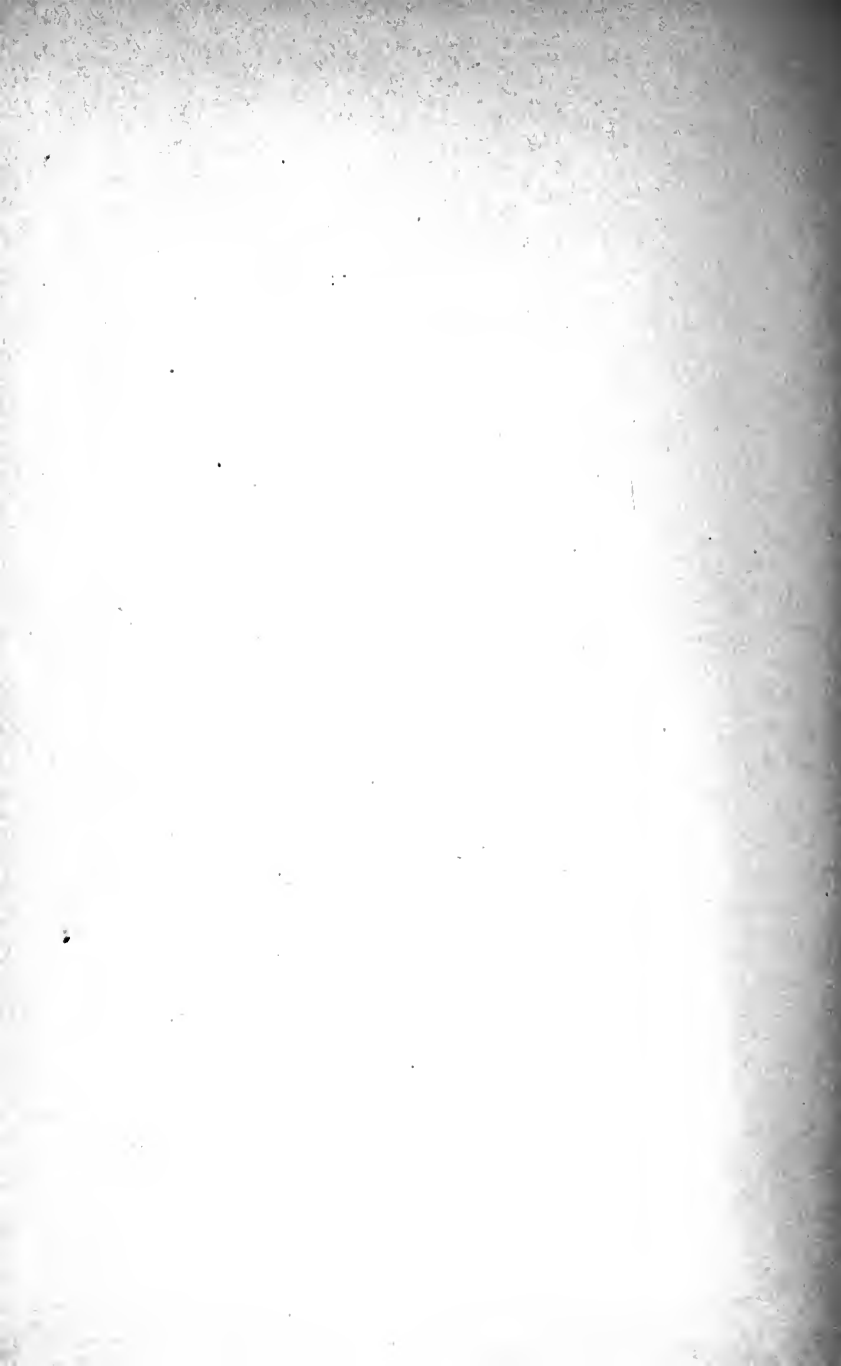
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