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**A
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A Novel

BY

MARY HALLOCK FOOTE
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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
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PART I

A PICKED COMPANY

CHAPTER I

THE NORTHEAST CHAMBER

THE storm had increased steadily toward nightfall, though Mr. Hannington had found it far from pleasant driving that afternoon, over country roads to an out-of-town funeral. He might have made the weather or the distance an excuse for not going, or that he had seen so little in late years of the old neighbor just deceased, but these were reasons that with Alvin worked the other way. "I guess I am full as equal to it as Mr. Yardley," he answered his wife's concern on his behalf. It had ended in his taking the minister with him, and as they plodded home together under the same buggy-top through the rain, he opened the subject of a decision that he and Silence had come to, which would add new material for church membership and another girl to the young people's circle of Dugdale.

"It will be quite a different element in your household," Mr. Yardley observed, speaking of the young relative who was expected.

"Yes," said Alvin, "she won't be altogether our kind, more than likely, but that may be some advantage on both sides."

It was a way of looking at it characteristic of Alvin; the minister could have nothing to say in disapproval, though he would have preferred to keep the Hannington

family as he had always known it, and he had a stake of his own in the social life of Dugdale in the person of a handsome, headstrong son.

It was now rather late in the evening: Alvin had finished his paper, folded his spectacles and the curtains of his consciousness and settled himself for a doze. Mrs. Hannington looked at him and at the clock; there were matters awaiting discussion that with difficulty she had postponed till he should have done with his reading, but she had not reckoned on a bedtime nap. Repression at this moment had given a slight set to her features which did injustice to their general benignity and the pleasure she was taking in her work; finishing the buttonholes in one of Barbie's new nightgowns which the girl had left in her mother's lap with a smile and a wheedling kiss when she went off to read "Philothea" alone by the dining-room fire. Barbie could make beautiful buttonholes herself, but preferred to charm them out of her mother; she had the fullest confidence in the weak points in that woman's character. Most mothers are strong in theory, but we think that many were infirm in practice, even in Hampshire County, seventy years ago.

Suddenly, out of his specious slumbers, Mr. Hannington brought forth a live remark, with evident deliberation back of it.

"I should think this house was big enough for the girl to have a room to herself."

Silence, at no loss to grasp an allusion to the very subject her own thoughts were busy with, answered as one prepared at all points, "It would have to be a room as good as Barbie's."

"It would have to be comfortable," Mr. Hannington

assented; but this did not settle the matter to a house-keeper's mind entirely.

"I have thought," she considered, "of giving her the northwest chamber; but then we should n't have any spare bedroom."

"How about that little room next the linen closet?"

"For a best bedroom!" — withering pause to allow the sarcasm to sink into the male mind.

"For one of the girls."

Mrs. Hannington put off her spectacles at once: "For which one, father? Barbie has had that northeast chamber since she was ten years old, and chose it herself, though I thought she would freeze to death up there winters. She always loved the room and I think she has well earned it."

"Who says she has n't? I did n't mean you should turn Barbie out." Mr. Hannington rose from the small of his back and sat forward, neglecting to straighten his vest. In domestic argument this was counter to his wife's laying aside her spectacles.

"Would you want me to put Stella Mutrie into a room not half so good as our own child's? The English live very handsomely in Jamaica," she subjoined, spoiling her point.

"It's nothing to us how they live! Any room in this house ought to be good enough for *any one* of my father's grandchildren. There was no such finicking and fussing when we were eleven to stow away, not counting company."

Silence accepted the rebuke; she knew when she had done injustice to her side of an argument. She was merely visualizing that little room next the linen closet as it would appear to Stella Mutrie coming from those houses in the tropics, with mahogany floors like dark mirrors

under foot, and courts full of flowers, and negro servants to fan you at your meals. Mary Hannington had written of these things glowingly, when she first went to the West Indies, exiled because of her cough. The doctors said she could not live North another winter.

"If I don't mistake," Alvin continued, warming into reminiscence, "the girl's own mother, my sister Mary, used to have that little room when she was about sixteen to twenty; before she began to be delicate. The room was n't much to boast of, but she used to come out of it Sunday mornings dressed for church, looking like a queen lily."

"Poor lily," said Mrs. Hannington softly.

Her husband had a way of forgetting how long ago it was that she entered his family. The lily was at their wedding in her first bloom. She remembered the sad years of her decline; she had been one of the intimate group gathered to say farewell, when her father took her by stage to Boston. To this day she could recall the girl's white face as she looked back at her home. It had seemed the end for her, but it turned out to be only another beginning; whether worth what it cost or not, Mary's legacy to her family, the child of her sudden, tropical marriage, the orphan niece who was coming to live with them, would prove.

Husband and wife shared the same misgivings with regard to this event. They were ready to say "better she had died at home"; better that her asphodel lilies had not turned into orange flowers. They were afraid of the late Captain Mutrie; of what he might have done with Mary's child in the years of his careless widowhood, after her mother's death.

The Hanningtons were village gentry of a plain, old-

fashioned type, but they knew enough about English society in Kingston to be aware that Mary could not have met her merchant captain in any of the houses her father's introductions had opened to her. Inquiries about him personally caused a great reserve whenever the marriage was mentioned. It was done, however; the doomed girl had made her last cast for life and happiness. She lived to see the curls on her baby's head — thick like its father's, golden like her own — grow long enough to brush a pair of sturdy shoulders that had not come from the New England side.

The Hanningtons were hardy stock, but Dr. Hannington in middle life had married beautiful Barbara Ilsey, of a more aristocratic, attenuated line. She bore him many babes in that northeast chamber, — which her grandchild and namesake throve in, loving its great summer mornings and thrilled by its winter gales. But Madam Ilsey declared that sunless bedroom, that chamber of the winds, had shortened her daughter's life and cost her the children she lost. It was amazing that a doctor should not have better protected his own — the old saying of shoemakers' children and blacksmiths' horses! Madam Ilsey was a spoiled, excitable woman who often spoke the truth, but seldom altogether truly.

Captain Mutrie had been away on one of his voyages when his wife died; certain requests she left him in writing, referring to their child, were mislaid in a slack West Indian household and never met his eyes. Very likely it would have made no difference.

No more was heard for many years of the little West Indian offshoot. Dr. Hannington died. He had provided against future complications, so he excused himself, by

giving his daughter Mary, on her marriage, cash value for what he deemed her share in his estate. The money he raised on a mortgage. It was done in wrath: "Take it," his act said, "and run through with it as you have with your life." Neither of his girls had married to suit him, but the youngest, who had done this thing almost at the door of heaven, had shocked his heart. He had a doctor's opinion of those days as to her right to marry at all. The wild experiment would soon be over, for her; let her use what he had to give her and use it up. He was not providing for the children of Captain Mutrie.

"That branch might as well be lopped off," said the hurt, despondent old man.

The Hanningtons were scattered now, like other big families in narrowing circumstances. Alvin was the last of his name in Dugdale: the least clever, least polished, but most dependable of the doctor's sons, — on his back were loaded the burdens which the old man could not carry beyond the grave.

Alvin had loved his youngest sister. The lopped branch never ceased to haunt him. Once, taking counsel of his wife, he wrote to Captain Mutrie, asking after his niece who must be now of an age to begin her schooling: could her relatives in Dugdale give him any information or help in regard to New England schools, in case he might be thinking of sending the little girl North for her education, and a more bracing climate? (The respect of a New Englander for his climate is rather like a small boy's for the master's rod: he will run his risks and take his chances, but if caught he can't complain: he knew the rod was there; and he courts the same risks and runs the same chances next time.)

Mr. Hannington's carefully considered letter obtained no answer. It may have miscarried, or Captain Mutrie, having nothing to say in response, had been too lazy to say it.

Great was Alvin's surprise, years later, when his niece herself addressed him, on paper perfumed and broadly edged with black. She informed him of her father's recent death in phrases a grown person would use. Reckoning back, he placed her age at eighteen. In almost the next sentence she entered upon a business matter, explained in a letter enclosed which had been found among her father's papers, in his handwriting, — either a copy or unsent. As it referred to a family matter, she had chosen to write to her uncle direct, she said, rather than consult a solicitor. Mr. Hannington smiled as he ran his eye over the enclosure.

“Is ‘solicitor’ English for lawyer?” Silence asked, taking alarm at the word, connected with family affairs.

“Probably her father did consult a lawyer and that's why he never sent his own letter. He'd heard of some wharf property sold in Boston after Edward's death, when his estate was settled up; he thought if he had died single, there might be a share coming to Mary's daughter. It was supposing a good many things that did n't happen to be true, as I guess he found out.”

“Well, that's easily set right. The poor girl will be disappointed, though. Does she think the money would be withheld?”

“I guess she did n't think much about it. She says she ‘knows nothing of business’” — Alvin consulted the letter — “but she does pretty well when it comes to asking for what she wants. ‘If any money from *any source* should be found to be awaiting my mother's claim,’” he read

on, "‘‘may it not be sent to her daughter directly? My father’s sudden death left his affairs in confusion. The law is very slow. I have no means to help myself with at present, — am living on my friends, in fact, — and one has n’t so many after misfortunes come, I find.’"

"That’s a poor sort of wisdom at her age, but she may be entitled to it," Alvin owned with charity. "Well, mother, — what do you think? This is the branch father said had better be lopped off. Shall I send her a hundred dollars and let it go at that?" He sat revolving his thumbs and waited with a quiet smile.

Silence looked at him absently. "Your father was a wise man in most things, but I expect he must have been considerably incensed when he said that. I’ve seen a tree branch cut off so close to the house it belonged to, that it fell on the roof and broke a skylight."

They laughed together at the homely allegory. "You think that branch my father cut off has struck somewhere near us do you? Well; won’t a hundred be enough?"

"In money, it’s enough, and more than you can spare."

"Well, come! say what you think. I can’t ask the girl to come and stay with us if you don’t feel to want her."

"I guess the roof won’t fall in if she should come," Silence answered dryly.

Each waited for the other to take the responsibility for a step which might well be supposed to have long consequences. They did not like the tone of their niece’s letter, but neither did they wish to prejudge her in her unhappy situation. It hurt their pride that one of the family should be so placed.

"What’s the use of asking me?" Mrs. Hannington

concluded. "You'll do it anyway, and I don't see, myself, how you can get out of it."

As the invitation had been an act of duty, so the acceptance was plainly one of necessity. It came after long delay, after the money was spent, perhaps, and other expedients tried in vain. Mr. Hannington forwarded a second remittance, rather closely figured out (times were tight with him that year), for his niece's passage North, and in three days he expected to go to Boston to meet her.

They talked until after midnight, but were both awake and thinking long before the slow, November dawn showed the objects in their room. The choreman overhead in the attic chamber gat himself up and into his boots with large clumping sounds as of cattle rising in their stalls. They heard his accustomed knock on Jane's door (Jane-of-all-work); then he continued downstairs, still on hoofs apparently, like a domesticated faun. The noise did not disturb them.

It was Mr. Hannington who brought up the bedroom question again, his wife grimly amused at his puzzled efforts to improve upon a plan she had resigned herself to with such deep, inward dissatisfaction.

"Why can't you take the room back of the parlor for your spare bedroom?"

"Because, in the first place," she answered tartly, "it is n't to spare!"

"I mean, of course, next spring."

"That's mother's room! As long as she is in it, I'd rather not discuss what we are going to do with it as soon as she is gone."

The doctor's old study, a charming room, with a fireplace and its own outside door opening on a sunny porch,

had been given to Mrs. Trumbull, to save her the stairs. Grandmother was, as Barbie said, a rather "stoutsome" old lady. This was her second visit East, since she moved out to Buffalo, following the fortunes of her son William and his family; not only had she followed them, she had materially pushed them with money of her own to give William a start. Now, Buffalo was building out to meet his land; he promised to become a rich man. In doing so much for William, Mrs. Trumbull had always felt guilty towards her daughter, her favorite child. She could not put it into words; Silence would have been wounded if her mother had apologized: "It's his only chance; he'll never do anything here; I will make it up to you if he succeeds." She made it up, by loving best the child she was parted from. She boasted a good deal, however, before her son-in-law, of her business-like hardness with William: "Oh, I don't let him keep me waiting! he pays me good interest right on the nail." She had means to dress well and to travel, as her Eastern visits showed; but now the years began to count. She was seventy-six, a wonderful old lady of her age; but there was no likelihood that she would ever make the trip again: hence her daughter's sensitiveness on the point of looking to its close, in a matter of house convenience. It was more than that, she knew, but the subject had nagged her enough already.

"We shall need a good spare room this winter," she explained less petulantly. "I want to ask one or two of mother's Valley friends to visit us while she is here. Old people can't be tucked around anywhere."

"I still say," — Mr. Hannington inserted a middle finger in either loop of his boot-leg, — "I still think you

ought not to put those girls together in the same bedroom unless Barbie wants it so. What does she say?"

"I don't know what Barbie wants. She does n't say anything."

"Much the best way! Well, I don't seem to be helping much," he yielded.

His wife took up the word brightly, to comfort him.

"I'll tell you how you can help! Go down to Harvey's and pick out a good-sized air-tight stove to put up in the girls' room."

"The 'girls' room'!" Barbie echoed.

She had been waiting in the dining-room for breakfast when her mother entered, speaking. The little smile on her face remained fixed, abashed by a flood of crimson. It was not the custom of this family to kiss all around when they met each morning, but Mrs. Hannington went over directly to her daughter and kissed her, without a word.

After worship, grace was said, and Barbie burst in fluently: "Are you going to put up a stove in — in our room — when Stella comes?"

"I think we must," said Mrs. Hannington. "She'll feel the change very much this first winter; her mother was delicate."

"The wind must be tempered to the shorn lamb," said the deacon; he meant it — not piously, though the commonplace jarred upon his women.

"Why can't we use the old fireplace? Is it bricked up, father?"

"No," he replied; Mrs. Hannington adding that stoves heat up so much quicker and save firewood. Barbie let the subject drop.

Harvey's men came next day and left the stove and a sheet-iron fireboard and their tracks on the stair carpet; it was snowing outside. After them Barbie rushed up to face disaster. What she saw first was her rejected fireboard leaned against the passage wall on its way up-garret. It was only a square pine back, faced with wallpaper of an old English design, a landscape supposed to be in China: till this moment she had not known how she cared for the old thing; nor, till she regarded the new one in its place, did she realize how it had suited its frame, the white-painted mantelpiece and the soft, dull pinks of her faded ingrain carpet. It had been the drop-curtain, never lifted, of those unseen dramas on stormy nights performed by the wind in dialogue with that deep-chested old tragedian, the East Chimney. In pauses the chimney would make you think it was speaking alone, mouthing and whispering and ranting to itself. Often, the stage would be the house roof; you knew it was a bough of the big elm that sounded like cordage dragged across a deck; that no men's feet could be up there, nor large bodies moving softly down the slope of the kitchen shingles, but the creepy effect, as you snuggled under the bedclothes, was the same.

These were days when the northeast chamber had for its small occupant one face by day and another by night; when she lived there in a state of fearsome joy—like a little Pysche in the Palace of the Unseen. She was enchanted by her solitary state, but at any moment there might be a nameless terror to reckon with.

In one pang, Barbie felt that a piece of her childhood was gone. "At least the rats shall not gnaw it!" And she searched the house for large wrapping-paper and lugged

the hgh bumping bundle up-garret herself and spent a quarter-hour suspending it by strings from the rafters.

Her mother was now calling ; she ran down and they met in the passage outside of her closed door.

“ Where is the fireboard ? ”

Barbie explained sufficiently : Mrs. Hannington was not obtuse.

“ Well, don't go in just yet. I've opened all the windows.”

“ What for ? ” asked Barbie.

She went into her room to see, — Silence following, flushed and depressed. They were seized by a smothering, greasy, gaseous smell mingled with fresh wood smoke which the wind was expelling through the open windows. A little dry snow drifted in, lightly sprinkling the carpet. In front of the hand-carved mantelpiece, which seemed to flatten itself against the chimney repellently, stood a squat, iron monster on crocodile feet, panting, sucking its own flames. It stood on a square of new, chequered oil-cloth, which went well enough with blackened sheet-iron, but not with old English ingrains dulled with use. These things were not matters of deep moment at that period, New England being moral and ethical rather than artistic, but certain persons had the instinct to feel them out. Mrs. Hannington saw the consternation in her daughter's eye.

“ I thought of telling them to put it wrongside up ; the under side is plain brown.”

“ I wish you had,” said Barbie.

“ Next time we put it down we'll do so.”

“ Will it always smell like this ? ” Barbie seized upon the odor savagely, to cover her general despair ; years of

that oilcloth and that stove stretched before her. They stood for years of other things.

"It's only the fresh blacking burning off. And they wanted to see how it would draw," Mrs. Hannington gasped, breathing through her handkerchief, "so they built a fire — and forgot the damper in the pipe."

"Oh, there's a damper in the pipe! I must remember that." Barbie began to giggle hysterically. "Come out, mother, and let it go on and do its worst alone."

In the passage Silence pleaded anxiously: "You'll find it very comfortable to dress by. I used to worry about you up here, those awful winter mornings. I don't know why we never did it for you."

"Well, *I* know!" said Barbie.

"Next summer it will come down. Then you'll have your room just as it used to be."

"It is n't the room!" said Barbie, choking. "But it's right, mother. I've had too many things just as I wanted." She was taller than her mother; she had to bend to kiss her cheek, clasping her tensely to feel herself close to the best thing in life which now she must learn to share with a stranger.

"Of course, it's right," said Silence sternly. "You don't suppose father and I did it because we wanted to! Parents can be selfish as well as children. I never felt a gift to mother any girl except my own, but I've got to do it, and you must help me, daughter."

This was said with clear intention. Mrs. Hannington had made observations while wrestling with the stove in Barbie's room: she saw where the hitch lay. Of all her material comforts, the girl had been generous. She had washed her dainty toilet-covers with her own hands and

given over the dressing-table to her room-mate, mounting a swing-glass on a chest of drawers for her own use; and made the action simple by saying, "I am tall and I never do my hair sitting"; she had been over-generous with closet-hooks and bureau-drawers, but every bit of herself she withheld. The room was stripped of personality. Mrs. Hannington looked around, missing one after another of the objects Barbie had built into her nest, some whose significance the mother understood, others that she smiled at in silence. The copy of *à Kempis* which she had placed on Barbie's bedside table, the first night she slept in her own room, was gone out of sight; also a broken skate-strap tied with a ribbon, that had hung since winter before last against the girl's looking-glass. The ribbon was plainly one of Barbie's; the strap fitted a skate of male size which Mrs. Hannington suspected had once belonged to Jimmy Yardley.

So; the decks were cleared. "She does n't know if it's a friend or an enemy who is coming into her life, I suppose," the mother sighed; "it is the instinct of self-defence." She was battling with the same instinct in herself, only, it included her offspring.

CHAPTER II

TWO DAUGHTERS OF ONE RACE

WITH Stella Mutrie's arrival the first fear was over. She looked healthy, to say the least ; — pale, from living in those darkened houses that narrow with their shuttered balconies the glaring streets of Kingston, but not meagre nor drooping : her complexion reminded one of Southern flowers, the velvet white of a magnolia blossom or the over-scented tuberose ; loops of golden curls fell against her temples, and a massive ten-strand braid crowned her with the support of a Spanish comb. Her black dresses had gigot sleeves and wide white shoulder capes ; they were very modish and looked expensive. There was no suggestion of the shorn lamb about her except her sensitiveness to cold.

Thus, the stove, which had been domiciled for her sake, became at once her idol and a grovelling necessity of her unacclimated being. The presumption had been that "the girls" would take turns laying their fire overnight, a task which delayed getting into bed when nights were coldest ; but Stella's fires would never "go" : hence, no good husband for her ! — such was the popular fallacy. Barbie's fires went at the first spurt of the match ; but Grandmother Trumbull hastened to moderate her hopes by setting forth that no young woman need build on the sort of intelligence required by these modern stoves, — nothing but iron boxes ! A fire on the hearth was the orthodox test, from the days when the saying began. Your wasteful

virgin used too much splitwood and kindlings ; a foolish one went out of her way to lay them contrary to the laws of artificial air currents ; a hasty disposition piled on logs and discouraged the struggling flames. There were ways enough of putting out a fire ; only the right way to mend or make one. Barbie would then speak up for those unpromising young firemakers — she could name them — who had hoodwinked destiny and got the good husband without qualifying for him. This was a girl's way of slighting prophecy too plainly put forth in the interests of thrift, marriage appealing to young minds on livelier grounds.

It was Sunday morning. Barbie, awakening at the usual hour, had lain listening for the clock downstairs to strike seven. There were no curtains to the mahogany four-poster : housekeepers were beginning to say that wash curtains made too much work and stuff ones were stuffy, but scarcely any one except reformers and cranks had reached the hardihood of open windows at night with the mercury below zero. There were in the room, besides a chintz-covered easy-chair and a small rocker, two straight-backed mahogany Sheratons, uncomfortable but choice, that matched the table and bedstead ; one stood on Stella's side of the bed, heaped with her peelings of the night before : to compare her garments with Barbie's folded on her chair by the frost-blinded window, was like comparing the crumpled leaves a fig tree flings down with the neatly sifted needles of the pine.

On week days, Barbie awoke to the sound of her father's voice below stairs : " Bound up, Barbie, bound up ! " but on Sundays, with an extra half-hour's grace, she was expected to " bound up " without that rouse to the conquest of creaturely comfort.

Out she sprang, when the fell moment came to have it over with; closed the passage door and set a match to the pine shaving hanging from the stove's square lip like a lazy man's pipe; placed the frozen water-jug near, but not too near, the zone of heat expansion and tip-toed across the icy carpet to the window for a look at the weather. No peep-hole scraped in the frost curtain (after warming the spot with one's breath) was needed to advise her of the state of things outside: her little nose, cold as a nipped rosebud above the bed covers when she woke, had reported the matter. It was still and clear; a hard January freeze without wind or snow had made skaters' ice; and this was Sabbath and Jimmy Yardley's last day at home!

He had been graduated from Yale the year before, and finished the summer, by his father's advice, making trips to manufacturing towns to study the best methods in cotton-milling, which he regretted was to be his occupation; one of those chilling compromises young men are sometimes forced into when they cannot please themselves without too much wreck and ruin to the feelings of others: in Jimmy's case, an old father whom he loved despite their habit of never quite understanding each other. He had been lately loafing around home, as he called it, waiting for a certain opening which had opened. This day his boyhood ended. To-morrow he would set out to begin his apprenticeship to business.

Barbie went down on her knees as custom directed, though in no mood for prayer. Still, one must be just even to a Providence which sees in secret and openly makes use of what it has seen. Her spirit was proud, but conscience humbled her by degrees.

Why had she raged at the weather — rain and slush and sleet and more rain, as the precious days of Jimmy's last boy holiday flew by? Why had she longed, nay, prayed for cold which Stella hated, for skating which left her out? Such thoughts are clearly to be paid for, and the sooner the better: it is the Busy One who chuckles to see a sinner's account overdrawn, while he waits for bankruptcy and the chance to bring in his fatal lien. It was a close calculation, an awful book of reckoning, but it produced a race of men and women unparalleled in history.

Most persons in Dugdale would have said that Barbie Hannington was about the whitest lamb of the Rev. Recompense Yardley's Congregational flock. She had inherited the brows and smile of a sainted great-grandmother whose over-stock of virtues, justly celebrated, had not robbed her of a delicate mundane beauty in her own type; oval face and sweet narrow eyes and hair of infantile fineness, so fine it seemed unable to retain the crudity of color and was ashen blonde; and the distinctive mouth of a nature that can both feel and repress feeling. Barbie was half the time striving to live up to her unearned increment of family piety, the other, despairing because she could n't, but never at any time as good as she looked.

Now, since Stella came, it had been her thankless task to prod and prevent another — no younger than herself and armed with a cool irony of self-sufficiency towards those virtues that bore Barbie down. She knew by daily experience just how long beforehand you had to begin in order to get the cousin up in any reasonable time for even breakfast; prayers were no longer expected of her. She was a guest; she had no rights in the house, therefore she must have privileges. Sunday was hardest, when every

moment downstairs counted before meeting. Barbie suffered both ways: for her mother and the sore-trying help, and for herself, acting the part of the woman whose price is above rubies, who rises betimes and looks well to the ways of her slug-a-bed sister.

"Come, Stella, come! I can't give you another minute. I am going down now. Come, it's Sunday, remember. Do turn over and see how late it is. All your fire will burn out."

This last argument carried some weight apparently. A sleek hand and wrist dragged a pair of roughened yellow braids from beneath the sleeper's shoulders and flung them over her pillow; they fell like loaded whips.

"I'm not going to church, you know, and I don't care for breakfast, so why bother?"

"Well," Barbie answered briskly, "if you change your mind about breakfast, there's plenty you can find to eat. I should think, though, you'd want to go to church this Sunday."

"Why *this* Sunday?"

"I told you; you've forgotten. Mr. Yardley will speak about his Oregon Mission in the spring. It's almost his resignation sermon!"

"Bless you! what do I care about his resignation — poor old man! I have n't an idea where or what his Oregon is."

Barbie moved about tidying the room. "What do you want I should say downstairs?"

"Say? I've nothing to say."

"Mother will come running up, of course. She'll think you must be sick if you can't get up for meeting."

"I can get up, but I don't see the use." Stella turned her back to the room and a warm shrug to the teaser.

Barbie waited another interval. "It seems almost disrespectful for any of us to stay away, to-day. It was given out last Sabbath what he wants to tell us. It's his great plan, and why he is breaking up his whole life here, after all these years."

"His plans don't concern me, my dear. Why should I walk a mile, and freeze to death —"

"Hardly half a mile!"

"— Half, then, to listen to — Oh; do be off! You can't get me up short of pouring cold water on me."

Hearing no further sound of departure, Stella turned on one elbow and looked at her cousin.

"There you are still!" she laughed, and lay down again.

Barbie was dressed for church, having tied on an apron to protect her blue merino. There was nothing difficult or æsthetic about that blue, — just blue; it showed hard in the cold snow light, but fairness like hers could bear it. Her curl-papers in a quaint way were becoming too; they suggested those sculptured lumps investing the brow of a Greek antique head. Her forehead was modelled on a more feminine plan than the vast Hannington brow; she had snatched that grace from the stout, brown, low-built Trumbulls, but she had missed the Trumbull hair which curled naturally. Still, her own was so angel-soft and light, a few minutes in papers shaped it for all day; but Barbie, unconscionable as to neatness, preferred to risk a rather cork-screw effect sooner than have her curls "come down" in what she called strings. Pretty sight as she was, in spite of mid-nineteenth-century fashions, there was something about her that provoked her cousin's merriment. Perhaps it was the perplexity in the fine Ilsey eye-

brows cast upwards. It was impossible for Stella to measure the seriousness of some of Barbie's obligations: she had never dreamt of a life so beset with moral responsibility.

"Now, I want to know what you are waiting for? I believe it's an excuse! Say I am sick, then."

"Stella! I can't contradict you."

"You need n't, dear: the fib is all mine. I used n't to have to tell them about lying in bed, but if it's necessary, why, go ahead and say I'm sick."

"I suppose," said Barbie, desperately resolved to keep her Sunday temper, "in that town where you lived I could n't have gone to their church as I am? I should have had to be in black, should n't I, with some kind of a shawl over my head?"

"They are not all Catholics, by any means: we went to the English church just as you go."

"Oh, you did go to church then!"

"Sometimes; it made no difference."

"That you see is just the difference! Here everybody has to go to some church."

"Not everybody; Jimmy Yardley, for instance?" Stella laughed, and Barbie colored in spite of herself.

"Jimmy's an exception."

"We quite understand that!"

"He gave up a great thing to please his father. He has always been crazy to go to sea, but he gave it up because his father felt so about it. I think Mr. Yardley wants to let him get his breath a little before he bears down too hard about something else."

"Something else"! Barbie, you reprobate! is that how you speak of our Jimmy's salvation? You'd better look out or you'll be slipping back where he is."

"I meant just what I said; not only uniting with the church, but other things. He reads books that mother would n't want me to read. She is right and he's right too. We are all one way of thinking here, and always have been; we can't make allowances. Where you were brought up you must have seen all sorts of ways of living?"

"Well, I never was brought up, you know. I lived in a houseful of lazy darkies, and the housekeeper — she was n't much like Aunt Silence!" Stella kicked her feet free from the weight of the cotton-wool comforter and clasped her hands beneath her head. With the light shining level with her chin, casting the shadow of her thick golden lashes up against her brows, she was a perfect beauty, Barbie thought, though her features lacked a good deal of perfection.

"Is there any of that honey salve left up here?"

Barbie fetched a small china box of it made after Grandma Trumbull's recipe.

"Thanks," said Stella. — "There was n't a rule about the place I could break, if I tried. We did n't live by rule."

"I see," said Barbie, watching Stella's narrow fingernail plane off a modicum of the salve that smelled of fresh honey-comb and rose-leaves. "It must come hard. But you'd be happier, don't you think —?"

The girl's answer was a groan; her lips being shut tight to receive the emollient. Barbie turned away and began to force wood into the stove, unshipped the lid of the hot-water kettle to ease its boiling fury, and closed down the draught to a crack.

"There! Now you'll do till noon. The trouble with us is we've never been out of Dugdale, Mass. I'm begin-

ning to find it out.—What was she like, your house-keeper?"

"Oh, I can't tell you—you!" said Stella, and proceeded to tell minutely, for the fun of shocking Barbie. "She was a mestiza, a person who is nearly white and sometimes very pretty; she was, when she was tidy. She wore a much-embroidered chemise and not much of a petticoat, and gold beads and bare feet. Sometimes she put on a low-necked yellow silk and French slippers. She told lies, but she could get up a ten-course dinner and mix every drink that was ever heard of. She'd been educated."

"Stella!"

"Well, dear, if you don't like the dregs of my past, why do you stir 'em up? I may be able to help my future, but I can't help my past. Come, kiss me, you blue-and-white Old Innocence! you are the youngest thing, and you are the oldest! You know nothing at all, and you know the most frightful lot that don't belong to you and certainly don't to me! I know I'm a sarpint—I'm a thankless adder; and I shall bite like one if you don't be off and take your scandalous perfections out of my sight; you positively blind me!"

Stella would often run on like this, mocking at what she pretended to admire; and Barbie, conscious of her own hapless attitude, felt the sting of words which a smile or a careless kiss were meant to sweeten, but seldom did. Barbie had not been brought up to kiss anybody on slight occasions.

Skating was not properly one of the sports for girls in New England, in the forties. Barbie had the luck, though, to be an exception, because she had a sensible mother;

and possibly the Hanningtons could do things on the strength of their local position for which others might have been talked about.

She had learned on Jimmy Yardley's outgrown skates, he having no sister and she no brother. His arm had supported her through the tottering stage — not in all respects like a brother. Afterwards, when rhythm was established between them, it was hands across, the mutual free stride, a marriage of true muscles and true minds. The air was the pure, unrealized cold of skating weather, the time — after school generally, approaching sunset, or the intense twilight of a short winter's day; colors marvellously blending above the horizon and all remaining light forced down upon the fields of white below; and the young faces beholding each other's fresh beauty on this startling background. The hour for parting was no chaperone's affair; the girl herself must remember and keep it, in spite of the boy and his longing looks and the pressure of his hard young hand.

Barbie's hours of this sort with Jimmy Yardley began about the winter she was fifteen, and Jimmy, after missing one vacation through a trip to the South, came home so tall she had to change the level of her eyes to meet his with the new shyness in them. Barbie did not realize the change in herself, which took his breath away. Then the shyness by fits became boldness. Then, last holidays, — that last evening on the ice, — she forgot the hour and was late to tea; but mother merely looked at her. At bedtime she came up on some excuse to Barbie's room and kissed her good-night with another look that asked, "Have you anything to tell mother?" Barbie had nothing that could be put in words, but she gave herself

to be kissed again—a kiss which both of them understood—how, is a mother's business.

Mrs. Hannington did not sleep that night. A beautiful thing which she might have welcomed later had begun, she feared, too soon. Barbie, of an age to listen, must wait till Jimmy was free to speak; yet nature, she guessed, had betrayed them to each other. The situation was unfair to both. The just woman had no blame for Jimmy more than her own child, though he was one-and-twenty, within a year then of his graduation; that was a man in those days. She comforted herself, thinking that he had no long bondage to poverty before him: his father had strong theories on the subject of a young man and his work, but Mr. Yardley was more than "well off," and Jimmy had property of his own from his mother.

This winter she perceived there was a change. If she had hunted for a simile she might have said, "you mustn't stop churning just as your butter has begun to come." If you leave it at that delicate moment it goes back. Now it was a question if Barbie's butter would ever come. The weather, as she knew, had been against her. Evenings the child no longer saw Jimmy alone; and Stella was so lovely by lamplight!

No one supposes these New England girls, with their pure brows and reticent eyes, were bloodless, immune from jealousy, and other passions they knew their mothers never had, and so little could understand that it would be like a form of spiritual indecency to lay such confessions at her feet; and besides, it might not be true. Jealousy, Barbie informed herself out of a good habit of thought, is a thing you need not be on speaking terms with unless you prefer low company; yet the struggle to get rid of

the pushing thing may hurt one's maiden self-respect and pride of detachment.

Stella Mutrie, in spite of her peculiarities as they were called in Dugdale, had been accepted for her mother's sake, though freely criticized for her own. So long as those excellent people, Alvin and Silence, were not pained by hearing what was said about their niece, the village might speak its mind. She wore low necks and jewelry with her fresh mourning, and spoke of her deceased father, the captain, as if he had just stepped into the next room. Every one knew it was "too soon" for her to go out: she was asked with Barbie, — no one expecting her to accept, yet she did; and though she joined none of the games that with church members took the place of dancing, her reason seemed to be a frank preference for the warm corner by the stove, where shortly a circle of flushed-faced youths would gather, to the detriment of the games.

She distributed pangs about equally between girls and young men that winter. Parents were "worked up" about her; one or two promising love-affairs went the wrong way. In a community made up largely of marriage and blood-relations and distinguished for sincerity of speech, the young stranger in their midst could hardly be unaware of the distrust she excited, nor fail to smile with quite excusable cynicism at its being so generally confined to her own sex.

The young men of the village haunted the Hannington block, hoping not to meet each other in Alvin's front parlor; his consumption of firewood that winter was distinctly increased by the persistence of Stella's admirers. They might have been called Barbie's, but Barbie knew; she could not escape it herself, that breath of allurements and

mystery from the lazy South. It pained and sickened her, but she owned its power.

As for Jimmy Yardley, in a place where neither laziness nor mystery had been tolerated for upwards of a hundred years, it would not be surprising if the high-hearted boy, baulked of his dreams in one direction, should fall to dreaming again under the spell of this fresh and foreign seduction. Stella instinctively created a sensuous atmosphere which upset calculations founded on self-control; she roused in these strong New England natures fundamental emotions which it was their painful study to subdue.

CHAPTER III

COLONIZATION SUNDAY

THE minister's dream of transplanting a Congregational colony beyond the Rocky Mountains had been laid before the session in November. Deacon Hannington discussed it in confidence with his wife, who, also in confidence, mourned to Barbie over the loss of the Yardleys. It did not look as if the minister intended to uproot his son, having but just started him in business, but with the home broken up there was not much to call Jimmy back to Dugdale, except for a glimpse of them all now and then. It was very serious news.

Barbie took it with suspicious quiet. She went about the house with an inward look for a day or two; then it occurred to her that the closets up-garret must need cleaning, which her mother disputed; they had been gone over once that fall—nevertheless Barbie said she would just as soon take a look up there. She went up with dusting-things and bags of gum-camphor and other preparations for a moth-hunt. (This was shortly after Stella had come to them.) Her mother opened the garret door once and listened: there was only Barbie up there and she made no sound. Mrs. Hannington went away, saying grimly, "She must fight it out by herself."

As the time grew close for Jimmy's departure, one little hope after another had failed. One last good skate together would have been enough;—that was denied, to punish her own meanness. Barbie went to church expecting

nothing more, beyond a brief call from Jimmy to say good-bye to the family. Mr. Yardley never visited on Sunday and Jimmy would not leave him this last day.

And then, as the organ droned out its prelude to the first hymn and the congregation stood up, Jimmy walked quickly past their seat, looking straight before him, coloring like a girl, and took his unwonted place in the minister's pew. He was directly in front of them. Mrs. Hannington thought Barbie's hymn-book shook a little, but she may have been too imaginative in trifles, owing to her fears. Barbie was thinking better of Providence all at once: she had faith that Jimmy would walk home with her; father and mother always went together on ahead. Meanwhile, she had his well-built back to look at and now and then that less than side-face which painters call the "lost" profile; there was still a boyish sweetness about the corners of his grave, black-lashed eyes, looking down. Perhaps she deceived herself, thinking she could rest in the persuasion that it would be enough if they but kept their friendship for each other through the years of changes to come: she was in church and she very honestly felt what she was there for.

Mr. Yardley's choice of hymns for the day expressed his confidence in the decision he had come to after long wrestlings.

"Sow in the morn thy seed ;
At eve hold not thy hand.
To doubt and fear give thou no heed ;
Broadcast it o'er the land."

Jimmy's uncertain second sought the support of the pure, pealing soprano in the Hannington pew behind him. The two voices blended surer with each verse. As he took

his seat again, he cast one look over his shoulder, and the singers exchanged a mute greeting.

Silence was happy, though afraid; her child's magnetic nearness communicated its excess of life and feeling to the sobered mother, who knew how such things too often end. Alvin had not been her first choice by many a long hour's struggle to accept the advice of parents. Other hopes had failed her through the Lord's will. It had turned out for the best, no doubt: who could look back upon far away might-have-beens with such a child as Barbie in the world!

"You folks wait here," Alvin said briskly, warmed by the excitement of the sermon. "I want to go up and speak to Mr. Yardley."

"I wish you wouldn't, father. You'd better wait; everybody's going up. I really would n't press in if I were you."

"Why, I just want to shake his hand and say a word to the man — I won't detain him a minute."

"I wish you'd wait, Alvin. We want to get home."

Jimmy had risen and was speaking over the pew-back to Barbie, who stood between her parents as they argued across her. Her chin was lifted while she hooked the neck of her victorine, and her languid eyes, beneath lowered lids, took him unawares, with their full meaning. He gave one long look into them, and then began to work his way out of the pew. The aisle was crowded. Mr. Hannington grabbed him by the arms laughing as they squeezed past each other.

"Hey, well, you're a stranger! Coming in this afternoon?"

"No, thank you, sir. This evening, I hope—to say good-bye."

"You hope! Well, your good-byes don't seem to worry you much. You'd better not be too pleased to go."

"I'm not, at all. I am very sorry to go."

Jimmy might have let the joke pass, but Barbie was listening. He continued to push ahead towards the door, permitting himself one more backward look; whatever he had to say to her was said presumably in that meeting of their eyes. It may have been much; it was probably more than he knew; but it was not enough, not near enough, for the last day. And he had not waited.

"You better sit down," Mrs. Hannington spoke hoarsely. "It's dreadfully close in here, seems to me."

Barbie sat down and rested her head against something which turned out to be her mother. Mrs. Hannington unhooked the fur cape again and fanned her with her handkerchief.

"Don't raise your head."

"I am not faint, mother," Barbie asserted; her perfectly white lips curled at the notion.

"Your father would go up — I asked him not to! Now, you sit still; there's no hurry"; — "Jimmy has gone on, anyway," Silence might have added if she had allowed her thoughts to show. Barbie smiled fixedly, but the smile hurt her mother more than a burst of crying. "We'll send her out to Buffalo when grandma goes back next spring; it will be just the thing for her," Mrs. Hannington resolved, and her thoughts seemed to take their own way on a sudden.

"Why can't we all go and shake off our troubles, and be some comfort to Mr. Yardley?" she asked herself crazily. "I don't know as there's any one left here we care much more about, and he will have no one of his

own. What's to prevent us?" For the moment she had forgotten they were four instead of three. Would Mr. Yardley want Stella in his company of the elect?

And "out there" — what could she do? Stella was not cut out for a pioneer's daughter nor a missionary's wife.

At the same moment her husband, holding the minister's hand, was saying, "Well, Mr. Yardley, you ought to be congratulated. That was a mighty sermon you gave us. But it's going to come hard to welcome a stranger in your place."

"I was a stranger, when this congregation first called me," said Mr. Yardley, rather wearily. "no doubt it was painful to many to see me in Mr. Whitehead's place."

"That was the course of nature: Mr. Whitehead was a good sound preacher while he lasted, but he wanted his release. I hope we'll all be as wise when our turn comes to give place to the next generation. Well, I could wish I needn't be here to see it. And I would n't, that's all! if I was ten years younger. I'd pull up and go along with you."

"You'd have to see first whether he'd take ye, Alvin," — a neighbor clapped him on the back, — "a kind of a reckless character like you. What say, Mr. Yardley? think he'd pass muster?"

"What, you goin' to Oregon, Deacon Hannington? Massy, what next!" said a sharp little old lady, who was pushing up to speak to the minister.

"Oh, I'm going, Mrs. Black," Alvin joked, "if my wife says yes. I have n't asked her yet. They do say," — he turned to the first speaker — "the country's been misrepresented right along. It's been the Fur Trade's interest to run it down and keep it down, sending out reports it's

nothing but a sand desert. Nat Wyeth says there's millions of dollars worth of clean, mighty timber, and pasture for thousands of sheep, and water power going to waste; he named a dozen ways to put in capital."

"Nat Wyeth's put in most of his own and left it there: I would n't lug him in for authority."

"Well, I would n't be afraid to quote Nat on any subject he's acquainted with," Alvin held out. "He's a strong man: Nat knows what he's talking about. He could n't fight the fur companies single-handed — who could, I want to know?"

"Plain, hard-working men are what we need; character, not capital," Mr. Yardley was answering another enquiring parishioner. "We want to get back to first principles and first practice. Faith was strongest here in New England when the bulk of our educated men worked their own farms and raised their sons to help them."

"Yes; that's true too. There's something *to* a church when the members want it bad enough to build it with their own hands."

"Yes, but you have to have money to get you there."

"Money will be advanced to those who are short of it for immediate necessities," Mr. Yardley answered. "There will be ample security."

"And a mortgage on your back?" said Alvin.

"A mortgage may be a very useful sort of limitation," Mr. Yardley observed with a faint wintry twinkle.

"A kind of a counsel to soberness," added the playful neighbor.

"It certainly does take the boy out of a man," Alvin pronounced, as one who might be supposed to know.

"If I had a mortgage on my place, I'd sell off an' git rid

of it and put what I had left out there, where a little's goin' to mean a good deal some day. Look at Bill Trumbull — how he's gone ahead! Interest is what ha'n'ts you. I'd take wild land any day and build on it with my bare hands, before I'd grow old meetin' payments on any old farm here you could show me. No, sir; life ain't long enough."

Alvin looked at the speaker anxiously; his jaw relaxed. Presently he said, "We want you should come in to tea to-night, Mr. Yardley, and bring Jimmy. Make an exception — do — the boy's last day; you don't call it visitin', coming in to our house?"

Mr. Yardley declined the invitation kindly. He and Jimmy, he said, had some matters to talk over.

Mrs. Hannington complained, as she walked fast beside her husband, Barbie following, elbowed by little Mrs. Black in pursuit of information: "I thought you never were coming! Mother gets so faint for her dinner."

"She ought to eat more breakfast."

"She can't seem to; she was just the same when she had her own big houseful. She'd sit and wait on the rest of us; but she wanted a good meal for dinner."

"Well, I hope she'll get one," said Alvin cheerfully. "How was that turkey? pretty middling tough, think you?"

"I am not thinking about turkey," Silence assured him. "Things do seem to work in such a queer, contrary way sometimes. I declare; it's hard to do what seems right and see it come back on your own children; — do your duty and have them suffer for it!"

"Why, is there anything the matter with Ba —?"

"Hush — sh! I don't want to discuss it now."

The effect of the sermon was to loosen tongues at the family dinner. Every one had something to say except Barbie, her mother noticed.

"I don't know what Mr. Yardley's idea is, leaving Jimmy back here: the West I should think would just suit Jimmy."

"Well, how can he take him, father? Jimmy is n't a church member," Mrs. Hannington objected.

"He's the son of a church member — ' Families whose heads are church members and who will be held responsible for their minors — ' "

"Jimmy is n't a minor."

"I should say he was, in religion — he's a minus!" Alvin led the laugh at his own joke.

"As long as going to church makes a good person and not going makes a bad one, I don't wonder Jimmy Yardley stops outside." Stella put both elbows on the table, as she spoke, turning her full glass of cider in her hands; it was the best fermented pippin, and the beads rose and spitted against the brim.

"That sounds clever," said her uncle, watching her performance uneasily, "but I guess you'll find it does n't cover the whole question, either side."

"Folks used to believe in avoiding the appearance of evil, but now they've grown so proud, they're ashamed to be good. I suppose Jimmy felt terrible to be caught in meeting this morning," Grandma Trumbull chuckled. — "Stella, if you ever had any table manners, child, I should think you were trying to avoid the appearance of it."

Stella laughed and took in her elbows; deep white cuffs, turned back with frilling, adorned her lower arm; black velvet bands at the wrists set off her white hands flatter-

ingly, and a similar band encircled her beautiful throat above the broad, ruffled collar fastened with her mother's stone-cameo brooch in a setting of pearls.

"I don't believe any two persons could disagree more unitedly than Mr. Yardley and his son." Barbie ended without breath.

"Which 'son'?" Stella enquired; she shot a keen, merry glance at her cousin, who colored furiously.

"Well, I guess giving up the sea hurt Jimmy pretty near as bad as his not uniting hurts his father," Mrs. Hannington struck in. "It's give and take; but if they go their separate ways it won't be because there's any hard feeling. I would be willing to say that to anybody."

"Mr. Yardley thinks young men had ought to get their facts and form their working habits while their minds are fresh and open; I've heard him say so. Founding missions away from home and such big errands that take judgment, I've heard him say, are for men old enough to leave details to others while they work out the main idea."

"I think you've got that a little different, father," Barbie protested in parenthesis.

"Ooh!" Stella pretended to shudder. "Old men's ideas are terrible things; they are so fixed."

"You want something to be fixed, or we should n't know where we stood," said Mrs. Hannington. "I like to be told when I'm in error, if I can't see it for myself."

"Everybody's in error to somebody," Stella mentioned lightly.

"Your pastor is n't 'somebody.' What's a pastor for? I guess Mr. Yardley is n't going to invent any new commandments."

“ Oh, I don't know ! I would n't trust him, away out in Oregon,” said Stella. “ Think how they behaved — your old Puritans — when they had everything their own way here ! ”

“ They were n't ‘ old ’ — not half of ‘ em,” Grandma Trumbull wandered placidly. “ My grandfather believed in witches and I don't know but what he helped to hang one or two. He was n't over five-and-thirty, — as pleasant a man as ever was. He lived to see Judge Sewall sit through his own recantation read out in the Old South, and ask forgiveness for all he ever done against those innocent folks that were murdered — and it wa'n't murder neither. They were mistaken and not mistaken, same as we are now, young or old, but I guess they were pretty conscientious on the whole.”

“ Grandma has such a way of spreading out a thing,” said Stella with a gesture to fit the phrase.

“ Because she can see so far back ; she can always think up some case to show how little we ought to say this is true, or that is n't true, of any one.”

“ Well, mother, I guess you need to take a nap,” said Alvin : “ you talk as if you were about half asleep already.”

“ Aunt Silence is thinking of something,” said Stella keenly. “ She is n't with us.”

“ Well, if we 're all through,” said Silence, rising, “ suppose we eat our walnuts in the sitting-room.”

CHAPTER IV

THE FIRST VOLUNTEER

JIMMY would not have missed his walk home with Barbie Hannington, but that his whole mind just then was bent on another matter, and there was no time to lose.

The Old Man had been "foxy." Here was his son, in the flower of his days, delivered over to Commerce and Manufactures while the reverend gentleman, nearing sixty, was planning for himself a mad career of adventure beyond the Rocky Mountains.

This accounted for so much extraneous and secular reading-matter covering the minister's desk; private diaries of far-western journeys in cheap, ugly bindings; reports of government engineers, pamphlets on sheep-raising, bee-culture, hops; notes on the customs and classification of the tra-montane tribes of Indians — Jimmy had borrowed the reports, observing it made his father nervous. "Ho!" thought Jimmy, "he's dissipating in topics of the time; he's got his eyes open at last to the fact that there's a country bigger than the Congregational church membership of New England!" But now it was Jimmy's eyes that were opened.

At dinner there had been silence, of extreme and nervous avidity on the young man's side of the table; he swallowed his soup as if a train, or, — to be chronological, — a fifty-mile-a-day stage-coach, had to be caught on time. Then suddenly he enquired, in an offhand manner, "What was the 'Flathead deputation,' father?"

Mr. Yardley raised sarcastic eyebrows. "How long is it since you've been inside a church before to-day?"

"I'd rather not be put on oath, sir."

"It might be worth your while to go occasionally, for the sake of a little general information.— Is this too rare for you?" Mr. Yardley asked the question regularly every Sunday; the boy of old had liked his beef well done.

"It's just right, thanks, but I don't mind a bit of the outside.— Father, why have you been keeping me in the dark about this? When a man of your age— excuse me, sir— breaks up his home, don't he usually mention it a few days beforehand to the only son he's got?"

"The home is broken up when you go, Jimmy. Your plans were decided before mine were."

"They can be mighty soon undecided! This opens entirely new ground between us, father. If it only had come sooner it would have saved all our trouble about the sea; you could have bought me off with this, in one word."

"I am glad you were not 'bought off.' That satisfaction I shall carry to my grave. But you have n't the first qualification for one of my Company."

"I have the qualification that I am your son. I hope you need me a little; I know that I need you."

"You have had me a number of years. You don't seem to have made much use of me."

"As a father I think I have used you pretty freely, and abused you some."

"The question remains: Would you find that you needed me so much now, if my plans were not taking a direction it suits your fancy to follow?"

“Oh, come, sir! We all have more than one reason for what we want to do; did n't you have more than one for not asking me to go along?”

“You keep forgetting the main idea: I go to build up a pioneer church. — Do you feel ready to unite with it?”

“Not quite,” — Jimmy permitted himself to copy his father's dryness, — “but there 'll be something for me to do out there as good as making calico.”

“I am not taking out settlers in assorted lots to fit all the temporal needs of a new country; I am following up the call for men of a special type. They need not be remarkable as individuals, but they must be clean-lived, obedient members of the fellowship of Christ.”

“I thought you said this morning, sir, it was not specifically a mission?”

“— To the Indians, I meant. It is intended for the next step, because I am too late for the first; braver men than your father answered that call. Simpler men, I might say: I am not aware that I was physically disinclined. ‘Leave the dead to bury the dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God’; that is simple; all it says is ‘Go.’ And they went. You were a boy; I suppose they would be only names to you, — Samuel Parker, Jason Lee, Whitman, Spaulding? — The Methodists broke the road, but we sent some grand men, and they stayed.

“Now, if you want to know about the Flathead deputation: — that was the great call in '33. I want you to understand the first causes; what started this tide that is pouring into the Northwest, and is going to make it a great country and a part of us. It was n't war, nor beaver, nor competition in trade: the fur interests, both sides, are dead against it; the British companies are beating us

out of all that territory, and they don't build up communities; fences and meeting-houses are scarecrows to them. And it was n't science, though science did something towards it. No; it was man's primal, unquenchable yearning for knowledge of God. It was the journey of the shepherds over again — so our churches named it. The 'call from the Wise men of the West' — eighteen centuries later; only there was no star to guide these poor men, and no Bethlehem. There was a city just as crowded, though, and just as heedless: — St. Louis, in winter, full of white men drunk and white men sober, spending their wages in sin.

"Five chiefs of the Flathead Nation, in 1832, crossed the Blue Mountains to talk to General Clark about the white man's 'Book of Heaven' — took a little walk of three thousand miles to ask the way to God! — Is n't that astounding? And you never heard of it — in this house! If I had not one other reason for resigning here, I should say that was enough!" Father and son smiled at each other forlornly.

"They had talked it over by their camp-fires," the minister resumed, "I don't remember how many winters — since Clark and Meriwether Lewis passed through their country."

"In 1806 they went through," said Jimmy modestly; he had just been reading Lewis and Clark's report.

"— 'And now,' said they, 'it is time we learned about these things.' They had heard that the book was the strength of the white race, and our only road to Heaven. Well, they started, five, and one died on the plains. In their own words, 'he grew tired in many moons, and his moccasins wore out.' The other four wintered in St.

Louis. If there was much talk of the Book there, it was hid from them. They began to have doubts whether all of the whites themselves had heard of it. General Clark made them his guests; he was very kind; he showed them the sights—some which they did not comprehend as proofs of our wisdom and friendship with the Almighty. They ate a great deal of rich food they were not accustomed to and two more died. In the spring, the last two started home. They took back nothing that they came for. General Clark told them the Book could not help them without teachers: there were none, so far from the white man's country. The roads were very long; how long none could know better than they.

“A young man, who was a believer, happened to have been in General Clark's office when their oldest chief made his farewell speech. He went away ‘exceeding sorrowful.’ It made such an impression on him that he wrote it out from memory and sent it to some church friends in Ohio and they passed it on East: it ran like wildfire; our ‘Christian Advocate’ published it. I could repeat that speech now, word for word;—but you would say, ‘they are the young man's words.’

“There, however, are the facts: the five who journeyed in hope, the two who went back in the old despair.

“‘We came,’ said they, ‘with one eye partly open, seeking more light. We go back with both eyes blinded. You make our feet heavy with the burden of your gifts but the Book is not among them.’—It was not long, though: once that message found the right men, they did not tarry. It was no matter to them whose words it came in; it was ‘as fire in their bones.’ It came to me with others. I preached a sermon on it; a good sermon, I think, but in

prayer, alone, it was a groaning and a reproach. I walked the floor many a night that winter, but I could not see my duty plain. I could not forget I was a father. You were beginning, before you were out of jackets, to dispute on subjects where I think children should listen and learn to pray. Next, you were possessed to go to sea. I could n't leave you adrift — if I took you, it would cost you your education. And, failing as I had to influence you here, with everything in my favor, how could I hope to stem the rush of new sensations, and all the excitements of a life more hazardous, I had reason to think, to soul and body, than the sea itself?"

"Your staying spoiled a good sailor-man, father, I expect. Now are you going to spoil a good pioneer?"

"I don't want you to interrupt me, son. This has nothing to do with you; this is my sole accounting for service that comes too late for me to be making my own conditions. I shall not dicker with my Maker now. The stumbling was here, here! Your father persuaded himself that his light would be hid, teaching poor, ignorant savages. My people were my very heart-strings. I give up easily to habits; I am hard to move. Son, the Lord took means to rout me out. He slackened my hands, — He shifted the ground I stood on. 'I leaned against my house and it fell!' What have I accomplished in this parish since I withheld my word among the heathen? Did that quenching of the spirit in me quicken any other soul in doubt? What have I done for Christ here in Dugdale in the past eight years?"

The question hung in the air while Lyddy, the parsonage cook and general servant, came in and ministered unto them in the matter of pie and walnuts. She glanced

at the thick wrinkles in the parson's forehead, his bleak eyes, and at his unused plate.

"I'll slip off that slice o' beef he's left and save it for Min's supper," she promised herself. Minnie was Lyddy's sister, a rheumatic cripple to whom the parson gave a home. She stayed upstairs in Lyddy's room and did what sewing her stiff finger-joints allowed. She could do so little for her "keep" that it was Lyddy's constant struggle to make her "eat enough to be decent" as she said, seeing no doubt the impropriety of bones with no flesh to cover them. The doctor had ordered that she should eat little or no red meat; but Lyddy thought "he only says so 'cause he knows she's beholden for every meal she gets; — I know Parson would n't be so small as all that comes to! Min'll eat it, if I tell her 't would be throw'd to the dog if she don't."

"Yes, if you could know the apathy I see all around me," the minister sighed. "My voice has been heard here too long: some new man must come and wake this parish up; and if my sermons are not bright enough for the younger generation, I had better carry them to those poor, rude souls who ask only the Bread of Life and are willing to take it on their knees. When I preach the Word of God I don't want to hear, 'What's your authority?' (human authority, mind!) 'Where did you get it?' 'Is that all of it?' — 'Sure you are n't keeping back what would alter the context?' You young disputers examine the gospels as if they were some new tricky investment for your money.

"Well; come, now, to my own household, where my responsibility sits closest. If I have had one sure expectation, it has been that I should prepare my son for his

first communion while his heart was tender and his life unstained. Can you measure, Jimmy, a boy like you, the exceeding bitterness there is in this — that at twenty-two you have not united with the church your mother and I were married in, where she made her own first profession, and where I have served the Lord in my poor way for six-and-twenty years? — and don't even call it a duty to go there and say the Lord's prayer on the Lord's Day! Could there be a greater rebuke before my people? It is needless to repeat — I am finished; but I don't exactly see how I can take you as a member of my outbound flock. I cannot plant heterodoxy, scepticism, intellectual conceit, even in the beloved son."

Jimmy had no defence to make to these terrible words; they really cut him very deep. The preacher's voice rasped on, harsh with nerves, soaring into a tone of almost angry emphasis. "And you are not the only proof that stares me in the face. I could point to another young soul adrift that I have failed to reach; — a stranger amongst us, under a cloud of bereavement —"

Jimmy rose up with a hot face: "Suppose we go into the study, sir," he broke in.

Mr. Yardley, dropping his napkin, preceded his son, vaguely adopting the motion, into the adjoining parlor which was the ministerial sanctum. He took his own arm-chair, the chair of counsel, and Jimmy sank into the uneasy seat of the counselled, opposite. Mr. Yardley fingered the sheets of sermon paper on the table between them, while he sought the lost thread of his discourse.

"It is a poor husbandman who finds fault with his young plants, or with God's seasons: he has something to learn — or he had better choose a different soil to work

in. New blood is needed in our old parishes, and some of us old hack preachers need quickening ourselves."

"All this accounts for your going, father," Jimmy sat forward to say, "but it does n't explain to my satisfaction why you won't take me. As I understand, you want the stuff for a free-soil and a religious community and you want it clean as seed wheat. I am free-soil and I'm not without religion, though I have n't joined the church; and I hope I'm not rotten before I am ripe. On what ground except the narrowest do you expect to keep me out? and what's to hinder my going anyhow? I'm of age. I shall not ask the Board of Foreign Missions for my expenses. There will have to be a long arm to the lever; let me lift on that end, at a respectful distance from your church members. I'm not trifling, sir, only your attitude towards me is so unnatural."

"I was natural before, Jimmy, when I hung back for your sake."

"Have I heard all your reasons, sir?"

"I have a feeling that I must not render and take back in the same action," said Mr. Yardley ignoring the question. "If I take you with me, where is my sacrifice? you will be the sacrifice! I am afraid of that life for you, unless you were better anchored. — There is one other safeguard."

Jimmy thought he knew its name; his father had often said, next to being a member in Christ the surest anchor for a young man was an early marriage to a good woman, herself a member.

Jimmy was more than a little stung by his own emotional doubts just now. If he had not met Stella Mutrie, he knew that he would by this time have come to an

understanding for life with his proud little sweetheart of the winter before. But he had hurt her image in his soul: while he could flush and pant at the mention of another girl he might not go near Barbie. Yet he was firm against steering any closer to the siren's isle. He was passionate but hard-headed, and he knew through his New England habit of foresight exactly — within certain limits — the sort of wife he must have: Stella was outside those limits. She found him excessively provoking to her vanity. He had undeveloped capacities for love-making which she recognized and felt it would be an agreeable mission to exploit. She was not without a certain naughty foresight that told her whom it would be fun to play with, but she could not make this gray-eyed, unsmiling boy commit himself, except with his eyes. He certainly gave himself every opportunity for using them — perhaps in the hope that he might come to see her in a different light; but she never satisfied the standards in his blood, — often she jarred on them screamingly.

He had come to his cool young judgment through a small-sized furnace-blast of controversy with his elders. His metal had been fired and chilled and hammered in those revival winters when he sat through exordiums and sobs and prayers and hushed moans of spiritual travail, shivering, quickened in every nerve of human sympathy, yet isolated and firm — “stiff-necked” — in his hairbreadth negations. That little, which others thought he might get over if he would, meant “worlds away” to him. Until he could see the road before him, neither in love nor religion would he take the first deliberate step. He had falsified his dream as to work, but that was a thing he owed to a higher necessity; the comfort and confidence

of his father's sympathy in shaping his course. Theoretically Mr. Yardley was bound to shudder at his son's future state, yet he must in fact have yielded to many consolations, in regard to the boy's fitness for this life.

"As to that 'safeguard,' father, how do you know what may happen out there?" this was bitter irony, but wasted on the preacher.

"The men I hope to take with me," Mr. Yardley persevered, "will be men too young to have grown-up daughters: that means no social life and no wives, for unmarried white men of your class; we shall have to wait for the wives to grow up."

"Well, perhaps I can wait. You have n't heard me clamoring for a wife lately, have you, sir?"

"How do I know what you are doing!" said the parson, painfully playful. "You may have begun to form ties already that I should be responsible for breaking if I took you West."

"I have no ties that keep me from you, father. I shall not marry yet awhile."

Mr. Yardley weighed this statement attentively. "Indeed? — Then I may have taken for granted more than is true, or likely to be true?" As nothing followed the question, he filled the pause himself. — "I am sorry, I am sorry! both ways: that I should have forced the subject on you and that I seem to have been mistaken."

"It was certainly no mistake to bring it up," said Jimmy. "It gives me a chance to say without any qualification that I am free to go with you anywhere — tomorrow, if you like."

"I cannot congratulate you on your freedom, son." Mr. Yardley spoke with a heaviness akin to sorrow. A lit-

tle hope cherished for years died in that moment between them. For of course it was Barbara Hannington who had so long filled the minister's eye as the appointed wife for his son. He had picked her out as a child and watched her with an almost proprietary pride as she grew in grace and comeliness; she was become to him like one of his own, and her pure, uplifted gaze among the faces in the front pews had long focused the best parts of his sermons. He thought of her in his hours of composition — of her lovely, intelligent eyes, when he was choosing a quotation which carried with it the old Bible thrill of naked utterance; the answering glow in her tender, speaking face was never wanting. But it was a dream — an old man's flattered fancy. He hoped Jimmy might not make a worse mistake, of commission instead of omission, when he came to choose for himself. Lyddy Fowler, in her vulgar, lucid way, had set before him the theory of a counter-attraction in the same house. Mr. Yardley endeavored to forget her words: —

“Anybody with eyes in their head can see Barbie Hannington's cake 's all dough sence that West Injian cousin 's come. Every single one of Barbie's beans is after her now. Oh, she 's a caution — that girl! Not so turrible good-lookin', *I* would n't call her, but you can see in one minute she knows how to use every smitch of looks she 's got.”

“There are better things for a young man than freedom from the obligations of affection,” Mr. Yardley returned heavily. “I had hoped to see you settled with a suitable partner while you were young, Jimmy. Have you never seen the woman yet you would wish to marry?”

“I have seen the woman I would wish not to marry,” said Jimmy, goaded to desperation; “and I want to get

away for fear I may ask her yet, in spite of myself. I am not half as anxious to get away from her as I ought to be; and that's why I think it's time for me to go. Fall River is n't Dugdale, but it's not far enough away. I may come pelting back again once your back is turned, you know."

Jimmy was teasing and lobbying too. He was beginning to feel reckless. There was truth enough in what he was saying to satisfy an ordinary working conscience — not, of course, a conscience like his father's. The good man had brought it on himself and he fell into the trap at once. His alarm was such that he could scarcely speak. But Jimmy saw his case was won. If he was smitten with a measure of shame for his cunning victory, he trusted the results might justify the means.

"I should not think you had better speak of this to any one quite yet," Mr. Yardley faltered.

"Certainly not, sir," Jimmy agreed largely; "not till I have seen Mr. Pierce. There will be handy fellows enough glad of my job there."

"I see no reason, if you explain your plans, why you should not keep the job yourself for a month or two. You would be nearer Boston; you could be very useful to me in working up certain lines of information through sources I can reach only by letter."

"That would suit me to a dot," said Jimmy, well pleased, "if they don't mind wasting time on a green-horn for nothing."

"I should n't imagine they would trouble about you much at first, but you would keep occupied, and you could help me. Be as frank as you like about my plans. I shall publish them in the 'Advocate' next month, to invite correspondence with persons who may desire to go."

Jimmy looked amused. "If it's not irreverent, I'd like to ask, sir, how you conduct your entrance examinations? how do you pick 'em out? By what you've put me through, I should call the needle's eye a double barn-door to it!"

"Well, son; you have n't gone through yet, quite."

"I am going to squeak it somehow;— it won't be my riches that will hinder me, that's one thing!"

"If it were the gate of heaven, I can't say I think it would be right for a man to favor his own."

"I'm sure you'd make it as hard for me as you could, dad. But that does n't prevent me scuffling for myself."

CHAPTER V

FOR THE YOUNG

THAT evening after prayer meeting, Alvin and Silence talked late over the embers of their sitting-room fire, comparing notes as to Jimmy's last call. It had seemed hurried and perfunctory; there is nothing particularly cheering, moreover, in the good spirits of a friend who comes to say farewell. Jimmy's face certainly was brighter since morning. He had not seen Stella alone, or Mrs. Hannington might have fancied they had come to a sudden understanding.

"I wonder," she said, leaning back in her rocking-chair and pushing off the cat that was clawing her black silk lap; "I wonder if you remember what year it is?"

"What year it is? Why, of course! why not?"

"Little Sam Demarest will be twenty-one this spring."

"Well, what then?" Alvin evaded. He knew her thoughts; she wished to remind him of his long, burdensome trusteeship of the Demarest children's legacies, to be paid off when the youngest came of age.

"I hope it don't harass you any?" Silence was intimate enough with her husband's business affairs to have cause for misgivings. "Think you'll be able to meet it all — interest and principal?"

"I won't be able to much more than meet it, and I don't know as I can that, without we sell off a piece of land."

"For pity's sake!" she cried; "I don't see what we'll have left to live on if much more of it goes."

"Nor I," said Alvin. "But don't you say anything."

"I! who would I say it to?"

"Don't say anything to your mother. She might, naturally enough, speak of it to William's folks, and perhaps it will work out without putting on another mortgage. I'm making arrangements."

"It's a great comfort to her the way *they* get along. It's more than she expected. We never thought William was much of a manager, but he's certainly done great things since they moved out there. It's almost discouraging."

Mrs. Hannington would not have been understood to mean that she deprecated her brother's success; it was the contrast that hurt. Alvin when she married him had been a man of property and her brother William had little or nothing. Alvin was silent; he knew her thoughts, but refrained from alluding to the help William's mother had given him: without her encouragement he would not have made even the start.

"A change does seem to bring a man out sometimes. I've noticed the branch that moves away generally's the one to get on, in families. The ones who stay by the old homes — well, they have the homes," she sighed.

"It's a good home." Alvin stroked the arms of his father's old black oak windsor. He tipped back for a fresh stick of wood. "But I'm pretty tired, seeing things go downhill. I can remember when we raised about everything we needed off the Ridge place. We children were sent there summers, like the country; we could n't see a house around us anywhere, and the land was all our own."

"I believe Barbie would like it real well."

"Like what?"

“Nothing, nothing! It just slipped out —”

“Out of what? What are you thinking about? — I wonder,” smiling shyly, he added, “if you could be thinking what I’m thinking?”

“I don’t know what you’re thinking. I was thinking about Barbie. I don’t know as I know of a place where there’s such a poor lookout for a girl as Dugdale.”

“Since when?”

“Oh, come; I don’t feel so very much like being teased Alvin.”

“I guess I can see that! I always supposed — but, — I guess maybe we were mistaken.”

“I guess it looks so; I never believed any of the time there was anything in it — just boy and girl.”

“Well, mother! I call that a pretty close shave for a church member.”

They had been awake for some hours in the night trying to hide their restlessness from each other, when Alvin spoke.

“What could we do with Stella, supposing we should ever want to make a change here?”

His wife needed no key to the question. “Stella is going to marry one of those young men before spring.”

“That’s the difficulty; there’s too many.”

“Well; she’s got all the bigger choice. I should n’t say she’d be easy to satisfy — I don’t know as she’d mind it so much as some girls would if she was n’t altogether satisfied. She’s easygoing; she scares me sometimes. I don’t know as I know where she would stop.”

“Oh, well; so far forth as that goes, she won’t have to stop. There’s nothing to persuade her to begin; there’s no strain on her, as I can see.”

"We can't see very far. If we did take her, we'd be responsible — she's a 'minor.'"

"What makes you so anxious, mother? Is it worrying about next spring? I'll be able to fix it up somehow. If I can't, why, then we'll sell out, if you're willing. It's better to have little and know it's your own. I haven't drawn a free breath, not to say, for twenty years; not since father's will was read."

"I can't see as he did anything out of the way." Silence rebuked her own thoughts. "It don't seem too much to ask a son to look after a sister's rights in her own property when she's made a poor marry of it. But I know what a burden it's been."

"Well, father certainly had his reasons. Never was any quarrel as I know of, but he sized up Uncle Demarest from the start. If any of Aunt Penny's money was to go to her children he did about the only way he could, unless he appointed a trustee out of the family; and he was opposed to taking the money out of the estate then. But it's a most singular awkward time to settle up now; times are tighter than ever I knew."

"Winter is a poor time to sell, is n't it?"

"Any time is a poor time when you've got to sell."

"But you have n't got to: it won't come to that, will it?"

"It's going to come mighty close to it. I'd sell quick enough if I could get anything like a fair, decent price. You would n't make any objection, would you?"

"I would sign anything you asked me to sign! I know you've done your best. I should say the same if it came to losing everything we have."

"It's a great comfort to have you feel so," Alvin admitted. "Father divided up the property when values

had n't begun to shrink the way they have lately. And he took out a big chunk in a prideful way when he paid off poor Mary, so to speak. All that was settled up at his death's took its chance since ; but the Demarests will have to have the round sum : it takes a good deal more to meet it now than father allowed for."

"I don't think everybody would be so scrupulous,— I really don't. Some would let them take their share of the shrinkages too."

"No ; that could n't be in this case. I know what he intended : he could n't foresee. Now, you try to sleep and stop thinking. If 't was summer, we'd hear the birds begin to twitter."

"Did you ever notice how spring is always the time for things to happen ? Not trouble always, but something upsetting."

"Natural enough ; people have leisure to think in winter. They do like nature ; gather up their forces and lay out the future. A man can stand the same round every day while he keeps busy, but when it comes to sitting by the stove and thinking, he's pretty apt to shape things for a move. When he gets to work again, he gets interested in the old job — to see what he can make of it this year. But if the job quits him — how then ? Things are narrowing down here for us ; there won't be much more than standing-room left pretty soon."

"I'm ready as soon as you are, but don't let's say anything."

"You won't have to, I guess ! Plenty others will be talking before you know it. That old Mrs. Black snapped up a word I said, just gassing ; but she took it in earnest — Well, it don't matter."

CHAPTER VI

A SALE AND AN ENGAGEMENT

To be the highest tax-payer in Dugdale might not be considered a very proud distinction, but such as it was it belonged to a young man whom Barbie refused, in the first flower of her saucy 'teens. She never gave him a moment's consideration; her father did. Mrs. Hannington said of him, "His hands perspire and he has got no chin: no girl could fall in love with him, Alvin!" But her true reasons probably went deeper than such a speech as this.

There was a year when young Hitchcock ceased to call and did not see Barbie Hannington when his sleigh cut around corners where she waited to cross, under the wintry elms. Next year he met Stella at the church socials and joined her court of overheated swains around the stove. Very soon he became a regular caller. That he continued to meet him there often drove Jimmy across the hall into the family sitting-room. Between the two rooms and the two suitors, Barbie's past pursued her ludicrously. She covered her rejected's first defeat, and left him a fair field in what she believed was a hopeless second venture: there are so many things we decide for others, judging them by ourselves.

Stella made no pretence of admiring the great catch, as he was called, but she allowed him to take the seat beside her on the small sofa, and if she were unaware of the poor youth's trance-like condition, no one else present could have been.

He was calling upon her the second week after "colonization Sunday;" they had the front parlor to themselves.

"Suppose," he said, easing the tightness of his waist-coat by laying one arm across the sofa-back; "suppose your uncle *should* go to Oregon; what would you do then?"

"— 'Poor thing!' Stella supplied lazily. "Suppose we should all go to the moon!" Her profile as she leaned back was not three inches from his huge, red, dangling paw. If he raised one finger it would touch her perfect cheek and leave a white pressure mark for the pink to overflow; the idea fascinated him.

"I am serious," he brought out. "Everybody's talking about it. I asked him the other day if there's anything in it. 'There is n't,' he says, 'but there mighty quick would be,' says he, 'if I could raise ten thousand on this place before spring.'"

Stella began to show attention: the fixed sum impressed her.

"I told him I guessed it could be raised, but it would take more than the place, if he meant the land only.

"'How much more?' he says.

"I put in the house and buildings and some lots on the marshes; they'll come up some day.

"'Cash down, or future payments?' he wanted to know. 'Cash down,' I told him *I* meant. We were standing close to the horse-block and he doubled his fist and brought it down — I could see his eyes water — 'You may have it!' he said, just as quick as that, 'if you can dig up the money soon enough. If I don't get off with Parson Yardley I don't know as I want to go.' — That looks serious, don't it?"

“‘ And what *will* poor robin do then, poor thing?’”
Stella raised her eyes; she did not smile this time.

“ Oh, please answer me! I’m not humbugging.”

“ Can’t you give poor robin a minute to think it over? — no; I’m not a robin — robins are such cheerful brutes; they get along anyhow. I’m a swallow, from the South. I think I am the ‘one swallow’ that does n’t make a summer.”

“ Where you are is summer enough for me,” said the infatuated Horace.

“ That’s poetry,” she said; “ but it does n’t answer swallow’s question.”

“ I can answer it, if you’ll let me. Is n’t this a pretty good old nest — for two? I want to know what you’d rather do? Go with them, or stay here — ”

“ Had n’t I better wait till I am asked?” she cut him off.

“ ‘ Asked ’! Which?”

“ Both — Suppose they don’t want to take me?”

“ You are asked to stay. You don’t need to go unless you’d rather. I ask you now, which you want to do — go to Oregon or stay in this house — ”

Again she broke in. “ What have you to say about this house?”

“ I am the man who can dig up the money, if you say so.” Horace spoke between heavy breaths. His face was pale, yet wet with the crisis of his hopes. “ I would do it for you — to keep you here — if you’re willing to stay — with me.”

“ I see,” said Stella slowly; — “ if I understand you,” she added to gain time.

“ Oh, understand! What do I come here for? If they

want to go and you don't and I want you so I can hardly live, — why is n't this a good way to settle it? Here's the house — I will deed it to — to my wife. It won't go out of the family. Is n't it clever? Oh, say you'll let me buy it in for you, Stella?"

She looked dully at the floor. "It is often done, of course. Girls marry for a home — what else can we do! Swallows you know are all wing; they have poor little feet; they can't scratch for a living — But I believe we are expected to lie about it."

"'Lie about it'?"

"Oh, you know! — We don't call it marrying for a home!"

"Ah, don't talk like that!"

"What is there to say? Don't you want me to be honest?"

"If you take me, I am not asking you why; your reasons are your own affair."

"You won't even ask if I love you? You are easily satisfied!"

His face showed distress that should have humiliated her; perhaps it did. "No; you are generous," she added. "I ought n't to have said that. You are offering everything to a cross, homesick girl. Give me a little time. There are so many new ideas to get used to all at once. How am I to know if they really are going, if they won't say anything? I have n't heard a word of this."

"They can't tell themselves till they know they have sold the place. I don't go a step further in that, unless I do it for you. If I can't have you, what do I want of a place like this?"

"Then I am to decide — about Oregon — for them?"

"It comes to about that; you leave out yourself — for me."

"You leave out the place."

"Of course — you get the place and me. I get the one thing in this world money won't buy me, if I had all the money I want."

"Your logic seems a little out, but it's polite," she said. "You are very, very kind. But you are going to be awfully cheated."

He caught her by the hand clumsily and kissed her wrist. She shrank from his unsteady, clammy touch. Her spirits sank low in the silence.

"You know," she said at last, with her rising inflection that made her words so casual, — "you know I can't promise for myself, how I may take things; I never can tell what I may do, or be, on trial."

"Is that all? Then I'll take you on trial and keep what I can get."

"And trust to luck for the rest?"

"Why, I don't know but I'd almost pray to heaven for the rest," he answered thickly.

"Oh, don't! Don't bring in poor heaven; we must manage this ourselves. But see here; I have n't answered you yet: we're only talking."

"I'll have to do something besides talk, you know, if they get off by spring. Suppose I do buy the place — what can I depend on, from you — anything?"

"Buy it," she said — "they want to go."

"But suppose they persuade you at the last moment to go, too? Then where am I? Promise you will not go to Oregon. I won't ask you anything more, to-night."

"If it comes to that," she drawled, looking at him with

dangerous sweetness, "I'd sooner drown myself in the river when the ice melts than go to Oregon."

"Then it shall come to that! I'll see that it does."

"So," she said, "you would take me if I chose you instead of drowning? Well, you are humble!"

"Call it what you like, but don't play with me too long. Do you like me — any?"

"Not much," she laughed bewitchingly. "Blessed are they that expect little; verily they shall not be disappointed."

"I haven't told you what I expect: I may expect a good deal some day. You can be stingy with me for a while —"

"For a while," Stella echoed vaguely.

She sat forward, — arms on her silken knees. The long chain of dark, crooked garnets she wore swung heavily into her lap. He lifted it, fingering the beads, turning one on the string. She shivered and drew back. "I am very stingy," she said, "when I feel like it, and I want you to remember that I can cheat like anything!"

The first clear moonlight nights were come. She asked Aunt Silence if there was any reason why she should n't go sleigh-riding with Horace Hitchcock. Aunt Silence opened her eyes a little: "Why, I don't know of any, if you want to go," she said. The emphasis might have told Stella if she cared to know, how her suitor was rated in the family; but that was a small item, now, in the sum of her hurried, desperate calculations.

Horace bore out an armful of hot soap-stones for her feet. She borrowed Aunt Silence's muff and wore the black velvet hood Barbie made her for a New Year's gift; it was lined with white satin and had white satin strings.

“I declare!” said Aunt Silence as they drove away, “that looks as if it might come to something.”

It was late when Stella returned in wild spirits, her hair blown about her brilliant face, to which color added a last dazzling charm. For a few days, after her evening of real or pretended joyousness, she seemed remote and thoughtful; and then the village heard of the sale and the engagement at one and the same time.

Jimmy felt sick over the letter in which his father made both announcements. There had been moments when he dreamed deliriously of risking the peril of Stella's answer to the question always back of his lips. Now he had her answer, and another had the risk; that the other man was Hitchcock could n't appeal to his own modesty nor his respect for Stella; he was too sure of her lazy, outspoken preferences not to scorch her with his contempt in other ways for this. But no less he was miserable. He kept away from Dugdale, doing his father's business at long range. It was known now that he had been accepted as one of the pilgrims. Mr. Yardley winced at the congratulations heaped upon him; many were anxious to learn how Jimmy “stood now” on the vital question, but they did not learn from his father.

Barbara patiently helped her mother in the tearing-up of the home. Hours were spent over trunks in dark attics, sorting, condensing, casting away the family past. Sentiment and prudence, small habits of economy, cutting mementoes that had lost their sting with time, — all must be exchanged for the traveller's cynic wisdom: nothing which they could live without. Silence grew thin with the agony of selection; we do not become wise in a day. Certain large parcels and crates of furniture and trunks were to

be left in grandma's care at William's — William's folks had been through it themselves. These had reference to Barbie's future, which was never discussed. Other things, some of the handsomest and least personal, were conferred upon Stella as wedding-gifts, who took no pleasure in the acceptance: all this rending and severing that avoided sympathy, going on around her, singularly emphasized her isolation in the house so soon to be her own. But the only words spoken were careful, gentle ones, as if these had been the days between a death and the burial.

CHAPTER VII

THE UMBRELLA

FEBRUARY came in dark and sodden with rain. It was a more than dubious afternoon. Stella was starting for a walk; her aunt met her in the hall and they sparred a moment about the weather.

"You need an umbrella more than you will that muff," said Aunt Silence: the muff was her own, which Stella borrowed so constantly she sometimes dispensed with the form of asking for it; she threw it on a chair.

"I won't take it if you think it will get wet."

"I'm thinking of you; I don't want you should get wet."

"I'd rather be wet than carry an umbrella," said Stella. "I'd rather not go at all."

"You'll get your wish, then. I can tell you it's going to pour in less than twenty minutes."

It did — and Stella was caught four long blocks from the house on her return. Sheets of rain met her in the face; the wind blew her bonnet back; puddles that formed by magic spattered her skirts as the showers churned them.

A man striding fast overtook her, looked at her keenly as she gave him room to pass, and offered her a share of his umbrella. One bedraggled woman is much like another seen from behind; few women could be as pretty as Stella was that moment, looking up — her face like a storm-beaten rose.

There was something alien and extraordinary in the man's appearance; she could not define it. It struck her more keenly, perhaps, by contrast with the village types she had grown used to; the rusty store-keepers, narrow-chested clerks, and long-lipped farmers with their big noses, and mild, shy eyes.

The man's look was bold, egregious; his gaze conveyed a challenge and a declaration, the substance of both grossly personal. Stella was able to bear it.

She bridled and turned her face away; but she had met his eyes.

He fell into step beside her.

"We are going the same way, it seems. Can you tell me how far I am from Mr. Alvin Hannington's?"

"Certainly; I can take you to the house."

"You are going there?"

"I live there."

"Ware mud! —" The stranger caught her towards him with his free arm strongly; she had nearly stepped into a puddle in their path: — "I call that luck!"

"So do I!" said she. "Thank you. I've no gum shoes on."

"No; I meant the other thing — the coincidence. I overtake a young lady; I say to myself (with all respect), 'What a face to pass and never see again!' And lo, she is bound for the same house! She lives there! A coincidence is a thing I never lose sight of."

"What do you do with them?"

"What do I do with them!" he roared over her question. "I watch them; I read them as the ancients read the flights of birds. I like to have 'em perch on my banner when I go a new road."

"Is this a new road?" she asked dazed by his audacity.
"This is 'Hannington Road.'"

"I am going to see your — father?"

"— Uncle," she corrected.

"Your uncle. We shall be taking the same road — all of us — next month. Is n't that a strange coincidence?"

"Oh," said Stella, "are you one of the Oregon party?"

"I am — rather!" She remained silent, puzzled by his laugh.

"I am the temporal head," he elucidated, "of Mr. Yardley's church caravan — he being the spiritual. I seldom aspire to such very select company on my travels, but your evangelists make it worth my while. Mr. Yardley realizes he could n't guide this expedition over the road he is going; for some reason, he prefers not to join the big train that will start from Independence in March."

"I thought *they* were going to start in March?"

"They are — but why 'they'? Why not 'we'?"

"Oh, I'm not going."

"You — not going? Then you don't live with your uncle?"

"I do, now — but I shall not go with them to Oregon. I have other plans."

"They must be mistaken ones."

Stella laughed in spite of herself.

"I assure you there is everything in omens: never fly in the face of a coincidence — Here's a bad bit!" They were come to a road crossing, wide and splashy. "Take the umbrella and skip on ahead; we shall make bad work of it together. — Now, tell me," he continued, at her side again, relieving her of the umbrella, "what are these plans that keep you from the greatest adventure of the

day — of any day? Don't you know this kind of travel will be done with in a very few years? The Oregon pilgrims will beat a trail as wide as the road to Rome."

"Oh, I wish the wind would n't blow so! I can hardly hear you!"

"Take my arm: — now can you hear? You will go? — won't you? You must never defy a coincidence."

"But your co-in-ci-dences are not mine," said Stella confusedly, pretending to stammer.

"They will be; you shall see. Fate never offers us the same thing twice."

"You are so funny! I'm going to be married. Is that another coincidence?"

"Married! Not to any one here!"

"You are mistaken again."

"Upon my soul! How did he do it? — Money, impudence? — Did he tire you out? Because you need n't tell me there are men in this place fit to win a girl like you."

"Oh, you are dreadful!"

"This is one of the days when I am very much alive, and I've no time for beating around bushes."

"There are remarkable men in Dugdale."

"Are you going to marry one of the remarkable ones? If you are, I guess his age to be about Mr. Yardley's. It must take a long time for a man to make himself remarkable, with the opportunities you have here."

"Let us walk faster."

"I think we are walking too fast: you are out of breath; — lean on me. Now; let me whisper you a prophecy."

"Based on coincidence?"

"On experience and knowledge of faces. You will never

marry that man, and you will go to Oregon. Now, walk as fast as you like ;— you cannot walk away from that. I am a wizard in some things. I know my fellow-travellers when we meet. I don't meet them every day and I never lose sight of one I have recognized. Tell me how long you had it in mind, before you set out for this walk ? ”

“ Ten minutes, perhaps — I don't remember.”

“ It was scarcely an afternoon for a lady to go out. Why did n't you carry an umbrella ? ”

“ Because — I was told to ! And I hate to carry things.”

“ Obstinacy and laziness ; two queenly attributes in woman ; many things are set in motion by those who refuse to move themselves. If you had taken advice and brought your own umbrella I'd have had no excuse to offer mine. Fate, you see — ‘ co-in-cidence.’ Just about the time you decided to go out, I left my tavern on the impulse to call upon your uncle. I came, by appointment, to see Mr. Yardley ! ”

“ Here's the house,” said Stella.

He opened the gate for her, extending his arm with the umbrella to shelter her steps, and bent a little as she passed under.

“ Young lady, if you do not go to Oregon, neither do I go. Many matters hang on my decision. Think this over.”

Stella flew up the walk without speaking.

She thought at first she would not go down to tea — the stranger having been asked to stop. She was fascinated yet afraid ; but she could not finally deny herself the excitement of meeting him again under the restraint of others present. She hesitated, too, about her dress — whether to set off the beauty his eye had seized so boldly, or to minimize it for the sake of Horace, and delicacy.

Here again temptation conquered ; it was so long since she had met any one who understood the exciting game they were playing.

Barbie watched her curiously as she turned over her necklaces, trying one and another with the peculiar oyster white of the silk she had laid out. She had not worn white before, and Horace was not coming that evening. Dressing up for a stranger — any man that came along ! Barbie justly severe as usual, was not this time quite correct. This stranger was not “ any man ” ; — his personality had taken an extraordinary hold on Stella, pining for the perilous form of amusement its daring promised her. She knew quite well what she risked, but peace of mind was not hers in any case ; she was restless as all are who are in doubt about their course, and as much in the power of those who have no doubts. This man, she felt, had no scruples either. The fact did not repel her : it was in accordance with the demands of her nature which was passive in deed, though abandoned in imagination.

“ You look quite like summer, Stella.” Her uncle greeted her with a pleased surprise, when she came in before tea and slipped smoothly past him to her seat by the fire. “ Mr. Bradburn, my niece, Miss Mutrie, — from Jamaica, British West Indies. No, she ’s only half English : half of her is Hannington — my half. She ’s my sister’s child. — I ’m glad to see you out of black, at last, my dear. The women oughtn’t to add to it with their clothes when the weather ’s so gloomy.”

“ We ’ll show her sunshine after we get her out on the plains.”

“ Yes — well ; she is n’t going to be one of us. There ’s a young man here has persuaded her to stay.”

Bradburn looked meaningly at Stella and smiled.

"Do you take along any women folks of your own, Mr. Bradburn?"

Stella raised her eyes and let them fall. She felt to her disgust that she was blushing. There was a second's pause.

"You have a family, I presume?" Alvin changed the question.

"All the family I possess, sir, I can put under my hat," said Bradburn, motioning as if he lifted it to the company, "and I have never regretted the fact less than at this moment," he added with marked significance.

Stella's eyelids flickered; a pair of hawk's eyes pounced upon hers and hovered there. She made an excuse to leave the room. As Bradburn opened the door for her she tripped on the mat; he caught her hand to steady her. "Do you know what freedom means to a man in my condition?" he murmured.

"Right before uncle!" She paced the bedroom floor alone, exulting in the wretch's extravagance. This was the sort of wooing she had dreamt of. "He must be crazy, or else I am." Horace's image came before her and she shivered with loathing. She trembled, with something else. The man was terrible; what would he do next!

Barbie came up, after giving the table its last touches, to look herself over a little: puritan prinking, Stella called it, — it was so embarrassed and deprecatory.

"You're ashamed, to see your own face in the glass for fear some one should think that you think you are pretty!" she would tease. But to-night there was no playing. The girls glanced at each other in silence; a strain was in the atmosphere.

CHAPTER VIII

BETWEEN TWO STOOLS

THE deed of the Hannington place had not been accepted nor signed yet, but ten per cent of the purchase money was in a lawyer's hands as a guarantee of good faith.

One Saturday afternoon, Horace Hitchcock called early and asked Mr. Hannington to walk out with him a little way. They went down to the barn and sat in the carriage-room and had a short and dreadful talk.

Hitchcock, with shameful tears, told how he had been jilted: Stella refused to marry him, after all. The place — to buy it now would make him a laughing stock. He asked to draw out of his bargain.

Alvin said, "Of course! and you don't lose your forfeit, either. One of my family has cheated you — I don't want your money, too. No; I won't keep it: we're humiliated enough. What does she say for herself?"

Horace's words need not be recorded. But he was magnanimous enough to own that Stella would never say she loved him, and had warned him that she could "cheat like anything."

"Oh she can!" said her uncle. "That's evident. I don't know where she gets it from. If there's any of it in me, now's no time to fool with it. I shan't take your money, Horace. You've been dealt hardly with among us."

But Alvin's face was dust gray. He sat turning over

the loose contents of his pocket with the hand he carried there. The men could not look at each other.

"Well!" he coughed and spat, and spoke in a dry, grating voice. "It's partly my own fault. To be honest, I never believed she cared for you much. In a father's place I'd ought to have made you both pause on it a while. I'm obliged to say I saw my own side too clear. It came like an answer to prayer; but it did n't come from the right place, Horace, or it would have turned out better. I should n't have let her go ahead and do so; her aunt I know will feel it too. We, both of us, — tell the truth, — were too Almighty glad to get her off our hands. She's a singular piece: pleasant as the day, and easy to live with, but undependable and shiftless and vain — vain as sin. I don't care if I do say it."

"You can say it to me! I know her — now," said poor Horace. "I'm sore — I'm sore about it. I meant to do well by her. She never would repent if she'd give me but the chance."

"Well, see if she won't. Maybe it's just a freak. Give her time, Horace. I'll get her aunt to talk to her. She may not realize —"

"No, no: I could n't go through with it again. I could n't trust her. I don't want her over-persuaded nor accused nor frightened. If she don't want me, let her go."

"Well, you shan't be mocked with the place on your hands. I'm sorry, man. But there's this to say on her side: she lost her mother when she was four years old. Her father did n't amount to anything! — he left her at loose ends. It wa'n't a nice set of folks she lived with. I don't mean to rake up the man's past, now it's done with, but he left things in a scandalous mess. We can't

go into it — women, and dabbling in the slave traffic : — he was better acquainted with the Congo coast and the harbor of New Orleans than ever he was with any of the China ports, though the China trade was what he boasted of.”

Supported by his good pride about the forfeit money, Alvin postponed for a little his own situation ; but he faced it — he and Silence faced it together, in the long hours of the night. Their Oregon plans were in ruins ; and as he had relied on the sale for means to meet the legacies due the first week in March, no other arrangements had been completed. No possible ones could be made now — the place must go at auction. This was a thing without precedent in the family since the first house was built to shelter the first of the name in America.

It was easy for Barbie not to speak of something she was not supposed to know, but Aunt Silence talked to Stella in whatever room they found themselves alone. She tried to read the girl, and learn if her mind was indeed made up ; if she realized what she had done, what she had lost, herself, and how little remained. Stella appeared to be sublimely indifferent to the future.

“Even if we were able to go, I don’t see how we could take you, Stella, unless you find you can profit by this trial in the right direction. Mr. Yardley is averse to taking any grown person who is n’t a church member.”

“How about his son?”

“Jimmy is n’t taken — he goes. He’s a man. I understand he gave his father fair notice he was going anyhow. It’s different with a minor. Well ; we’d be responsible. But if you can’t ever know your own mind, how’s anybody to answer for you?”

“If I were to say I was ready to join the church now, no one would believe me;” Stella smiled bitterly. “They would think I did it, as I promised to marry — for a home!”

“Oh, don’t!” said Mrs. Hannington.

“What shall I do? I can go back to Jamaica, I suppose.”

“You know you can’t. Your uncle would n’t hear of it; and there’s nothing there for you. — It’s hard to say where any of us will go.”

Stella went over to her aunt’s chair and stood beside her patiently, in deference to her tears. She would have liked to weep herself, but she had no real sense of the trouble which oppressed every one about her.

“Do you wish me to bring him back and tell him I will marry him?”

“Mercy, no! Why should I want you to do wrong?”

“I don’t know what to do,” said Stella. “I don’t see what I ought to have done. You were willing I should marry him at first; did you think then I loved him? Did you ever think so, Aunt Silence?”

There was no satisfactory answer to this question; Aunt Silence was humbled by it, but thought no better of Stella, the source of so many perplexities. The girl sat upstairs alone in her room for hours at a time, partly to hide her shameless indifference. All the true feeling she had was a consuming restlessness — a craving for change, for release from these woebegone relatives who took life, herself, themselves, and all things with such terrible seriousness.

She wrote a letter that afternoon and posted it in the village. She met a number of persons on her walk whom she knew — women and girls; they avoided seeing her.

The letter was addressed to —— Bradburn, Esq. (she was writing to a man whose first name she did not know), at his business address in Boston. It said :—

I believe you *are* a wizard. You knew my mind before I knew it myself. I have broken my engagement, but the punishment is dreadful. There's no end to it. He—the man—was going to buy my uncle's place, for a home for me. He only wanted it for me. When I said I could n't go on as we were, he backed out of his bargain. Uncle is worried about some legacies that are coming due. He has no money to meet them. The place is to be sold at auction, I believe. Every one thinks it's my fault—all this trouble—because I could n't marry a man I never can love. People that I know won't speak to me. I am in disgrace. And yet I told him all along I did n't care for him. He said he'd take me anyhow—take the chance of my learning to care. I should have learned only to hate him. Do you know of anything I can do?—of any way uncle can get help about the money? I don't see how it's my fault, but if it is, will you help me to find some way of repairing all the trouble I seem to have caused?

You said we were fellow-travellers. This traveller appears to be stuck fast, unable to get back or to go forward.

In doubt, faithfully yours,

STELLA MUTRIE.

She hesitated over the declaration above her name; it was the merest convention; he knew enough of the world to take it so. Yet she knew he would not so take it, in this case.

She heard nothing directly from her letter, but chance words her uncle dropped assured her that he was looking for another visit soon from Bradburn. He had, in fact, been in the house an hour or more, talking to his host, before she knew it.

She was sitting above in her bedroom — the girls' room, where Barbie seldom came to disturb her cousin's listless musings. Coming down she picked up a pet kitten at the stair-head and descended slowly, cuddling its murmuring warmth beneath her chin. She did not see Bradburn till he came out from the parlor just as she had reached the bottom step. It was useless to try to hide from him the complete joy of her surprise.

He wore a new suit of fine dark blue cloth and a satin waistcoat striped with velvet. The bow which finished his stock was tied in an elegant and citified way. She took a starved delight in his gallant, worldly appearance. And his strange eyes were the same; — the feeling they gave her, the weak trembling that dissolved in helpless, excited laughter. She kept hold of the kitten lest he should see how her hands were shaking. He offered his; she guided one paw of the kitten to meet it. Smiling he took her then by the wrists and forced her hands apart; the kitten fell between them with a thud to the carpet and a surprised "mew" jounced out of it.

"Now I shall take them both!" He held her hands in his for some seconds. "I did n't come to play with kittens, you know." His tones smote upon her nerves like throbbing brass.

As he did not mention her letter, she would not; but she knew it had brought him. It was their secret from the family.

“Where are they all?” she led the way into the sitting-room, which was empty.

“I have not seen the ladies yet. Your uncle and I have had a little talk.”

“Where is uncle?”

“Hitching up a horse. We are going to look at some lots he owns out towards the marshes. I am here for a purpose, — you know that, don't you? I am interested in your uncle's getting off for Oregon. Part of my prophecy has come true; how about the other part?”

“Why should I want to go to Oregon!” Stella cried. She sat down shivering close to the hearth, and rested her elbows on her knees, a favorite attitude when absorbed. The same long chain of cut garnets fell into her lap in two straight lines, describing the lovely curves of neck and bosom. He drew up a chair and sat and bit his lips and watched her; certain nervous motions betrayed his state, although his physical control in general was perfect as a gambler's.

At length the question came, dragged out of her: “Are you going to be there — to stay — any time?”

“In Oregon?” he answered softly. “What should I do in that galley, my dear? I shall see them through the mountains, and deliver my stuff that I'm taking out to Fort Union. Part of it goes around the Horn; that must be met and re-shipped up the Columbia. It sounds pretty mixed, but it will all combine and straighten out if my plans go through. I don't do business for the fun of it, though there's lots of fun. Then, when I've toted up my commissions, — there are other, bigger plans.” His eyes blazed.

Stella looked up with a hunted expression. “After the journey is over, then, we shall see no more of you?”

“I hope—” he began, and laughed and smothered the laugh abruptly. “No, I won’t say that; it’s a first-rate company — none better. They will make it go. Their piety won’t block them out of a good slice apiece of government land. I’m to help them there, too, — do a little lobbying in Washington on the Land-Grant Bill. Are you as pious as the rest of them?”

Stella smiled, too, but tears stood in her eyes.

“My dear,” he repeated, looking into them while her hands were held in his, “I hope I shall part — good friends — with most of your friends, and with some of their money in my pocket. But I do not part with you, unless you desire to see no more of me. When we have made that most wonderful journey together — what do you think?” There was no answer in words. They both rose: Stella’s head swam with the long, fierce kiss he had given her. The chaise stopped at the horse-block and her uncle came tramping up the porch steps. His look, his changed voice and expression told her “The ships can sail!”

CHAPTER IX

THE COVENANT

NOTICES of the Hannington auction were torn down. It was understood Alvin had found a new purchaser at the last moment, or some one with money to risk on a second mortgage.

The minister was asked one day if he would see Mrs. Hannington for a moment. Ministers know what a woman's "moment" means, but his valued parishioner was not kept waiting.

Shown into the study, she breathed deep, having walked too fast whilst her thoughts were centred in what she was about to say.

"Now I have come to trouble you again," she warned him, smiling nervously as they shook hands. "We're in a great fix up at our house. Things have about come to a standstill. You've heard what Stella has done?"

Mr. Yardley assented, reserving his sympathy.

"Young girls have been known to change their minds before, Mr. Yardley. I don't know as she ought exactly to be blamed for not wanting to marry without the proper feelings?"

"Certainly not," said the minister.

"She was late finding it out, to be sure; but then she acted up to her convictions. She's lost a good deal by it, in one way."

"True; she has not been mercenary."

"I did think at first 'twas his money; I will confess I

didn't respect her much for taking him. We didn't *do* anything about it, so we're hardly the ones to blame her now."

"I think you put it very fairly," said Mr. Yardley. "Neither do I blame her, for being honest."

"What else could it be! She as good as said to me, once, that she'd sooner give right up than go to Oregon to settle. I pitied her when she took Horace Hitchcock. I thought she was a poor little coward and wanted to live easy, a rich man's wife. What she's doing now looks better, certainly. — Don't you think so?"

"Are you positive her affections are not engaged elsewhere? — with some one, possibly, who might be going in our party?"

"How could that be, when she said she'd court death sooner than be obliged to go?"

"Is it quite lately she said that?"

"I don't remember, exactly — 'twas before she was engaged, though, for it gave me a clue to her taking the man. He certainly behaved well. I suppose he was keyed up, at first; now he's growing more bitter. She ought to get away from here, if only on his account."

"I don't know that he should be considered to that extent," said Mr. Yardley. "He has abundant means to go himself."

He spoke as required, but his mind was busy on a closer question; he was cogitating about Jimmy — whether *his* joining the expedition late could have influenced Stella Mutrie. All his most private, searching fears and hopes were centred in her not going, yet he knew that her good aunt was come to ask his official consent to it. It behooved him to examine carefully what lay back of his objections, if he offered any.

"I don't see exactly what we do blame her for, but she's lost all her friends. Nobody speaks to her hardly when she goes out. — Mr. Yardley, do you condemn her so much?"

"I don't know her disposition," said Mr. Yardley. "Ostracism of the young when they are in doubt about themselves is certainly cruel; I should condemn that; but public opinion is like water: it slips through our fingers, and still its force is beyond us. It is one of the mysteries of character — how one person can do a thing and never be questioned, and another, doing the same thing, is cast overboard."

"Yes, but she's so young! Her life has never been governed, — oh, worse than that! There's room enough for mistrust; but we must have charity. You remember her mother, Mr. Yardley?"

"I do; she was one of my dear wife's young school friends."

"I think a great deal of my husband's family, but Mary Hannington I always heard was a little — a little sentimental? Maybe she never was very well. But Stella is strong —"

"It is a case for prayer: — for our enlightenment, and for receptiveness in her. It is hard to know how to help those who can't see their own greatest need."

"Well, she needs us: I don't know who she's going to turn to, if we were to leave her behind."

"Has she never been moved at all towards the true and only source?"

"You have talked with her, Mr. Yardley: you know her state better than I can. Of course we sympathize with your objection to anything but a close membership; but it's going to exclude her, I'm afraid."

"It excludes my own son; yet he is going with us. He says it is an open road."

"Not for her, Mr. Yardley. And I don't see how we can leave her — we can't! — What shall we do? Had we best give up going ourselves?" Mrs. Hannington was being subtle without knowing it. "I don't see how it could be managed, now, either; Alvin's made all his plans; we've burnt our ships, so to say."

"Who is it, may I ask, stands behind your husband now, in this strait you once spoke to me of?" Mr. Yardley hesitated to intrude, yet he was anxious, for reasons.

"Oh, Mr. Bradburn."

"Your husband has confided in him?"

"Well, I don't know, but he seemed aware there was some difficulty. I guess it was common knowledge enough; I did n't gather all that was said — he seemed just sent, somehow, at the last moment. I don't know as I ever saw Alvin so relieved."

"Are you much indebted to him?"

"Why, he's practically lifting the whole load for the present."

"At high interest, most probably?"

"I don't think so. He's a generous, large sort of man — very free about money; a great friend to pioneering. I don't know but he's as much a missionary in his way as some others are in a better way. He believes it's a wonderful country out there, and it's meant for us. And if we don't get it, others will, and we'll realize what we've lost when it's too late."

"That is good practical preaching. But, in my dealings with him, he hardly struck me as one who would be likely to forget his price, — not entirely disinterested."

"I don't suppose he is: he's got on too well in the world to have been that always. But he and Alvin seem to have taken a wonderful fancy to each other. You do see it sometimes with folks so different you can't believe it hardly. He seemed to enjoy himself with us," the simple woman boasted; "he said it was good to be in a real home."

"Then he is not married?" Thinking always of the two young persons dearest to him, Mr. Yardley now was troubled for Barbara — had this altruistic stranger been setting his hopes on a sweeter reward than money?

"I should judge he was n't, by a remark he made."

"You don't know if he is?"

"Why, he said, right out, he'd no women folks to take along; he could put his family under his hat."

"Yes?" Mr. Yardley assented; "that is a common figure of speech, I believe. But, do you know, Mrs. Hanington, — assuming to be worldly for once, — I think I would not admit a stranger to the company of young girls very intimately, unless I had traced him back a little. Are you committed to this man already in friendship?"

"I suppose you might call it a beginning that way. In business I guess we are in pretty deep with him." She smiled, uneasy; — "I hope it's all right?"

"I have no reason to imagine otherwise," said the minister conscientiously. But his forebodings were at work on these new elements added to the membership of his picked company which had promised such providential combinations.

Returning to Stella, he asked: "I suppose she is not very well provided for?"

"Oh, nothing, you may say. — He made money, — her father, — but he spent right along as though there

was no end to it. And there are claims against the estate we can't dispute without going to law. It's too far off and too slow, and too unpleasant every way, for justice; her uncle advises her to let it all go; the lawyers would get it anyway. She has n't much to count on besides what we are able to do for her. I don't see as she's fitted anyway to do for herself; — as useless a pretty person as ever was. But there! Suppose you did say 'take her'? Let her be what she will, we can't expect to show up any better than the apostles, can we? — one in twelve?"

"Well put," said the minister, smiling. "I have no fear of a Judas amongst us. I warn you, though, my friend: a form of discipline will be exacted on our journey that you good ladies would find intolerable in your own community. One reason I shall not join the caravan that starts when we do is the silly attempt at democracy those great moving villages try to practise, in midocean, you may call it. I am the captain of our ship, so far as the souls on board are concerned. Whoever signs with me, must weigh well that condition beforehand; for themselves and for those they bind with them. We are going where there is no civil law and no means of administering it if we had it. We are not an organized church, as yet; simply a collection of human beings chosen as material for a church, who agree, in uniting with my company, to recognize me as their governing head for the time we are on the road. We shall meet new and trying experiences together, grievances will arise, — questions of private conduct outside of family discipline. Such questions, where they affect the good of the whole, shall be laid before me. If I fear my own judgment, a committee will be named by me to pass on my decisions; but in all cases where sin as distinguished

from crime is to be punished, I, under the Lord's guidance, shall wield the rod. This is the covenant each individual among you who is of age will be expected to make with me."

"Mr. Bradburn calls himself our 'temporal head'?" Mrs. Hannington sought confirmation of this remarkable statement.

"Yes, he amuses himself with our terms 'temporal' and 'spiritual,' though I should rather call him the 'temporal arm.' Power, in material things, would represent his co-efficiency, and knowledge in directions where we must permit him to lead. But I am your pastor in the Lord."

"Well," — Mrs. Hannington rose, feeling stiff with the intensity of the interview.

"Well?" the minister repeated, taking her kind big hand. "Will you remember my violent language before you decide to commit another of your young charges to my care, on this long and difficult journey? Can you agree not to keep from the old friend, for family reasons, anything he ought to know as the pastor of the whole flock? Our New England women have seldom been known to falter in any public duty required of them."

Mrs. Hannington smiled rather wanly. "I don't anticipate we shall have any trouble, if you are thinking of Stella; she seems to me quite a good deal chastened."

Silence went home heavy-hearted, having gained her point. She had forced her sincerity in urging, as duty bade, a thing which she believed would blight her daughter's hopes of happiness. Grimly she said to herself, "If there's nothing in it, she can't know it too soon." She never guessed the minister's own private, lonely struggle. He was another honest soul that disdained to palter with poor motives.

CHAPTER X

OPPORTUNITY

THEY saw no more of their temporal head (or arm) till they mustered at St. Louis. We know that Mr. Yardley had set his heart on young men with years of work before them, and young wives who might have hopes of numerous and healthy offspring. Yet, such is the fate of Perfectionists, the first persons actually accepted by him were his old friends, Alvin and Silence Hannington, both well past fifty; and such is the comfort of human companionship when our ideals are knocked to pieces, — the minister was thankful and glad to get them.

The other men were young, but — disappointment again! — most of the wives turned out to be either maidens waiting at home in the promised stage, or they were hindered by various reasons from making the journey at this time. It was believed that no wagons nor anything on wheels could cross the Blue Mountains. This was stated persistently and the report was spread by the Hudson's Bay factors, for the obvious reason that the fur companies wanted to keep home-makers out of all that tramontane territory.

A journey known to last six or seven months, and ending in the saddle, naturally effected a rigid selection when it came to women and children. The few who "passed" were cheerful, buxom specimens of womankind, and the five or six little faces that peeped from under wagon-tops when the new arrivals drove in looked like the clean

seed of a hopeful generation. They came out of various congregations east of Ohio, endorsed by their pastors as sound in character and doctrine, bearing letters of membership in readiness to join the new church of the Northwest: the church they would build as their forefathers built the first log meeting-houses, with one eye upon God and one eye upon Satan lurking in the forest, father and instigator of all the evil that dwelt therein. Some progress had been made in thought and practice as to both devil and savages, but the Congregational idea of God was still an awful thing to contemplate, and it was a question of the individual minister, or even of his moods, how far consistency would drive the nail that pinned man in his natural state to eternal torment hereafter.

The pilgrims came mostly in their own farm conveyances, by country roads deep in mud, and beaten up with spring rains. They brought thrice what they could hope to carry onward: fancied necessaries; beloved possessions bought with years of waiting; parlor tables, best bonnets, china tea-sets, pots of preserves, and growing plants. Bradburn's first task was the hard one of parting the women from their idols; husbands were consoled by lighter loads for the cattle and the prices their wives' relics brought in the booming St. Louis market: many a staid old Puritan sideboard or high-browed secretary stood alone in the alien, unthrifty border home which had acquired it for a song—for a sermon, would have suited better with their sacrificed dignities.

The Hanningtons travelled by stage-coach to Albany; thence by the Erie Canal to Buffalo, where their freight slowly overtook them. They visited meanwhile at "William's," and there they left Grandma Trumbull to end her

days in peace. But her soul was marching on. Very little would have persuaded the undaunted old lady to forsake her feather bed and India-print curtains for the women's end of a Santa Fé wagon and a view of the desert stars. She had never seen the prairies nor the plains nor a herd of buffalo, and mourned that her day must close without one more journey "where the strange roads go down" — the roads that were the heritage of her grandchildren.

"You've seen a good deal in your time, mother," Alvin endeavored to comfort her. "Some folks would be satisfied to rest."

"I ain't through yet; I can rest when I have n't got strength to do anything else. I'm coming out to visit ye soon as I find a wagon can get across the mountains."

"Whitman says it can, mother, and we're a-going to see."

"And don't you let anything stop you! I don't want you should come back; I want to live to go out there too."

"You shall, you shall!" — "Blessings on you, dears: — The Lord is your Shepherd. — Do be careful of yourselves." The women choked in each other's arms, but they shed few tears.

"Barbie my pet, don't you go and marry any outlandish fellow out there. Wait and plenty good ones will come. — You wait and get a good one! You can take your pick if any girl can!"

Grandma's talk was a trifle worldly for past seventy. She would speak out like that about men and marrying. Sad or glad, it was her fashion, of a time when, as she said, girls were not brought up so squeamish. Stella thought grandma was great fun.

“And how about me?” she asked, half serious, aside.

“Oh, you’ll go through the woods and pick up a broken stick at last.”

“A — what?”

“*What!*” grandma echoed. “You heard me. — Come, give me a kiss, my pretty; what I won’t do is flatter you! And if you can ever find a man who won’t flatter you, you marry him, quick!”

St. Louis was as “wide open” as a town can be. Independence was the “jumping-off place”; but at St. Louis the wise ones girded their loins, sewed their money into their belts, and committed their souls to God. The foolish were plucked like geese and said good-bye to theatres and cock-fights and cards and girls and faced the grim path of the nation’s destiny with unclean memories and feverish breaths.

In spite of firmest intentions to the contrary, Mr. Yardley’s company did join the spring caravan, — twenty-two wagons and one hundred and five persons, eight days out from Independence; and they were in trouble already. A baby had died, and its mother, prostrated by grief and ill besides, declared herself unable to go on. The caravan split; a few sympathizers waited at the sick-camp, the main column making a few miles a day uncertainly; horsemen posting back and forth for the latest news of the woman’s condition, and votes nightly taken on the course to pursue. Some called it cheap humanity to spare one family’s feelings at the cost of delay which might imperil the lives of them all later on. Yet wisdom halted. The pilgrims were new to this kind of voting. The husband then drew out from the company and said he would take his wife back, by easy stages, to her friends in Illinois.

There was nothing left of their home, — but that was his affair: he cut the knot; the caravan moved on.

Mr. Yardley's party met this lone wagon going the other way. They asked questions which the man answered impassively; his wife from her pallet-bed could be heard sobbing while he told their story. Farther on they passed the little grave: "Mary Lancaster, died May 2nd: aged two years and seven mos." — "A pebble cast" — a snowflake on the desert's dusty face.

"Now, I wonder," said Aunt Silence to the constant companion of her wonderings, "what Mr. Yardley would have done. I don't envy him his almighty 'one-man-power!' About the worst thing that can happen to any one, I should say, is sitting up alone in the judgment seat."

"Well, voting, you see, don't work either: they wasted a whole week and the husband decided after all."

"It was manlier: — I guess he felt full better about it than if he'd been herded back like cattle."

"It would n't have been done that way. Mr. Yardley would have offered up a good prayer, too."

"Just the same, I would n't be in his place when he gets us out there a thousand miles from anywhere. He isn't a young man and he isn't familiar with what common folks call life."

"We are going on with the others for a spell, I hear say."

"Is that so? Why, I thought he was so set against it!"

"Mr. Yardley's considerable of an aristocrat, remember, though he don't know it. When he heard about all these folks from everywhere consorting together so, it struck him like Bedlam broke loose. I know he told me it was nothing but troubles, little and big: children of

different wagons disagreeing and ketching each other's diseases, dogs fighting, guns going off, — handled careless, and killing folks. One man captain one month, another the next, — voted for by their friends. Ridiculous rivalries and feuds — more politics than Town Meetin'. He said he 'd just as soon go into a madhouse as into such a mess."

"That don't sound like him."

"Well, it's my way of putting it."

"You better be careful how you quote the minister when you are talking yourself."

"He 'd been reading, see! Now, come to look at 'em close by, they 're much the same as we are. I see fine big fellows there, clean-built, sensible-looking. Don't know as we can brag much on our own looks about now. Any man's a ruffian with a week's beard on his face."

More than this was true : the shadow of death and parting crossing their path so soon had inclined all hearts to gentleness. The strangers coming up to camp were greeted like brothers. Mr. Yardley felt the warmth of such a welcome, as night drew down in the new silence of that great solitude. He, too, admired the faces of some of the men. They joined camp-fires. And next day, being Sunday, when his little company gathered for the service of prayer and singing that marked off each seventh day that saw them farther from church bells, the others closed in respectfully and all said the Lord's prayer and sang the doxology together. Those who had never seen each other before, — men from the East, the far East, men from the Western Reserve, sprung from the same stock ; lank Missourians, fever-shaken, but the sentiment not shaken out of them ; homesick women who hushed their babes

and wept silently, young girls casting curious looks at the Northern women — their newer clothes and brighter skins. It all meant a future nation by the waters of the West. The Lord was their shepherd too.

Mr. Yardley yielded easily to Bradburn's argument that it would be wisdom to keep on with the train, since they could hardly out-travel it without pressing themselves, or let it pass them without unfriendliness and loss of precious time.

"We need n't mix up in their election frauds," Bradburn jeered lightly, "and their discipline would be a loose fit for us! We can keep along with them as far as Green River. The caravans break up there anyhow: some for California, some for our way."

During Sunday service, a man across the circle, singing vigorously, kept his eyes fixed on Bradburn — where he sat between two lovely girls, a quiet one who looked proud, and a golden-haired beauty with a glance that was not so still.

He came over, after the benediction, and caught Bradburn a playful slap between the shoulder blades.

"Hullo, Cap! pikin' West again? You look hearty. How's the wife? How's her mother? going on just the same? sad — awful nuisance. Well, I suppose you console yourself; same gay old Benedick!"

Bradburn edged the speaker off a bit; he did not introduce him, though he looked amusing; and interested. "I'll hunt you up later; I'm engaged to dinner with some friends," he said.

"Nice-looking 'friends'! You always light on your feet somehow in the social game," said the new man. "I'm with an outfit from Pike County, — good old Pike! I shan't take up your time!"

“Where do you hang out your shirt?” said Bradburn; “what’s the street and number of your wagon?”

He knew this conversation had been more or less overheard, but he seemed cool; explanations did not particularly worry him now; the game was going his way. He had played for secrecy in the first hand, when it suited him to appear to be free in the conventional acceptation of the word: he was not a Christian and he had a grudge against Christian society, so called. These were simple persons; he had never found the force of language fail him with minds like theirs. He believed that in an hour’s talk he could win them over to think of him as he thought of himself, an injured man.

CHAPTER XI

BRADBURN'S EDUCATION

"*You* speak to him, Alvin!" said Mrs. Hannington. "I don't want he should think we are accusing him —"

"Then why don't you let it pass? It don't affect us any."

"Well, I don't know. It don't look well to quibble about a simple question like that. If the man's got a wife, why could n't he say so?"

"If you put it that way, no wonder you feel uncomfortable to bring it up. You'll show that it nags you."

"That's why I want you to bring it up, — accidentally."

"Mother! you can quibble as well's any one when you see reason to."

"I should be sorry if I could n't. You have to respect people's feelings."

"Then why don't you, and leave the man alone?"

"Because we're seeing so much of him."

"Well, if he's a married man, that settles it. He must be hard on to forty."

"Oh, he's old enough, but he don't look it and he don't act it. Do you remember that night in St. Louis, when he and Jimmy took the girls to the Minstrels — just as if they were the same age! Jimmy and Barbie came home together. The other two not near so soon. Don't you recall it?"

"I don't know as I do."

"I don't know what place he took her to. They said the show was no account, and Jimmy differed, and they fussed about it and Stella sided with Bradburn; and they two went off — she said they went to see some open-air dancing: Indians and trappers and Mexicans, and they had refreshments after, in a grove. I couldn't bear to think of her in such a place. It was all a tangled-up story. It made me cringe, somehow. — Now, if he is married after all —"

"Well, I want to know! A married man of forty! Suppose he is n't so particular as you are; can't he give a little pleasure to a chick like Stella? The place is strange to us and we think all of it's queer. Their amusements are innocent enough to them. It's the way you look at it."

"It seems to me you're quibbling now."

"Well, I don't like to speak this way about a man I talk to every day as a friend. If you can't trust him, then say so and quit doing it, but don't let's criticize behind his back."

"Well, I shall bring it up, if you won't. I want to hear what he has got to say."

The opportunity came that evening, by the camp-fire, — Silence preferring to ask her question before the family; the better, perhaps, to hide her nervousness, for distrust lay at the bottom of it. Even so, she took a long breath to steady her voice before beginning.

"Did n't we understand you to say, Mr. Bradburn, that you had no family?"

"I must have said so if you asked me. I have no children, and for the past fifteen years, no wife. Did you ask me if I had a wife? There is," continued Bradburn, "a lady who has the right to bear my name, but she is not my wife in

any sense ever contemplated when our marriage laws were made. It is a peculiar story — ”

He paused, but no one asked for the story.

“ My wife is one of the best women in the world — in her world. She was my superior in every way when I married her. I was a boy of twenty. I told her I was twenty-three ; I added those three years out of pure gratitude — she was thirty-one.” He laughed coarsely. “ I thought the heavens had fallen ! She was n’t pretty, but she was the great lady of the village where they knew me first as little better than a tramp. I walked in with a bundle on my back ; but, six years after, they were giving me a banquet in the town hall and presenting me with a gold watch and chain — I carry it still — care to see the inscription ? ”

By the firelight, leaning his dark, high-colored visage down where shadow and flame brought out its heavy outlines, he opened a glittering watch-case.

“ Won’t you read it out for us ? ” said Mrs. Hannington stiffly.

“ It’s of no consequence, now,” said Bradburn — “ a bauble : twenty years ago it helped to make a fool of me, though.

“ Generally speaking, a man’s fool-trap is the moment he selects as the proudest of his life. I had my first foreman’s job in the Androscoggin woollen mills, part of my wife’s property from her father. He died up to his eyelids in money. That spring something happened ; there was a big freshet and the storage-dam went out. Then it was seen who was the man for a crisis. I suppose I did some pretty quick thinking, if it was thinking. She praised my work the night after the break. It was a bitter flood ; the

valley lined with houseless women and children, in the pouring rain. She was out in it, sending men around with hot stuff and blankets. — A tender-hearted, romantic person, — saw everything in a story-book light. It was she started the hero cry; others took it up.

“ Well, the superintendent got the sack, and I got his place that was too big for me, but I never let any one find it out. That’s my rule : take a thing you want when you can get it, work like sin and pay for it when you are able. The gods never stand waiting, and they don’t offer the same thing twice.

“ The day I got my step, she and her mother asked me to dinner. I say she, because her mother was a lay figure. It was a great condescension ; but they could ask whoever they liked, for any reason that struck their fancy. She asked Frederick Douglass to dinner once! — it was our only quarrel. I would n’t eat with a nigger if he was the prophet Daniel. She would n’t have asked me if I’d been one of the village boys ; then she’d have had my family to swallow ; I was a *rara avis*.

“ We made a long evening of it for the first. Old lady amiable but sleepy ; went off early and left us. I got up and offered to go, but I saw I need n’t.

“ The room where we sat was chock-a-block with books ; smelt of ’em fairly. I had never seen so many together in my life in a private house. I was hungry then for books. It was my time to read. She was, I told you, thirty—thirty-one ; she was hungry for life, shut in. So we talked life — an old maid and a boy ! The advances, you might say, were hers — had to be. She was a sort of queen to me, then.”

“ Did she ask you to marry her ? ” Barbie astonished her mother by enquiring.

“No, Miss Barbie; no woman I wanted could get the chance to do that: I did want her—then. There were some people in that village I thought I’d like to surprise, and I did. But I had to pay for my fun; that’s where the little gods are laughing now. We were married. For five years she was the best friend to me a man ever had. Say what you like, a well-bred old maid is a great person. She taught me to use my mind; she taught me how to dress, how to sit, and stand, and brush my hair. She was a mother to me, but bright and funny about it, so it did n’t sting.

“But the village was too small for me; my work was routine. I had to go; and she was tied. Her mother had had a long sickness that left her weak in the upper story. There are plenty of places for taking care of gentle lunies like her; they could have paid for one all to herself,—they could have hired nurses and kept her home. No; my wife would n’t listen to it. ‘There is only a very little of mother left,’ she said, ‘but that little wants me: I shall be near her as long as she lives.’ The old lady is living still; my wife is half dead. So there we are!

“‘A man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh.’ Does that mean woman also? My wife don’t believe in divorce. It is n’t a Christian institution, she says, nor a necessity of Christian society. Separation, on sufficient grounds, she tolerates; but that does n’t admit of second marriage. She forgets that men and women mated before marriages were made, on earth or in heaven either: there was no priest for Adam and Eve.”

Mrs. Hannington rose abruptly and said it must be near bedtime. The speaker was forgetting he had two young

girls among his listeners ; — her own fault, she owned ; she need not have broached the subject then.

“Stella did not rise at once. Her aunt looked back : “Are n't you coming, Stella ? Take care of that stump there ! I nearly fell over it.”

Bradburn sprang to offer Mrs. Hannington his hand, which she ignored.

Alvin, more clumsily, followed. “Ain't you coming, Stella ?”

“It's early yet,” she said. “I'm not sleepy.”

“I guess you'd better come, had n't you ?” He turned on his way, meaning to say a few words to Bradburn to excuse his wife's abruptness. Stella strolled vaguely towards the wagon.

“Good night,” said Bradburn in a low voice. She did not answer.

The Hanningtons agreed that Bradburn's story had been frank — if anything indecently frank, though they used a moderate word. His impartiality, which cost him nothing, they found unexpected. The poor lady, his wife, might have heard him herself, said Alvin —

“I guess not !” said Aunt Silence. “What do you think of calling your wife an old maid, — hungry for life ! And the way he put it about her mother ! I don't like him ; he's coarse, and I always thought so.”

Bradburn's statement of his wife's views on divorce, while perfectly true, omitted the fact that he had never asked for one. He did not bring the story down to date and tell them that his wife was still the best friend he had ; that he as ever was the one romance of her life, and knew it and traded on it. That once a year he dawned on the long night of her vigil, and flushed its pale horizon

(a waiting for death) with the force and color of his progressions from one side of the continent to the other. No one could enter so vitally into his schemes, for she backed them with her money; none could flatter his ego as she could, for she had a command of words, and she was sincere when she listened spellbound to his dramatic presentations of himself, and believed him born to be one of the country's great men. He never talked better than to her, in the glow of that reflection of himself he saw in her earnest eyes; he had that power over her imagination, and desired to keep it till he became her heir in fact, as he knew he was on paper. Meantime, his bondage was light. It was only since he had met Stella Mutrie, hedged in by relatives, and with a certain calculating side of her own beneath her tropical softness, that he felt his limitations. Now he proposed to free himself for his true marriage, the flowering of his belated youth.

But no irrevocable step could be taken until he was on a stronger financial footing of his own. His dreams were those of a Faust after his soul has surrendered to sense: nature in her shameless connivance was with him, and the old gods laughed.

CHAPTER XII

CAPTAIN OF THE ROAD

ALL the mules of the train sang together every morning before sunrise: no trumpeter was needed after that. But amateur trumpet-calls were cheap; they brightened the day's monotony. There was reveille and the call for the bachelor's and teamster's mess to meals, the order for the wagons to pull out in line of march, and sound off, when they unhitched at night. Young men on horseback rode ahead, following Bradburn's lead, to examine the country and choose the next camping-spot. Bradburn's horse would be first across every doubtful ford. He was seen scouring up mountain-sides, picking the best trail; he knew all the Indian signs they met, the name of each tribe represented in their Indian encounters — always friendly. There was everything, he said, in manner when you met these fellows: you must never let them suspect you were anxious, still less afraid; and you must n't give an inch or they would take an ell, and mark it down for death if you denied them. Light hand and hard eye did it, the same as with horses. He was admired by most of the young men who formed the scouting party. Others thought he bragged and condescended. In all things he was too theatrical for the New England taste.

Bradburn's outfit included two good horses gaited for the saddle. He had listened to Stella's homesick raptures over her rides in Jamaica. Rising at four, after coffee in bed, and climbing the mountain to eat an elaborate hot

breakfast cooked by black servants who had been up half the night; seated above the fog and watching the world emerge — color first, then mountain forms faintly showing till, in a burst, the sun smote the veil and the great sea wall broke through, rising dark and flashing into surf towards the shore. Homeward lazily, then, through the jessamine-scented trails, to a bath and cool drinks and a siesta in the darkened house. Her words could move him as his moved her: he would retort huskily, "Wait, child! I will build you a cedar palace on the side of a mountain bigger than your whole tuppenny island. You shall look across the fog lakes to a chain of peaks, — monarchs all, — with the colors of Jerusalem's gates on their foreheads. We'll keep the valley roads hot with men running with stuff for you to eat; and when we get tired of one place we'll ride away to another. Horses — ho; they are thick as flies in that country! The hills are black with 'em. I'll have you a saddle made of tooled leather fit for a queen's prayer-book, and mounted with gold."

Not any of this was too crude for Stella's fancy, but the actual date of this rhapsody was before Bradburn told the story of his marriage. He had fewer opportunities with her alone after they became an organized army on the march. There had been unexpected seductive occasions in St. Louis during the ten days spent in that unholy town; hours it shook the blood in his veins to remember. Stella's thoughts in these days were her own.

"You know how to ride!" he addressed her before the family. "She's a rider," he nodded to Mrs. Hannington familiarly, as an ally. "Miss Barbie, too, ought to learn. We leave the wagons at Fort Hall, or Boise at the furthest. Wagons can't go over the Blue Mountains."

"Not any wagons?" Mrs. Hannington exclaimed.

"Carts—a few. There will be a great cutting-down for that last climb. Some of the wagons we shall leave at Fort Laramie—some we'll break up and make into those carts, for ladies like yourself, ma'am."

"Old ladies."

"And mothers with babies, and children too small to ride. The rest of us will have to toughen down to the cross-saddle business over those high trails. So I say, the young ladies had better work up their riding while the roads are safe. I have a spare horse that's a dandy,—a pacer. Will you let me lend it to you, Hannington, for your girls to try?"

Stella had jumped at the offer, but would not confess it by her manner. Barbie was civil, while resolved to ride no horse of Bradburn's. As Stella, after being properly persuaded, began to ride and begged her cousin constantly to take her turn, Barbie found herself cornered. She had a fair amount of character for a girl of twenty, but she was not yet so posed that she could nerve herself against the appearance of old-maidishness it gave her to hold out, or the seeming reflection on Stella. Her feeling about Bradburn she did not attempt to explain, but favors from him she felt it somehow impossible to accept. To her mother she merely said she did not ride well enough to show off before a crowd of men. This sounded disagreeable, and she hastened to amend the speech, though Stella was not present to be hurt by it.

"You know what I mean! Stella can do it and everybody thinks it charming. It would n't suit me; now, do you think it would, mother?"

Everybody did not think it charming. The older men

said it was wearing horses out for nothing. Most of the young wives with husbands on scout duty thought it bold for one girl to ride with so many men alone. Mrs. Hannington was weak-minded: she hated to have Barbie left out of everything youthful and gay.

"Why, Jimmy is one of them always," she said. "I can't see how it's different from skating alone with him, with all the village boys looking on."

"They were n't looking on!" Barbie retorted, stung by the difference. "They did n't care a snap about us, and they all knew who we were."

"They know who you are now. Whatever you do you'll do like yourself, not like Stella. It's kinder to her, don't you think?" Aunt Silence pleaded.

Barbie was still a moment, then she burst into frantic sobbing.

"Oh, my dear, what is it?"

"Nothing, nothing!"

"I know! I tease you all the time — I can't seem to help it — we won't say another word." Mrs. Hannington realized once more how constantly she was tempted to work Barbie in — Barbie whom she always could be sure of — into the exhausting problem of Stella. Neither she nor Mr. Hannington liked to see their niece, beautiful as she looked, flying ahead of a column of young men, sometimes allowing herself to be caught, oftener leading the chase for miles ahead of the caravan; she was a senseless rider. Jimmy would frown as he rode at her side or frankly scold her, but he was the one she generally rode with now. It was so contrived by her, and it flattered him when he began to see her intention. He took credit to himself for lecturing her in these opportunities for something different that she

gave him. More than ever, for some reason, he was afraid to lose control of himself. She listened to him with a pretty pensiveness and promised to be good.

When Bradburn snatched a moment at her side, he descended at once with the full spring of his tense male speech upon her fainting imagination. There is no disguising the type girls like Stella represent; the insoluble problem of sex — the last form of womanhood that yields to the power of soul through motherhood or maiden self-restraint. The Puritan half of her began while her own mother, the poor lady, relaxed by illness, under the spell of the tropical life around her clung feverishly to her passing moments of happiness in the arms of full-blown materialism. The paternal half was Captain Mutrie, a handsome sea animal without a thought of fear or a twinge of conscience in his makeup.

“Do you forget how short those first talks were?” Bradburn said, crowding his horse up close to hers. “I had five minutes each time to win you in, my girl, my love! How if I had said to you at first, ‘I want you forever, but I’m a married man’? We should have lost each other. I can and I shall do right by you, give me only what I need in my two fists to keep you on, my blessed little queen!”

They were skirting those low sand hills called the Coasts of the Platte. The road dipped into a wide, scooped hollow and the world disappeared. They stopped their horses. A wind from immeasurable distances flickered the faded ribbon on Stella’s hat; a prairie-dog popped its head out of its hole to reconnoitre and popped it in again, scattering a few grains of sand that shocked the stillness like a blast of gunpowder. Stella started. Bradburn’s arm was around her, but no one was in sight.

"I can't bear this much longer," she said. "There will be no way of hiding it, for me."

"You will not have to hide anything, precious: there is plenty of time. Do you keep the bit of gold I gave you? Well, keep it dark. That is our world secret: it will change the world for us, and for thousands of lovers after we are dead and done with. Have you got it? Suppose you give it back to me. It might be safer."

"You are very careful, about the gold!"

"Why not? It means everything; it makes us gods! Have you got it with you now?"

She handed him out of her bosom, scornfully, a lump of pale greenish yellow stuff wrapped in soft paper. He uncovered and looked at it a moment.

"The power and the glory," he murmured. "Gold is the greatest power on earth, and the glory is to him who finds it first — and most! — And his will be the worship, world without end."

"Oh, you are too awful!"

"Why? — they are only words. Does the alleged Creator care what we say in our prayer-books? Think of the queer things he has listened to from all the peoples in languages before prayer-books began! Don't you see how narrow it is, to think he hears only us, and that our stock words and phrases the churches fight about mean any more to him than the beating of a tom-tom or the name of Allah, when the Turk falls on his face at sunrise?"

"I am afraid of you," she repeated, "when you talk like that. I am not a heathen!"

"You are superstitious, darling, and so am I. I have a superstition about this journey —"

Glancing back he saw that the others were too near.

He took his arm away and they trotted forward lightly over the noiseless sand.

"I shall meet that man, you know, at Laramie. We'll have six minutes' talk across the river. Then he will poke along south and wait for me at the place — where this came from." Bradburn patted his breast-pocket. "He got the secret from an old drunken Indian who is dead, who knew it back in the padres' time. But the padres were too lazy to dig gold and the Indians were lazier still. They did n't want it known there was much of it there. It meant too many back-loads of dirt for them."

"How do you know you can trust that man?"

"Who? My little Qui Court? — 'L'eau Qui Court' is his name in the mountains — he won't run away from me! I have a bit in the poor devil's mouth and the reins are in my hand. The bit is fear, and the reins: I understand him — that's the right rein; and he loves me in his fashion — that's the left. Qui Court is one of the men I own — though he's hardly a man. He'll sit on our secret like a horned toad in the sand. No one watches Qui Court. And when I come with my fist full of coin we shall go to work in earnest, and the world will buy land of us at a thousand the square foot."

"Can a thing like that be kept to himself by any one man, very long?"

"Not very long. But it won't take more than a few days' start of the rest of the world to get boiling rich at that business."

"What was your superstition — about this journey?"

"It was only a dream. Three times I dreamt I could n't get through the Devil's Gate on horseback. — Ever hear of that place? — I sat alone there on my horse and could n't

get back nor forward. The oddity is, we don't go through that canyon at all. You can turn out a mile from the trail to see it. It's one of the wonders of the road: it's four hundred feet deep; the sides go straight down; they are about three hundred feet apart at the top. The Sweet Water strolls along at the bottom; but if you were down there in it, you'd be gasping for your life."

"Three times the same night did you dream it?"

"No; three different nights. It was only a dream, but once was enough. Cheer up, lady-love! They are here now."

He turned in his saddle and called out laughing, "What are those things you are sitting on made of? Pasteboard — or are they sheep? You must have charged along at the rate of three miles an hour!"

He was equal to anything, she thought. He could hide anything — he could be anything to anybody as it suited his purpose.

"'Qui Court,' " she reflected, "'is one of the men I own,' — how about women!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE WAGONS AT NIGHT

BRADBURN had engaged a young Missourian to do camp chores, drive his team, and take care of his animals. The lad was poor, anxious to get to Oregon — not anxious to work but took the job, unwillingly, for the chance it gave. Driving another man's mules was work for a nigger.

With envy he watched the scouts ride off, giving him their dust while he stooped to buckle belly-bands or hook greasy traces. It particularly discouraged him to see his employer, a man he called middle-aged, cantering on ahead, like one of the beaus, with the young fellows who squired that handsome girl: daily the sight teased him more and more.

One morning, as the squad rode by, his temper gave way and he let his leaders "have it." The guide-rein jerked, he lost his balance, and fell in front of the wheels which passed over his leg and broke it.

It was a case for experienced nursing in proportion to the dearth of surgical skill. Mrs. Hannington said "that boy should not limp for the rest of his life if she could help it!" She had him brought into their wagon.

He was no boy in size: six feet was the length of him stretched on a wagon-bed. At night with his restlessness he took up the room of two; Alvin's help was needed in moving the patient. The girls were minus a lodging.

Bradburn at once vacated his own wagon for the young ladies' exclusive use; their mother was nursing his sick. He cheerfully made his bed on the ground near enough to be in sound of a call, and all seemed well.

But a woman is never satisfied. Mrs. Hannington wanted to know if it would be "too much to ask" that Captain Bradburn's wagon should change places with one of those next to theirs. It would be pleasanter, she thought, for the girls. Her husband said dryly no doubt it would; no doubt they'd like to have the leader's wagon hauled hither and yon, whichever way they took a notion. They had driven him out upon the ground and made him their private watchman; wasn't that about enough to ask of the man?

The caravan had passed the South Fork's junction with the Platte; Chimney Rock was its next landmark, five hundred and seventy-one miles, — but they were still in the Pawnee Country. That sinister highway, the Pawnee Trail, lay behind them, unswerving as a road of ants, wide as a county turnpike, beaten smooth by families of feet for generations, on errands that shall be told when we know the stories of the buffalo wallows and the wild-horse stampedes and the secret battles of the big-horn and the elk.

The Indians had left their winter villages on the South Fork and were roaming in large parties looking for buffalo and scalps. There was no special war on, but the Pawnees had their blood enemies besides those private feuds always seeking a fresh victim.

Many Indians met them every day, awaiting their coming curiously, or camped on their trail, begging, prying, pilfering, watching a chance to run off cattle in the night. The emigrants were in force too great to be in fear of attack. Two wagons might have tempted the feathered Gentlemen of the Road with their faces blacked for murder, but twenty were merely watched in hostile wonder,

and followed and advertised by secret messengers for leagues ahead.

A triple guard was set each night, the men serving in turn, and they were generally faithful, but occasionally — such is the contempt familiarity breeds for dangers we have always with us — a watchman would choose a dark spot where the camp-fire did not paint him to a prowling aim, bury his head in his blanket, and sleep with the rest.

All the camp slept mightily; the whole wearied company took in deep draughts of midnight slumber and emitted them peacefully or in emulative snores. Rarely a babe cried. About twenty dogs the train started with had been voted on and shot, to spare heart-burnings between owners of separate parties to the incessant fights, and to silence their own arguments with the coyotes at night. The coyotes had the first word and the last word now, pack answering pack from one low sand-hill chain to another, and a sound of weird footsteps hustled past in the dark; horses started at their pickets, cattle ceased chewing and breathed deep. But every one was grown accustomed to the desert sounds thrown up on the desert silence. Only the wind never rested, prowling about camp, seeking something to displace; — a bit of tumble-weed to play with, a wagon-sheet to flap, or a woman's rocking-chair left out, to set in motion.

Through the rear opening in the wagon-hood, this was what Barbie saw, one moonless night when the wind was rising: the little Boston rocker that used to be in her mother's bedroom rocking empty in a blink of firelight. Father had said he would take that chair through to Oregon, patchwork cushion and all, if he left the family Bible. Every evening at supper-time he brought it out for his

wife to sit in, by the cooking-fire that each family built at the heel of its wagon, but sometimes he forgot to take it in. Barbie was startled. It looked "so like mother" — rocking in the night in the middle of the continent alone, too homesick to rest, or as if grieving in wakeful silence over a trouble no one could share.

We give the fancy as it struck the girl, who was but half awake. She asked herself what had wakened her? — she was conscious of having been very deep asleep, and the night in pauses had been so still! It might have been the wind getting up strong; the wagon-cover had blown back at the rear end where Stella lay. That was why she could see out so plain; that and one other reason: Stella was not there.

It took a moment to make sure of this. Then she called her by name, in a guarded voice, "Stella," and again, "Stella?" No answer betrayed the silence. The little rocker paused as if listening too.

While hunting for a cloak Barbie explored the wagon, every part; there was no other person in it. Stella might have awakened, feeling sick, and gone to speak to mother; she had not always seemed so well these late days nor in such high spirits; none of them were.

Before her feet touched ground, Jimmy Yardley was beside her.

"Is anything wrong?"

It was Jimmy's night on watch, but he was middle guard. His post was at the opposite arc of the great circle, yet he had heard her call; and Bradburn, their protector, sleeping not five rods away, did not stir. Instinctively she spoke low, dreading that he would rise and confront them.

"I want to see mother a moment. I am afraid — some one — is sick."

This was a lame excuse for being up in the night, but she could not bring out Stella's name; nor did Jimmy ask another question. His eyes, accustomed to the dark, had satisfied him as he helped Barbie to the ground that the wagon she had left was empty. They stole across to the family camp and he waited while the women whispered together.

"What is it, dear?"

"Hush! don't let's wake father. I can't find Stella. Is n't she here?"

"Why, no! Can't you find her?" — Barbie had just said so. "She must be there with you."

"She is not in the wagon."

"You are sure?"

"Of course, mother! Two persons can't lose each other in a wagon."

"Well, I'll go over and see. — Why, she would n't get up and leave you without telling you!"

Barbie did not dispute it.

"She may have waked up and felt sick and tried to come over here, and got confused," said Mrs. Hannington, talking to herself while she hastily added to her clothing.

They went back together; Jimmy again stood aside and said nothing; the women looked into the wagon timidly. He could not avoid hearing Stella's voice in a hurried, thick, but not sleepy tone: "Barbie, what are you doing out there! Why do you wake people up and frighten them half to death? Where in the world have you been?"

"Where were you?" Aunt Silence asked.

Stella visibly started.

"Why, nowhere! Barbie must have left me sound asleep."

"Did n't you hear me call you?"

"Did you call? When? — perhaps it was you that woke me. I found myself all doubled up in a bunch in that corner" — she laughed. "My arm has gone to sleep. I wish you could wake that up! Do, Barbie, speak to me when you get up and go off like that!"

Stella rattled on; no one answered her. Mrs. Hannington was shivering, but not with cold. It was a new sensation, to listen to one of her own family — lying. She was no judge of counterfeiting, but her own tense earnestness told her that the girl, confused and frightened, had attempted a hasty part and was not doing it well.

Jimmy and Barbie knew beyond doubt that she was lying, but such was the staggering effect of the knowledge they shared, and the reluctance of sensitive persons to accuse another on their own bare assertion, it is probable both would have said, if evidence had been demanded of them, that they might be mistaken; Stella might have been in the wagon asleep all the time.

Bradburn surprised them, coming up apparently from making his rounds of the camp. It is hard to say why they did not believe this either; they were in a doubting mood. He presented his enquiries to the mother who stared at him, pale as a ghost.

No, there was nothing he could do; she thanked him. Barbie had been over to see her a moment. She had had a little scare; they were going back now.

"Mother, you will come back to us!" Barbie whispered.

Jimmy heard her and ground his teeth.

Bradburn stepped up to him. "Are n't you middle

guard to-night? — Then what are you doing over here? You'd better get back to your own post. I'll see to the ladies if they want anything."

"Mother, you will come back!"

"I am going to trouble Jimmy Yardley one moment, Mr. Bradburn; — then he can go. You were not here, you know."

It was very easily arranged, Mr. Hannington assenting, half asleep, and surprised next morning not to find his wife in her own place. He had forgotten that she had wakened him.

CHAPTER XIV

SILENCE

TRUTH is hard to kill and lies, the frightened assassins, dig shallow graves. Jimmy's system was purged, that night, of the last dregs of his infatuation.

He had flattered himself of late that if he chose to try, it might be possible to win over a girl so changed as Stella seemed, to a sweeter form of womanhood. He laughed at himself hideously now. Her lie, her own laugh, had worked his cure. He tested the strength of his clean scorn, and knew that he was free. But he was not yet able to pity her: she had cost him too much. Six months may seem a long time to a boy when he has reason to believe they have changed his whole life. Barbie, whom he might have won, was as steel to him now; cold, springy, keen-edged steel. He never knew how she would answer when he spoke to her. Her state of mind need not be pried into; it was her business to guard it and she did it well. But her mother, her unhappy mother, was to be stripped of unconsciousness; dragged by unnamable suspicions through that knowledge which the terrible intimacy of women gives them of each other and the advantage experience has over youth, towards a discovery which threatened to wreck her home. Her heart fainted within her; for on her it rested—such was her resolve—to hide what she knew, and spare her own family the shame and perplexity of the task she set herself in dealing with it alone; and finally, to reckon with her own conscience

in daring to do this, notwithstanding her sworn obligations as a member of Mr. Yardley's picked company.

Mrs. Hannington has put herself on record as one who desired to be shown her duty when in doubt. In this case she hugged what few doubts were left and prayed to be in ignorance as long as possible. She shut out of her mind all speculation as to who could be the man who was responsible for this woe. His name she refused to guess, yet there is no refuting a certain sort of evidence that is never brought into court — and her husband was in this man's power. They all were — as their financier and leader and guide. She exaggerated, perhaps, the extent of his importance to them, — but she feared him too much to dare be the means of an open collision between him and Mr. Yardley, whom she knew no thought of expediency would turn a hair's breadth from his conception of duty. She dreaded the position her poor husband would find himself in, between the family honor and the future of all of them in material ways. Stella, unhappy child, was not one of them, yet they had counted her in, at great cost of anxiety and responsibility. It seemed fantastically unjust that everything they had or hoped to have should be lost through her, even to the family good name.

They stopped over more than a week at Fort Laramie — incomprehensibly to some. Bradburn waited for those six minutes with Running Water across the river, for if he came inside the fort, Running Water would mix himself with whiskey, and it was time he was going south.

The greater company broke up in two divisions and both passed on: — those for California, and those for Oregon by Fort Hall and Fort Boise and Black's Fork to the gates of the Blue Mountains.

Our small band, condensed as to outfit and refreshed in body, left Laramie the second week in July. They toiled up the rugged valley of the North Platte and entered the Black Hills; they passed Independence Rock, "the great register of the desert," and saw the grave of poor young Bailey of the train ahead, shot by accident and buried here on the road of the million feet to come. An Indian with gestures and broken talk told the story and grinned in the way of a savage when he speaks of cruelty or tragedy.

It was the dry grass plains that lay before them now, the Indian's hunting-ground and the buffalo's range. The native possessors of this solitude met them and petty bargains were transacted. Many buffalo were killed. There was no time nor horse-flesh to spend on sport for its own sake, but the camp commissariat was overburdened with meat which the young men brought in piles as an excuse for the excitement of killing; so many fresh carcasses hanging in sight, so much blood and offal, made some of the women sick. Stella said she never wished to eat meat again.

July gave way to August; the days were hot, the nights astonishingly cold. They saw mountains covered with snow to the southeast; but they were in the midst of dust, — the summer's long burden of drought lay heavy on the land. Mrs. Hannington's surgical patient had asked to be left at Fort Laramie where Bradburn replaced him with a sound man. The girls were back in the family wagon again. It was this interval, between not seeing Stella and seeing her again, unprotected as to dress, that forced the truth upon the mother. She fought against it till, in a dreadful way known to all who have suffered unnatural

things, she grew used to the fact and bowed her pride to meet it.

Stella became certain that her aunt knew all ; she nerved herself, expecting cruel scenes. None came. The silence frightened her. She was meek enough now ; she clung to the woman who held this power over her and forebore to use it, with such marvellous strength and constancy while suffering, as her looks showed, more, probably, than Stella did herself. Of such characteristics in the persons about her, she knew little.

Long hours Aunt Silence pondered, while the wagons toiled on. Absorbed, strangely separated in thought from those around her, she sat by the evening fire, in her little rocking chair. The camp-fire was built now on the grades of the South Pass — those amazing easy stages of the climb, which the minister said showed that Providence had left a door open from East to West, as a sign that his people should be one. They hardly knew when the highest point was gained, but Bradburn announced it and cried theatrically, "Hail, Oregon — and Japan and China and the East ! Here the great snake turns to find its tail ! — buried in the Pacific — emerging where the East begins to rise. Now the waters go the other way !" But they were not yet across the Blue Mountains.

In this pure altitude the brain works clear. Mrs. Hanington shook off her weakness and formed a plan. Alas ! had she but known what she knew now, before they left Fort Laramie. Possibly it needed those weeks of hard thinking, steadily facing an approaching dread, to nerve her for this solution and for the battle with her family such a proposal meant.

It suited her now to be told she was looking "miserable."

“Your mother don’t seem to be standing the travel near so well as she did at first,” Alvin said to his confidant in all things not to be spoken of to “mother” herself. Barbie owned she had noticed the same thing. “She’s falling away in flesh, she’s lost that good tan, and she looks as sallow as a nervous invalid. Your mother never was nervous. — She don’t eat enough to keep a bird alive.” Alvin could not say how little she slept, — he slept sound himself, — but her wretched eyes at daybreak told the story of the night.

“She says her head swims with the shaking of the wagon the whole time. She gets short of breath, and her strength will go all in a second.” — But it never went so far as loss of consciousness and the power to smile and say, “It is nothing.” The steadfast woman bided her time. Since it was too late now for Fort Laramie her hope lay in Fort Hall, their next important station.

She began to ask questions as many others were doing, but she asked different questions. Fort Hall was now a British post. Nathaniel Wyeth, who built it in revenge to hurt the American fur company, — “to roll a stone into their garden,” — had been frozen out by the Hudson’s Bay people who were just completing Fort Boise to head him off on the other side. No wonder the plucky Yankee was forced to drop his prey.

The Hudson’s Bay Company had sent to Fort Hall Captain Grant, not a young man; report said a gentleman but something of an eccentric. He had been at outs with his company; had lately gone back to them, or they had induced him to come back, but he ranked lower by some grades than he would have had he not broken his connection with them. This small post was the only one open to

him. It was exceedingly well managed and trade was coming in fast. He was very haughty with the tribes, allowed no familiarity; the women, for instance, — “nothing of that kind for him.”

All this gossip, much of it untrue, Aunt Silence amassed to her husband's astonishment; women always wanted to hear about “the folks” inside of these places which to the men meant rest and barter and repairs; old horses for fresh ones, old harness for new; time and tools to construct those pioneer carts, — two wheels showing the way to four wheels that were to follow next year: hanging over torrents, stalled in the snow, crashing down rocky canyons, lowered by ropes from the horns of precipices where only a wagon-body with wings could pass.

Mrs. Hannington, pondering in silence on the character report gave to the commandant at Fort Hall, said to herself, “It will have to do!”

CHAPTER XV

THE FIRST ADMONITION

“STAY up after the rest to-night, Stella : I want to have a little talk with you.”

It was time for travellers to be abed. Mr. Hannington was already asleep in the elders' end of the wagon. The fire outside scarcely blazed, but it showed dimly four persons watching in front of it: Barbara on her mother's right and Jimmy Yardley next, seated sombrely, thoughtfully apart ; only his voice blent with hers in the ancient music of “ Transfiguration.” The bare stars listened unamazed in spaces of sky framed in the lofty darkness of strange forests : —

“ O Master, it is good to be
With thee and with thy faithful three,
Here, where the apostles' heart of rock
Is nerved against temptation's shock ;
Here, where the son of thunder learns
The thought that breathes, the word that burns ;
Here, where on eagles' wings we move
With Him whose last, best creed is love.”

The young soprano sent its clear, vaulting notes aloft as if to escape the thick, shaken second, pursuing, enfolding them.

“ O Master, it is good to be
Here, on the holy mount with thee,
When, darkling in the depths of night,
When dazzled with excess of light,

We bow before the heavenly voice
That bids bewildered souls rejoice ;
Though love wax cold and faith be dim,
This is my Son, oh, hear ye him."

Stella was on the ground at Mrs. Hannington's left side, her golden head in the motherly lap. With one arm she half embraced the little rocker as if to keep her head-rest still. — What tales they could tell, these New England rocking-chairs ! of nerves relieved, or tortured, by their ceaseless oscillations ; long aching thoughts of sons at sea or vanished on the uncharted plains ; husbands grown harsh and cold, struggling with debt ; — daughters with too many babies and all their own work to do ; daughters wasting their bloom waiting for some other mother's son who never wrote nor came ; proud silences of misunderstanding, burning silences of injury and regret ; bitter silences of resentment hardening into hate. But problems of this kind — not often !

"Stella, how would you like it, if you and I were to stay over at Fort Hall and let the others go on without us?"

Aunt Silence spoke in her peaceful, everyday tone, rather more gently than usual. Stella's cheek had whitened miserably ; her breath came hard, for she knew her hour was come. Still, no advantage taken of the fact that they were now without listeners ! The blood drummed in her ears so that she scarcely heard the words first spoken ; no others followed. She could bear the suspense no longer.

"Don't be afraid to speak to me, Aunt Silence."

"I am speaking, now. Do you expect me to be ugly to you? I never mean to be. It's strange, but I believe I'm learning to love you — now, when I'd a good deal rather see you dead."

"I am in your power. If you love me — now, it's because you are a great person. I have learned to love you. But you must not despair of me. I shall be his wife, perhaps in a year."

"You poor child! They all say that."

"'They' are not like him. He is not like any one. I can't tell you all the cruel reasons there were — for what has happened." Stella sat up, speaking fast though hardly above a whisper. "He loves me beyond — beyond everything that people are careful about; it was so from the first. He may not be good in your way, but I cannot change him. I have given him my life. I do everything — give everything he asks; he knows just how to make me. It is love, and it will be marriage."

"— When he has done a great wrong to another woman in order to right you. He never can right you."

"Don't! Don't speak his name! It would bring destruction on us all if it was known."

"I don't want his name; — I have a name for him! But do you realize what's before you?"

Mrs. Hannington talked for some moments in an undertone, Stella holding her hand clasped tight in hers; now and then she answered a question. She kissed her aunt's hand, who drew it away quickly and then, with a sigh, gave it back.

"Don't you want Uncle Alvin to stay with us?"

"No; for then Barbie would have to."

Stella breathed deep while this stone settled on her heart; it was not cast at her; it fell by its inevitable weight. Her aunt and uncle and Barbie she knew had never been separated. What separation in such circumstances would mean to them, she was learning to know,

as she began to understand these people; their dumb, deep attachments and the price they would pay for a principle of conduct. Aunt Silence was ready to pay the price of that winter at Fort Hall to keep her own child clean of this thing which she handled herself so calmly. "Barbie's life and mine," thought Stella, "will never be allowed to touch again." Gently but absolutely she was judged.

"You will never see it of course as it really is. It is quite the same as if I were his wife. I should have to consult him, about this, for instance."

Mrs. Hannington tasted the withdrawal, the working of that obstinacy which she knew this easy-going nature abundantly held.

"You need not consult 'him' about *his* coming to Fort Hall. If you go there with me he stays away, remember."

"All winter, of course; but you would not prevent his coming next spring, to arrange about our marriage?"

"Spring is a long way off. You will have other things to think about before spring."

"And you would stay there all winter with me, alone — in that place! Would Uncle Alvin allow it?"

"If I made him see I need the rest; and I certainly do!"

"But would n't he insist on staying with you?"

"We 'd lose what little we have left to start on, if he does. He must be out there next spring to take up his land with the others; he can't draw out now. He would see that, the first thing — not knowing about this. I may have to tell him before I can get his consent for me to stay: I shan't unless I have to."

"You are wonderfully good to me. — Barbie will not understand why you keep me instead of her?"

"I can show her that father needs her most. He must

have one of us; if I drop out she must take my place. — Don't do that!" Stella was kissing her hand again — "I'd rather you'd trust me than that. You will have to choose between him and me; don't think you can mix us up. I cannot help your speaking to him, but he can't speak to me — I don't want a word with him."

There is no danger of that. I have not told you his name. But if you knew, you'd understand the difference."

"What difference?"

"How big he is. If you lose the world for love, Aunt Silence, you want to feel you have got something better in its place."

Aunt Silence took a long, slow breath. "Is the world all you think you have lost? — Stella, your poor little soul is not born yet. And you are bringing into this life another soul."

"Why do you *do* so much for me, if you can't bear what I have done?"

"I guess we'll have to bear it; I don't pretend I do it all for you, either: I want to keep this thing from spreading. I want to hold it back till we can have a chance to bear it by ourselves, where it don't hem us in so and hurt everybody else. If you *will* go back and forth between us, don't you give him the idea that because I know it and keep it, I tolerate it. If you were my own daughter I'd rather see you in your grave."

"Do you think I shall tell him that?" said Stella softly. "Perhaps you would rather see even me there!"

"Worse might happen to you but our Lord knows best. If he means you to live and learn, I suppose you will have to. But if you live and don't learn, — at least how to suffer, — you might as well be dead."

"I don't suppose I do suffer," she admitted tentatively.
"— Do you want me to ?"

"Not physically : I should like to see you able to suffer in your mind, though, or your conscience ?"

"It may come," said Stella.

"It has come, but you don't feel it ! If it was n't real, — this shame and suffering, — why should I feel it, an old woman like me ? If it is n't a real thing, why do I try to keep it from hurting the nearest ones I have ? There is such a thing as shame, and right and wrong. To get a thing you have wanted — is that the whole of life for you ?"

"The shame seems to come from giving more than your share. I did n't want — any more than he wanted. But these people are nothing to us, Aunt Silence ; their opinion of me does n't matter."

Stella drew back and released the sitter, who rose and looked into the distance a moment. "You go first," she said sternly.

"Would you kiss me, Aunt Silence ?"

"— In a way, I would ; but I don't feel to kiss you truly, after that last speech. There's something else you need inside, that I can't give you. Oh, if you only —" she could not mention prayer for she knew the words would be wasted ; she could not lay her lifelong faith at the feet of this ignorant child to stare at.

After all the dreaded plan had cost her, Mrs. Hannington was to be kept waiting for "his" opinion of it, and to learn at last that he considered it impossible, for many reasons which Stella hastened to set forth as plausibly as she could, in defence of this mad dismissal. Her aunt listened in silence.

The difficulties of the road ahead had been exaggerated (he thought). The winter at Fort Hall would mean a long separation (for them) and a long, out-of-the-way journey for him to fetch her. And Fort Hall was a place he could n't fetch her from; it was the post of a black enemy of his, the new commandant — fortunately away just now on a trade mission to some far-off tribal village; but he would return before snow fell. To leave in Grant's care anything he valued, and come and thank him for the favor, was absurd! They had crossed each other's trails in time past; they might do so once too often — for one of them.

Stella did not give "his" opinion in his own language, which was as well; even so, Aunt Silence was not appeased.

"On your own heads be it then! There is just one more chance left: did you ask him anything about Fort Boise?"

"Yes; it is a new little fort, hardly finished; there is only one white man there and he is a Frenchman."

Mrs. Hannington cast her hands into her lap. "Remember, now, who it is you are trusting!"

"But I must do as he says, Aunt Silence. If I don't, it will give him his first excuse —"

"Excuse for what?"

"What you say 'they' always do. — If he is one of 'them,' I have got a great deal to learn; but I did n't suppose that you could teach me!"

"Stella! I could tell you had been with that man by your having the face to say such a thing to me. You don't love him to trust him. You are afraid he'll be off and not give you what you expect for what you've given him. I could almost bear it if I thought it was true love with either of you; I might have some compunction about

coming between you. But he 'll never do you any good by anything he gives you. He'll make you just like himself, or he'll get tired of you and desert you when you 're in some worse strait than you are now. Now, you have got us still; what you want to do is to face this thing and choose" —

"I have chosen," said Stella faintly. — "Forgive me, but I must."

"Well, if you see it that way, I'm sorry for your blindness. Your eyes will be opened some day!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECOND ADMONITION

“SEPTEMBER 14th,”—quoting from Hannington’s diary of their journey, preserved in the family but seldom read, we think, by any of Alvin’s descendants of to-day — “our horses strayed far from camp, and instead of an early start as we intended, got off by 9 o’clock. We left the Branch [of the Powder River ?] and gradually rose a long hill. Stopped for dinner on a small stream at 12 o’clock, started 2½, continued to rise by degrees. The country we travelled to-day was thickly covered with bunch-grass which the horses are very fond of. We found at last the top of the mountain. At a distance we could see what we suppose to be the Blue Mountains and they struck us with terror.—Their peaks seemed a resting-place for the clouds. Below us was a great plain and at some distance we could discover a tree which we recognized as the Lone Tree of which we had heard before.”

If men of Hannington’s breed were “struck with terror” at the way before them, how must it have been with that soft bundle of sensation clothed in flesh which awaited the unborn soul of Stella Mutrie? Her will expired like a snuffed candle; what was left, it puzzled a woman of Mrs. Hannington’s experience to deal with.

—“Can’t go on? Why, there’s nothing else you can do, now!”

“I must speak to him, then. Aunt Silence, won’t you

try to manage so I can have another talk with him by ourselves?"

The closer organization since they became a small company brought each individual under the constant observation of the others. This had estranged Stella of late from Bradburn's direct influence; she escaped easily from the effect of her most binding impressions.

A New England woman of Silence Hannington's make is no worm: she turned, and answered with exasperated contempt:—

"If you want to manage any more of those talks, you will have to get along without me. You took his advice at Fort Hall; I ought to have told your uncle then. Now I shall speak to him, whether or no! And you'll do what *he* says."

Mr. Hannington, during the noon halt, was taking a brief nap in a sitting posture braced against a roll of blankets on the ground. His wife disturbed him, asking him to get up and step away with her a piece.

"Haven't we stepped about far enough? You going back to Green River!" he joked, as she led him away some distance out of ear-shot.

With the empty continent receding in every direction from their pygmy group, privacy was the last thing possible to any two persons, or any one family on this march.

"I've got a dreadful thing to tell you, father, and I don't want it should be overheard."

Alvin's jaw fell; he looked at his wife pathetically: she understood the appeal.

"No, no; it's nothing to do with Barbie. She's safe out of it, and I mean she shall be.— But there! she can't

be ; none of us can. It don't seem to me we've ever known what trouble was before."

He would not believe her at first and then he was stunned, but as the fact was forced upon him he broke out in tones that shocked her nerves ; she had no patience with his manlike carelessness of listeners. He talked as loud as if they were shut up in their own sitting-room with house walls and a door-yard between them and neighborly curiosity. In spite of the total exposure they were drifting on, she clung to her lifelong habit of reticence in family troubles not to be classed as direct dispensations.

"Hush—sh, for goodness' sake!" she prayed in despair, and could have shaken him like a child.

"I shan't hush! It's been hushed up plenty long enough. It ought to have gone to Mr. Yardley the very first minute you knew it. It looks almost as if you'd consented to it. I never knew you to do so, mother. It cuts me like everything to own it up now."

"It isn't you: I take it all on me, every bit. I couldn't bring myself to believe it; then I thought I could just take care of it alone. Of course it will have to come out sooner or later, but nobody ever had to bear such a thing with so many folks around! And carry it along with us—the man too! And our Barbie, and Jimmy—oh my! oh my!"

"Mr. Yardley won't carry it far if I know him," said Alvin, choking up fiercely at the sound of his wife's wail. "I shall see him to-night; you've had it on your mind long enough."

"Not to-night! He won't sleep a wink. There's nothing he can do till to-morrow, anyhow. I know something about nights."

"I guess you do! You've done enough and more than

enough for that girl. I repudiate her: I won't be responsible for what she's liable to do next."

"You would n't go at it that way if it was our own child."

"It could n't be! She's no blood of mine. There's nothing of her mother in her; she's her father over again — made his money any dirty way he could and spent it the same way."

"Don't take it so — please, Alvin! being angry won't reach it. Do try to go in the right spirit when you speak to Mr. Yardley."

"Why, it seems to me you've got no spirit left at all. Don't you realize what it means? I'm surprised at you, Silence!"

"I'm surprised at myself," she owned. "I don't see how I put up with it at all. It don't seem as if it could be you and me, talking about such a thing right in our own family; and everybody thinking, I suppose, we're quarreling. — Well; I've tried my way. Now you men see what you can do."

Alvin, in spite of his wife's plea, had his conversation with the minister that same evening — Jimmy being kindly invited to leave them. He went across to the Hannington camp and helped Barbie splice a clothes-line. Washing was done evenings, a few pieces at a time. Stella would not wash, — said that she could n't, and practically went unwashed sooner than try.

The mother cooked and Barbie washed for all; and her arms increased and grew beautiful, but she was unreconciled in soul. These were Stella's clothes the maiden daughter of the house was hanging out to "blow dry." Stella was quite as handsome as ever, perhaps handsomer,

but everything connected with her personally, including her garments, was repellent to Barbie on grounds of spiritual caste. The odor of her hair on the pillow next her own at night; the sight of her marble shoulders when she sat half dressed, feebly mending or altering some article she needed to put on, gave Barbie thrills of loathing.

In a setting of forest the night would have been pitch dark, but the vast overarching country of stars and star-mist held light enough for space to brood in. The land outstretched beneath might have been some worn-out planet's verge, and this little handful of breathing creatures the remnant of its doomed inhabitants waiting for extinction, instead of the sorted seed of a race to come.

Barbie stood, arms uplifted, her small head dark against the stars. The wind wrapped her skirts about her poised, slender height as she rose on tiptoe, reaching for the line. The corners of her apron tucked up made a bit of classic drapery, but in fact was a pocket for clothes-pins. She felt for them nimbly, and stuck them astride the rope. Jimmy watched her.

“Bought in Dugdale?”

Barbie nodded.

“Don't they look human?—jacking about in the breeze of the last Divide! They ought to go down to posterity:—‘Clothes-pins made in Massachusetts that my grandmother hung up her clothes with, all across the continent in '42.’”

“Posterity may not care to own a grandmother that washed her own clothes.”

“Posterity had better be thankful to get one not too lazy to do it, or” (Jimmy's eye was on a pink sunbonnet

dangling by its strings which was n't Barbie's, he knew) "selfish enough to make some one else do it for her!"

"What they might be proud of," said Barbie, "would be clothes-pins a grandfather hung up his wife's clothes with!"

"Pooh! who'd want such a poor-spirited grandfather as that? What does a man take a wife to Oregon for!"

Barbie sat down on a stone and hugged her elbows in the folds of a little blue shawl that she dragged about her shoulders. She was so curt and cold to him, and she looked so gentle and spiritually worn that Jimmy could scarcely bear his share of the estrangement between them. Yet, as he told himself, he was getting his deserts.

"I can't ask you to come *in*," said Barbie, "but I can ask you to sit down outside, anywhere" — she waved one arm abroad.

"Yes, it will seem strange to shut doors again. Don't you begin to like it? — this big house with no walls? Is n't it a relief to get rid of dusting chairs and cleaning closets — or whatever it was you did do?"

"Well, I did n't wash! On the whole I think I'd just as soon do the little things. Men hate them, but women don't; they take one's mind off —"

Barbie stopped, and Jimmy presently added: —

"But the sunsets, and sunrises, and the stars!"

She looked up and stared at the sky long, in silence. "Yes," she said at length, "the house is big enough, and yet I've never had such a feeling of nowhere to go. Home is the place where you can sometimes be alone."

"Do you need that too?" said Jimmy, with studied indifference.

But he could capture no more of her confidence. She rose. "There is father coming."

"Is he? Then I must go back and cook supper for my dad."

"What! no supper yet? Do bring him over here — there's plenty left. Mother would be so pleased," Barbie added impersonally.

"Thank you; we manage pretty well, man-fashion. I'm not such a bad cook, you know. My frying-pan is going down along with your cocky little clothes-pins. Don't you ever tell, but I wash the parson's clothes."

Barbie laughed, and laughed again. Her voice trembled: — "I know it; I've seen you. I've been dying to show you how. You are a frightful washer!"

Jimmy said "Good night, sir," as Mr. Hannington met and passed him; there was no answer. This was so unlike the kind, friendly neighbor that Jimmy stood still and looked after him.

"He walks like a drunken man," he thought. "He's possessed with worry about something or other; —" Under his breath he added, "Shame upon it!"

Husband and wife conferred in whispers.

"Think you had n't better speak with her to-night? I would n't put it off."

"When does he want to see her — before breakfast? that's half-past five! Well, I guess I sha n't speak to her to-night."

"I could n't make objections," said Alvin. "Breakfast don't count with him; and he's giving her every chance. I can see he's afraid of what's before him. He's afraid! — Do try and work her up to some sense of her condi-

tion. The way she takes it seems to me almost more of a disgrace than the thing itself. Can't you make her see anything?"

"I've been trying, about a month; but what's the use! There's nothing there to work on. She's completely taken up with 'him' and some great future he's planning for her."

Barbie came towards them, hesitating; her face smote the mother in its questing, resistant dread. She held out her arms with a rare gesture. "Kiss me!" she said as to a child.

Barbara kissed her lightly and drew herself away.

"You must be tired out." Mrs. Hannington hastened to pass off her emotional excess as common, ordinary sympathy. "And here you are sitting up till after ten o'clock!"

"Mother, if we don't have a house bigger than a nutshell 'out there,' I want you to give me a room to myself — if it's on the roof."

"You shall!" her mother cried incoherently; "we owe it to you."

"You don't owe me anything! I simply want to make it easier for my own bad disposition."

"Barbie, you never had a bad disposition!"

"Well, then I've cultivated one, which is worse. It will have to be reckoned with one of these days, but, just now, — I feel as if something might break loose."

"Something will!" said her mother darkly. "Something is going to, before long."

Voices were heard in the girls' tent bright and early on Saturday morning. Barbie was up and out, fetching in her wash. It was the mother speaking to Stella.

“You better get you dressed as quick as you can. He wants to talk to you, right now, before we eat.”

The girl shuddered.

“Barbie will bring you some coffee; it’s all made — oh, my child, don’t do that!” Mrs. Hannington was distracted, watching Stella at her toilet. “Wait, I’ve got a bit of tape in my work-basket.”

“Did Uncle Alvin tell him?”

“Yes, last evening. I did n’t want him to so soon, but it’s just as well to have it over with. He says Mr. Yardley is holding the Door open to you; he wants you to remember there’s forgiveness to the last. But it’s got to be asked for. He’ll expect to see some sign of a change in you.”

“What sign does he expect?”

“He won’t ask for any public confession; I was afraid of that. He only wants to talk with you alone. He’s braver to face the truth than I was: he won’t put up with a wrong-doer if he knows who he is, and he won’t shirk the knowledge.”

“But he knows — he must know.”

“He may guess, but he’ll have to have it straight from you. Such a charge as that can’t be handed round on suspicion.”

“He will never get that name from me! It’s madness. Mr. Yardley can’t do anything to him, but he can drive him to leave us all in the lurch. He can make him desert me.”

“Why, of course he’ll expect to part you if he finds the man is married. You can’t ask forgiveness and go on sinning.”

“I have n’t asked forgiveness, yet; I can’t, if he won’t — if he scorns it, and scorns me for asking. We are not

the dirt under everybody's feet; Mr. Yardley need n't stoop so low to be merciful."

"How about the woman at the Saviour's feet! did He stoop? He spared her, but not what she had done. He called it sin."

"No one called it sin when I promised to marry Horace, but I felt more like dirt then than I do now. I was n't bought — this time."

Aunt Silence's conscience may have stung her. She retorted: "You were, only you don't know it. You parted with yourself for the moment's weakness, for just excitement; it's terrible to me to say so, but I've looked in vain for that love in you that might excuse you, if it was unselfish. How long would it take you to turn against him if he left you? You are counting on a great time with him somewhere, somehow: that's why you don't suffer."

"Did Uncle Alvin tell him I can't go on?" A sullen hardening of the girl's face showed the uselessness of words; driven beyond a certain point she would turn in this way.

"I don't believe he did because you can, and you would, if the man you rely on said so. Own up, now! would n't you? — if he was taking you to that paradise where you won't have to think about anybody but yourselves, — would you say 'I can't go on'?"

"I suppose not; but he would make it easier somehow."

"I guess he can't move mountains nor give you wings to fly with. Mrs. Spaulding was full more delicate than you are; she went over on horseback, eight — nine years ago. And Mrs. Whitman, a bride, straight from the altar. They did it on their own courage and faith in God. —

But that is n't the question. It is n't Mr. Yardley's part to see that you are comfortable. What did St. Paul say? 'I buffet my body and bring it into bondage'?"

"Aunt Silence, I do love you; you can preach to me if any one can. If I could n't give him up for you, I certainly won't for Mr. Yardley! he can 'buffet' me all he wants. You don't any of you see how *he* was wronged! Take any old maid and let her fall in love with a young man and tempt him with her money — what will happen? He's the one who was injured."

"He sold himself for a price, and cheap at that! I heard him say myself there were some people in that village he wanted to surprise. He sold himself and now he wants to crawl out of it — sin first, and then a cloak to cover it; the law will be pretty set to work making that sort of a marriage legal! Now, that's the last of my preaching to you. — Here's your coffee."

The petticoat-band was pieced and the sad place Stella had pinned into rags, dragging it together, was mended securely. Aunt Silence rose and straightened up under the weight of mind and body. "It makes no difference between us: we're bound together, humanly speaking. Your uncle's folks are my folks for this life. If you should think better of these foolish things you've said, tell me — any time to-day, just a word. You don't want to drive a man like Mr. Yardley into a corner. He'll never dispute with the Law. I speak while I can. If he deals with you as the minister, flesh and blood will have to stand aside."

Alvin, starting to fetch Mr. Yardley, was hurriedly intercepted by his wife.

"You tell him, father, the time is n't ripe for her. He might just as well eat his breakfast. I would n't want he

should talk to her the way she is now ; nothing makes any impression, and goodness knows I've said enough ! I never talked to any living being as I have to her. It makes me think of snake-bite : it's all through her system. You can burn the place or you can cut it out ; — the poison's in her blood."

CHAPTER XVII

AN APOSTOLIC JUDGMENT

MR. YARDLEY'S sense of his own impending duty kept him silent like a breathless load. As the day went by, with no better answer from the subject of his prayers, he steeled himself slowly; he tried to forget old friends' faces and family scenes; honestly, fearfully, in the fear of God, he isolated himself from man. Such was his teaching.

But when it came to his cherished mission, the blow went home. Good men have their beast of pride to reckon with. This scheme had taken years to ripen; it was the fruit of self-blame, his atonement for admitted cowardice in the past. Worse than physical torture it was to see his dream so mutilated in the very inception. He was not taking bad men and women into the clean wilderness to reform them; he was taking good ones to exercise and preserve their goodness, alone with the worship and the works of God. What had he done that he should be so confounded? His explanation partook of the nature of that hard-riden doctrine of his time that life is one long accounting: some sin of his own in secret the Lord was rewarding openly. Herein was he punished, being called to punish another; risking his future influence with his flock through their probable condemnation of the act. It must be faced. He had gone partners, influenced by cowardice of various kinds, with a man he neither knew nor liked. He should have trusted God and walked forward.

All Saturday, journeying onward, he gazed at the fear-

ful peaks and murmured, "On eagles' wings — on eagles' wings I bare you and brought you unto myself," and in the words of the mighty apostle he girded his loins anew: "for necessity is laid upon me; for it were good for me rather to die than that any man should make my glorying void." Saturday night he slept a few hours from sheer exhaustion, and on the morning of the Sabbath he faced his people with haggard eyes but a lip of priestly determination. When the benediction had been said, he requested that the women retire with their children to the camping-spot; the men to remain in session with him alone.

A flutter of anxiety agitated the little departing group. There were some who thought they could guess what was coming. Stella required help to get away. Her uncle, looking after his women, saw with wrath the arm of his daughter supporting her, while the mother hastened on to spread down a place for her to lie. His thoughts at the moment did his Christianity sad injustice: it was very clear which of those two girls was his own.

The little company was encamped in mid-valley near the old landmark of the Lone Pine; they had expected to reach it by noon of the previous day, but darkness had overtaken them while they were unsaddling and pitching their few tents. Morning now showed they were but halfway across the vast, featureless plain. A steady movement of air passing over it unimpeded, caused a murmur on high in the great tree's top like many voices in unison, or a dreamy breaking of surf on some far-off, monotonous shore. Our sagebushes of the desert, like the sedges, have no voice — "And still they sing." For miles across the empty intervale there was a dry whispering in answer to the pine.

“Those little children,” said the preacher, “who went from us just now, and others who shall be born to us — they will be our pledge, our promise to the nation and to God. But they must come of clean seed; and no ‘pleasant vessel,’ no ‘vessel of desire’ shall hold the consecrated offering.

“You may have heard it whispered — it has been known to me only within the last thirty-six hours — the nature of the folly that has been wrought amongst us. We are not adventurers nor money-seekers, nor seekers of homes in the sense that we bring nothing to build with more precious than life and worldly goods. I see the heads of ten families before me. Such a thing as this I do not believe has been known in one of these families since their ancestors settled in America.

“Remember, brethren, our dealing with offenders is founded on the apostolic letters of different young churches of Christ according to their individual needs and characteristics, but on this point of keeping the membership pure there is never any variance nor the least obscurity: ‘Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly. . . . And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. . . . Put away the wicked man from among yourselves. Ye shall put him away, or her away from among yourselves. . . . Unless they shall repent and die unto sin and live unto God in Christ Jesus.’ Observe the repetition, the insistence on the words, ‘put away’: the text cannot otherwise be construed or softened or tampered with.

“Now, there are two persons in this company whose

choice, so far as I am able to investigate, is finally made: we mock the Law and the Commandments in keeping them with us. As we are moving forward our only means of obeying the word of the apostle is to leave them behind. To them who will own no guide but that of their inclinations, we leave the trackless wilderness and their free choice of a way to go.

“Does this seem hard? I can see faces wincing. Is there any other reading of the Word? Again and seven times seven did Christ forgive the sinner — never the sin. In this case I have not learned that forgiveness has been asked. They have put themselves outside of family discipline, outside of church discipline, — there is no community to receive them condoning or otherwise: there remains God ‘who judgeth them that are without.’

“Our situation takes us back to those days when men lived as we are living, in tents of the wilderness, as one family, with no law but the word of Jehovah and with no administrators but his priests. I am but a rod of Aaron, a tool of the just God. The winnower of souls does not go about the matter with softness and relenting. Blows shall resound upon the threshing-floor where the good grain is sorted and vanity swept away.

“The woman I shall name but once. Nature takes care the woman shall not escape; she cannot hide her sin. It is the man I want. I call on the betrayer of Estella Mutrie to step out here before us and take his share in this sentence and help her to bear the punishment he has brought upon her; which might seem in our sister’s case extreme but for those vital consequences you know of yourselves. You are family men: the children that grow up among us your children will marry.

“Those who took the responsibility of bringing her, did so, knowing the absolute terms of the contract which governs us in our departure beyond the reach of human law. They have placed the matter in my hands, as in duty bound. I can see my duty no otherwise than as I have stated. Now, son of Adam, come and take this daughter of Eve for thy companion. May the toils and tribulations of the way before you be counted to you for righteousness. It is not in man, as some claim, to give you absolution, but you know where it is to be found; and I think you are on the best of all roads to meet it.”

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE PARSON'S SON

JIMMY had drawn close to his father's knees, planting himself opposite on the ground. The minister's face was hidden while he strove with the spirit of prayer: it was denied him; he could not bind his thoughts into words. He believed himself alone and it startled him, through the beating in his ears, to hear his son's voice speaking with forced naturalness:—

“We seem to be the only ones left, father. Excuse my staying; I hope I have n't frightened you? No one seemed inclined to sit me out.”

His father looked at him searchingly, but without conviction of the worst. “I can't suppose you are here for any reason. . . . Have you anything to say to me?”

“No, sir: I thought it looked rather lonely in the judgment seat.” There was no comment. “Could n't you remit—something, now it's only the woman?”

“She can't be one of us with my consent.”

“Consent!” echoed Jimmy, recalling his father's sermon. “But she is one of us. Her trouble began right here in our midst. I don't think you'll find the men of this company will stand by and see her punished alone.”

“That is what her betrayer is saying to himself now. He laughs in his sleeve.”

“Let him laugh! We will use him for his price. We have paid for him, Lord knows!”

“What are you talking about?” the minister demanded. “Is this expediency, or mercy?”

“Both,” said Jimmy. “You can’t cast her out alone — if that is mercy!”

“If you stand between her and the Law, you make yourselves a fence for him. I certainly expect to raise the issue to the point of punishment for her: then we shall see if the traitor be human. The rest is God’s.”

“I hope, sir, you will not try that! It will break up the company. Before the words are out of your mouth every man, woman, and child will be up against you.”

“My influence is blasted if I let that scoffer foil me now. I have no evidence to accuse him and no power over him, except through her. You know the man I mean!”

“I do, and we need him. Suppose he *is* human, and you force him out? where are we? Consider the lives under your care, sir! I would not say to that worker of iniquity, ‘Depart from me,’ till this company is over the Blue Mountains.”

“Then you would be a moral coward, Jimmy. In matters of duty we must leave the consequences to God. Do what the Law compels and trust Him for the event.”

“Well, father; you did not trust Him entirely on this journey. You took the road of duty, but you hired that man to pilot us over the physical difficulties.”

“There was my false step! My responsibility for others weakened me, and this is the punishment; this monstrous thing I am forced to do.”

“It is monstrous: it’s ‘cruel and unusual.’ It seems to me one of those things that can’t be done by men in their —”

Jimmy paused at “right mind,” but his father’s heated

face showed he had been able to finish the sentence for himself: it did not tend towards harmony at that tortured moment, with all eyes upon them.

"It has been done," the judge pronounced. "I shall not revoke that sentence under the Law. Am I any wiser or more charitable than God's greatest apostle?"

"You have not looked at it in detail —"

"Have n't I? I've been on my knees over it for every hour since I have known. Leave me, now, to work it out. I need to think."

"Excuse me if I say I don't think you are able: this has grown so in your eyes it blots out everything else. It's ridiculous, for instance, to talk of common humanity blasting your reputation with sensible men who can see the situation you are in."

"Go away, Jimmy; you work at the wrong end: expediency, consequences — what have I to do with those? I am the Law and the Commandments here, or I am nothing."

"Then I plant myself, before everybody, as the one who must stay with her; not because I am the man, but because I am your son: that's your compensation for working out your law. You shall not sacrifice all the others to reach that one villain — who is useful, as God made him. I say you were perfectly right to hire him. Has he hurt any one who was sound? Evil finds evil, and you can thank him for testing her. When he goes, she'll go with him; that is her law."

"Jimmy, you are mocking!"

"Well, you drive me to it, sir! You go so far the other way, — I have to range myself with common sense."

There was a deadly silence. The parson's face showed grim agony.

"Are you trying to force me out of my duty, Jimmy? You can wrench my heart, but I will not recede, even to spare my own son."

"I don't ask you to spare me — and I don't want to frighten you: it's no great thing to go back the way we came. I know that road; none of us know the road ahead. We may meet snow; we don't know what may happen. This is the crucial part, and with him behind us! — He may stir up the Indians."

"Cowardice and no faith! Take your place beside her, then, if you wish to be the sacrifice. What will you do with her?"

"Take her back to Fort Hall. She'll have Christian treatment there! Captain Grant is a good man. I will follow you out when I can — with the next train, I suppose: I may have to wait over till spring."

Another silence of wretchedness and obstinacy on both sides. The minister gazed into the young face that confronted him; Jimmy met his eyes; his own were not so hard but a mist stole into them as he pondered the consequences to his own half-born hopes. He would have liked to say to his father that he ought to thank the smiling villain, out of reach, for his son's final cure: the shock that scattered those flattering little theories that Stella was leaning to the better side through his influence at last, with all her bewildering charm intensified by an unexplained sadness. There was abundant mockery for himself in his sick heart, when he thought of some of their rides together, and what that soul sadness really hid.

"Your mind is made up on this alternative?"

"Quite, sir."

"Then I see no way but for us both to go through with

it; unless I ask those who brought her with them to take her and leave, themselves. I gather from Mr. Hannington that he and his wife hold somewhat different views, but their pride would unite them if I gave the least hint that such a course was expected."

"I hope you will spare them that!" said Jimmy, wincing. "Let us call it finished."

He sat and considered his own part in this appalling situation, and his father's bowels yearned over him.

"You must understand, son, I cannot take back the sentence now that you are the one to share it. It was wrung from me: Stella with a broken, contrite heart would be the lamb our Saviour carried in his breast, but Stella, as she is, were a secret door to sin."

"I see, father: you overwhelm me, but I quite see where the courage of the judge comes in. — Granting your reading of the Law, no woman like her has any case, to be sure. It's a pity she has no counsel."

"Jesus is her counsel, but she has refused Him, over and over."

"Do you think it will be understood that I am not the man you asked for? I'm willing to take his job, but I don't covet his character exactly. You must see to that, father."

"It shall be seen to. I will tell the Hanningtons myself."

Jimmy's eyes contracted: "I was n't thinking of them; if they have to be told, I may as well go and shoot myself."

"Why have you done this, son? Do you — God help us — do you love that girl?"

"Not more than you do, father. I had no idea of staying till — Bradburn — went away."

“Were you quite unprepared for the facts as I stated them?”

“No; but, yes, I was — for the fact. Though I have known for some time she is untruthful.”

“Do you know anything else?”

“Nothing I could name except on suspicion; but there is a man around here the Lord must be looking for.”

“He will find him. How was it with them who tempted His wrath in that other desert? — He ‘gave them their desire’; ‘but sent leanness into their souls.’ That man in our midst I alone am responsible for; and this, I repeat, is my punishment. It takes my very all to meet it. But have faith in your own action, Jimmy; unconsidered as you say it was, I do not doubt it has been laid upon you, even as my part is laid on me. Would to God I were in your place!” Again for an instant the minister’s features betrayed his lonely anguish.

“Now, I want to ask you — this may be our last private moment; are you free to give your life for this woman, if it should come to that?”

“How do you mean, am I ‘free’?”

“As you said you were once; don’t you remember our talk — when I hesitated to include you in the offer of my own services and life to the work out here?”

“I am free in that way still, father, and no more to be congratulated on my freedom: there is no one who cares for my life half as much as we do. I think we can settle the disposal of it between ourselves. But it is n’t going to be given away. Now, I’ll tell you what I’m most afraid of — sleeping on watch. But if Stella wants to save me up for my work, she’ll take a dog-watch now and then herself.” — “She’ll not do anything of the kind,” was

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"The question this morning, of risk, concerned your company rather than ourselves. I would sooner, as to safety, take my chance going back alone with her than ahead with this party and your minister as guide. But I won't detain you. I will write to your niece, and seal the letter. There will be a small packet inside; something she ought not to travel without."

"Medicine?"

"— For snake bite," said Bradburn soberly. He looked at her with his black impenetrable eyes.

"Very well, I will deliver it."

"Did she send me no message at all?"

"Just now, you mean?" Mrs. Hannington paused, after his "Yes, when you left her."

"Well; she did say something I was to tell you. I thought, perhaps, I'd better not."

"Was n't that rather too much responsibility for a lady so anxious to wash her hands of our affairs?"

"Maybe it was. You think you want to hear it?"

"Most certainly."

"These were her words, then, if I recollect: she said, 'If anybody cares to hear him talk they are welcome. I will never believe a word he says to me again.' I did n't tell you because I thought it sounded — peevish. She's a child, about half the time. — But then, she is n't!"

"Does she seem to take it very hard?"

Silence looked at him a moment. He was a man whose effrontery beat down the common barriers of speech; he could not feel a rebuff, and compelled from others the familiarity he forced upon all whom he addressed. Aunt Silence surprised herself by answering him.

"I can't tell you how she takes it, and I don't see how

you can ask. But I don't know anything about such people as she and you are."

"That is evident," said Bradburn; "and, looking at it from our side, your twisting and torturing and cramping of nature, for the sake of living according to a recipe made by men who were half mad on one or two questions a thousand years ago, is a mystery to us. Such a scene as we had this morning, some of the greatest philosophers — men who have changed our whole conception of the universe — would be unable to comprehend. It would look as monstrous to — Benjamin Franklin, for instance, as stoning a woman to death or throwing her over the wall would look to you."

"You are a terrible man; but you, and Benjamin Franklin, have hurt that poor girl about all you are ever going to, I guess."

"You seemed to be having a stormy time of it," Alvin speculated anxiously as he rejoined his better half.

"I gave him to understand what we think of him — but, there! I'm doing just what he asked me to. He's a terrible man," she repeated. "I don't know as I ever heard any one talk as he does. — If he's been talking that way to Stella I don't wonder much she can't tell black from white."

"The trouble with Stella is she would n't care if she could: she'll do just what suits her best and the rest of us can call it what we like."

Mrs. Hannington observed aloud without any manifest feeling, "Good as they are, I've always noticed a hard streak in the Hanningtons. If there's one person in this world you can't blind, it's my own mother; she sees straight

through Stella, and yet I do believe she's half fond of her."

"Grandma likes pretty people, and she does n't have to suffer for her likes and dislikes. She sits one side — she's interested in folks, whether they're the just or the unjust."

"Grandma suffers what we suffer, I guess, but she sees there's an end to all of it; an end to our wisdom and our conceit of our own justice; and to all the wonderful happiness young folks think is meant for them that's going to last forever, and the sorrow they think they never can bear. I know we shall bear this, but I wish I did know where it's going to end!"

"It won't end — short of a life for a life. He's taken what he can't give back. 'Burning for burning, wound for wound.'"

"Father, that's benighted! We're some ways beyond Leviticus, I should hope."

"You're mistaken; everything in the Bible is in life. We come to it piece by piece; and we've got to take it. I don't say it's meted out to one more than another."

"Well, I hope you get your fill of the Old Testament before you're through with it. I always pitied Mr. Yardley; he's never advanced much. But I never dreamt his own son would have to pay for his antiquated judgments. I promised I'd submit to what he said should be, but I believe he'd thank us now to set his word aside and just rebel! I'm ready to, for my part. I'm ready to go to him now and say it's too much! If he leaves one of us, he'll have to leave us all."

"Well, now I put my foot down! You'll do no such thing. This paying for Stella stops right here. You took

the responsibility on you, and when you got through you said 'Now, I leave it to the men.' This is a man's way."

"Three men's way, I guess you mean. Jimmy won't back out; his father can't, now; the other I don't call a man. But if you'll stand by me, you and I could give Mr. Yardley a chance to forget he's a rod of Aaron and act like a human being. Don't you believe he'd thank us? I do! I believe he's just praying now for some way out of it."

"He did his praying beforehand. He won't ask for a new way to be shown him."

"Why should n't he? A new way was shown; — had to be, or the world could n't go on. Don't the hymn say 'last best creed'? Don't you see how good it would turn out, if you'd only have the courage, Alvin!"

"I'm going to have the courage to keep my word and obey the Law," said her husband.

"Oh, the Law! There are forty different ways of reading the Law, but there is only one Jesus."

"I said I would follow Mr. Yardley and abide by his judgment on this march and I am going to do it, and I expect my wife will do the same, unless you want to take hold and run the whole thing yourself."

"I don't see how we *can* do it!" moaned the woman. "How are we ever going to forget those two! How are you going to feel, when night comes down and you are fixing you to sleep, and friends all around you, and don't know what may be creeping upon them! How's Jimmy Yardley going to keep awake every night — a young man like him? They'll be followed, and they'll be surprised!"

"Silence, where's your faith in anything? Jimmy's got to do this; there's no one else for it. His father, if

he's consistent, can't pardon a woman to save a man — and his own son at that! How could any one believe that scoundrel would have hung back? Why, I'd do it myself if I wa'n't owing money and had no family to provide for, though I should be out of my element considerable; it's a young man's job. Jimmy, I ventur', don't feel to be pitied one bit; no more than if he was going to sea. Sailors have to be broke of their sleep, young or old. He won't get lost; he is n't afraid to fight and he won't be in a hurry *to* fight. You'll see it will make a man of him! And if he has any foolishness left for Stella, this trip will take it well out of him. He'll know her before it's through. Now, go and see what you can do for her and don't talk mutiny to me in the middle of the desert."

CHAPTER XX

A SURE REMEDY

“MY poor little queen,” wrote Bradburn. “It looks as if she was downright forsaken, but that is n’t so. The old inquisitor fixed up a devilish trap for us this morning, didn’t he? I was even with him, though, if son Jimmy had n’t been taken the way he was. When I got up and showed the other sons of Adam what to do, I supposed they would all follow like sheep. That would have left Parson Yardley alone with the Tables of the Law. I think the tables would have turned on him; he could n’t have thrown little Eve out of the Garden alone (perhaps you don’t see the Garden!) — Nay, his own flock would have torn him to pieces first. Having settled that in my mind, I went away.

“You never can tell what children and fools will do next. The son of the judge plays the part of saviour. He hangs to his job like a dog to a bone. — We’ll let him have it, then; give the parson a taste of his own medicine. As it happens, if I had been looking for a man to take my place as your escort, I believe I’d have picked Yardley; but he will take no orders from me, hang his impudence! You must manage him,

“My darling, on no account stop at Fort Hall! I want you to winter over at Bridger’s new fort. The place will be clean anyhow. You can trust old Jim. He’s the best sort I know. I trust him, even with you. Wait for me there and take care of yourself for my sake. But if things take such a turn, with pig-headed boys in charge, that you can’t do my way, then you keep me informed. I shall think of

you every moment, but you know how I am tied. — Must deliver the goods to the U. M. O. Must get my commissions, and nail that discovery before some one gets ahead of me. It will give us our kingdom, my golden-haired gypsy! Soon as I get rid of these church farmers and fix the other matters, I am after you; no shadow of turning in me. But I was caught this morning, — I own it. The father and son, both together, were rather much for me. *Pacienza!* I shall get even with those two yet. No man ever bested me in the long run.

“Now for the last word! Don’t let me frighten you, but mind what I say. If that boy tries to take you as far as Laramie with no more guns along, never on your life be parted one instant from the contents of this box. The pills are wax outside and a trifle big for a baby throat like yours, but inside is the best gift I can give you if you should be taken by Indians alive. If you are chased, put one, or two, in your mouth. But for God’s sake, don’t close your teeth on it unless you are actually in the devils’ hands. Do I make it plain enough? I wish you knew how I feel, writing this! Don’t experiment — don’t delay! Either is fatal. This is for the moment we call the last extremity; be sure it’s come before you use my gift. But when you are sure, don’t delay. Farewell, my star of the desert. Stars will set, but they rise again. Pity your poor pilgrim when he turns his face away from the east. He will suffer more than you.”

As Stella read these closing words, she tore the sheet across; then she took up her gift, and smiled. When the little white box, with its careful fastening of string and sealing-wax, dropped into her lap out of the letter, her thought had been, he has sent me a pledge — his diamond ring!

A short time later Bradburn got her reply.

“Your last gift, like all your gifts to me, is inexpensive, I judge, and it is something you have no use for yourself. When I say ‘all’ I forgot the lump of gold — but you took that back. I remember you said it might be ‘safer.’ It is quite safe, and so are you and all your secrets, for what I care! Go and find your kingdom and find some one else to share it with. But I thank you for this *last gift*. I will think of you when I am ready to use it. Farewell, ‘fellow traveller.’”

Bradburn asked himself sincerely, What did the girl expect? Had he not done all a man so trapped could do? The facts he reminded her of she had known before; could these facts be altered? Did she seriously demand that he should fling away the whole foundation in material means of that life glorious they had planned together to save a bad hour and a period of waiting? How could he have foreseen that the parson's son would pick up his carefully rejected rôle and make it the star part in the performance? No; his letter explained everything, but she was a child and something hurt her. She must be kissed and cured at once.

But Jimmy's action did not by any means strike him as negligible. The infatuated boy (Bradburn was still convinced of Jimmy's passion for Stella) had become a rival seriously to be reckoned with. What he had done proclaimed what he might be capable of, once alone with the monstrous advantages he had seized. Bradburn could see nothing in Jimmy's championship but the wild hope of possession; thy woman — my woman, if I can snatch and console her. Stella's rebuff and Jimmy's defiance, taken together, gave him food for much thought.

CHAPTER XXI

“A THIMBLEFUL OF LOVE”

JIMMY, though hurried with thoughtful preparations, could spare an eye for what was taking place in the Hanningtons' quarter of the camp. He saw Barbie leave the tent and wander off by herself after one look at her mother's visitor. Jimmy saw that look. He was puzzled and indignant. Mrs. Hannington had been talking to the man all of ten minutes, and still he stood there quite at ease, throwing his weight carelessly on one hip, cocking his hat-brim against the sun, obviously expecting her back again soon. If Bradburn were to be taken into the councils of that family, — after the scene of the morning, — no wonder Barbie had fled confounded. He started in pursuit of her with no definite purpose but to be near in case she might wish to speak to him.

She did not, apparently; she gave him one quick glance, — said “Jimmy,” by way of greeting, and they walked on together in silence. They had nowhere to go in their miserable, isolated self-consciousness. The strange publicity both families had achieved was hardly a subject for them, yet Barbie could think of nothing else. Jimmy had his resolution on his mind: he had also pockets to drive his restless fists into; — Barbie had only her thimble, which she had been using when her mother made her drop her work. All the motions of her hands were dearly familiar to him in those feminine arts and crafts which are practised with the aid of a thimble. Young men have

remarkable powers of observation, off and on, and Jimmy, at one time in his lamented past, had cultivated with tingling results the habit of observing Barbara. There are layers and layers of one's consciousness ; every seasonable experience that bears fruit in the soul leaves its drift and buries its seeds of memory. Suddenly as mayflowers are uncovered by spring winds, a perfume, an ecstasy of the most evasive, subtle delicacy, took hold of him. It was one of those moments, ghostlike, that came and went on that strange pilgrimage, where none of them seemed to be themselves. This immense bare valley, that incredible scene of the morning, the thing his father had done, and what he was about to do, — this preposterous parting — all sense of the present went out of him ; he could not think ; association was sharper than fact. He smelled hyacinths blooming, — hyacinths and daffodils, in earthen pots, in the Hanningtons' sitting-room in winter ; it was the short mid-term vacation, — those evenings after skating when Barbie's cheeks in the close-heated room (she was too young, then, to have her company in the parlor) mounted that wonderful deep, blush rose that lends distracting brilliancy to blue eyes with dark lashes ; when he would sit transfixed on the sofa apart, entertained by her parents while his eyes wandered to her profile against the lamp where she sat sewing by the centre-table. In a thrill of memory keen as the scent of those imprisoned flowers, he lived it all over again, — to the moment which crowned the hours of waiting when Deacon Hannington's book slipped down and his head sank back and his wrinkled eyelids closed, and Mrs. Hannington rose softly and went out for a plate of apples and nut-cakes cold from the pantry, and he would compass the

distance feebly to Barbie's chair and make her look at him in those pleading, confused attempts at conversation between them which were so bad for fine sewing. Her work would flutter down, her fingers go astray, she would fall to playing with her thimble, flash it to and fro, drop it, very likely. — All this was damaging to a studied frame of mind; it finished Jimmy's perfected resolution.

"Oh, Barbie," he said, simply, but quite mad, "I want that little old thimble. Give it to me now, won't you?"

"My thimble?" she turned her languid eyes towards him haughtily. "Are you really out of your senses, Jimmy? What do you want with my thimble?"

"What do I want with anything! naturally I don't intend to wear it."

A laugh gushed out of her. "That is so exactly like you!"

"What is like me?"

"The whole thing! a perfectly foolish speech which you would n't take back for anything in the world, no matter how it sounded."

"It sounds all right, only you are exacting, I think, on the point of sanity, — considering. Why should n't I ask for a trifling keepsake when I'm saying good-bye?"

"From me!" said Barbie, suddenly grave.

"Who else?"

She answered him first with silence; — "I don't remember that we have ever been on a footing of keepsakes."

"Don't you? Then I should propose a change in our footing at once."

"There have been changes enough, I think; let us try to keep what we have left."

"Barbie, why do you take that tone with me, just now? Explain it, won't you?"

"It does n't need explaining —"

"Why, I think it does; you seem to imply that we never have been friends."

"We never have — on the footing you seem to imply."

"Is that quite true?" Jimmy said deliberately.

She reflected, moving her hands in the way that wore upon him: he wanted to take them and hold them still. "If it's not, I think you should not remind me of it. I have a right to think — of what is past — in any way I choose."

"*That* is true: nevertheless I have something to say to you — about yourself and me, and one other —"

"Then I shall leave you; only let *me* say, first —"

"Oh, no: you must let me talk, Barbie. I've begun wrong, but what of that? Give me a moment: I'll show you if I am crazy."

She had turned away, but stood so, listening; she must listen — this last day. She pitied him — wondered over him so, saw him in such a whirl of misery. He kept his gaze upon her. She was changed in looks, any one could see, in this last year; there were deeper lines which gave a womanly pathos to the lowered eyelids, larger and more wan. But it was her own profile, distressingly sweet; it could not change. The Psyche droop of the tall, white, bended neck, the short perpendicular intent brow. And then she turned and gave him a curious, waiting, patient smile. "I thought you had come to say good-bye, quietly and sensibly."

Jimmy laughed. "It's a nice, quiet, sensible occasion

for good-bye, isn't it? It's one of those good-byes that may last the rest of our lives, you know. I want to say a few things first."

"Not about me!"

"Yes, you and me — and Stella."

"No; no, Jimmy!" she pleaded sternly.

"Oh, yes, I must. There can be misunderstandings between friends that are worse than any parting, — they are *the* parting. They are more destructive than death."

"There are a great many things more destructive than death," said Barbie.

"We need n't manufacture them for ourselves."

"What is it you want to explain? I don't misunderstand you, Jimmy. You had a friend — you have her still. I don't profess to follow you in these days all the way a friend perhaps should go; but you need n't explain to any one, I should hope, why you cannot turn your back on a girl you cared for once, when she had everything to give, — because — she had been robbed, and left — on the road."

Having taxed herself to say this all out to the end, Barbie flew ahead; when he reached her side again she was shuddering, bowed down, her face between her hands. She did not weep free tears; she fought with the hard paroxysms of the young, who mistake their strength and are overtaken suddenly.

He walked beside her — every moment more content — listening to her long-drawn, broken breaths following the wrecking sobs. Out of the storm came a bewildering peace.

"I was afraid you might be thinking something like that," he began on a different key, coaxingly. There was

sunshine in his tones. Barbie's heart expanded: she gave one long, last sigh. He tried to take her hand, but she refused it.

"You are utterly mistaken: I am not Stella's broken-down lover, nor her champion personally. It is the case of Stella. Any other man has an equal right to take it up — only there was none. I regard it as the grimiest episode of my life. The only thing that could make it more infernal would be that you should mistake the situation and I not be able to explain. There is no situation: it's a wild accident; — no, not quite. There may be a certain devilish hilarity in it. I was more or less intoxicated with your cousin once. I paid for my little spree; I paid with about all I had, but not with myself. No; when it comes to pitying me for what I'm supposed to suffer, I'd like you to give me credit for knowing what's worth suffering for. We know that women may ruin their lives and men's lives, and be loved — not the same, but loved — by men who can be faithful to them; — different men from me, and *not* women like Stella. Can you let me say that? It's not because of the catastrophe — it's because of what made it too easy — what will go on, with Stella, to the end; that is why I can justify my father and carry out his orders, though he is terrible."

"You are terrible!"

"Ah, I have been her fool! — not very long, though, and only a fool of a boy."

Barbie gave him one of her clear looks, like a call. "You shall not let me hear you abuse that boy! — I loved — the boy," she added softly.

"The man loves you. What are you going to say to him, — the man that you made?"

“I did n't make you, Jimmy,”— she might as well have added the “dear,” for her way of speaking his name amounted to the same thing. “You made yourself, ‘with divine assistance,’ and I looked on and was cross with you.”

“Well, perhaps Stella made me: she certainly articulated me limb from limb. She played the mischief with some of me, but not all of me; because, you know, the best part of this male specimen has always belonged in your collection, you hard-hearted girl!”

“I am hard-hearted,—there's too much truth in that;—but not to you, I'm ashamed to say:—to others who are weaker and have no family and no home.”

“Now, where is she coming out on this?” Jimmy enquired aloud, impartially.

This time he insisted on the hand; she gave his a hasty squeeze and dispensed with it firmly, while she went on to say:—

“Mother trusted me to be sweet to her.—I never was! We were put together like sisters, and I was mean. I made comparisons,—I disliked her; I almost loathed—Oh, I can't tell you!—Yes, I must! I was even jealous of her looks, and her charm that confused everybody when I knew what she was! It enraged me to have father pet her the same as he does me; and my own mother,—so much my own,—always on her side, excusing her, wanting me to love her! I could n't bear to see her head in mother's lap. I was glad when she engaged herself to that ridiculous Horace. I wished her—gone, anywhere, anyhow! I have prayed, without saying the words—just in the cowardly meanness of my heart—to have her taken out of our lives forever, before she won away from me every

one I loved. — Now," said Barbie in tragic accents, "God, who must be just before He can be merciful, has answered that prayer. He has 'removed' Stella 'from the fore-seat,' and taken you, too! That's the way it must work out when we want to fix things so nicely for ourselves. I thought she was all safe there with Horace — and Horace's mother — to anchor her down, and we should be sailing away to Galilee, a perfect company — just the ones who belonged together. You see the difference! But if I'm to be punished more — oh, I hope it need n't be through you, Jimmy, for really that's not fair!"

"— Even for God, I suppose!" mocked the unregenerate. "You precious little darling egotist! Do you suppose the Lord spends his time weighing you up every Monday morning to see how much heavier you are in sin?" He laughed in the face of her Divine Justice, strutting in his hour of happiness, but suddenly perceived that it was not wise to laugh in hers. He took her hand instead and held it warm and hard, and argued with her in good, set fashion out of his personal idea of life and the ruler of his existence.

"You give me that little black heart of yours: I'll educate it! How were you to learn self-abnegation, my child, unless you put it on, and then I should hate you — living all your life under the wing of your blessed parents, the apple of their eye! It is n't what you do, dear, nor what you feel, for you don't feel the same two days together — even about Stella! It's what you are everlastingly made of that's going to count in the long run. You are the making, I want you to understand, of everything a man needs in his life. You are the stuff the best of us are made of, and that's why I want you in our family. Men

are fastidious, too, when they are n't fools. We shall fight, of course: I'm an only child and a man, besides; but, wow! it's more fun to fight, with the woman you love, on the wide house-tops, than to sit and suck thumbs at any other female feast — or gorge, if you like!"

Barbie was giggling girlishly. She believed every word he said, though it was not orthodox.

"You can say good-bye to that 'boy,' though; he's my hated rival. He got me into trouble once. I don't want him in our house."

"He belongs in my house! I am going to keep him, for times when I get tired of you. — I dare say," she sighed, "we may grow young again if we live long enough. — When will you be able to come back to us, Jimmy?" The shadow fell upon them and put out their joy.

"Oh, next day after never," Jimmy groaned. "Not until next spring anyway. I'm taking no more fool chances after this, let me tell you; I want to live a long, hard life with you." Her laugh with that tremor in it was a sound he seemed to have missed for years.

"Barbie — darling — I want you to believe, dear, I did n't look for all this. I only meant to tell you something I thought you ought to know. But it is n't too much — I need it. There's lots more I shall want, though, when I have earned it."

"You will earn it, hard enough, — more than I can ever give you. It's nobler and harder than anything I ever heard of. It's 'stranger than fiction.' It's Christian chivalry. It's watching your armor before you are made a knight —"

"Dear, it's grime! And we've wasted time horribly. Here's a whole summer gone, and now we must part.

Think, if this had only happened months ago! Could it, do you think, if I had n't been a coward?"

"Don't be a greedy Goliah; it's happened now."

"Ah, so late: — and nowhere in this wide wilderness where I can have you one second to myself! I should like to show Lottie Kiersted over there just what I think of you this minute; she's looking at us as if she 'wanted to know'; — shall I? — surprise her!"

"Jimmy, behave! You must let go my hand."

Barbie, affecting a tragic indifference to her companion, was leading the way rapidly "home." She wore a faint rose in the centre of each cheek, the color of flown joy, and Jimmy's gray eyes, lighted to their blackest depths, blazed his secret to Lottie Kiersted — to all and sundry. He revelled shamelessly in the curiosity this conspicuous stroll of theirs aroused; it stung him to think that others, perhaps every one, looked at the situation as Barbie had done.

"That man's gone anyhow!" she announced, seeing that her father and mother were now talking by themselves — quite forcibly, it could be noted, even at that distance. "My mother, my mother!" she cried, with one of her quick revulsions; "she has borne this thing for months, and she loves Stella even now! But, oh, Jimmy, I think to-day she looks as if it was going to kill her; and poor father is almost out of his mind. Can I love Stella when I look at them?"

"She cannot hurt them, really."

"No: but she can kill them — and you, too. I think sometimes she will finish us all in the end."

"You are worn out, Blessedest. Stella is a poor thing for our fears, don't you think — rather?"

"Well, you wait and see!"

"Anyhow, I'm going to look after Stella; and it's the man, after all—"

"And him we have still!"

"I tell you, he can't hurt us either, except in ways perfectly immaterial like himself."

"He is very dangerous."

"He is very business-like. Men who buy and sell do nothing rash."

"But they can be treacherous: see how he circumvented your father."

"He will not be apt to circumvent his God."

"It does n't seem as if he could have one!"

"His own devil, then, little communicant! I should n't have ventured to say that to you! I think you flatter him, you know. He's a common wretch; his remarkableness consists in his being one of us."

"Good-bye, now, Jimmy—" The tender voice dwelling upon his name made the flushes go over him.

"Will you remember—I take your little soul with me, to be the strength of mine—to bring me back, in the right way?"

"Oh, if I have a soul," she whispered, "I'm sure you're welcome to it!" They both laughed crazily, being as wretchedly happy as the circumstances allowed. "I must go in now, but nothing will seem the same: I can bear anything now."

It struck Mrs. Hannington, as it had Lottie Kiersted and various others, that Jimmy and Barbie seemed to have a great deal to say to each other, for a day that was so full of things for both of them to do. They had not been in the habit of going for walks together.

"Oh, here's your old thimble, if you want it:" Barbie lingered distractedly, because Jimmy would not go. "Achilles, take your distaff," she taunted. He refused to smile. "I shall be hurt if you don't take it now."

"What will you do without it? I'm afraid you'll be lazy."

"You always did have a queer effect upon my sewing —" They gloated over the past that could not hurt them now.

"I remember trying to get that large tool away from you once, when you would n't stop sewing; we had quite a scuffle."

"We both lost it; and you had to go under the table after it —"

"And bumped my head, and you laughed enormously! You were a wicked child. My soul, how we have wasted time! Go in, for heaven's sake! — Oh, my thimble, bless its little heart!"

He helped himself to his maniacal trophy and deliberately, before several distant witnesses, put a ceremonial kiss on the blanched, tender finger-tip it left bare. "Now, run in and don't let that finger of mine take cold."

"That's the one he ought to have had before he tangled himself up in this business," Sam Kiersted observed to Lottie, his wife, — a small, vivid, black-eyed person he had married after a two weeks' courtship, but was in love with still.

"Perhaps he could n't get her," said Lottie, in behalf of the sex that waits.

"It looks that way, don't it!" Sam exulted. "I guess little Jim don't have to go round on his knees much to

girls. Well, she'll be another victim, if anything happens to him."

"Victim of what?"

"— The parson's threshing-floor. Where there's such an almighty wind let loose, something besides chaff is bound to go."

CHAPTER XXII

THINKING IT OVER

THEY travelled slowly that first day of the separation; even the dumb beasts lagged, with ears strained back, listening for their road companions that had been parted out for the sinner's convoy. Bradburn rode alone, well in advance; he addressed no one, and his face of wrath and gloom forbade speech to him. Bits of rather free comment on the late occurrence went on in subdued tones at a safe distance from the leaders.

"How are you feeling about now, Sam?"

"Mean as dirt!" grunted Sam.

"I feel a good deal like a pious nigger-driver myself. How do you suppose the parson takes it about Jimmy?"

"Parson Yardley lives with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I suppose he's feeling like Abraham, about now."

"Well, where's the angel of the Lord? Abraham has stood his test—"

"You can't call Jimmy a sacrifice for nothing but a father's pride, though it looks so. He's acting like a little man; he'll save us a lot of trouble, besides helping out the girl. Where, by gracious, would we be if the other had owned up?"

A faint, awkward smile passed between the two young husbands.

"Think you know who it is?"

"Parson's process of 'elimination'—mental. It's safer than picking us over on the spot—and surer.—You know who he is as well as I do."

“That’s a long way from charging him with it. He’s a man I would n’t want to differ with much on this road. The Injians we met last Friday said there are two ways to cross those mountains. They could n’t tell us which was which, or they would n’t. The party ahead got disputing and split! Now, which way’s the best it’s going to take a cunning eye to tell. There would be fresh hoof-tracks both roads.”

“I go back to the question; has Mr. Yardley any right to discipline one that is n’t a member?”

“The people she comes with handed her over; that’s what they promised to do. ‘Families shall not transgress within themselves and hide the transgression’; those were his words. My wife has got his letter—the copy we signed;—any ‘private transgression,’ or ‘contagious disease.’ We read, last night, what the parson was quoting from Thessalonians.—Guess there’s no getting around it. It’s worse than he dared to give us—the whole of it. They want to live free. Now, see how they like it.”

“They! If it *was* ‘they’; but it’s her and Jimmy. That’s lunacy.”

“The parson did his best to reach the fellow. What could he do more? Throw a woman overboard, and the man who loves her will jump first. Trouble was with the parson, he expected a man. But, squirm as we like, here we are and we need him. As far as the parson goes, don’t you worry! He’ll pay his share; anyhow you put it, there’s his son. The Lord can foreclose on him.”

“Yes; but how about us? We have n’t put up any bond. Where do we stand?”

“Ship’s discipline; our grandfathers used to maroon men—land ’em and sail away.”

“They did n’t maroon women! We ’re wandering from the point. Every mile we go they are going a mile the other way; that makes two; — I say something ought to be done. We ’re not children; we can’t put this off on Mr. Yardley. He ’s a good man, but he ’s carried this too far.”

“Do you hear many saying so?” the first speaker asked uneasily.

“I say so myself, and I ’m going to stir around for votes. There ought to be a protest signed by every man of us,” said Kiersted.

“How about the women? My wife says leave the minister alone; the women are all for the martyr side; they like strong doings.”

“I ’d like to horsewhip Alvin Hannington. He brought the girl. She ’s his own blood kin. He never ought to have given her up. The case would n’t spread. It would n’t have hurt any one of us to take her along. This looking ahead to who your children ’s going to marry before they ’re born is stretching it pretty far, I think. Mr. Yardley was an only child; and then he was a minister with money in the bank; and then he was a widower, sixteen years, with an only son. What chance has he ever had to learn about life! I don’t say he is n’t all right on principle but the man lacks common sense.”

“How are you going to tackle him?”

“Work it up to-night quietly, and have a big talk with him to-morrow morning before we start. I ’ll bet anything he ’s pretty sick over it himself.”

That night was Bradburn’s moment if he had been cool enough to seize it. But he did not even suspect it was there. He had travelled with these men all summer,

thought he knew them, and called them "sheep." With all his cleverness he missed the very point of the situation: he believed that his only course was to ignore them as allies, make the trump himself and play his hand alone; the others he supposed had all "passed."

Moreover he was frightfully unnerved, sleepless, and shaken by the conflict between his two live cravings: which to satisfy, which to bind over. When the choice had been forced upon him he said, money first; love affairs must wait. The girl was his; but the gold was in the ground, and his time contracts were running out. Now it looked not so certain that Stella was his. Jealousy added its goad to the sting of her repulse. He dashed down his truckster's scales; the money rolled away. All he could see was a golden head, in close proximity to Jimmy's, while that good-looking youth packed their stuff for the mutual journey. They looked like the typical young pair starting forth on that time-honored pilgrimage in which two are a company and three a crowd. It was a memory provocative of maddening suggestions.

In the Hanningtons' quarter of the camp, also, there was hard thinking and little sleep. Alvin, after all his mighty talk of the day before, groaned like a sinner in his blankets; and his wife, while she soothed him, battled with a secret shame of her own, — a giving way in spite of herself to the sense of rest, utter physical, mental, moral, immoral rest in being free from the load of Stella's daily presence; "just ourselves" once more. "What must be coming to me," she thought, "for such a spiritual breakdown?"

Barbie, like any young person, supposed herself to be alone with the ravaging testimonies of the night. A

fastidious moral training rejects such a meretricious performance as her late confession to Jimmy ; that was no penance worthy of the name. There might even be the subtlest of dangers in contact with a point of view so overbalanced in one's favor, — so ingeniously clever at defending one against one's self. She and her conscience remained on the same dark terms as before. Her state, indeed, was worse : she, who had been crowned by happiness and enriched by hope, — could she not put a little spontaneity into her labored compassion for Stella? Alas, she could do many things for Stella of set purpose, but she could not quicken that dead plant, affection ; having forced the first feeble shoots too hard and unavailingly, all life seemed now to have gone out of the root.

She tried to feel towards her as if she were the Scriptural Magdalen, Christ's immortal penitent, crouched for all the ages at humanity's feet. Instead, she saw a painter's invention — spurious, to Barbie's Puritan eyes. The print had been shown her once in a Boston bookstore : "Magdalene at the entrance of her cavern," it was called. That plump, blonde female was Stella to the life ! There was an actual physical resemblance. The smooth flat brows and full eyelids, the loops of fair hair pushed against the oval cheek by that lovely hand supporting the mock studious head. What was the connection between those well-fed charms, those dazzling arms and shoulders and bare breasts, and the life a penitent leads in the desert of remorse? No ; that comfortable feline creature was no Magdalen of the cross. She was a fictitious student of higher things, a burden on the earth, a disintegrating influence in any normal family or society that should take her in.

Why should her sisters love her? Her desire is not towards them. It is little brother man she plays with. The rules of the game are fixed — God sitting in the judge's chair. This was how Barbie felt, when she was honest with herself, towards the victim of religious law.

CHAPTER XXIII

A SCOFFER'S SERMON

IT was early on the morning of the second day; — these were days, every circumstance of which was to fix itself in the memory of those who lived them. Bradburn, leading his best horse saddled, a pair of Mexican spurs clashing at his heels, walked up to a group of men who since breakfast had been earnestly conferring with the minister. That it was no ordinary camp caucus their faces bore witness. Mr. Yardley was not, outwardly, at his best: it becomes not gentlemen of his years to shave but once a week, and wear dark flannel shirts with loose collars. Notwithstanding, he dominated the assembly, and those who listened to his cold but penetrating words were not aware of his shirt collar.

Bradburn made no scruple of interrupting them. "You are all out, I see," he opened in his loud, familiar manner. "Can you listen to a lay sermon this morning? I have a few words to say to you before I start; — call it my valedictory."

They turned in surprised silence. Their captain was equipped in every point, horse and man, for an independent journey, with gallant adventures in view his dress betokened. He wore a new suit of white-tanned buckskins, soft enough for an Indian bride. From head to foot he was fringed and tagged and silver-buttoned. His black silk neckerchief and dark blue shirt contrasted elegantly with the pale-hued buckskin; a commoner type

of dandy might have chosen red : Bradburn's visage supplied enough of that ; the blood vessels of his forehead and face were swollen ; his eyes blazed impudent fire.

He pulled from the blanket-roll, strapped behind his saddle, a small crackling bundle done up in oiled silk ; slapping his gloved palm with this, he summoned their attention. The rudeness passed unnoticed. They did not believe him so dashingly at ease as he pretended, and when Bradburn was at the pains to pretend, they knew him well enough by this time to be on guard.

“I am headed the other way this morning, gentlemen ; carrying out Parson Yardley's programme, you see. Better late than never. But I want to call your attention to one fact : I am forced out of this sanctimonious concern. There has been friction right along from the first between Mr. Yardley and myself. He wants to father my conduct as he does yours. That can't be. If he'd known anything about men, he would n't have been surprised to find I drink when I feel like it, and flip a card, and so on.— There are other things I don't do. I used to read the Bible — as a book. There are funny things in it. You take it seriously when St. Paul says, has n't a Christian got the right 'to lead about a wife who is a believer.' Those are the words, I think. That's exactly what you do. You lead about a wife, who is 'a believer' — fortunate for you. You put her in a log hut — God knows where ! You expect her to bear you a child every two years and nurse it, and cook your meals and wash your clothes and scrub the floor you pray on ; she mends and makes, and saves, and teaches filthy Indians, and entertains all the travelling brothers and sisters, and adopts their orphans and keeps cheerful and faithful to the end. I have seen

whereof I speak. I have eaten at Dr. Whitman's table and listened to his wife sing hymns and wondered where in God's name the woman got her strength."

"— From God," said the minister's voice.

"Thanks, sir," Bradburn retorted. "You probably know, but that is faith. Faith is like red hair; it goes with some temperaments, but every woman is n't born with that kind. You had a young lady with you that I am deeply attached to. Miss Mutrie could not live the life you expect your lawful wives to live. I would n't myself inflict such a life on a dog. She chose me, knowing I was no church member. I did n't tell her I was married when we first met. The truth, if you call it so, would have deceived her then; it would have parted us, and I wanted her. I knew she was mine. Nor am I married—in any sense to exclude me from love or teaching her to love. My only object in concealing my relations with her was to keep the peace amongst us as men while we were partners; till the contract was fulfilled on both sides. As I am not pledged to live according to Mr. Yardley's ideas, am not a member of his church, nor the young lady either, I don't see where his priestly jurisdiction came in. But it worried him just the same. It's become a habit with him to feel accountable to God for the conduct of his fellow men. He read up the case in the Bible; he got hysterical about such a thing hanging to his skirts. He could n't get at me by name, but he took the name of the young girl, an orphan,— set her up in his spiritual stocks before you all! Our ancestors used to do the same thing literally; I, for one, am not proud of it. He called for the man who belonged there beside her:—he meant me, but he had no evidence to say so. He just advertised for a yellow dog.

I don't answer to that name, nor you did n't. It was, so far, on him. He could n't cast out the girl alone: even church members would have turned. I gave you that much credit. So I went away. Then the parson's son — he has a taste for church theatricals too; — he saw a chance to distinguish himself in the hero and martyr line. He volunteered just in time to save the whole show from being a fizzle."

Bradburn ground his thumb-nail against his teeth and continued, gripping the thumb inside his fist.

"Casting young women to the beasts for young men to rescue them is a fine spectacle, gentlemen, a new form of excitement to crop out on a pious jaunt like this. Why, any of my forbidden little pastimes would be a child's tea-party to it! But it gets to be exhausting. I don't know how you feel, but I've had about as much as my system can stand. I leave you here," — he tossed his packet on the ground — "all the maps I have; my maps are in my head. Yardley thinks he's road-wise: I hope he'll take you safe through. I expect to overhaul him about to-morrow dark; I will relieve him of his job and he can have mine. My contract calls for safe conduct of this party through to the Willamette Valley; I need n't mention what I lose myself by turning back — but Mr. Yardley will feel safer without me. I expect he'd be afraid of the wrath of God in those mountains, with such as I am along. If I'm not overtaken in my sins, you will see me sometime next spring, and I don't abate one damned dollar of my price to you, for you've broken your own contract. So I'm off, — good-bye. I bear you no ill-will as men; it is the shape of your convictions that cramps me. The Lord will take care of his own and I hope you will continue to be without sin among you."

They had made camp for the night at the entrance to Grande Ronde Valley. The country behind them was rugged; little hills interlapping shut off the distance. Bradburn rode his spare horse, the pacer, seldom used since Stella had graced the saddle on its back. The beast was full of life; he sprang away under the rider: five minutes after his last words were said, their captain was gone out of sight. And then the storm broke upon the head of the preacher.—The line of argument has been sketched already.

Mr. Yardley appeared to listen to each person in turn who interrupted the spokesman. In reality he heard only the words of Bradburn's speech. It left him as a Christian leader no choice. Across the open circle of the great valley a range of foothills climbed; warm oak woods covering their slopes on the sheltered side, golden aspens in the gulches, firs thick and tall — firs and pines stunted, straggling up towards timber-line; gulfs of shadow marking separate planes; then the lonely peaks, — pure flat color against the paler sky, and on their tops a glittering menace of snow.

“There is the last divide, my friends,” said the minister; “there is our holy mountain. As many as are faithful will march on with me. Those who would feel safer with Captain Bradburn will go and take their families, part their stuff from ours, and join him, but they need not return to me. Don't confuse yourselves with the idea that in suing Bradburn to come back you would help Stella Mutrie. While she is under his protection she cannot be a member of my flock. I will not receive her back if she comes with him. You of course may impeach my authority; you have the numbers, but on *my* responsibility those two will not rejoin this company. Take your choice: I go forward, if I have to go alone. But I shall wait here a due time first

for James Yardley, — not as my son ; as I would wait for any one of you, and no longer.”

Having delivered this ultimatum, the preacher turned his back on paltering humanity and faced the mountain of endeavor. In a few moments Samuel Kiersted, spokesman and leader of the insurgents, a big-boned, red-fleshed man, came and put out the hand of reconciliation. Mr. Yardley gave his in silence.

“ Well ? ” he enquired.

“ All right, Mr. Yardley. It’s all right. We’ll stick it out with you. But see here : have you any objection to letting some of us go back for Jimmy and Stella — just themselves ? ”

“ Sam, why do you come here and tempt an old man in his hour of trial ? ”

“ Oh, go on, Mr. Yardley ! We’ll be responsible. ”

“ You had better see what the wives say first. ”

“ Does that mean you are willing ? ”

“ I wash my hands of it. ”

Alas ; the men who were thought fittest to go back were husbands, and the wives said, “ No. ”

As day after day dragged by, their own peril more definitely over-shadowed them. They were making as it was a close calculation on the arrival of the first big snow. When a week had passed, it was agreed (Mr. Yardley being spared a voice in the matter) that a search party should go back, and volunteers were called for. Deacon Hannington, admonished by age and obvious unfitness, did not press his claim of kinship before the younger men. Sam Kiersted was chosen leader as the best man for the job. Lottie, his wife, thought him the best man for her job and tried to keep him on it, but this time the women were not consulted.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DIVIDE

JIMMY began very soon to see where his chief difficulty would lie. It was near the middle of September and they were four hundred miles from Fort Hall: a certain rate of progress they must make each day or be caught in the snow. Stella groaned under his exactions. She could stand, she told him, just about so much! He had seen her day by day stand more, under the form of stimulus that appealed to her. "If I save her life, I shall have to treat her like a child." Jimmy had never handled children, but thought he knew how it should be done, having observed the mistakes of parents.

He went over with her, again and again, the unalterable facts which an intelligence of six years might have retained. Stella had now no object in going one way more than another; her "spur in the head" was gone; Jimmy fell back on the "spur in the heel," which brought the situation down to a level humiliating to both.

"Keep up! keep up!" would come the reiterated command, Jimmy leading, a long way ahead, Stella looking her despair; or he would ride back and rouse her beast himself, and when a rough-and-tumble gait followed, she scolded her rude knight and asked why not tie her hands behind her back at once and lead her as his captive!

The trail for much of the way led through a broken country of hills and box-canyons, along precipices where a mis-step were fatal. In such places they could not travel

off a walk ; time should be made up on every fair stretch between. Stella, misunderstanding Jimmy's silence, treated it as punitive and tried on him little humble politic arts of solicitation which caused him to writhe. He had never spent two consecutive hours before alone in her company. She affected him as wholly deficient in feeling suited to her case — forgetting she was hardly likely to see it as he saw it.

They lagged along in this fashion, losing a little each day, and failed the second evening to make their proper camping-spot. Night overtook them on the mountain between Burnt and Powder rivers, an exposed spot in a strong cold wind. He tied the horses to trees and left them whinnying for supper. There was no grass and no water nearer than a canyon half a mile farther on, down a descent dangerous to riders after dark. They were unhappy without their coffee, but Jimmy refused to go for water and leave his camp-mate alone. He was both afraid to do so and disposed to let her taste the consequence of what he called her feebleness. She complained of cold ; he objected to more fire, since what they had was a beacon conspicuous to the country round ; but he wrapped her scornfully in all the blankets and gave her hot Scotch made with what little water was left in the canteen, content to go without as punishment for being hard with her on purpose. She settled herself in a nook out of the wind and he watched her doze off. Passionate regrets and comparisons, as useless as they were cruel, occupied his mind and did not tend to quiet his nerves for guard duty, but there was no danger of his sleeping.

Some moments later Stella sprang up, startled by a stone plunging down the bank above her that struck the

log she leaned against. Straining upward, she saw Jimmy pause as he was stealing past.

"Where are you going?"

He made a gesture for silence, and slipped by.

She heard him moving about at intervals. Before long he came back and sat down, reflecting.

"What did you think you heard?"

"I thought I'd take a look around, that's all."

"Jimmy, you heard something."

"I imagined I heard a strange horse's step. It must have been one of our own."

"Are they all right? Did you look?"

"Yes, but they will be restless. It's a poor place for them. You need not be frightened if you hear steps stirring about to-night."

"I wish you had n't gone. The negroes say it's a bad sign to stub your foot against a stone or anything when you start out."

"It's a sign of clumsiness, which is a —" He checked himself, and they both listened.

"Was that one of our horses whinnying?"

"Very likely," said Jimmy.

"It sounded too far off, to me."

"The wind is the other way."

Stella still seemed nervous. She began fumbling in her dress. "I want to show you something, Jimmy, — a friend gave me, — Captain Bradburn."

At the name Jimmy started. They looked at each other straight for an instant.

She opened the box and showed him Bradburn's gift; the four white pills nearly covered the bottom of the small receptacle.

"This is all he could do for me; — for me!"

Her eyes and Jimmy's met again. She showed her beautiful white teeth in the firelight, but her lips were pale.

"Do you know what they are for? They are just wax, filled with some poison, — quick, I hope. He recommends me to take them without delay, if the Indians capture us, you know. Don't you want half, Jimmy? There are four."

"Did Captain Bradburn give you those himself?"

"Yes, in a letter with all the directions. If we are followed and can't get away, I am to put one, or two, in my mouth — not to bite them unless I am actually in the Indians' hands. He told me once some of the things they do; he has a way of putting it right before you. He said don't be in a hurry, but don't delay. You see how much safer this is than your pistol, for instance, supposing I could make you promise to shoot me. You'd wait too long. I would n't trust you, Jimmy. He knows what to do, you see. He has provided for everything."

"Stella," said Jimmy, after awhile, "will you let me ask you one question? I have a reason or I would n't — That man owes you enough! Do you want, now, — do you ever intend to take — anything that he owes you?"

"Nothing but this."

"That's all I wanted to know," said Jimmy.

He looked long into the darkness beyond the glow of their sinking fire. His cheek-bones appeared to have grown more prominent in the last few days. Stella took note of his attractions — not for the first time; the eloquent shadows marking his eye-sockets, the modelling of his nostrils, and the strongly revealed curves of his upper lip.

"Jimmy," she remarked casually, but with her enticing smile, which was probably as much beyond her control

as the color of her hair, "I did n't know you had such a handsome mouth. Firelight is very becoming to you."

"I did n't know, Stella, that you were possessed to be such an utter fool," Jimmy retorted mercilessly.

"Jimmy Yardley! How dare you speak to me like that?"

"How dare you speak to me like *that*! My remark to you was quite as fitting as yours to me, under the circumstances."

"Thank you!" said Stella; her lip quivered. "You don't want me to forget my 'circumstances'—not for one minute, do you?"

"I want you to be still if you can."

"What are you listening for?"

"I don't know till I hear."

A short silence followed. "I will do whatever you ask me, if you won't be so rude to me, when I am so tired and—"

"I ask you just now to be quiet; is that rude? I can't see for the bushes and rocks—I must use my ears!"

"Is it Indians?" she whispered. There was no answer. She crept nearer, and softly touched him.

"No: Indian ponies are not shod. But there is some one, I think, camping not far from us. Now, you know all I know."

The silence this time lasted long enough for reflection on his side to do its work. "Stella, I beg your pardon for being so rough with you. I can't explain why I spoke so. Will you forgive it?"

"Oh, I forgive it: I'm getting used to some things I thought I never could bear. I never did quarrel much with people anyway."

"I wish you'd let me take that box and keep it for you?"

"What, my dear little pillikins? Not for the world! I never felt so safe in all my life. You know death is one thing—but to suffer! I shall suffer enough before we get through!"

"I'm in earnest, Stella. You ought not to carry that stuff about with you. No decent man would put those things in your hands!"

"Unless he knew how much I need them! He trusted me with my own life—why can't you?"

"I would n't trust any one so unhappy as you are with anything like that, day after day. Come, hand over that box."

"No; I'll divide: if I need them, you will, too, but you can't have them all. That's one thing I will fight for. You can't have them unless you take them by force."

Jimmy accepted the challenge in silence, meditating cunning instead of force. If he allowed her to keep her medicine he would practically be aiding Bradburn's cynical purpose when he tempted her with this cheap egress. Jimmy unhesitatingly believed this of Bradburn, who in his thoughts, that same moment, was doing Jimmy a fouler injustice.

"Are n't you almost ready to turn in, Stella? I want to cover up this fire."

Stella stowed her box in a pocket of the coat she now took off and folded for a pillow. Jimmy observed her, before going out for a final look around while she made her preparations for bed, camp fashion.

When he came back later, he discovered she had left him all his own blankets which were thicker than hers.

He laid an extra pair over her and she thanked him drowsily. Even that little act made him gentler to her in his thoughts, as to a child he had put to sleep. Then he sat apart and waited. It was his conclusion, judging by those sounds, that their camp was being watched by one man—a white man—and would be visited in the morning. He had no difficulty in guessing the man's name, or the nature of his suspicions when he chose this manner of approach. His own part in the collision to come had been helped somewhat by Stella's answer to that straight question. In defending his trust he would have the satisfaction of upholding a finer choice in her than he had believed this poor little daughter of Eve to be capable of. What she might do, in the event of a surprise leading to capture by the man she professed now to abhor, he had no conception;—therefore he felt bound to deprive her of the means to any desperate act, which showed his unacquaintance with women of her type when they boast of their eagerness to die.

He went about his task with innocent composure. For a moment he stood looking at the sleeper, studying her attitude with reference to his intended theft; it was discouraging. She had crowded the folded jacket beneath her head, one hand saving her cheek from its harsh texture. The smallest tug, exploring for pockets, would start her up like a bird. Jimmy had robbed birds' nests, but birds when they scream are not articulate. It seemed a clumsy way of handling a delicate matter and he felt the insufficiency of his excuse.

Stella, he decided abruptly, must take her own risks: his vigilance stopped at meddling with her person.

As he turned away, the round black eyes of Bradburn

looked into his over the muzzle of a revolver which had nearly touched his chin. The pair fell apart, smiling at each other curiously.

"It's you, is it? I thought so," Jimmy remarked in a pause with no amenities to fill it; adding, "Why did n't you come around and show us who you were?"

"I could see you quite well where I was," Bradburn sneered. "Why do you camp in such fool places? And why do you sleep by your fire where anybody can spot you? You are less of a mountain man than I thought."

"You have taken some trouble to give me your opinion; is that what you came for?"

"Meet me to-morrow at daybreak, by that big rock—the one with a clump of junipers: I'll tell you my business then. Good-night; and see here. You are a parson's son; you know what 'looking on a woman' the way I saw you just now may do to you? Take care your eyes don't send you tripping down the back stairs"—Bradburn reversed his thumb and smiled. "You've probably heard of the place!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE BETTER MAN

IT was, as Stephenson says, "a wonderful great night of stars." The stillness and the purity of frost chilled the air; towards morning the sky clouded over and a creeping wind arose. Slowly, delicately the autumn dawn came on, preparing for the sun. On the distant ranges there had been heavy snow. Jimmy limped from his shelter and built a small furtive fire for warmth. It was too early to cook breakfast; Stella slept on undisturbed. In the night — his lodging being paved with rocks — a small compass he was accustomed to carry in a side pocket annoyed him; he changed it to the left breast-pocket of his coat. This circumstance should have been mentioned in its proper place, for it belongs in that train of eventualities which in Jimmy's philosophy were nothing accounted save as accidents, while the Rev. Mr. Yardley saw in them proofs, not always understood but unimpeachable, of the direct interposition of Providence which disdains not the smallest means to its ends — all fixed beforehand for purposes wrapped in mystery. Jimmy could be very sarcastic about his father's survivals of a belief which in the main he condescended to share — with reservations. There would always be more and more reservations on such a sliding scale of conviction, the minister argued, and where would you stop?

As he stepped forth, facing the burst of distance seen from the divide, he took a fresh breath of amaze. For

uncounted centuries all this astonishing beauty had been waiting here for the first white man to behold. Savages had known it and hunted each other off that prehistoric stage. All these covert paths of loveliness had been paths of death tracked by predatory feet — “the wolf that follows, the fawn that flies.” This stillness was an ambush, and he, crunching through the pure frost, spoiling shapes of wonder at every step, was walking in these invisible footprints, bound upon the ancient trade.

Bradburn was already there, by the rock, expecting him. He said “Good morning,” and spoke of the cold; his manner was flat and perfunctory, and held the usual touch of condescension towards any boy of Jimmy’s age, — he at forty being manhood in its flower.

“I left your party at the eastern entrance to Grande Ronde Valley, just after you clear the canyon wall. You follow the river right down. They will camp there till you join them.”

As Jimmy remained silent, Bradburn urged the suggestion upon him without concealing his own impatience.

“You’d better put your stuff together now and start on, Yardley; you don’t want to keep them waiting long, you know, this time of year.”

“Why should you think they expect me?”

“Because I tell you they do! They are waiting for you. I told them yesterday morning I was going back to overtake you and relieve you of your job.”

“But you can’t relieve me of my job, Captain Bradburn.”

“Can’t I? Well I can make a devil of a shy at it!”

“I shall do my best to prevent you, of course, if necessary.”

"Young man, don't try any of that bluff on me! I woke up cool this morning; I don't want to lose my temper. How far do you propose to carry your interference with my plans?"

"I don't know why you call it my interference. You gave up this 'job' when you went on with the company. Now you come back to interfere with my plans. You are making the bluff, not I."

"That is how you see it. If you ask the person most concerned, I think you'll find it looks a little different to her. Suppose we let her decide?"

"I did ask her," said Jimmy, "for my own satisfaction, but she can't decide either."

"What did she answer?"

"Her answer was to me. — This is all beside the mark. You know that she and I are not free agents on this trip. Her friends have accepted my escort for her and given us what help they can; no change can be made in the programme now except by my father's orders."

They stood less than five feet apart and their voices had not risen above a low conversational pitch.

"Don't be nonsensical, Yardley. What is this to you? For what I said last night, that's nothing! I was mad, with good reason. I don't distrust you more than common. Now get back to your own crowd and put them out of their predicament. You can take it on my word, — and I've no reason to lie about it, — they are expecting you! In about three days at the latest."

"Then they should have sent a special word to that effect. Have you anything from my father to show that I am under your orders?"

"Not a d—d thing! I am not on your father's clerical

staff. You seem to be obsessed all around. Do you think the Rev. Yardley is the Lord in his holy temple?"

"I think" — Jimmy lowered his voice, shivers ran down his spine — "that you had better be careful how you speak of my father when you talk to me."

"By —! You keep up this row much longer and I shall begin to think you have something of your own at stake."

"I have."

"Out with it, then! Don't be such a — — hypocrite. What do I care for your high moral airs! If you want to fight me for the girl, I can see some sense in that!"

"You can see more sense in it than I can," said Jimmy.

He wondered if ever he should be able to share, with any one capable of understanding it, the goblin humor of this situation.

"If you have been talking me over with Miss Mutrie, you probably know something of my connection with this affair. What business have you to start up, against your father's authority, and say 'Adam' and 'Eve' shall not go forth together? I am asking you the question from your father's standpoint."

"If Adam had gone with Eve when he was called, I should not be here myself."

"Adam had other things, at the time, to think of."

"So had I," said Jimmy gloomily.

"Then you can go now and attend to those things. I'll play out your hand. In other words, pack your stuff and take the road you came — or, take the consequences."

"Do you mean that you intend to put me out of my own camp by force, if I don't get out at your orders?"

"You have it exactly — if that's what you mean!

We'll settle it here and now, as much like gentlemen as we can. If I were a horse thief, I could have picked you off last night and saved all this bother."

"Then you are the challenger. It's not my quarrel if I have to resist an impossible demand."

"We won't split hairs on it. I challenge you, then; that gives you the choice of weapons."

"We have our weapons, I think." Jimmy set down his rifle against the rock and stood armed as Bradburn was with a revolver and its mate, the invariable hunting-knife.

Bradburn fortified himself with a quatum of tobacco, remarking to Jimmy as he pocketed the plug—"You don't use it, I believe? God's best gift to man!—How shall we conduct this affair? There are several ways, all good form."

"It's an accomplishment you are better skilled in, probably, than I am. Fix it as you like."

"Twenty paces, then. And we fire together at the word. That is technically self-defence if we were hauled up on it."

"It would leave her in bad shape, would n't it, if we both should drop?"

"Not likely—but there's something in it. How will you have it, then?"

"Toss up for turns?"

"That will settle you! Coin luck is always on my side. Will you be your own executioner?"

Bradburn offered a copper cent to Jimmy, who shook his head with a writhen smile. "Your hands, I think, are steadier than mine."

The coin lay poised on Bradburn's thumb-nail. "If you say 'heads,' or if you say 'tails,' that thing is bound to

fall my way! Now, let's quit this nonsense and go about our business: I don't want to mess with a boy like you."

A faint color came into Jimmy's ashen face.

"Thank you, Captain. I would spare your feelings if I could, but this appears to be my business, just now."

"Then, farewell, Pilgrim father!" the mockery was not coarsely meant; there was tribute in it to a quality that Bradburn considered preposterous, yet did not scorn. "Heads or tails?" The coin flew and spatted the ground between them.

"As I warned you!" He pointed to where it lay: Jimmy had lost.

"We need n't shake hands, I suppose," said the captain. "That's a gallery play. Go back about ten paces. Halt! I shall count three."

CHAPTER XXVI

ENLIGHTENMENT ON BOTH SIDES

THE first shot awakened Stella from a dream in which for an infinitesimal space it mingled in a disturbing manner. At the second shot she sat up, wide awake; her calming thought was, "Jimmy has gone pot-hunting before sunrise"; she took it for a sign there were no intruders near camp. The fire burning peacefully seemed another assurance. She rose, straightened her dress, rolled up her blankets wearily and sat down on them to unbraid her hair; she had not done so since they left Lone Tree Camp. Now she loosened its whole burnished mass, and brushed it tenderly. She loved her hair. It rose in a cloud of shining filaments following each stroke of the brush, enveloping her as if it loved her, too, and offered its glory to console her in her abasement: "queen" — of hunger and thirst — but queen of beauty still. All those speeches in which he had clothed his pursuit of her pointed now to its selfishness, naked in the sequel; naked but unashamed.

She lingered, tired as she always was now in the mornings and thinking, perhaps, poor fool, "Jimmy has never seen my hair down!" Aunt Silence was so precise about camp toilets and Barbie, of course, — a perfect old maid!

But Jimmy did not come; had he lost his game, or was he stopping to pluck it in the woods? She fed the fire sullenly, feeling neglected and cross.

If she had but some way of making Jimmy feel her

power once more! — Once she held the hearts of men in fee. It was bitter to be hunted about the world like this at the behest of one dreadful old man.

Jimmy came at last, empty-handed. Without speaking or looking at her, he began to prepare a bed of coals for his frying-pan.

Suddenly he sat back and glowered at the fire, still silent; his shoulders contracted with a sharp shiver. She saw, without noticing particularly, that his color was bad.

“Did n’t you get any game?” she asked. “You shot something, did n’t you? — What is it now? Do you wake up in the morning angry with me?”

“Angry with you?”

“Hear him! You won’t look at me; you haven’t so much as said ‘good morning’; you won’t answer when I ask you what you were shooting at — ”

“The thing is dead. Could you ride on as far as the river? We can’t eat here.”

“Can’t eat here! I am as hungry as a bear, this minute! Jimmy, how pale you look — you look green!”

“I am a little sick; I want something hot to drink. The river is n’t far.”

“Look at your coat!” she whispered. “You have been shot! Will you tell me that is n’t a bullet-hole?” She pointed at a small puncture in the cloth of his reefing-jacket over the left breast. He covered it with his hand.

“I was hit; yes. It glanced — struck something in my pocket; otherwise — you see for yourself! that’s the whole of it.”

“Was it — that man who camped here last night?”

“Yes: don’t ask any more questions now, will you?”

“Only one: where is he?”

"He will not follow us. Can't you spare the subject for a while? for both our sakes."

"I just want to ask you — was he a white man? You said last night —"

Jimmy looked at her; instead of shouting as she expected he answered low but fierce: "He was — a white man, and if I were not alive by accident you would be in his hands now. Just give me a moment to think, will you? I am not through yet."

Stella stared at him and murmured meekly, "You do look sick. I'm very sorry — If you'd lie down and get warm while I — Don't try to do that, don't! You need n't cook anything for me: I'll ride to the river."

He thanked her mechanically and packed up the camp-stuff while she finished her own preparations; she was always very slow when obliged to use her hands. Jimmy watched her when he was through. "Don't be frightened," he said, "if you hear another shot. I have to dispose of — his — horse, over there waiting."

"Not shoot it! You would n't shoot a horse! Don't we need another horse?"

"We don't need that horse."

He went away out of sight and presently a pistol-shot was heard, followed by a trampling and a crash in the bushes; — chokeberries and juniper grew thick on the mountain.

"What a waste!" thought Stella; "a good horse; better perhaps than ours." Her own had a beastly gait, as if his feet were buckets. The dead creature's master had come with designs upon them and their property; it was certainly overstrained of Jimmy — inexplicable, truly. There was no keeping up with the notions of that dismal crew.

Their horses scenting grass and water went plunging down the trail. The little river ran low and quiet so late in the year, but a wistful peace was there, and lean, gray trees like hermits brooded in the shadow of the deep hills; only their tops at this hour caught a fringe of light.

Jimmy made coffee and they drank cup after cup greedily in silence. Stella then said what she felt the occasion demanded: "I am very sorry you had that thing to do; it must have been horrid. And you are not used to such things. I know I'm not worth it — any of it — to you?"

The question won from Jimmy no denial. She sighed.

"How mistaken people are about us! Once I used to think myself that you liked me a little, but you don't any more. You rather hate me — though I don't know how I have ever injured you?"

"You are quite wrong, of course; it would be worse than absurd to hate you."

"You mean that I am not worthy of your hate? It's extraordinary how men do change as soon as they get the upper hand of us."

He did not answer: he was in the back-wash of that current of fatalities which had swept him over the brink of an experience that could not leave him the same. It was a terrific plunge. There was nothing casual to him in the killing of a man before breakfast and he did not want any breakfast, but he was far from confusing the visual memory of certain details inseparable from the act itself, with remorse for what he had done. His cause to him held good: his chance had been one in a thousand and he was alive by the chance; yet he had been alone for a long time with that silent thing he had made of Brad-

burn, which he supposed he never should cease to see. A profound desolation, a homesickness of the soul drew him back to lay the case before his father, his boyhood's judge. There was the cooler necessity, when he came to think it out, of ending the predicament those friends were left in; not knowing how long to wait, nor even whether to expect him. Bradburn might not have lied; the situation was one too dangerous to risk, on the chance that he had.

"Jimmy, won't you tell me something? — you don't hesitate to say things. I have been wondering ever since we started what *did* induce you to take this upon you? Barbiethinks you are doing it all for me." — Jimmy began to listen. "She little knows the truth as we know it! — as you grind it into me every hour of the day. You hale me along as if you were both arms of the law. Is it for your father — to hold up his arms? You make a wonderful combination, you two, considering there's no law but your own sweet wills within a thousand miles of us. I have about as much chance, have n't I, as a blind kitten in a bag going to be drowned!"

Potations of strong hot coffee, after a fast and hungry ride, were telling upon Stella's exhausted system; for the moment she was practically intoxicated. The blood flew to her face with the force of her own excited imagery and with expectation of the counter-stroke. It did not come. Jimmy gave her a long, unseeing stare.

"Well, can't you even speak to me? am I thin air? Abuse me — you know I'm used to it; say anything! — Thousands of miles of this awful silence, and you, too!"

"Yes," said Jimmy, rousing, "there's a great deal of truth in what you say, if it would do any good, you know. It's the journey that's such a brute. Now we're come to

a place where I think we can turn around. I shall not 'hale' you on this road any further; we are going back to them. Hold on a moment!" He saw her face redden with surprise and resistance. She threw out her hands, a gesture common with her.

"I'm afraid you'll have to leave this to me altogether. There are too many reasons to tell you now; some of them —" he stopped discouraged. "Well, can't you just let me decide?"

"I can't think what you mean! Is this a child's picnic? Can we go home when we are tired? Please ask yourself why we are here and what you are going to do with me! I'm not exactly a bundle on your back. As for what I said just now; — you get cross sometimes yourself. If it's to spare me — we'd have to go twice as fast that way to overtake them now. I never could do it: you'd kill the horses and kill me."

"Which shall I answer first? You won't go back, and it would kill you if you tried? I will say to the first, there is no choice — if you and I stay together, and I shall not leave you on the road. To the second: I can't tell you how I know, but I do know they are waiting for us now, in Grande Ronde Valley. We must go back — for one thing, to put them out of their uncertainty: they have been told to expect us."

"Well, this is a very strange thing."

"It is — much stranger than I can possibly explain to you."

"Are you 'in league with powers of the air,' that you can tell what they are doing in Grande Ronde Valley and we here? — or, did you plan all this before we started?"

Stella's mind was of such an order that she could credit

the theory of Jimmy, in collusion with the other men of the party, — leaving out her simple-minded uncle, and Bradburn, a bird of a different feather not likely to make one in their counsels, — planning a farcical journey to satisfy the man of God, and give time for remorse and reflection and rebellion to do their work. In a flash she pictured herself the central figure, the wronged heroine of this drama; but in another flash the dream faded in conflict with certain details of hopeless reality. She had abandoned the wild dream even before Jimmy could deprive her of it, wondering always at the complexion of her thoughts.

“Well, then,” she said, “I must tell you plainly I can’t believe it because it’s impossible. It really scares me to hear you talk so! You must have worked yourself up into a state of mind; people do sometimes, they say, crossing high mountains. It is one of those hallucinations.”

Jimmy — of the shattered wits — smiled at her. It was enough; they came to close quarters at once.

“You must have got word through that man, then, who followed us? You have never told me —”

“— And you had better not ask,” he cut her off.

She warped back to her first and strongest argument: “They may be waiting for you; they will be anxious enough about you, of course! your father never meant this to fall on his beloved son. For my part, I’d rather die on the road than ever see one of their faces again; — except one. And him I don’t want bad enough to go chasing back after him. No, if he wants me now he can come and get me.”

This was enigmatical; Jimmy did not pause on it; his brain was tired and numb.

"We have n't time to go on with this sort of thing, Stella. It must answer for the present that I tell you there is no other thing for you and me to do. What will come of it, I can't say. Only, there is no human situation that does n't change: however it was when we left them, it will be sure to be different now."

"You may as well say it then! *You* are going back and if I don't go, you wash your hands of me right here on the road. I might have known how it would end. Your nerve has given out; something has upset you; I can see that. You want to go back; you want to explain to Barbie that it is n't for me. I don't believe one word of that story about their waiting. It's a trumped-up excuse."

"You think that I am lying, so as to be a coward, or desert you?" Jimmy breathed deep and smiled at her again. "This is pretty cheap for even our style of argument; and it's so far from the truth that my heart aches for you!"

"Oh, thank you! I don't care about your heart. I know who it aches for. It is no exaggeration to say I'd sooner go on alone than take one step back with you in that direction. Perhaps some kind Blackfoot will pick me up and give me courage to use my *last way out*. He might even be human—if he is n't Christian—and take me where I want to go. I never meant to stay at Fort Hall; I expected to stand out on that when we got there. Fort Bridger is the place where *he* wants me to go. You need not look at me, Jimmy. What I said last night was rage! I was beside myself. Every one of their backs I hated when they rode away—his the worst of all. I would n't see him or let him speak—I tore his letter and wrote back the meanest things I could think of. And how much better am I off! Oh, I have come to my senses. My traitor

is human — he's a man, not a monster of righteousness. He will forgive me, and follow me there — where his letter said I should go. I can't disobey him now. He is with me all the the time. I shut my eyes and see him — Jimmy! What, Jimmy?"

With a cry she turned as he dropped down beside her and took her hands in his. They looked at each other one long, tremendous instant —

"I am sorry, terribly sorry for you. But if you won't trust me without the truth, then here is the truth. There is no one who will meet you at Fort Bridger or anywhere on this road. He is out of the world. I could n't know you cared for him — after what you said. But it would n't have changed anything. I was bound to do by you as I would by my own — very sister. If you had been mine I should have shot him without a word —"

"Then you did!"

"I did: — not without a word, many words. I had to do it."

"That was the man who followed us? And I never knew! You let me talk like that, and he was there all the time! Came after me and you never told me! I don't know why I don't shoot you! He was —"

Her face turned sickly in the play of sunlight through the shifting leaves; as he caught her by the arms, she sank away from him and lay over in the grass. The black alders across the ford leaned towards them in a listening group; there were hushed rustlings up the bank as of late comers to a meeting where proceedings had begun. After the silence of the skeleton plains, all this wooded passage teemed with inanimate life, curious, participant, and in a subtle way communicative.

It had been in Stella's mind, when the darkness came over her, to thank him with telling irony for having slain the father of her child. Blow for blow. Amazing, ignorant boy; she would turn him over to nature and let her teach him a few of her facts that he should remember! He who had called her fool, and whipped her horse under her as if she were a common burden, and visited upon her every speech that jarred, or punished her with his sullenness! This, the revenge of the weak, she had been about to take when her breath came thick and all grew dark. It might have been thought transference, or he may have made the discovery for himself; but the shock came to him precisely as she had planned. This, then, was the meaning of his father's words which he had taken for oratory: "The woman cannot hide her sin." He was dealing with laws he had no knowledge of except that to all civilized manhood a woman in her case is sacred. Even so slight a creature as this "carries destinies in her mantle"; yet on this nightmare of a march he must either coax or drive. He wondered what hold there was left upon her curious mind, and if, knowing it, he could dare to use it? He was working against nature in the dark.

A hard journey is the best of opiates. Stella did not wish to die except when she felt too tired to live; her exhausted system made such heavy demands for itself that the brain went to sleep; memory was cheated. And she was a woman who could weep and always, insanely, she could talk: Jimmy took it out of himself in being forced to listen.

He resumed his leadership, but timidly; their progress was fatally slow, and what his thoughts made him suffer in the long, silent hours of the day's march, imagining

the cost of this delay to those who were waiting for them, we need not attempt to say.

He now insisted on the precaution Bradburn had reminded him of: no good camper in an Indian country sleeps by his fire or on the spot where he makes his first halt; having eaten he creeps away to the shelter of the dark. This simple manœuvre Jimmy had abandoned out of sheer inability to control Stella's actions; hence his exhausting night-watches. But he found her more docile now: half the time she seemed to be in a swoon of weariness or drowned in a feeble sort of despair. He believed the chance was small of their continued immunity from Indian alarms; but he was not posted on the temper of the tribes, and '42 was before the army of invasion that started the next year had alarmed them as to the future of their own possessions; before the chiefs of distant nations would travel for many moons, to gaze astonished on that highway of destiny which they named the "Great Medicine Road of the Whites," and then silently creep away to join their confederates.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CAMP OF WAITING

IN those transmontane valleys, at the dry summer's close, sunsets are generally cloudless. After the sun is gone, the last peaks against him smoulder and recede in veils of pearl; the nearer ranges suddenly grow dark. Pines that pencil the edges of their heights give to those lonely spots a fabulous appearance of crowded spires in dead, Gothic cities of the past. If there should be any cloud, it floats, a chain of purple islets beached with gold, low in the tropic regions of the color sea that sweeps to the zenith's blue, where we watch for the first star. Intense as the radiance is, lighting up faces of gazers like scenic fire, it has a mysterious quality of aloofness which chills the heart. It reminds us of the difference between a living love, with all its human shortcomings, and that love made perfect through the longings of absence or death.

Every one who has known suspense knows the passion of this hour. It was then the minister, with no house to hide in, would go away off and walk by himself up and down, up and down. He had his Bible always, so rich in the language of lamentation, in which to clothe his lonely anguish: he was David in the chamber over the gate; but no one came running of whom he could ask, "Is the young man Absalom well?" But if ever tears brought relief to his burning, sleepless eyes, they came with the whispered,

immortal cry, "Would God I had died for thee, my son, my son!"

It was Barbie's mission, when cooking smells began to spread on the evening air, to call him in to supper. He seldom answered her first call and she would walk at his side in silence. She had full courage to approach him; his grief was hers and this, without words, he partly realized and the comfort of it was very great. If he could have brought himself to speak of Jimmy, he would have told her the boy's secret now, unaware that nature had been before him and disposed already of those high considerations discussed between father and son. What he constantly did crave was some assurance from the girl's own lips, closed in a silence he could but approve, that Jimmy was forgiven even as matters now stood. It had been such a little, boyish wrong, many would say, but not Mr. Yardley,—a gentleman before he was a minister. His son had made a girl understand that he loved her, no matter how; he had put himself in a position to learn the secrets of her heart: with that knowledge between them he had let the matter drop. Scorn was the only answer he deserved, but love is not logical at nineteen. Why, in speaking to his father, were her tones so delicate, fraught with unspoken meanings full of anguished tenderness? He could not question her. She was as unapproachable to him as the evening star. Barbie did not dream what he wanted. Although in his spiritual office the recipient of so many confidences affecting others, his own personal trials were wrapped in complete reserve. No one ventured to talk to the minister about himself.

"Will you come to supper, Mr. Yardley?" Barbie repeated the invitation and urged it with some impatience.

"Will you please to come? Supper is ready, and this is mother's birthday. She's forgotten it herself; we want to be all there to accuse her of it."

The last words penetrated. "Your mother's birthday? Then *I* must have had one yesterday. I believe we are the same age, fifty-nine, lacking one day."

"Mother is fifty-eight, is n't she? She has been telling us for almost a year that she was 'going on' fifty-eight. What a joke if she's been mistaken all the time! Let's go and ask her if she knows how old she is."

Silence met them, rosy with fire heat and redolent of ham.

"Mother, dear, do you know how old you are? Mr. Yardley thinks you are his age, — fifty-nine."

"I should n't like to contradict, but I'm afraid Mr. Yardley's a trifle out of the way: I believe I'm pretty close to fifty-eight. Father, what day of the month is it?"

"Now, mummy, don't try to make yourself out younger than you are. You've been fifty-eight all this whole day, so now you must be 'going on' fifty-nine. You've been cooking your own birthday supper — I never in my life smelled anything so good! Why don't we always have ham for supper?"

"Because this is the very last one," complained the chief of commissary. "I wondered why father insisted on my cutting it!" She was quite peevish with them all, standing and smiling at her; being on a strain in other ways, surprises jarred her nerves. "Really, I can't see what there is to make a fuss over in growing old. We don't deserve much credit for it."

"We make a fuss because you don't grow old," Mr. Hannington gallantly rejoined, without appeasing her. "Does she look a day over forty-five?"

Silence ignored him. "Barbie, just run over to Mrs. Kiersted's with this plate. It's hot, child! wrap a towel around it. That little woman scarcely cooks anything for herself since Sam went. Now, we won't wait for Barbie."

The talk lingered upon ages of persons they knew or might be said to have known in the past so far behind them; how some held their own and some had wasted away like April snow.

"Years have n't much to do with age up to a certain point," said Silence.

"Well, I guess you have n't reached that point," Alvin persisted.

Discussing his own family before company was one of the deacon's little weaknesses; he had often been discouraged in it, — enough to make him feel guilty, but he went on with astonishing hardihood, even dragging in Barbie, who had returned and was listening, amused at her mother's face.

"I was saying — your mother's making up to us for keeping out of the scrape so long. Nearly six years she had me on a string — steady business, too. She was pretty near an old maid before she would take me. And here she looks like a girl still!"

"I'd be sorry for the girl," Mrs. Hannington retorted.

In the next pause Mr. Yardley asked, with his detached manner, out of his own thoughts apparently, —

"Was it one, or two children you lost as infants? I can only remember you with one child."

There is scarcely any age when a question like this cannot make a woman's heart turn over with a mute groan.

"Two — boys," was the answer briefly. "They were

not infants: little Edward was three and a half and Alvy was two."

"And Barbie was born—?"

"The year you took Mr. Whitehead's place. She gave me back what father calls my youth: — pure comfort she was, from the first. We talked some of giving her your name, — Recompense, — it just fitted so, but we did n't know how you would feel about it; and I never liked my own name —" Silence checked herself with a glance at Barbie, whose mirthful eyes were upon her.

"I remember her," said the minister; "a pretty child."

"We thought so."

"Well, she's got bravely over it," said the deacon.

Barbie smiled at her father's customary jocose precaution: she knew his private opinion of her looks. But it was hollow trifling. The old allusions and the old jokes were timid, terrible things. They would have been quieter had they been by themselves. This galvanized flow of spirits was a form of shyness caused by the minister's presence; he was now their daily guest at meals.

Alvin rose and excused himself, saying he'd go and stretch his legs a little before bed, and remarked for the hundredth time that he wished he had a new set of joints for this sitting-down work. Barbie, from where she sat, could follow him with her eyes. He stood still a while facing the gate of the little hills, then turned and beckoned. Her heart flew, but she walked away quietly. Mrs. Hanington saw it all, pretending superstitiously to think there was nothing in it, — specks in the distance that would turn out to be a bunch of antelope. But when Barbie came hurrying back for her father's field-glass, pale and refusing to talk, there was no disguising the start it gave them.

Two or three men pounded past, to get the first news; one calling out to Mr. Yardley: "I would n't come yet, sir. We'll send word if it's them."

The moments lagged. Silence moved about clearing away supper, but gave it up, and waited helplessly.

"I think, if you'll excuse me, Mrs. Hannington, I'll walk down a little way."

"There's Barbie now," said Silence. She put out her hand to him; supporting each other they walked forward trembling.

Barbie had seen them and checked her run to a walk gathering breath to speak.

"It is!" she gasped; "they are coming."

Mr. Yardley uncovered his head. "Is the young man Absalom—?" He had no power over his thoughts. The women waited in silence with their eyes down. Then he took a hand of each and said brokenly, "If this be true, let us thank God, for His infinite mercy."

"Could you count them, Barbie?" Silence whispered.

"Yes, four men — and one woman."

"They can't be our folks!"

"They are; the woman is Stella."

"It can't be!" Mrs. Hannington half groaned.

But she knew by Barbie's face that it was, and in a moment the news became old and familiar to her, and she had begun to readjust herself to the load.

"Is that man Bradburn with them?"

"No, Mr. Yardley."

"Could you see their faces?"

"Yes, sir," faltering; — "Jimmy is there. They are coming very slowly. One of them is a woman —"

"What woman?" Mr. Yardley demanded.

"She seems sick or very tired —" Barbie answered, shirking the name.

"Then it *is* Stella!"

"Yes, mother. She can hardly ride; one of them is leading her horse."

"That will be Jimmy," thought the mother, with a jealous pang.

"Of course she's sick" — she spoke aloud confirming some dread in her own mind; "of course she would be sick!"

"We cannot settle everything beforehand, my friend. There may be surprises for us yet."

"Now he's just begging the question," thought Silence. "All I hope is," she said aloud, "we don't take back any of our thanks because she is with them. If we need mercy, she needs it more."

"You hope more than is reasonable, then," rejoined the minister. "I do not give thanks for this trial sent to us again and I will not pretend to before the Lord, though I trust I can say, Thy will be done." He walked away without looking at them; they could see his thin hands shaking.

"I don't blame him one bit." Barbie spoke first.

"Well he need n't call other folks hypocrites."

"He did n't, mother: how can you say so!"

"Why, I heard him: 'I won't pretend,' he said. What does pretending mean?"

"It does n't matter. We feel just as he does, if we would own it. He's not afraid for himself."

"I suppose I ought to go down there? There ought to be one of us to meet her. All those men —"

"Father's there. You look so badly, mother! I'm sorry I sided with Mr. Yardley."

“ Well, he did hurt me, I must say. Of course I dread her, too, but we can't give way to it. There's got to be some heart in it or it's going to spoil our lives.”

“ There'll be a heart in it — a broken heart: it won't be hers !” Barbie seized her mother and dragged her into a wild embrace. It was not Silence's moment for demonstrativeness ; she took the assault passively.

“ Well ; with all we are to one another — three of us, it does seem as if we might spare a little to that poor thing.”

“ She's not poor ! She has a dreadful power and she'll have it always, because she finds the weak spot in every one of us.”

“ Well, Jimmy is here alive — and strong. Isn't that enough, after what we've been through ? I can take up Stella again and not feel her, now I know it's all right between you two.”

Whether Mrs. Hannington supposed that her God, who was a jealous God, would accept this form of barter in trying out the soul of woman instead of sacrifice for its own sake, who can say ? They believed strange things and took strange liberties with their belief under “ that ancient battle-flag, the Westminster Confession.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WOMEN'S PART

THE women were standing about their cooking-fires waiting and wondering at the strange behavior of the men. Welcomes and suppers grew cold. Lottie Kiersted was in tears because Sam stayed down there at the halting-place with the other men and did not come and kiss her and the baby.

"That little fellow belongs in bed," Aunt Silence observed impartially. "I would n't keep him up a minute longer for any one. A watched pot never boils: they won't come any sooner for our worrying. I suppose they are explaining to Mr. Yardley about Stella. I don't, for the life of me, see what he can do but take her back! There's a limit to all things."

"They are coming!" said Barbie, releasing a long breath; but it was only her father and Stella. No one moved from that ominous group which the women were watching. They had seen the travellers alight and turn loose their horses. The greetings seemed quiet and timid, on Stella's account probably. Sam Kiersted certainly would have been heard from on such an occasion, under other circumstances.

Mr. Hannington came on supporting Stella at a slow walk; behind them the tired beasts straggled, girths and packs unloosed, a sign alone that signified some serious preoccupation in their riders. Mrs. Hannington hurried forward, and at sight of Stella her heart swelled against the minister. Could he be human and hold to consistency now!

The meeting of these three women was one of those impossible situations which admit of no preparation and defy description. The neighbors looked on a moment and drew away, exchanging glances upon Stella's appearance. There was a deep flush of pain on her cheek-bones; her eyes refused to meet other eyes; the dust was thick on her golden hair welded into a mass by heat and neglect on the journey; her little luxurious hands were dirty and darkly tanned like a lost child's. Aunt Silence gazed at her, humbly: we are all humbled by the sight of suffering which is beyond our help. Barbie's heart beat fast. She and her mother between them helped the sick girl under cover and put her to bed, groaning.

"Go and call your father," Mrs. Hannington ordered sternly, in a hoarse, hurried whisper.

Alvin had been looking after the horses, tagged by two or three women asking impossible questions. They were interested in Barbie's errand, but made no comments, having regard for her maiden ignorance.

Father and daughter walked back together, out of step, over the uneven ground. He put his arm through hers awkwardly, an unaccustomed demonstration which alarmed Barbie, who saw no occasion for it.

"Jimmy?" she asked; — "he's there?" (She knew he was, having counted him and picked him out with the glass, but Jimmy was at the bottom of all her fears.)

"Yes; he's pretty busy now."

"Busy!"

"Yes, giving in his report, so to say."

Barbie considered the word: her father did not use important terms unless his mind was beclouded.

"Oh, he's all right. Looks thin, but he would, of course."

"Father, what is it? What keeps them down there so long? What's Jimmy done?" she brought it out at last. It was Jimmy they were examining, not Stella, something told her.

"It's just a case that's a little hard to put in words and be fair to all sides of it. I don't believe you'd better know about it," said this poor intriguer.

"Why, I've got to know if it's anything about Jimmy."

Mr. Hannington cleared his throat.

"Did they meet?"

"Who 'meet'?"

"Did Captain Bradburn overtake them?"

"Yes. They spent the night on a hill together somewhere —"

"All three?"

"All three; and they settled it there which one Stella was to go on with."

"One of them did not leave that hill! — And Jimmy is here." Barbie's voice sank to match the stillness around them.

— "What's that?" her father interrupted. The question answered itself; he heard a woman groaning in their tent.

"Is Jimmy on his defence for — anything that happened to that man? — I want to know!"

"Well, Barbie, we're law-abiding folks: we don't do such things. There's a great deal back of it, and Jimmy will get a fair hearing. But we can't take it as a matter of course: it might be held as a precedent."

"Father, you go down there and say what you think about this, not what you think you ought to think."

"I'm going — but your mother wants me, did n't you say?"

The sounds from the tent grew plainer.

"Oh, of course! Stella first! She is the scourge of this company. This is what she's made Jimmy do! She could n't hurt him any other way."

"Don't you say it, daughter; don't you say it. Let some one say it who has n't suffered by her."

"Who is there among us who has n't suffered by her or won't suffer before it's through with?"

"Hush, child. Let the minister say those things."

"Has n't he suffered?"

Barbie took her mother's place and mortified her spirit by doing menial services which the sick require; she washed the fair one's feet, handled her soiled linen, untangled her hateful hair. Outside, husband and wife were holding another of those shameful colloquies over Mary's child.

"She's been over-doing right along; no woman could stand it except a squaw. Jimmy could n't help it, though of course she blames him. I can't say but it would be better to have it all over with: she's not fit to be a mother."

"You could n't prevent it now, could you, even with a doctor?"

"No, no. Mr. Yardley need n't be worried about this poor little seed of iniquity. But he's got to let up on her for a while. She must be kept stone-still and not worried —"

"Why, what you talking about, mother? What's Mr. Yardley done?"

"What are *you* talking about, all of you down there?"

"Well, not about Stella."

“What, then?”

He drew her off and while she listened in turbid anxiety, he disclosed the main facts, as far as he knew them, down to this moment — with Jimmy on trial for Bradburn’s death.

“Well; I’m glad I’m not a man! I suppose you’ve got to find some name to call it by.”

“Why, yes,” said Alvin. “That’s the difference between principles and no principles, — what name you call things by.”

“Well; when you come to our affairs, if Mr. Yardley says anything about Stella, you tell him, father, that’s the women’s business. If he’s planning to start on to-morrow, you just say to him he will leave our family behind. That girl’s not going to be moved, not till she’s had a few days’ rest, however you fix it.”

“Well, of all things in this world!” said the “forgotten man,” “if this is n’t the cap-sheaf! I never did see the beat. There must be something very strange going to come of this move, the way we are handled right along.”

“We’d be foolish to judge the end by the beginning,” argued his wife. “We’ve seen many a fair day start out with a cloudy morning.”

But it was only through the family habit of discussion that she rebuked her husband’s despair. She thought of the lone wagon they met on the Kansas plains, with its hood-face turned the other way.

“Ah, but that was their own child! What was Oregon to them?” When a great sacrifice is demanded, it makes all the difference on whose account it is, and the cost weighs in proportion to other things. Here was her husband, a middle-aged man in debt, homeless between east

and west, with his life to begin all over again; and here was their daughter whose future would be spoiled, or parted from her parents in their declining days; and there was the minister who would miss his old friends, the ones closest to him in age and in every relation, private and parochial —

“Poor, poor man! how I did misjudge him. I wish I was n't always so hasty.”

“Who, mother?”

“Why, the minister. To think of it — his own son! — and such a boy as Jimmy. He would n't judge the case himself, you say?”

“Handed him right over to the committee,” said Alvin, with pride in the pastor's purity. “He never excused him, nor begged for him by one word.”

“And Jimmy? how does he seem?”

“Just the same: I guess he's pretty hungry. Looks as gaunt as a hound.”

Silence flamed out at the bare suggestion of such refinement of cruelty. “Well, I do think, among you all — that's a little too much! Badgering the boy without any supper. If you're going to condemn him, do let him eat first and see his friends. You know it's all a farce anyway; there is n't one of you would n't have done the same if you'd felt able for it. Would you have let that scoundrel run you out of your own camp and take what was put in your charge, if it was only a dog?”

“Why, no,” Alvin retorted pleasantly; “unless I was so plaguey anxious to get quit of the whole business I snapped up the first chance.”

“Well, Jimmy stuck to his orders, and now you're laying it up to him for a crime.”

"Why, no, mother; nobody is doing any such thing. There's always an investigation. I wish I could have taken the job and spared the boy, but if I had and it came out this way, I would expect to be questioned pretty sharp. Jimmy expects it, you may be sure. If he'd wanted to run away from it, the road was open. I think he looks happy; he's done the work. He didn't do it to get praised."

"Mother," called Barbie, "could you come?"

They heard Stella groaning and crying; their own voices ceased. Mr. Hannington started on hurriedly, then came back to say, "If you want me — what *did* you want?"

"Just for you to say to Mr. Yardley what I said; we can't go on across any mountains to-morrow. If it's best for the others, we've got no right to detain them. Don't you go and beg them to stay for us, will you?"

"I guess not!" said Alvin.

They parted satisfied with each other, and Silence returned to her patient.

Stella lay an unmanageable heap of dishevelled womanhood, half on the pallet, half on the canvas-covered ground. Her rich hair unbraided its full length, hid like a cloth of gold the coarse cotton pillow (one didn't use one's best linen in these emigrant camps). She tossed incessantly and writhed in apparent agony.

"I can't undress her alone," Barbie explained softly. "She's almost in convulsions."

"Nothing of the sort!" Her mother's matter-of-fact tone astonished the amateur.

Stella began talking wildly as soon as she perceived a fresh listener.

"I did n't mean to come back. Jimmy made me! Don't I know none of you ever wanted me? *He* came after me and Jimmy shot him. Oh, how I hate this whole world! It's a torture-chamber, and you can't die."

"What are these things?" Silence opened the pill-box which she had discovered in Stella's clothing. Stella glanced at it and was dumb.

"Was that what he gave you 'for snake-bite'?"

"It was—for Indians," Stella choked out,— "if we were taken—alive."

"H'um," said Silence, "I've heard of those pills—'for Indians.' Well, Stella; I can understand how you feel about living. If you want to take one of these now, or all of them and have it over with, no one is going to prevent you."

Stella, it appeared, felt hurt by this invitation; whether genuine or ironic, it left nothing to be said.

"Very well, then. Now, let me tell you: this is only the beginning, and it can be borne. You won't have near so hard a time as others do." Silence told her why—"Now, if you are able to talk about 'torture-chambers,' you are able to stop screaming like a wild animal. You have a will—enough to keep you alive at any rate: you better try to use it."

This summing-up left Stella in a passion of resentment which did duty, momentarily, for courage. There was a bitter silence.

"Barbie, don't cry so! Go out and get some air."

"Mother, you are so hard."

"Well, you see it's done her good," Silence fiercely whispered. To have Barbie break down was the last straw. "Now, go away; go and help Lottie Kiersted, or let her

come and help me, and you go over there and cook supper. Those men have got to be fed somewhere; we can't have anybody here."

Barbie had an acute remembrance since childhood of those tones in her mother's voice. She had the need and the expectation of unvarying love and approval from that mighty woman which made it a shattering experience to have the gulfs of her sudden anger sweep you down; to have the flashes of her censure light up the blackness of a home in ruins. These were domestic paroxysms not so far back in the past of her twenty years; they were not of impossible recurrence even now. Incredible as it seemed, she found herself on Stella's side, for once, against her own mother, who showed in such a strange light as a comforter in this supreme extremity. There is nothing like the philosophy that experience breeds.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE MEN'S PART

THE men, when Deacon Hannington left them, were seated, knee to knee, on the ground amidst some leafless willows where a stream enters the valley at the base of those interlapping hills. The spot was charmless; it merely shut them in from observation, and the little runlet at this season was too low to interrupt their talk. In spring it had been a tearing torrent and these sticks and broken limbs of trees amid the trampled copses were part of its regular work.

Jimmy had been telling his story, not having risen; he merely sat a little forward in advance of the ring of faces, — his own not the palest there. The amateur judges hated their task: discussing the boy's conduct before his father, their sorrow-stricken pastor, seated there in stern detachment, surrendering his tenderest ties to their handling. They felt clumsy and afraid.

"I don't ask you to treat this as a duel," said Jimmy, in conclusion. "It was n't romantic murder; it was the law working out by means of me. I plead guilty, but I will defend the law! Don't you suppose I would have been glad to give her up, — and come back home? It may be unmanly to say this, but for my father's sake I am not ashamed to make as good a showing as I can; I am not pleading against conscience either. If it were to do over again, I don't see how I could escape. He ordered me back and I would n't go: so we fought. We tossed up for turns and

he got first shot. He hit me — here ; but — you can call it an accident, if you believe in such accidents — a little compass I happened to carry in my breast-pocket turned the ball. Then *I* fired to clear the road, and to purge the earth of a shameless villain. You can purge this company of me : — I have no repentance to offer. I was shaken at first, but I've been thinking it over on the way here. No ; I had to do it."

As Mr. Hannington approached and stood listening to Jimmy's last words, room was made for him in the circle. Jimmy glanced up a trifle uneasily.

"Deacon," said Cephas More, the moderator, "we are pretty well advanced with our proceedings. I'm sorry ye could n't join us a little sooner to get all the points of this matter and hear what Jimmy has to say for himself."

"Jimmy is not on his defence before me," said the deacon firmly. "If I join with you it's not to vote. I am biased and with good reason."

"Exactly so !" Sam Kiersted bellowed softly.

"If this discussion is closed and you are ready now for the question, I will put it for your votes, 'yea' or 'nay,'" said Cephas, on his feet looking shyly around upon his neighbors. The meeting eased its sense of difficulty in Jimmy's case by a disparaging attitude towards one another as members.

"Does anybody know what *is* 'the question'? I don't!" Sam Kiersted spoke up irregularly. He wanted to see Lottie, he wanted his supper ; his big feelings had been terribly worked up over Stella's condition on the march. He believed that he cared more for Jim Yardley than for any man, young or old, he had ever associated with for the same length of time, — more than for many he called kin

and had known all his life. After the custom of disciplining church members, Jimmy had been asked if he would choose counsel from those present, and had declined. This was a disappointment to Sam, who had hoped to be called on in some such capacity, and in general wished to relieve his mind of things he did not know how to say. No one spoke to the point of order.

"The question? Well — a —" Cephas hummed; "had n't some of you better frame it in the shape of a — resolution and then I will put it *as* a resolution?"

Sam gave a sardonic laugh. "Do we know what we are doing anyhow? Are we a town-meetin', or a church committee, or a judge and jury? I move, Mr. Moderator, we consider that question first and in the mean time let Jimmy go get his supper. It's hardly fair to keep him here while we discuss, and don't even know what we want to vote on."

"That's a friendly suggestion," Cephas allowed. "It is moved that we a — no use repeating! you heard the motion. Does any one second it?"

"Neighbors, we must not trifle," Mr. Yardley interposed in a passionless voice. "Let your sympathies and your suppers wait." They glanced at his chill, worn face and at each other, but concluded not to smile. "We are thankful to our Heavenly Father for our friends' safe return, but we must not shirk the duty that comes home to us in the very act of this rejoicing. Although my son is not one of our church fellowship, he's a member of Christian society of which you are all responsible members. Having broken society's oldest law and one of God's most holy commandments, he is not to be treated as a child who wants his supper. He has come home to be judged, and

there is no court but that of your consciences before which he can be tried. You are not empowered to sentence him in law, but you have a right to reject him as a member of our company and a future citizen of the community we go to found. Now, if you please, the question!"

Poor Cephas with an audible sigh took up his task again. He cast a deprecatory look at Jimmy.

"We are all acquainted with our — with this young man's character in the past. What we say or which way we vote —"

"Mr. Moderator," broke in belligerent Sam, "I'd like to ask why you say 'in the past'? That's what I call pre-judging the case. If you think Jimmy's character has altered any in the last few days some of the rest of us may not be of your opinion."

"Out of order!" "That's unnecessary!" was the general voice: Sam smiled and sat back on his boots, suppressed but chuckling.

"I repeat, friends, and I know you understand me ('Aye, aye') — any action we may take here and now on this special matter before us don't affect our individual opinion of Jimmy, nor begin to express what we feel towards him —"

"You're wandering from the point, Cephas," drawled a voice. "Get back on the question, can't ye?"

"In plain words, then," said the unhappy mouthpiece, "the question we must look in the face is this: would — would Jimmy here — having done what he confesses — be liable — in a community with laws in full force — to be indicted on the charge of homicide, say — in the second or third —"

"I submit," howled Sam, in a voice as submissive as a steam siren, "that's not the question at *all!*"

"Order, order, Sam! No use taking the ground you're the only friend Jim's got."

"Just hear me out, will you? There's a point right here we ought to settle; the discussion won't be closed till we do settle it. There's no law in any part of these United States that would punish Jimmy for manslaughter on this charge—"

"He did n't say punish; he said 'indict,'" a voice interrupted.

Sam glared and went on:—

"— Because you could n't get a live human jury to find him guilty. There's a law of man's nature in a case like this. It don't need to be on the statutes. It's in you and in me, if we'd let it speak. Why don't we? The question, as I would put it, is: 'Do we censure him, man to man? Would we have done different in his place? Do we want him to be one of us?' That's what Mr. Yardley means, if I can say it before him. Do we, honest, respect Jimmy a bit the less or distrust him more on account of what he's done? Do we think he ought to have forsook his manhood and his trust and come home to us a poltroon his own father would be ashamed of? That's the way I'd put the question or I would n't put it at all."

Sam sat back on his heels with a satisfied smile and chewed tobacco furiously. It soothed his stomach which clamored for supper. He pitied poor little Jim, who had n't sense enough to use it.

"If I understand the duties of a moderator," Cephas patiently rejoined, "one of them is to be mod'rate. It would n't strike me as a fair way to put any question to

vote, the way Brother Kiersted puts his; but if you want it that way you're the ones to say so. It's open for you to discuss, and when you're ready I will put it to vote on the question which is the question — how you'll have it: the way it was put first or the way Brother Kiersted wants it. Is that all clear?"

"That's all right, Brother More," said a new voice encouragingly. "If I may have the floor, or the ground, a moment, I'd like to remark: We don't go on record as favoring such methods in general because we exonerate Jimmy for fighting this out. But some might say he went counter to his father's judgment before us all at Lone Tree Camp, when he said the son of Adam and the daughter of Eve should go forth together to eat of the fruit of their inheritance.

"Circumstances alter cases," the argument continued. "Jimmy was given the job to run it his own way. No special order was sent to the contrary of what he done. The first call was for Adam's son to go with Eve's daughter and sustain her in what lay before them. Now, this man was n't worthy the name of Adam, who was a *man*. His conduct right there showed it. Adam's had enough cast back at him, and Eve too, through their descendants, without putting such a creatur' as this in the same category. You can call her Eve, but you can't call him Adam, — not after he showed what he was; — and if we don't blame Jimmy for being forced out of his job by one that had no right to it, why not say so and put it to vote?"

Deacon Hannington here gave signs of having something on his mind: attention was drawn to him by his straightening up and looking fixedly across the circle at the parson. Failing to meet his eye, he rose and addressed

him by name, asking permission to say a few words "in acknowledgment of error, grievous error on the part of myself and wife. — We desire to ask our minister's forgiveness, out and out before you all, for urging upon him to take my unfortunate — my niece along. We knew he was averse to it; we did n't really think ourselves she had the requirements; we put him in a delicate position to help ourselves out; we were self-seeking through the whole of it, in one way. In another we wa'n't, but that I can't explain."

There was a pause. All eyes looked kindness upon the pain-stricken face of the speaker: old Doctor Hannington's son, — grandson of Judge Hannington, — men to whom all hats went off in their day. They warmed to him more for being able to pity him.

"She's brought a world of trouble on our minister's family, first and last. (Jimmy moved restlessly.) We have made it the subject of prayer. We see our fault and accept our punishment; but for what has fallen on others, my head is bowed in shame."

There was a strong murmured protest, a heavy taking of breaths. Mr. Yardley's eyes were covered, but beneath the shielding hand his mouth was visible in its broken sweetness. He appeared to gather himself to rise, with difficulty, Deacon Hannington gently forestalling the attempt.

"Parson, excuse me: I have n't finished quite. I wanted to thank Jimmy now, before you act upon him, for bringing the poor girl home. Whatever she's done — and I've been as hard on her as the next one — she needs help now, and other women. And I ask you to remember she's young yet, not twenty. It's her first serious step aside. To me, of course, — she's my sister's child."

Mr. Yardley now stood up and looked straight at the deacon, who with his last words had broken down and was forced to hide his face.

“Deacon Hannington, my friend ; I cannot sit still and let God hear you asking forgiveness of me.” The minister’s voice rang with a rich jar like a stroke on a fine-toned bell. “Your niece, alone, could have done us no harm : there was a bad man amongst you and I brought him ! Instead of trusting the Word of God, I purchased safety and paid the price in a human soul. I knew that man had evil in him. The seed of evil found soil prepared for it : the same soil, sweetened and opened to the sun of love, might have been fit for a precious crop. I will not tax you further with self-examination ; but let no one ask forgiveness of me.”

He sat down and Jimmy reached across and stroked his father’s hand. It was not a man’s action : wherefore the others looked away.

Mr. Hannington asked to be heard somewhat further, on a practical matter.

“I expect you will be planning to start on to-morrow morning, when you have settled whether — well,” — he began afresh ; “my wife and I want it known that on account of our niece’s illness, and for other reasons, we shall not be able to remain with this company. We are going to feel the separation very much, and we remember all the kindness you have shown us, but we are prepared to accept what comes to us alone, through our family circumstances. I deeply appreciate our minister’s words, and I know my wife, if she could have heard him, would say the same ; but we have no right to take advantage of your sympathies, nor his magnanimous way of putting

things. We've been a handicap first and last, and a detriment to the whole spirit of the undertaking: and so we are bound to withdraw, and no compunctions need be felt. But now, as to Jimmy;—it occurred to me while you were discussing whether he is blameworthy or not:—if you should decide to name it so and want to express your disapproval, in moderation, of what he has done—why not consign him to us? If our company's good enough for him, he's plenty good enough for ours. We're the ones who got him into this trouble: it would ill become us to set up in judgment; and we need him. There are several reasons and they don't all jibe, but I guess the main reason is we love the boy."

"Now, I'd like to know what's that!" said Lottie Kiersted with a snap of her black eyes. "That's the second time they've woke him up making that noise. My goodness, I think it's awful—cheering like Fourth of July and we up here worried to death and not knowing a thing!"

Lottie had made the exchange Mrs. Hannington suggested, her nursing for Barbie's cooking, but had rushed back to her camp hearing the baby cry.

"Hush!" said Barbie. There was no hushing Sam's progeny nor for that matter Sammy junior's excitable little mother when her feelings were aroused. She swung the youngster on her hip and hummed to him while Barbie was trying to listen.

"They seem pleased with themselves," she thought. "That great shout could n't have meant 'guilty'?—they would n't have said it like that! It could n't have been 'unanimous' even if it had to be 'guilty.'" She was not

greatly afraid ; but she was rasped and excited and sick with delay : she wanted one look at Jimmy.

“Think of their being down there this whole hour !” Lottie whispered, breaking off her tune ; “why, Sam just loves Jimmy, and he sees through folks. I thought I heard Sam’s roar. If it was ‘guilty’ you would n’t hear his voice !”

Sam, the great reader of character, at that moment was saying to Mr. Hannington, — after that last huge testimony to the effect that all should go or none : no more breaks in the company, — “Why, great goodness,” he was saying, “that little thing ! no more trouble than a kitten ! We ought to rest our horses a day or two anyhow — what’s a few days ! If she can lay on a bed she can go along. We’ll rig a horse-litter ; and if the trail gives out I’ll carry her myself. I can hoof it like a goat. Lottie will have the boy with her in one of the carts ; all of you will see to her. I’m the strong man of Gaza. I would n’t feel that little girl more than a squaw feels her papoose on her back, climbing the mountains. My ! I wanted to carry her on the road we come — but — I say but that was rough ! As for being one of us ! Who are we ? If we’re all right ourselves, as parson says, how’s she going to hurt us ?”

CHAPTER XXX

THE FIRST OFFERING

No one observed Jimmy — no one spoke of it, at least — when he slipped away from the supper group and followed a lane of shadow down which Barbie had disappeared. Her errand was water, to refill the tea-kettle: the men were being served by the women, patriarchal fashion. He had taken her pail and set it down, and whatever the precaution led to had satisfactorily occurred without witnesses.

“There is a hole in my coat, under your cheek, girl — girl! You’ve got to mend it with *my* thimble.”

Barbie felt of the place where her cheek had rested; she became thoughtful. “What is under that hole?”

“My ‘self-defence.’ I’d like you to see it. Put your head back there again!”

“But I hurt you! There is something —”

“My old compass gave me a beautiful dig just to show it was there on the job. My bully old compass that I paid three dollars for — even the money dad sent me to buy a new hat for church.”

“You were always wicked, Jimmy.”

“I’ve come to a bad end. Am I the same to you?”

“Not quite the same.” (Better, thought Barbie, who had never seen her lover’s eyes like that before.)

“Not quite such good material for one’s husband?”

“Oh, I need n’t be particular: we’re not a very nice family to marry into. I’m not joking.”

"Nor I!" said Jimmy. "I suppose you and my father care what the other folks think. I want to know what's going to be thought of this in my own home, that house we were speaking about."

"We're not going to think: but you are not going to put on this coat ever again in my sight."

"Then you don't call it square — a case of brute necessity?"

"I call it — I don't call it anything. You are just you: but other people had better be careful what they call it before me! Jimmy, you won't keep that coat?"

"This," said Jimmy — serious topics being suppressed for a time — "will have to be your engagement ring, 'in lieu of many ornaments wherewith my love should duly have been decked.'" He put back the little old thimble on the finger it belonged to, leaving a kiss in its keeping.

Barbie's mild acquaintance with profane classics gave her no clew to Jimmy's flight, but her heart followed and her ear was delicately tuned to niceties of speech. Her dreaming mind had passed over much in the village life she was too familiar with to note its rich complexity of local detail and its concentrated human interest; she was not an observer or an interpreter, but an imaginative listener and follower of the range of bigger minds: here were pleasant paths to tread in the future of that home which was seeking a spot to rest on. But there would be a strong, practical reaction first: Barbie's initial output would register a plunge into cook-books instead of Elizabethan poetry.

"Speaking of rings," said Jimmy, "could one borrow one's mother's wedding-ring, if a need should arise?"

"Would n't a clothes-pin do?"

"Barbie, I'm shocked! Where's this sort of thing going to end, in one that was a church member?"

"In hard work, where every frontier marriage ends, we're told."

"Will you mind it, I wonder? Of course, that's most miserably true!"

"Not more than you will: you don't love ploughing do you?"

"I am willing to plough for something better than ploughing."

"I'm willing to wash for something better than washing."

"It won't last, not the first period. And you won't wash, young lady. If you do, it means failure and we'll quit."

"By the time it means — anything, we'll be so wild about it we can't 'quit.'"

"Prophetess in Israel, I bow to thy wisdom! I guess we'll stick it out somehow."

They were silenced by the sight of two figures illuminated by a lantern, who passed singly, at a distance, across the dark mountain background: Deacon Hannington and his wife. He carried a spade over his shoulder and she walked behind him, holding something out on her two hands wrapped in a white cloth; her long step broke the line of her skirt in the back; she moved with solemnity, like a priestess presenting an offering. This strange sight amazed the younger pair. Barbie was the first to understand: her parents were burying the family pride, the clean old record of generations which fate had made sport of. It was also a sacrifice to Libitina; the price of thrills. And the irony which smote the girl was that her own

father and mother, in the presence of their maiden daughter and her lover, should be the chosen ministrants of this ceremony. She tore herself out of Jimmy's arms and vanished somewhere, in the darkness.

When he had swallowed his share of the meaning of that spectacle, he was better prepared for his part. Barbie was not hard to find; she was crying to herself in a little heap on the ground, not anywhere in particular,—just where she could be alone. He took her back to his arms; there was little said; but Jimmy at length presented a conclusion based not altogether on passion nor on circumstance: "I want to marry into this family as soon as it will have me."

PART II

CHAPTER I

HAIL AND FAREWELL!

EAST of the Cascade Range and west of the Blue Mountains, in the country of the Upper Columbia, Dr. Whitman had planted his mission among the Cayuse Indians at Waiilatpu, "place of rye grass." Here arrived, in the middle of September, the main caravan of 1842, giving the honors of emigration for that year to the Methodists. These people had started without a guide, trusting themselves to the eccentric leadership of Dr. Elijah White, who held a commission as sub-Indian-agent to coöperate with the British in Oregon and Vancouver. It was he who ordered the execution of those twenty dogs belonging to as many uptorn families clinging to the few ties left them that spoke of home: wherefore, and for similar reasons, we are not surprised to hear later on of a split in the party under a rival, Captain Hastings; but all were of one body, united for safety as they passed through the Pawnee country. At Fort Laramie, where they left our small band of exodists, they hired the mountaineer, Fitzpatrick, for a round sum to pilot them as far as Fort Hall; onward from there to Waiilatpu, the tribes, he assured them, were friendly.

The great Nez Percé nation, to the north and east of the mission, were intermarried with the Cayuses, having given them their language which had largely replaced the original Cayuse tongue; all books translated for the use of Indian converts being done into Nez Percé. Bradburn

equally may have been posted as to the temper of these tribes, but he appears to have been frugal of spreading knowledge which might cheapen the value of the personal element in Indian affairs supposed to reside in himself.

With Dr. White's party, first to reach the mission, came A. L. Lovejoy, as brave a heart as Whitman's and as keen for the Oregon game: call the stake religion or national expansion or free-state territory, or simply getting rich, the game was big enough to include most things big men desire to do in this world, and a faith in God besides which was the chief reward of many who spent their lives there, and lost them as the seed of higher things.

White and Lovejoy brought news — only six months old — of the hitch in Oregon affairs at Washington: of the South's opposition and the attitude of Webster, not entirely disinterested; of the calm shrewdness of England's waiting policy — not too eager diplomatically, but industrious on the ground. Whitman was burning with his own knowledge: the strength of the Hudson's Bay people and the Catholics combined against sectarian Americans who would scatter the hunts and cut into priestly authority. He had other reasons connected with his special work which we will not touch upon; what he knew in addition to what he heard was enough. The others agreed with him, but could he do it? would he be able to convince President Tyler and the nation that wagons could pass Fort Hall, and that a land for home-makers lay beyond?

He said, "I must be there this winter in order to do it. The train must start next spring, and those wagons shall go through! If it were Pelion upon Ossa, we'll get across."

The material part of his equipment took not long: in spirit he was there already; his only lack — a companion he could trust as himself. In Lovejoy he found the man. Having but just completed a little journey of fifteen hundred miles, he turned about and went back with Whitman by a shorter, wholly conjectural route on the famous "mid-winter ride." We have merely to mention here an incident at the outset of that adventure which hinges upon our tale, explaining several matters that shall follow.

The horsemen had come down after dark into the valley, making long hours in the saddle. They failed to discern the little camp, its fires covered for the night, hid in the willows across the vague, dim prospect. Daybreak showed them, as they pushed on for the canyon wall, a stain of smoke rising lazily on the frosty air.

Every high endeavor we read of has been attended by its coincidences which Christian minds call Providence. Mr. Yardley was ever fond of recalling that, by seeming accident, Dr. Whitman had chosen this morning for his start and decided to cross the mountains by a way on which they would surely have missed him had they broken camp on the day first set; if, in short, they had not waited for the Hanningtons. It is on record that the doctor reached Fort Hall in eleven days, our pilgrims taking a month for the same distance.

Mrs. Hannington had not slept that night, her patient being restless and full of fears. She had been up a number of times waiting upon her and watching her condition in reference to the journey. The watchman had built an early fire and filled her kettle for her and she was brewing tea when the cattle-guard, grazing his stock before hitching up for the climb, was heard to shout a name.

"Lovejoy!" rang through the camp. The two had been friends when the companies were united, and had said good-bye to each other at Laramie with strong regrets.

"Lovejoy! Whitman!" Men sprang out of their blankets; women tidied their hair in haste and bundled themselves and their babes in wraps to go forth and gaze at the visitors. Dr. Whitman — this time of year! his face towards the way they had come!

He welcomed them loudly, shaking one after another by the hand, between gulps of Mrs. Hannington's hot tea. Lovejoy, who had known them all, introduced them with hearty pride.

"You are the very men I am going East to fetch out here," the doctor bellowed. "We want you now, and your wives and babies. I tell you I am glad to see the women: that means a future. We want as many of your sort as the Lord can spare us. We want the salt of the earth. There's an empire waiting for us here, but you can't make an empire out of fur traders and soldiers — no, nor missionaries. We want the people — and we might as well have good ones. The Lord was n't humble when he made this country;" the doctor waved a proud hand at the landscape: "now, we want men and women to fit it.

"Mr. Yardley, let me shake your hand again, sir. There never was a truer or braver conception of a Christian minister's work than this of yours — nor more timely. I see you here with your chosen flock, — fathers and mothers in Israel, in answer to our prayers. I don't disparage others, but I *know* the stuff that you bring us. I am only a practical man myself; a teacher — my wife's a better one; a physician, but she's the nurse; a farmer, but she's

the gardener. We're practical workers, but we need a head, so to speak, in the clouds.

"There are folks here who hunger and thirst after an old-fashioned church service, prayer and praise and preaching. We want you, we need you—more than the Indians think they need us; you will support us in our work. 'Us,' I say! you'll be far away from us, but it's all one country— one fellowship in Christ. You'll be our first pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of the new Northwest. We'll make you our bishop one of these days. And look at that little pink tow-head over there, the rascal!"—remarks addressed to Sam'l Kiersted, Jr., sleepily sucking his thumb and staring at the speaker. Finding himself the centre of all eyes and smiles he ducked his head into his mother's shawl hunched about her neck. — "We'll send that fellow to Congress about the time he grows a beard on those fat cheeks. Mrs. Han-nington, let me say, this tea of yours tastes of home. I think I see the lacquered caddy it came out of, in the corner cupboard of an old white-painted sittin'-room, back in the Old Bay State. That's where you're from; you don't need to tell me. I knew it, first minute you spoke. My! I wish my wife could be here and there, too! You'll find her all ready and waiting for you. We've been looking out for you folks these two weeks, ever since the last of the others got in; they reported you not more than a few days behind: 3d of October, when we left—not a word! I was anxious, so I sent some of our Indians out on scout for you. They won't miss you. You can trust 'em—guides or packers or hunters. They'll show you where I had them cache a lot of fodder and foodstuff—case you were short and got caught in the snow; cattle

can't travel without food. The Willamette is where you are going, I suppose? Well, there's a splendid country around Walla Walla, bound to fill up some day. You can't take your stock over the trail this time of year, remember: the Indians make a practice of burning off the grass in October. You would better go down the Columbia from Fort Walla Walla in the fur company's boats; there's a wild dash at the Dalles where you 'carry':— Don't we have the names out here? My wife says they sound like the 'timbrels o'er Egypt's dark sea.' They get into your blood."

"Are the Hudson's Bay people friendly, speaking of borrowing boats?" the question was asked.

"Well, as a company they are not,— quite the reverse. They don't want us here and they are trying as hard as they can to back-fire us with settlers of their own. But, man to man, they are clever folks and gentlemen besides:— ever see a nicer man than Captain Grant? Keeps saying, though, and believes it, that our wagons will never get across. We'll show 'em what our wagons can do! Old John McLoughlin, 'King of Oregon'— he's 'king,' but he's father, too. If we don't love him and stick up for him we ought to be spanked for it like ungrateful children. He saved the lives of all those first ones,— crazy they were, too. He won't sell a cow; cows are too precious, but where there's babies he'll rent. You seem to have had bad luck with your stock.— Plenty, plenty! thank you, Mrs. Hannington. How many cups have you had, Lovejoy? don't want to rob my neighbor. We had a cold start. Did n't stop to boil coffee.— Letters, ma'm? Why, of course!— write 'em quick's you can, though; we must n't let the sun show us our shadows this side the

climb. How much can a woman's pen say in fifteen minutes?" Whitman took out his watch, but looked sailor-wise at the sky.

"A pen that's been waiting all summer to say it can say a good deal, I guess." Deacon Hannington smiled at his wife. "Here let me sharpen that pencil! I kept a diary for most part of the way: if I could get at it handy, I'd send that along to our folks in Buffalo."

"Better not," Whitman cautioned. "A diary of this journey is going to be sought after, fifty years from now. We're not sure, you know, if we'll ever see a post-office again."

CHAPTER II

THE TRUTH AS IT IS TOLD

"DEAR mother and all of you," Silence wrote. The letter was one of a bundle sorted by their dates and labelled "The children's letters from Oregon, 1842-43," found in Grandmother Trumbull's secretary, — the small middle drawer with a special key. She read them as the whole truth, forgetting what sort of letters she used to send her daughter in Dugdale, from her first pioneer home. They were, if not God's truth, a woman's, — the blood-red rose of truth from which love has plucked the thorns.

"I must write as fast as I can with this stub of a pencil. Everything is packed. We start in about an hour. Dr. Whitman and Mr. Lovejoy surprised us, stopping at our camp this morning on a sudden journey East. A wonderful Providence our not missing them. Mr. Yardley had the greatest desire to talk with Dr. Whitman. He is a glorious man. You will know all about his journey East if this ever reaches you — if *they get through*, that is.

"We are in the famous valley of the Grand Round, only sixty miles from the mission where friends and rest await us. Dr. Whitman has posted guides in the mountains to meet us. Our troubles, we feel, are over now. This valley is encircled by the grandest peaks; they shine like the gates of pearl. Snow up there and hot sunshine here, — a great plain of dried grass, yellow as harvest. At night we look up at such a sky as they might have watched from the housetops of Bethlehem.

“You mustn’t expect to hear about the journey, yet. It overwhelms me to look back upon the distance we have come. Months of sunrise and sunset, — travel — travel — travel! Everything we ever knew, except the stars, we have left behind us. I ought to add — our faults and the faults of our neighbors. Human nature comes out on such a journey as this. But we are n’t quite as bad as the Israelites. I’ve never heard any one say, ‘Would to God we had died, when we sat by the flesh-pots,’ though I’ve thought with longing of the bits of bread we used to throw to the chickens. Too much ‘flesh’ has been our cry. But we don’t look back; we look ahead. And now for our family news. Some day next spring, if we all live, — I don’t know when, but you may ‘feel it in your bones,’ — our girl and the minister’s son will stand up before him and be made man and wife. They say they can’t wait — Jimmy says — for a church to be married in. It will be under a tree, I expect, in the woods if there are any around our first cabins. We don’t know exactly where we shall settle yet. I hear talk of the Willamette Valley. It’s all like a dream, the strange names and all, but if you could hear those men talking as I hear them, while we women write our letters, you’d say there was a mighty sight of something in it. But I know you can wait about Oregon, and I can’t think of anything but the children and their happiness, so wonderfully *proved* and chastened to them, I hope, by the experiences they have shared on this journey.

“Barbie and Jimmy have both lost flesh, but she has a beauty I never saw in her face before and you know I never was so very humble about the child’s looks. She’s a dear child! — and Jimmy seems to have stretched up

somehow in expression if not in height. And his eyes are a story when he looks at Barbie, which is pretty much all the time.

“Mr. Yardley seems as pleased as we are. I used to think he held himself just a touch above any of us in Dugdale, but I was over-proud myself, I guess. He has a manner that sets you back sometimes. I dare say he don't know it. To Barbie he's as tender as a father and behaves quite like other folks, telling how he saw her first sitting on top of one of our old white gate-posts; she was n't more than five. He never noticed whose house he was passing, being in a brown study, but her little face and figure perched up there struck him. He asked whose little girl she was — ‘Why, Mr. Hanna'ton's!’ she said, as if anybody could tell him that. ‘Well,’ said he, ‘I think “Mr. Hanna'ton's” little girl might give the minister a kiss.’ — ‘See will’; she had a doll in her arms and made him kiss Dolly, too. I guess he hoped nobody saw him. He laughed till the tears came in his eyes when he told it, and owned that he'd never told any one before. Poor man!

“Jimmy is full of his dreams: they are good, unworldly dreams such as a man should dream once in his life. Barbie will never cramp him. I think he has a fine mind, more scope than most of us, and a will that ought to amount to something if he uses it right. I have no fears; I look to see him one of the able men in this new country, with greater powers to come with age and experience. But hear me! wasting these precious moments bragging about my son-in-law!

“We love you all and pray to see you all again, and I know you never forget us. Think of us, dear mother, as

well and happy, standing the journey splendidly — and *near the end!* It has taken all our fear away and given us new strength, this great meeting with Dr. Whitman. I can see it in the faces of our men. If he can do what he is setting out to do, why, we ought to be ashamed if we can't crawl sixty miles, — and then the other part, which is all plain sailing, — though it may be a little hard. The others ahead of us have all got through: no trouble with the Indians, though they broke up into small parties. If we had known! — what hours of anxiety we might have been spared. We know more than we did about a good many things. I don't try to send messages. We just all send our love, and are satisfied that we did well to come."

Oh, prevaricating woman! "well and happy"! And not one whit ashamed — out-braving conscience on every charge. "All I've said in so many words is true," she would have answered. "I *do* want her to think of us as well and happy. Am I going to give poor mother such a blow at her age and shame my husband's kin? Grandma shall go on smiling and chuckling whenever she thinks of naughty pretty Stella and her 'crooked stick at last.'"

Mrs. Hannington folded her letter. Barbie was holding young Sam while his mother scrawled a page to her mother in Schenectady; a sudden stillness fell between the groups.

"Where's your Captain Bradburn? Is n't he sleeping late this morning? Is he with you?"

Lovejoy asked the question; breaths were held awaiting the answer.

"He sleeps," said Mr. Yardley, "on the divide as you go up beyond Powder River to the east"; the minister's look was calm. "He left us in a frame of mind, — I can but call it lawless, mocking at the wrath of God, which

overtook him and slew him, by means himself had devised : ' For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law.' He lies buried on the mountain, but I fear he has not a quiet bed. Your question falls in with my thoughts precisely as you spoke, Mr. Lovejoy. I was thinking of his wife ; he has no children. Her home is in the East. A message would reach her through his business address in Boston. I should like to give it to you, Dr. Whitman, and ask you to send her this word : ' He died of a fatal disorder too long neglected, and was buried on the road.' That is all I think she need know. I will write her on the first opportunity after we arrive and account for the various matters between us which leave us considerably in debt to his estate, and for all property of his remaining in our charge. In the mean time, I will ask another favor : would you give me an order for the services of a couple of trusty Indians from your mission to go back there and make the interment more permanent, and recover anything of value he had with him which the elements may have spared ?"

Dr. Whitman was impatient to be gone ; the minister took many words to explain what his quick mind had anticipated. He was accustomed to death in sudden and shocking forms, whether attributable to God directly or in the working-out of natural laws ; in any case, the thought was too familiar to be dwelt upon. He rubbed his beard and glanced at the sunrise brightening above the eastern wall.

" How long ago was this ?"

Mr. Yardley gave the date.

" My dear sir, there would be nothing left. If the burial at the time was not ' permanent ' there would be no ' re-

mains.' I will give you the order certainly, but our boys would expect payment and I count it money thrown away; and I cannot promise that they would be 'trusty' — for no one could watch them."

The minister inclined his head in silence.

Dr. Whitman held out his hand. "Well, I must bid you farewell — and 'well' I hope it may be, with all of you."

"Stay," said Mr. Yardley, "we must not forget there are some things, not the greatest, you have done for us that we are able to repay. You and the mission must not be left poorer for our visit; you are here to do your work, which is not feeding emigrants. I know it will be merely passing it on to others whom you will help, who may not have the means to compensate you. The work of God is not cheap and a man has but one life."

"That's about the way of it," said the doctor humbly. "We'll certainly try to pass it on; that's what we're here for. But the Home Board thinks we ought to be self-supporting, and we're too far away to explain. It's partly what I am going East for — to have a few talks face to face with some of the good folks back there who see us from a distance darkly. We don't pretend to be perfect, but we do our best."

CHAPTER III

STILL WITH US

A NUMBER of reasons united to make our company's choice of location an unsocial one. They needed room for adjoining claims in one tract, with home-lots on the river where their future town should build itself and invite the crafts and trades. Their numbers insured safety in isolation. They were Presbyterians and we must remember what sectarianism meant in the forties : there was not that "gay condoning charity" as to shades of doctrine, more especially "my neighbor's" doctrine, that we boast of now. Concerning the Methodist brethren at the Falls : — they were not Catholics ; so much could be said for them. "Glory, honor, and peace to every man that worketh good," — but St. Paul set Jew distinctly before Gentile : — "to Presbyterians 'and also' Methodists," would have ranked the denominations, according to a mind cultivated even as our minister's.

There was a reason, touching those grave incidents on the journey, for their sensitiveness to the curiosity of strangers. It would have taken the minister himself to explain, outside the membership, why they held Jimmy guilty yet blameless for his terrible deed ; and the minister would be the last to try. Stella, too : the unhappy girl must be given another chance, and how could any woman expect to have a fair chance among respectable people, even in a new country, with a story like hers in circulation ?

They may never have discussed these reasons, but by common consent they cast their lot at a safe distance from gossip, and kept to themselves, busy as beavers that first autumn and winter: working in friendly contest, getting out logs and putting up cabins, making rude furniture of the "settler's period," constructing farming-tools,— these were fireside industries during the rains; breaking ground, planting, fishing, hunting, marrying. Jimmy, with the help of friends, expected to get his cabin roof on, ready for his bride in March.

In February they were run to earth by W. H. Gray, a stirring visitor, who rode up the valley in search of the new colony and preached to them of their political duties. He came for the purpose of urging them to send delegates or to come, every man of them, to the "wolf meeting" in March. They listened dubiously. The object of the gathering ostensibly was to secure protection from wild animals for their increasing flocks and herds, through some concerted action of the settlers; but the opportunity was to be improved for the purpose of forming a constitution and laws under which the Americans, if necessary, could unite against British interests on the ground, and be ready for recognition as a new Territory.

Our Eastern men brought with them the conservatism of older communities; fresh from British hospitality, the war scare left them cold. Their wealth in flocks and herds did not prey upon their minds, as yet; nor had the Oregon fever taken with them a political turn.

Mr. Gray's answer was sarcastic. "Well, my good friends, I see how it is with you: 'Ye can discern the face of the sky; but ye cannot discern the signs of the times.' I leave you now, but I expect to hear from you

later. There were the two sons, remember? the one who said, 'I go not,' — but he went after all. If you won't meet with us in March, we'll give you another chance in May. The ball is just opening. We have done all those things which every newcomer advises. Three years ago we petitioned Congress, — nothing came of it. We were told to consult with Commodore Wilkes; — fine man, — guest of Dr. McLoughlin at the time of the conference; the doctor's wines are good. This sounds like scandal; it's human nature, and loyalty, every man to his side: for all his private benevolence, the doctor is a subject of Great Britain, and he's pledged to carry out his company's policy in the Northwest. Now we are going to act for ourselves and we don't intend to advertise the fact more than necessary; times are ticklish. But this year shall see something done."

So the world was with them, after all.

CHAPTER IV

THE WASTERS

THE first wheat-seed had been hardly more than scratched into the ground by means of those hand-made harrows, but such was the grip of fertility in that new soil, it sent up stalks an hundred, a thousand fold, with the sun's energy upon it; and the straws were not hollow; they were filled with a pithy substance which gave to the wheat backbone. Seldom did a crop lodge in the field, and as the summers were dry a farmer had time to turn around in the press of work: he was not hunted by his harvest in danger of storms.

It was now the last of June, a forward season; the early wheat was ready for the cradle, or the sickle; all had not been equally forehanded in the matter of tools, nor were equally clever in making them.

"What have you got in that basket?"

Susan, wife of Peter (baptized Indians known as Susan-Peter and Peter Cooniac) grinned and wrinkled her two-inch forehead to squint at the handsome white woman, dazzling in thin white lawn and a pink sunbonnet.

"Show me," Stella commanded.

The cloth was raised; underneath, fresh baked raspberry turn-overs (wild raspberries were in fruit) which Mrs. Hannington had made that morning and was packing off hot to the young men reaping in the upper fields. Sukey displayed them with pride.

"Who for?"

"Him 'Sam,' him 'Jim.'" — A greasy forefinger designated each pie by the name of the donee.

"I take them," said Stella coolly.

"Me la-la." Susan stood rooted. The white kloochman's charms made her a vision worth stopping to gaze at, but Na-ha was very kind and Susan was learning obedience. The basket was not yielded.

"Na-ha (mother) tell me 'go quick.' I go;" she pointed towards the wheat-fields.

Stella closed the argument effectively on her side by taking the basket.

"Klat-a-wah!"

Sukey laughed at the Chinook word. She imagined Stella to be the queen bee in this hive of workers. She wore white dresses which Na-ha washed. Na-ha would trust Sukey to wash her own dresses, but not Stella's, because Sukey scorched the best one trying too hot an iron. All the other white kloochmen worked like squaws. Therefore, Sukey concluded, she must submit to the confiscation of her errand by this princess of do-nothing. She walked away thoughtful. Stella with the basket strolled on.

It was past noon. The men would have eaten their cold dinners already, but pies were good at any time. She was in no hurry; she had come to speak to Sam Kiersted and wished to see him alone. He and Jimmy were reaping in the same field and usually they lunched together.

A few steps farther on, a sound that she knew made her turn and smile. Out of the oak openings sprang a half-grown fawn, his beautiful proud head thrown back, his breast shining like a satin jerkin. Light as the leap of a fountain, a few bounds brought him to her side and

he would have planted his forefeet on her shoulders in triumph, but she eluded him. They went on together, a lovely pair.

This creature had been the joy and now was the bane of her existence — made so by tyrannous utilitarians in behalf of their wretched gardens. Sam Kiersted had shot the mother doe early that spring, — by accident, he excused himself to Lottie who scolded him; in reality they needed meat. When she asked what became of the nursing fawn and he told her, she did not scold, but she looked dark.

“Why, I’d love to have had it myself.”

“You’ve got a house and a baby and me to look after; ain’t that enough? Stella saw me fetch it in; — the little beggar came right up to my hand and followed me — and she asked for it. I thought ’t would be good for her to have something to think about besides her troubles.”

“I guess Mrs. Hannington won’t thank you: she’ll raise the fawn!”

“I looked out for that: I told Stella I would n’t give it to her unless she promised me to take the whole care of it herself.”

Stella did so, faithfully, thereby putting Lottie in the wrong, who had said she would forget it in a week. Every one was surprised at her constancy and said what an excellent thing it was for her and such a good sign. It was, in fact, a sign of nothing but her preference for playing with pets rather than washing her own white dresses, for instance, which she wore with great recklessness this warm weather. Aunt Silence apologized for her looking so “dressed up” all the time; she had such a stock of summer clothes, and so few others, it seemed a pity not to “get

some good" out of them; and she was so encouraged by Stella's affectionate ways with her pet, she would have washed her dresses gladly or done anything else the girl neglected for it: only she wished it had n't been called Nimrod, — a heathenish name. "Daisy" would have been prettier; and the little thing's first coat was all besprinkled with white spots thick as daisies in an old meadow.

The white stars were gone now: the foundling they had feared coyotes might chase was able to distance or face its enemies. The delicate legs were swift and strong as bow-strings and the pouncing hoofs could strike like arrows to the mark. Lottie Kiersted lived in fear that the unexpected creature, bounding up behind in sport, might deal her little toddling Sam a fatal blow, some day, with those terrible forefeet which she had seen kill a snake and beat a dog to death. The fences he could not leap he made a practice of swimming around — the water fences where sowed ground came down to the shore. He fed at hours when no one was astir: he had become a pest. Public sentiment had put him beyond the pale where Stella followed him and wasted, the house-wives called it, many an hour tampering with his salvation. The field rejected him and the forest knew him not, and his mistress kept him like a longing peri at the gate. There were small elements of tragedy in the situation as it grew.

They travelled on together towards the wheat-fields, the illicit pair; and one of them well knew her guilt. Incidentally they made a picture a painter would have raved over.

Jimmy in his reaping had reached the lower fence corner; it was a provisional fence of pine poles thrown up in haste. At first sight of the visitors he raised a shout: "Drive him back!" — without so much as a word of

greeting. "Boor!" said Stella, thinking how handsome he looked with his tall brown throat, and his shirt open, not unlike a stag himself. She stopped and laughed. His nostrils whitened.

"Stella! Don't you bring that beast up here! I would n't have him find the way into this wheat for a hundred dollars."

"I did n't bring him; he comes wherever I go. I never call him," she said in her wavy English intonation.

"Stand aside!" was the next order: Jimmy threw clods at the fawn.

"I shall not stand aside! Pelt me, if you choose." She tossed her head and laughed at him, placing herself between him and his mark, and holding out her skirts in thumb and finger saucily.

"I will, then, if you say so: that brute's got to go."

"We'll both go, thank you. I had some pie for you, — fresh — raspberry turn-overs!" she called back. "I'll take them all to Sam!"

Jimmy continued to fire sods at the fawn; and, to his honest dismay, one struck close to Stella's feet in low shoes, soiling her ankles. He lifted his hat and waved his best apology, but they were both angry and the fawn had fled.

The outcast came back a few moments later and pushed his head over the rails at another place, whimpering for his mistress. She was seated beside Sam in the fence corner watching him eat pie. He would take only his own; she had told her story, urging the other one on him.

"No, Jim was right. You no business to bring that fellow up here; you'll get him in the way of jumping this fence, too. Can't you see? — it is n't fair to the beast. You ought to help him cure himself of folks and let him go back

to his own. He'll end in getting shot for a confirmed nuisance and you'll be partly responsible, you know."

"Did n't you tell me to be good to him and take care of him myself? Could you be ugly to a dumb creature, turning upon it all of a sudden, after you had taught it to love you? I can't—I love him, too. He's my baby; he's everything I've got."

"Well, that's so," mumbled Sam. "By gum, this pie's good!"

"Take the other one," she laughed. "It's contraband of war."

"T ain't my war. I'm a neutral. I don't side against Jim."

"Even if it's me?"

"You've got to have a better cause than this, young lady, before I quit Jim for you. Now, you give that one to him on your way home, that's a good girl. They are n't your pies, you know."

"They are if I bring them."

"You make 'em?"

"No, I can't make pies. You ask that just to tease; you know I can't do things the other women do. I'm a waster, like Nim."

"Why need you be? There's a question!"

"Because it's too late to be born again."

"That's what church folks deny."

"Oh—in that sense! Don't you try to preach, Sam: it does n't suit you."

"Is it preaching to have faith in those we are fond of?"

"Speaking of me?"

"Both of you. Nim could learn to be free and inde-

pendent again, and I think you'd be just as well off if you could let yourself be governed. You were born to please; you could please inside of rules just as well as outside — more."

"I was born 'to point the moral' for you good people's benefit. They — you — are always drawing morals from everything, even a poor wild fawn."

"Well if you point the moral there's no mistake you 'adorn the tale,'" said Sam, blushing a trifle, but proud of his borrowed wit.

"Ah, yes: I know how to make myself look well — compared" — she added maliciously and, with deeper malice — "all wasted here, though: you've all got your own pretty girls to look at. Who wants to look at me!"

"I do, when I want to see something just plain pretty: when I want to see a good little wife I look 'to hum.'"

"Well, that's what I call a daring sort of thing to say; rather a back-hander both ways. If wife does n't mind, I'm sure I don't."

"Make what you like of it; it's the truth. I love my wife and I'm glad I married her, but I know she is n't the handsomest woman in the world, and I guess if she had been she'd have thought twice before she took me."

"No doubt *that's* the truth!" laughed Stella. "Sam, you are a great person. I admire a man who dares to be as simple as you are."

"I am not so blame simple as maybe you think I am. I don't flatter myself, for instance, that you're sitting here delaying my work for nothing. What did you come for?"

"Not to see you, and yet I did, partly. I want you to come down on the beach to-night — this evening about eight o'clock. I want to talk to you — business."

"Eight o'clock's my bedtime, pretty near," said Sam, overdoing his indifference. "'Early to bed and early to rise' you know 'makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise.' I'm healthy enough, but there's lots of room for the other two."

"Going to bed at eight for all the years of your life won't make you as wealthy as I can, if you'll come down to-night and let me make you 'wise.'"

"You're a mysterious little puss, ain't you!"

"I'm in a hurry to tell you all there is 'mysterious' about it; but, as you say, it's no time now: policeman Yardley will be after me and Nim again, if we don't clear out. Good-bye; sure you won't take the other pie? You need n't think I'm going back with it to Jimmy."

"We'll divide, then, and Lott shall pay it back to him; she can make bully pies. Hold on a bit! — make it seven, to-night; why wait till eight?"

"There's a lovely moon."

"I don't go down to look at the moon."

"You can't see me without, and you said I was worth looking at."

"I said *when* I wanted to look at something pretty — but I don't sit up nights in harvest for that," Sam ha-ha'd. "I thought this was going to be a present of some wisdom. Is it your own?"

"I said I would make you rich if you'd consent to be wise. — Oh, I like to tease you, Sam! you are so solid, so satisfied with your lot — your Lott! I love to see if I can't stir you up."

"Well, you can," said Sam, with a sudden spark in his blue eyes, "and that's why you had n't better try. Now, trot along and thank Mrs. Hannington."

“Let’s divide Jimmy’s pie; yours was the smallest.”

“You go on home, you little baggage. I’ll be down there this evening at *seven*, mind.”

“Obstinate old thing!” She stood and ate the second pie in front of him, crushing the flaky pastry with her perfect teeth between lips as red as the raspberry juice; then she sighed, “Hah, that was good!” and delicately, one by one, she licked her finger tips, smiling at him. He took her by the shoulders and faced her about towards home, and as she whirled in his grasp to laugh back at him, the impulse to kiss her burned in his silly face. He saw that she saw it and knew she knew that much about him which his own wife did not know, nor his best friend. — “But it is n’t true! she’ll find she’s mistaken,” Sam denied, kicking against the pricks.

CHAPTER V

THE BUILDERS

A ROUGH cabin interior where two sweet-faced women were talking; they looked both out of place and singularly at home. It was the middle room of the dwelling called the Long House which the Hanningtons and Yardleys put up the first autumn, to shelter both families in haste. Jimmy would want his own cabin in the spring; meantime they would "make out" somehow. The room was the house-place. Sunday services and Wednesday prayer-meetings were held here, and here Mr. and Mrs. Hannington slept, apologizing for the fact by going to bed later and rising earlier than any one else to remove the traces of their guilt. Tooth-brushes and nighties Aunt Silence concealed as a cat her recent family, but without any of Mother Tabbykin's shameless complacency when the affair is brought to light. You might come upon a comb and brush or some other damaging evidence in the warm precincts of the cheerful day, but it would hurt the dear woman's pride for that day if you did. The unrestfulness of this struggle to separate the two main facts of existence, and confine the details of each within its proper sphere, tired her more than she knew, but she endeavored not to let it prey upon her mind. It was one of the "temporalities," like Barbie having the same room with Stella all winter in spite of vows previously exchanged between mother and daughter to the contrary; or a gentlemen of Mr. Yardley's antecedents being squeezed into another

little den with one window, sleeping on a bunk beside his long-limbed son.

The apostles had their dungeons, and angels brought the keys of release. Spring came like a troop of angels. The sun moved into Aries and flooded the cell with warmth, and Mr. Yardley had his son's room for his company; satisfaction was mutual and open to admission on both sides, — Jimmy, the Benedict, being no subject for commiseration.

All this now being settled, why should the good man move? It seemed to be expected, but with his gentle self-absorption he was an adept at putting questions by.

Through the open windows, voices of men were heard in the uplands calling to their oxen, rich, open-air notes against an undertone of water that persisted without change; no cataract, merely the shallow mountain river playing with its stones or sliding a few rapids in laughing leaps like a child. Hundreds of birds, attracted by the settlers' crops, were chirping and twittering in mad excitement over a discovery which could n't be exploited too soon, and must have matched in their annals the gold rush of '49. The *whack! whang!* of hoes where minister and deacon were gardening in the home-lot scarcely disturbed them, nor even the deacon's deaconly profanity. Our poor settlers had not spare rags enough wherewith to dress a scarecrow, for the beggar Indian was ever at their gates; a sinister suppliant dangerous to refuse.

Lying down under protest at 4 o'clock of the afternoon (because her daughter sat there to make her), Mrs. Hannington works off her frustrate activity in words; nervous women talk most when they are over-tired.

“My child, don't worry about your housekeeping, espe-

cially now." She took up a corner of Barbie's knitting. — "Are n't your needles a little too big for that yarn?"

Barbie smiled at the parenthesis. "I have no house-keeping. You've taken it all on you. Keeping house for Jimmy is nothing, but I did expect to keep house for his father. Either you've enticed the good man from his home or there's something wrong about us: he simply eats and sleeps over here."

"What does it matter where he eats and sleeps. That's not the point about Mr. Yardley."

"It's the point about a home; it shows that he's more at home over here than he is with us. That's what's agitating his daughter-in-law."

"Well, remember you are a daughter-in-law. When you were a young girl sitting under his preaching, that was another thing. He's told me himself frequently that you were his choice above all others for Jimmy; but now you're Jimmy's wife, — that's different. A daughter-in-law is an institution."

"Now, do I look like an institution?" Barbie's large white apron came down to the floor on both sides of her chair, but not in front where the increasing portliness of her lap took it up. The flushed face of a mother-to-be smiled at the mother *emeritus*, thin and worn. Their deep life wisdom of love's inevitable price was exchanged in that look between them. If the daughter honored the mother who was done with her part, the mother ached proudly for the younger whose task was but just begun.

"A very good one," Mrs. Hannington rejoined. "And Jimmy's another excellent institution. No one could ask for a better son-in-law, but I am afraid of him a little — just as Mr. Yardley, I guess, is afraid of you."

We're always afraid of things we can't change or get rid of."

"Where did you learn to talk like that, mummy? You've been theorizing. It's bad for old ladies."

"Well, you put me here on my back! If I can't do my work, I have to lie and think about it."

"Think and lie about it you mean. You've never told the truth about your work since you began to have any. You say you don't do any work! As a fact you are four over here and we are two, and you are as much alone, when it comes to help, as I am."

"Oh, she helps, sometimes."

"'Sometimes' is nothing, for you don't know when the time will be."

The feminine singular was understood to mean Stella, whose name really could not be brought into these domestic conferences in which she had no share, associated always with minor criticism; it did her no good and was a corrupting family practice. Still, they indulged in it off and on, keeping each other in countenance.

"Where is she now, for instance? Is she coming back to see about tea, or not?"

"I have n't seen her since about eleven. That French-Indian fellow came to talk to her and they went off together. She gave him something to eat and took her own dinner at the same time."

"I'm not worrying about that. She's very generous with pies and cakes she does n't make herself."

"I don't like the way that sounds, from you, Barbie."

"I'm not any too good to speak the truth about the situation in this house," said Barbie, undaunted. "It's too much to put up with. Either Stella's got to step

around and help you more or we must manage somehow to remind Mr. Yardley where he lives."

"I won't have you speak so, Barbie!" Silence half rose from the lounge. "Your husband's father! I should like to know —"

"Well, you're my father's wife, — sometime called my mother. I don't want you to kill yourself."

"Let things take their course. I can tell you just how it is: a man likes to eat in the house where he sleeps. It's convenient for him Sundays. He's attached to that room — we're so torn up anyway; if a little rootlet takes a start here or there with old folks like us, do let it stay! I feel for him myself. If anybody speaks to me of a change, if it's only to move a bed into the next room, I feel as if I could scream."

"Well, mother," said Barbie, a little scared, "I leave the matter of his sleeping, though you and father ought to have that room. That's *your room*. We said, you know, 'just for the winter.'"

"Well, he likes to come in with father to dinner after they've been hoeing together all the morning; they have such good times talking gardening."

"It looks as if we were both trying to feed him, and he was gently but firmly refusing my advances and carrying on a flesh-pot flirtation with my ma."

They chuckled, as women will, picking a man to pieces whom they are bound to reverence and obey.

"I don't deny you're a better cook than I am."

"It isn't that; he does n't know what he eats."

"Well, I guess you do!" said Barbie, with towering sarcasm.

"All this has nothing to do with it."

"With what, mummy, dear?"

"With what we were talking about," said Mrs. Hannington, glancing about her with restless eyes.

"What were we talking about?"

"Well — most things old wives say to young ones could just as well be omitted ; I'm only thinking out loud. As I look back, it seems to me I made about all the mistakes a woman could make. They used to call me house-proud. I can't forget how it was our little boys caught scarlet fever. Little Johnny Wilmarth had it, down street where they used to go and play. The Wilmarths did n't believe it was catching. Johnny was n't very sick, but Mrs. Wilmarth felt hurt that I did n't run in. I was firm, though. But that day I thought my citron preserves were too much consequence to leave to a woman I had ; I set her cutting carpet rags on the back porch where she could watch the children. Maybe they would have slipped away from me just the same. Mrs. Wilmarth said they came right in ; she did n't prevent them. It was n't her fault, though ; she was sincere. She thought 'twas all a notion that they caught it there. I knew it was citron preserves. That's why I say, you can make your 'creeturly comforts,' as Auntie Northrup used to call them, cost a good deal more than they come to."

Barbie listened without speaking ; her mother had not finished. The thoughts of an active woman, with a touch of "temperature," who has been persuaded to lie down on a hot afternoon, are not to be held against her. Aunt Silence was no babbler nor morbid in her memories as a rule. This was an old wound that had never healed. She was now smiling to herself and breathing hard, her lips parted.

"Poor Auntie Northrup ; her own marriage was n't hampered much by 'creeturly comforts.' But she always kept

her pride and her good faith. No one ever heard her confess by a word that she had anything to regret, though Daniel was a notorious poor provider and left her with three sons to start in life and an invalid daughter — homely at that. I dare say they loved each other ; he was weak and complaining and she was always well and cheerful as the day is long.”

“ But mother, dear, is Auntie Northrup dead ? ”

“ Why, no, not that I know of, but we shall never see her again. I think of them all in Dugdale as if they were long passed away. We must seem like the dead to them.” Silence paused on a quivering breath. “ But memory is a strange thing ! So many of our old neighbors were no wiser than they need to be and no better, we thought, and the place was full of gossip about one another’s weaknesses ; and now, as I look back, they seem to have been wonderfully good, clever folks in the main ; there is n’t one I can’t recall some real kindness of, even Hannah Wilmarth. I hope it will be so after death.”

Barbie leaned and looked into her mother’s eyes with a gaze fond yet searching ; there was something in her manner that seemed strange. They said no more for a few minutes ; then Barbie resumed in a different key.

“ You know I don’t worry about Jimmy’s comforts. I know just what he likes and he’s got the appetite of a wolf and so have I. I put up piles of stuff for him to eat in the field, and we’d rather have wheaten grits for supper and only three or four things for the kloochman to wash while the man does his chores, and go out and sit by the river, than a stalled ox and — dishes to match,” she ended with a laugh. “ But there’s the father ! he’s on my mind, for he says nothing. He simply does n’t come till near bedtime

for a little call, when Jimmy and I are so sleepy we can hardly hold our heads up. Ever so many times I have cooked things special I thought he'd like, but he didn't come, and I don't want to ask him *when* he's coming, for that implies we think he's likely not to."

"Well, listen," said the mother; "it has nothing to do with you. In spring, he'd come out looking so cold of a morning and warm his back at the fire before going over to your house. I think he expected to go, regularly, but we could n't sit there with breakfast before us and not ask him to take a cup of coffee, at least."

"Coffee leads to other things," said Barbie: "I knew you were corrupting him, wicked woman! But that was long ago; it's only a step to our coffee, and he does n't need a fire at his back now."

"Well, my dear, he's got in the way of it. Just leave him be. It is n't worth arguing over and it puts me out of breath to think about it."

"Are n't those Chinook ladies any good at all?" said Barbie quickly.

"Well, at a distance; if there's anything they can do outside. I sent Susan-Peter on an errand up in the fields —" The remark trailed off. Mrs. Hannington knew herself culpable in the matter of those pies. "She ought to have been back, but I'm rather glad she is n't; she makes the whole house smell of fish."

"*Br-r-r!*" Barbie shuddered. "I shall never eat fish again!"

"You'll get over *that*," said the mother wisely.

"Mother, dear, tell me how you make your short-cake rise so evenly in the Dutch oven."

"You don't want too hot a fire at first. A good bed of

coals; slow, steady heat, so the whole will rise at once and brown *very* lightly the last thing," Mrs. Hannington explained with unction.

"Sounds easy. It means, I guess, starting a fire about one solid hour before you begin to bake, so as to get those coals, eh?"

"Yes, I guess it does."

"Is that why you are so hot and chilly every afternoon, with that queer thick look to your skin?" Barbie felt the inside of her mother's hand.

"It may be a little touch of fever, getting used to the climate," said Silence, who had long known what it was. "It goes off about two in the morning."

"And about four you get up to start that bed of coals?"

"No, never! Father makes the fire and fetches all the water, just as Jimmy used to — he's just like a young man. I tell him it's our first housekeeping over again."

"Adding Stella and Mr. Yardley, and subtracting the help and most of the comforts —"

"My dear, I don't worry about the comforts, and I'm sure Mr. Yardley adds nothing but pleasure. Mercy knows he's no trouble, with his absent-minded ways! he's such a gentleman; do let him eat where he pleases."

"Mummy, it's your own guilty conscience makes you dust around so for arguments; you only excite yourself in a bad cause. When this family divided last spring, we were three and you were three: now we are two and you are four; and it's Jimmy's own father who has gone over to the Hanningtons. How does that look? Haven't you any pride about your daughter's start in life? You don't want me to be a notorious failure that my own husband's father can't live with?"

"Are you serious, Barbie?"

"Why, no, I guess not: — I *am* serious about you."

Mrs. Hannington put out her hand with its heavy veins purpling the back, and touched her daughter's knee.

"You can't very well have him, after a while — when you'll be needing more room yourselves. It's just as well to begin the way we are going on."

"But we are n't going on — not this way. Everything is piling up on you. Either Jimmy ought to speak to his father —"

"No, no! I won't have it. I would n't for the world have it brought up. He'll think we're tired of him. It'll set him wondering whether he's wanted anywhere. That's going to make real trouble."

"Well, well, I'll behave, I'll behave!" Barbie rushed to another topic. — "What do you suppose Qui Court is back here for?"

"Oh, there's no telling what's going on between them. He's found out her connection with his 'chief'; either he thinks he can get money out of her on some old trade between them, or she is trying to use him in some of her foolish schemes: you know what she wanted father to do about Bradburn's property?"

"Oh, yes!" said Barbie loathingly.

"Well, it's hard; it *is* hard. I don't like to see her moping about so discouraged."

"Mother, she does n't mope when she is doing what she likes." Barbie could have added more.

"Never mind," said Silence, flushing darkly.

A doctor would have had her put to bed and changed her mode of life from that hour. Barbie felt there was something wrong; there should be a change of some kind.

But it would not do to try to manage her mother. Giving orders in her own house for so many years, like other habits, was now taking its revenge: Silence had forgotten what a rest it is simply to do as you are told. She attempted to rise, but found herself unable to stand without help; a dizziness not to be dissembled laid her low again, with Barbie passionately recriminating.

“Mother, you will break my heart if you do this way. You make me feel as if I had no right to a home of my own. For you to get up and stoop over a hot fire, this weather, with your heart going like that — it makes me perfectly wild! You’ve *got* to let it be a rule that I shall come over every afternoon.”

“Come, then, dear; I love to have you,” Silence assented speciously. She lay down again, but as she watched Barbie hurrying to and fro with her burdened step, doing what her own hands ached to do, the stubborn truth came out.

“It is n’t a rest, when I borrow of you. I’m robbing my grandchild. Now, go on and mind your business and I will manage mine. You’ll have a poor getting-up if you overwork now, and there’s no time after the baby comes to make up old scores. I know what I am talking about.”

It was late when Alvin went to bed that night. The minister had sat up writing; his light shone through the cracks in the rough board partition. Silence lay staring at it a long time. Alvin hung up a table-cover as a screen. He spoke to her and was startled; she did not appear to know him, but came to herself quickly, saying:—

“I thought mother was sitting there. I must have been dreaming.”

She laughed softly and seemed feebly amused and happy. He was dozing off when she spoke again.

“I have such a queer feeling — such a queer feeling! — all over me.”

He asked her where and she said, “In my veins, I guess,” and looked at him, puzzled. “Something seems to go tick, tick, tick!” She could give no clearer account of her sensation.

Alvin set it down to nerves; and she was perhaps a little “light-headed.”

CHAPTER VI

THE GAMBLERS

SAM listened to his wife's chatter that evening and watched her blythe, unconscious motions about the house with an absorbing discomfort. Self-examination was not his habit and it worried him. He had not "done anything"; his will was all right and his heart in the usual place, but a man need n't be an ass, even if the fact is not generally known. Stella and her lazy seductions must be given the go-by. Sam was clever enough to see that she only played with him in default of some one she could like better. She was a little baggage; she would n't have minded if he had kissed her, not so much as he minded now that he had wanted to — which, as Euclid puts it, is absurd.

The minister had laid it before them as men, married or single, that this young woman under a cloud in their midst was the ancient ordeal, their share in the debt of Adam. The woman herself is the temptation; she shall be strong if the man be weak, and the serpent never dies.

At seven they were sitting peacefully on their doorstep, a model pair; Sam smoking a fresh clay pipe, Sam's wife doing some coarse mending that would not suffer through fading daylight.

"That little woman never wastes a minute." Sam pridefully inspected the work of her hands, a huge patch she had stitched onto the knee of his plough-pants "in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

"I believe I'll just run over and sit with Mrs. Hanning-

ton till bedtime," said Lottie, folding her clumsy work. "Barbie says she's feeling quite poorly. Think I'm mean to go off and leave you?"

"We'll walk over together," said Sam, knocking out his pipe on the doorstep.

"What about sonny?"

"I guess that son won't be heard from yet awhile. It's a pretty night. Come!"

Lottie laughed. She liked to be dragged half off her feet by one of Sam's huge hugs; she liked to have him follow her about. "Oh, I guess he's safe. I never saw such a supper as he ate, poor little fellow! He works all day when he is n't asleep—every minute; he works, for his size, harder than both of us put together."

"Well, he'd better," said Sam. "He'll have to support us in our old age if I give out."

"Yes, you look like it," Lottie boasted, casting on him the eye of fatuous pride. "Maybe you ought n't to go in, Sam. Mrs. Hannington's room is the sitting-room. I'm not going to visit; only to sit there and spell Mr. Hannington and see if there's anything she'll let me do."

They found their host seated outside in a chair tipped back against the log wall of the house. He greeted them and made a motion to close the door.

"Is that Lottie Kiersted?" Mrs. Hannington spoke from her couch. "Ask her in, father, do! I'd love to see you Lottie, if you don't mind sitting in this close room. It's pretty warm to-night, is n't it?"

As soon as Mrs. Hannington began to speak, she became breathless, and she constantly moistened her lips. "I would n't have known her voice," thought Lottie: she was familiar enough with sick-rooms to regard the symptom

as a grave one. "I wonder they don't notice it! I suppose, seeing her every day, they don't realize."

She passed into the dimly lighted room, after a look at her husband warning him not to linger. The deacon walked back a little way with his guest to spare the seeming dismissal.

"She has these poor nights right along," he let his thoughts speak for him. "We'll have to raise a doctor from somewhere if this goes on."

"It's a pity she can't doctor herself. I guess she knows full more about it than any one around here."

"Yes, but she can't, and she tries to make out it's nothing that won't wear off; a kind of low fever. Things have just killed her, Sam! medicine won't do everything."

"We know it, Mr. Hannington." ("Lord!" thought Sam, "I'm glad I did n't kiss her.") His face grew hot while he was speaking. "We all know what your family has been through; it's the kind of trouble that don't belong to you either."

"We can't say that, Sam. When things are sent you have to take 'em. It's a queer kink in a family like ours, it's true, but I guess we can live it down."

"Well, I guess so," Sam could respond. ("My Lord, I'm glad I did n't kiss her!")

"I'll walk home with your wife, Sam. It was good of her to come over. Mother likes to speak to some one when she's lying there awake. She and I, when we get talking, we say too much; we work ourselves up over things we'd better leave alone."

Sam strolled away, sobered and at peace. The trouble in that house had done him good: the deacon's simple yearning over his wife's decline, — this was reality. Such

foolery as that silly pie frolic in the wheat-field — “moonshine!” He would go home by the shore, though, in case Stella should be waiting: a promise is a promise. He would explain how Lottie had gone out and the boy was alone. It might be well for the girl’s own sake to have a few quiet words with her to show himself the hearty old friend he always had been.

There *is* wisdom, he reflected further, turning over the words of her invitation, in neglecting no live opportunity, and the way we come by things is through our friends; that is how some men get ahead so much faster than others; any sort of a friend may be useful. Bradburn had not been too haughty in his cleverness to despise that appointment with the half-breed. (Sam was not altogether in the dark as to Stella’s promised disclosure.) He had delayed the march a whole week, not to miss those few minutes across the ford with Qui Court. What was good enough for Bradburn, no man need turn up his nose at. Fellows like that French-Indian run across many a good thing a steady worker tied down to one job would never hear of. He had come in the spring looking for his chief. He had gone as suddenly, having learned the general facts of Bradburn’s death. Now he was back in daily consultation with her whom he called his captain’s “woman,” to whom he appeared to have transferred his curious allegiance.

There was no reason, Sam agreed, why he should not accept a favor in the form of a business tip from Stella; he had done a good deal for her first and last — not counting it, of course. When she was as weak as a kitten, and as scared to look down out of her litter over the precipices the horses went swinging past, had n’t he picked her up and carried her in his arms around the ticklish bends!

He had not grudged her the use of his muscles; she had wit enough of her own, he had noticed, when it came to getting what she wanted. Now, let her pay him back, if she felt inclined that way; it might build up her self-respect.

She was there on the beach, no longer expecting him, apparently; it was nearer eight than seven. The moon, striving with the long summer twilight, was high enough above the hill to throw a soft forecast of shadow over two figures on the stretch of grey pebbles below. Nim, the outcast, had found his clandestine friend. He lay nuzzling up close to her with his head in her lap; her arm embraced his neck—shapes of nature's perfection, both, unspoiled by work. Stella's arm was rather short below the elbow, too short for elegance or classic nobility of line; it was an arm of the toying type that gives rise to primitive impulses like a mother's mumbling of her babe.

"Feel his little horns," she said in her cosey, casual tones; "they are as big as walnuts."

"You are a naughty girl."

"What are you? do you call this 'seven'?"

"Look at that thing there, beside you! Don't you mean to pay any attention to what's said to you?"

"Don't you mean to pay any attention to what you say! Come and sit down with the rest of us."

"You know you'll be the death of that fellow yet."

"So you've told me before."

"You can't give him what belongs to him: let him go and find it for himself. I do hate to see you play him false; luring him back just for your own pleasure."

"I say I *don't*, Sam! Is it 'luring' to go for a walk? Have I got to keep inside your stupid little fences, too?"

Please 'sit down and show less.' I can't talk to a stone pillar with its hands in its pockets."

Sam sat down and did violence to principle in tolerating her other neighbor, the wretched fawn; they were a thoroughly reprehensible pair, defying whosoever should look at them to point out where, in so much that was beautiful and natural and appealing, the wickedness could hide. The great goddess Rhea, patroness of agriculture and the wealth of cities, has her mysterious worship also in the woods and caves.

"To begin with," said Stella, settling herself for a long talk, "I'm going to put my case before you legally, Sam."

"Your 'case'?" Sam asked, bewildered.

"My 'circumstances' your friend Jimmy Yardley calls it. Has a woman in my 'circumstances' no rights — no natural rights — you law-abiders are bound to respect?"

"I don't know what rights you are speaking of."

"You do, Sam; you know what Mr. Yardley is doing. Now, tell me: have I no rights in the property — the estate — of the man who meant to marry me? said so not once, but a hundred times? Whose death leaves me — as I am?"

Sam understood her now: it was not what he had come to hear, but a good joke on him; her business was first to her, naturally. The hard tone she took so easily towards the past jarred, yet it was a brace to his reflection and a warning to his credulity. He rearranged his thoughts on a matter-of-fact basis, much safer than that give-and-take nonsense that had tripped him before.

"There would be sympathy with such a case, depending on the woman, of course — her age, and — But the

law fights on the side of the family generally. The strongest kind of proofs would be called for."

"In the case of my father's estate 'the woman' got it all!" Stella stated, with perfect coolness. "The family was one orphan girl" — she pointed to herself.

Sam winced: he was a plain fellow, but he could not be as plain as she.

"Are they usually younger than I am, Sam? or any more helpless? Was there anything against me before? Oh, I have no proofs: nothing but my bare word. I was a fool and lost my temper. — I have n't got much, but it's always in my way. — I tore up a letter that would have fixed me, even in law. — But what law is there here? there is only Mr. Yardley. He is keeping account of every cent that's due 'the estate,' for the sake of the widow — a rich old woman, thousands of miles away. He did n't love her; she bought him with her money; she has never had a child; they had n't lived together for years. She let him go — with a chain to his leg; she — so virtuous! She would n't give him a chance to live an honest life. He lied to me, of course, but his nature was honest because he was not afraid. They call her a good woman; if she is, she ought to be told about me; they ought not to deprive her of the right to do me justice. Good people, I should think, would n't want to be led into doing a great wrong. I had written her the whole story, but uncle would n't allow it to be sent. As long as I am under his roof, he says, I shall never with his knowledge profit by one cent of what was *his*. That makes me a pauper, a slave — to this life I was never meant for. I was trapped into it by fate; now they bind it upon me. I shall rebel! Yet I am not ungrateful. Give me some money of my own: the first

thing I'd do with it would be to show Aunt Silence what I feel towards her."

"But you don't need money to do that," said Sam, more gently. "There are little ways — women know how to show what they feel — if they feel it. Why can't you go to her now with this mighty communication, whatever it is? she'd be a lots better adviser than me."

"Ah, she's sick, poor dear! it's too late; and I never meant to anyway. Going to her means going to uncle. Whatever I want to do he'd see something wrong in it; have n't I told you what he said? You don't listen, Sam; you go right on with your own ideas."

"I am listening; but see here," Sam remembered himself suddenly. "You've been so long over your preambles — I've got to go, now; the boy's up there in the house alone."

"Sit down, grandfather: I have n't begun to talk yet. I have n't told you anything."

"Stella," said Sam, gazing at her in questioning wonder at her beauty and her mystery, as it seemed to him, and her hardness; so wrong and yet so piteous! "If you had been born in New England — time they believed in witches — I believe your life would n't have been safe; you and that creature that comes like your shadow —"

Stella gave the fawn a quick hug.

"They would have called him your 'familiar' with hoofs and horns."

"Would you have helped to hang me, Sam? Or would you have stood up for me and been one of the accused for my sake? I could believe it of you, sometimes."

"Now, will you send that beast away?"

"My staglet?—how mean you are! The only living thing that asks nothing but my company; that loves me first and best and always. Every one of you is first to somebody. I have only Nim!" She held up the beautiful wild head and kissed it between the great dark, depthless eyes.

"I wish I had n't given him to you."

"I wish so, too, now. We were n't meant for fences, were we, Nimsie?"

"Go on and talk sense now, if you are going to: I'm in a hurry."

Sam waited with his head between his hands. The girl had a confusing charm that worked hypnotically; he felt disinclined to speak, yet resisted the spell of her nearness by talking rudely. It was bothersome and it was n't safe. She watched him in silence, then she touched his arm and felt him start.

"Look at this!" she pushed into his hand a small metal box, closing his fingers on it with her own, a childish action, but he shook her off.

"What now?" he growled.

"Old Bear! open it for me." It took the blade of his jack-knife to do so, for the lid (it was a gun-cap box) had been weather-rusted and pressed in by small, sharp dents resembling tooth-marks. It crossed his mind and it made him qualmish, that Qui Court's many questions as to localities and where a certain tragedy occurred might have had reference to the recovery of this box. On opening it, Stella exclaimed, "Yellow does n't show by moonlight, but that's gold; and no one knows where it came from but Qui Court — no one who is living now."

Sam stared at the coarse grains of whitish yellow flakes,

and poked them about with his big finger. Stella lifted a thin scale with her more delicate touch.

"Feel of that; you can bend it like a leaf — pure, pure gold! Now, have I told you anything? and you come lumbering down here as if it was a favor to me. This was my captain's secret and now it's mine — not all, but you shall have half of my share when we divide with Qui Court. This," said Stella, "is what he turned his back on to go after me! do you wonder he hesitated? he wanted it for me, for us. — Oh, well, if they had not murdered him —"

"Stella, now you stop, my girl; you can't use that word to me."

"Well, let it go! But this would have been secure, by now, if he had lived. It would have meant the earth — I was his 'queen.' That's all over for me, but here's your fortune, Sam; Lottie's fortune and a future for your children. Qui Court can be bought off for a few hundreds. If it's half what *he* thought it was you could 'wash' those hundreds out of a bushel of sand; you might do it any day — any hour. How much can a man make in a day clear, by farming, Sam?"

"I believe my soul, you are a witch! I could be afraid of you."

"And I mean so well by you," said Stella, with genuine sadness in her voice. "Of course I'm thinking of myself, too; a woman can do nothing alone. Qui Court keeps at me: 'Get a partner, get a partner.' He won't stay down there on the ground, he says, if there's nothing to be done; he can't 'work' it, for that would set people to watching him, and he's got a squaw wife in the mountains; she wants him back to hunt this fall. He's

the only living person who can take us to the spot. I am going when you do, Sam. This is my one chance of freedom. I'll cook for you — I'll learn, and keep your camp nice while you wash my sands — our golden river. Now, are you afraid of me, partner — your little drudge? Why, I'm only nineteen and you are as old — how old are you, Sam?"

"Old enough to keep you in order, my lady: be quiet now; I want to think. In the first place, I've got no money to put into this partnership."

"You've got these things," she lifted in both hands with great glee one of his huge fists, "and you've got this, if you'll only use it."

The fist went down of its own limp weight: he was magnetized; and she laid one hand on his head of curls and rocked it saucily.

"You behave! I'm no pet fawn!" Sam roared.

He set her off from him by main force. She became grave at once and bewitchingly business-like. He forgot the dead owner of the secret she was tempting him with; he forgot because she forgot; she had no more consciousness about it — getting all she could out of it — than the fawn when it went up to Sam, after he had killed its mother, and nuzzled in his breast.

"I've got a little money of my own; I've been saving it a long time — that's my New England blood 'I guess.' It will take us down there and give us a start. After that, we'll dig it like clams, with those things;" she indicated Sam's large paws, but without taking liberties this time.

"That's all talk yet awhile. Are there any papers — deeds of the land or anything?"

"The land — I don't know who owns it; perhaps

nobody ; you can buy acres for a song. By and by — a week — a day — after you show them *that* stuff — can you guess what that land will be worth? You won't need to do your own digging then."

"No ; I guess a man will have to own a pistol then."

"You and I, two simple country folks, can go down there like squatters. It looks much less like prospecting when a man has a woman along."

"You've thought it all out, have n't you?"

"I have. You can call yourself my uncle. I don't mean anything but straight business : can you doubt me, Sam? Are n't you able to see it as straight as I can?"

"I certainly am not," said Sam. "I will go, but you can't go with me : you must understand that."

"But I will go ; what's to stop me going down to take possession of my own?"

"That's another question : if there is a title to this discovery claim it's an asset of his estate. You have n't any right to dispose of his business secrets, have you?"

"Be easy in your mind. There is no title *till* you find the gold ; it's Qui Court's secret now. The discovery is years old ; it was covered up by the Indians from the padres for fear they would make slaves of them to dig that gold."

"I'll think it over," said Sam, in a maze ; — "see what Lottie says about it."

"Now, Sam ; wait a minute. This secret is not yours, nor mine, yet. Qui Court trusted me and I trust you : you have no right to talk to Lottie."

"Perhaps that's so," Sam assented.

"Of course it's so. It must be so !"

"But if I should take it up, there will have to be

conditions on my side : first, I must tell Lottie where I am going and why ; second, that Indian and I will go alone."

Stella mused a moment subtly.

"Very well, if you insist on barring me, though it looks queer that I can't pay a visit to my own 'diggings' because you are there. You take a lower ground, a good deal, than I do. I hope you see that, my virtuous man."

"I see it : men are lower than women in some respects ; it's a fact that's better let alone. If you want plain speaking, there it is. I was n't born a church member nor a 'virtuous man.'"

"I did n't mean a sneer ; I know you are human, Sam : that's why I go to you for help. Of all the apostles, St. Paul was the biggest ; he was n't always a saint nor a virtuous man. It takes two men to make a really great one."

"Well," said Sam, "I must go home and think it over. There 's only one of me, and he 's got to be careful of himself ; he can't lay his foolishness off on t' other fellow."

"Are you going off with my box ?"

"Oh, to be sure !" Sam gave it back, with another look at those curious dents. Stella's eyes followed his. Everything else, when Qui Court sought the spot, was gone ; only this *they* left with their wolfish marks upon it. It was horrible, but it was fate : so she saw it. This was the gift of the mountain where he died, — for her.

CHAPTER VII

CORN AND CABBAGES

LOTTIE waited alone in the house three quarters of an hour for Sam's return. She had found the bedroom door open, a draught blowing across the baby's bed; it had not been properly latched and had opened of itself, but if he had been there he might have seen to it. The baby's blanket was all off! the window up, of course, that summer night; a prowling coyote might have scrambled in; Indians could have carried him off. At this point Sam, who was listening to the recital of his crimes, broke into a rude laugh.

The common matrimonial quarrel is much too common to dwell upon and leads to less of consequence in the case of a Sam and Lottie, than is possible with a more perilous grade of stuff, they worked too hard and slept too sound for genuine nerve-play to reach the danger pitch, and the words of unreserved persons soon pass the limits of language. After Lottie had said her worst and Sam had gone out and banged the door there remained only a period of sulks too inconvenient to last. The kitchen stove-pipe fell down and Lottie had to ask Sam's help before she could cook his breakfast; he tore his thumb on an edge of pipe and swore, and she bound it up and soaked the rag in paregoric by mistake for pain-killer, which made them both laugh. They were children; they could n't keep the same frame of mind for many hours consecutively. That evening, with her lapful of mending mostly of his pro-

viding, she observed, "If I did n't care anything about you, of course it would n't kill me so not to know what you do. Nobody can scare me like you can because you are all I've got; you and the boy."

"Come, Lott, you have n't acted much like being 'scared.' You're all I've got, too. What I'm turning over in mind now is every bit for you. There's no mystery in it; it's making money, that's all. Now, will you be satisfied?"

"But I was satisfied: I don't want money."

"Well, I do, then. I'm not satisfied to see my wife working all her days the way you're doing. We're going to be first-class folks and raise a big family. I want to hold up my end of the job in good shape. This is the country for opportunities, but they ain't all in one spot."

Lottie thought: "That sounds like another move; — not with Stella Mutrie along! If he's fixing up anything connected with her, I shall fight it to the last."

For a man with so good a conscience, Sam found the subject remarkably difficult to handle with fairness to all concerned. There was little danger of Stella's secret getting abroad through him; he could n't picture a worse quarter of an hour than that in store for him when he should lay his plan in detail before his wife.

He was not slow to realize how impossible a partnership with Stella Mutrie, secret or avowed, would be for him if he expected to live happy with Lottie. It took longer to put out of his mind the dream as a useless temptation, and longer still wholly to forgive Lottie what her jealousy was costing him. But the honest fellow could not pretend to be greatly surprised or shocked at her primitive behavior. Simple men are open to this crude

form of marital compliment. There was a certain safety and comfort in being held tight in one woman's arms.

"I guess I'd have been a pretty wild sort of fellow if Lott had n't roped me in. And high time, too! Stella is n't safe to have around for a full-blooded sinner like you, Samuel."

So the matter paused, and next he must see Stella and communicate his decision. She would take it hard, poor lonesome little thing. Lottie had to be flatly informed (there was no reason for lying) that another interview with Stella would be necessary, — in fact, that very evening. She flushed at this evidence that a meeting had been prearranged, and left the room quickly. It was her usual time for putting young Sam to bed, after a romp with his dad, who would carry him in to his mother squealing with joy. He saw her run out and snatch the boy from his sand-pile; she swept in past him without a look, the child fighting against capture, against rules with kisses added for insult. They disappeared like any mother and child except his own. He hung about awhile and finally went off so exasperated at Lott's folly and nonsense that he cared little what she thought.

The second interview was no easier than would be expected. Stella taunted him with cowardice and enlarged upon her own hapless fate, forever the victim of circumstance and the will of others, till she wept; and sitting so near, with no words to offer, simple Sam laid a big clumsy hand upon her shoulder which encouraged her to lean against his breast.

The fawn, who had kept his usual tryst, rose quietly from the edge of Stella's skirt and stole off up the hill to investigate the parson's fences. Seizing the chance to

extricate himself from an attitude he would not have cared to be seen in, Sam noisily gave chase and hooted the beast away.

Nim sought cover till the night was again still: he had found the weak spot. At sunrise the garden was no more; — a tragedy in the annals of a budding settlement. The seed of that sweet corn just coming into tassel had been brought from the garden of the old Dugdale manse; the lettuces and young cabbage plants, over which the parson had toiled in the hot sun, had borne up against frosts and fowls of the air and beasts of the field and vermin, to perish in a night as a consequence of disobedience and crass folly. The minister was human; he loved sweet corn and fresh lettuce, and his words on this occasion lacked a sense of proportion: nor was Stella backward in response. They had not told her she must keep curfew hours. Did they expect her to change the nature of the fawn? it must be that or kill him! as for a consistent antagonism, day after day, towards a creature she loved and had taught to love her, it might be possible for some, but not for her. The case, too, had been taken out of her hands when they drove her weanling away with sticks and stones.

“ I didn't shoot his mother and make him dependant on us! Why did you let him live at all? Talk of the tender mercies of the wicked! — deliver *me* from the mercies of the good!”

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEAD FAWN

A THIRD call had reached the settlement for delegates to Champoeg with the warning added that now the hour was come. Previous meetings, to draw up a constitution for the future State of Oregon, had half failed or not quite finished the work, but necessary ground had been gone over, in close committee work. It was now time the people were heard from.

Jimmy had been chosen, almost by acclamation, to represent the company after his father had declined the nomination, alleging as his reason that he did not care to mix in politics. When his son's name was put up immediately after his own, he knew what that choice meant. It was the first public trust in the power of the new settlement to bestow. They could not give him a colleague; it was the height of harvest and laborers were too few, — which made the honor more unique.

Barbie cast herself into her boy's arms at the wonderful news. They had not dreamed it could be, nor anything like it, so soon. It was a deliberate confirmation of that first impassioned acquittal, which had satisfied neither of them at the time nor after. That came from the hearts of excited men; this made him their equal and their exponent. It restored his pride of citizenship before the law.

Sam Kiersted found it a help to himself even in his own little questions — this bolt that had struck Jimmy

from the blue : it cleared the air tremendously. It made him see there are other prizes in life besides wealth. Gophering for gold looked small as a man's dream beside Jimmy's clean opportunity ; hunting it on the word of a slippery half-breed, leaving your wife behind, carrying a dead man's secret about to share it with that Indian and the dead man's girl ! A queer mess it showed up by daylight. Different from the way it had looked on the beach by a spring moon with the dazzle of Stella's white arms and her goddess head close to your breast confusing your better judgment. Bah ! bah ! Samuel, you are no such fool as that ! You were perfectly straight, with that girl in your arms on the mountains : did your heart beat then any faster against your silly ass's ribs ? Thus Sam shoved himself back into the traces again, and tramped off afield. He no longer worried about Lottie's sulks. All she wanted he could give her if he would : it was n't money.

Nimrod's raid on the ministerial corn-patch occurred on a Wednesday night. Jimmy was making arrangements to start for Champoeg on Monday, July fifth. He left the harvest field before sundown, his mind divided between matters outside and in. Barbie's apprehensions for her mother were fairly hunting her by now ; she spent full half of each day at the Long House doing as she pleased, pretty much. Silence had passed from that former phase of nervous irritability into a passiveness which no one mistook for improvement. There were no more arguments or questions : she had folded the hands of her spirit in an ominous peace. Jimmy thought of Barbie's doubled load and feared she was doing far too much for her own good, but she showed an obstinacy equal to her mother's. He could not stand between them now. He found ways of

getting ahead of her and helping in their own house, though it meant shirking somewhat in the field. To leave, with Sam in full swing, hurt his pride. Sam was in no haste to quit: the days were nearing their longest; it was also part of his plan with Lottie in her present mood to let her wait for him once in a while; he might be the more welcome when he did come. He was not going the whole way himself to "make up"; he was behaving like a child, in short, while chiefly doing his duty like a man.

"Well, I'll have to give you best again to-day, Sam. I've got an engagement with myself at home."

"You don't need to ask leave of me," said Sam, "when you're ready to quit, best or no best."

As he came in sight of the river through bordering woods, Jimmy heard a gun go off. The trail hugged the edge of the bank close under the shade of some water-side birches. Following the shot instantly came a woman's scream. He ran, and at the first opening he saw Stella Mutrie, a white shape, flying towards the beach. The boughs closed, but in that glimpse he had gathered the whole scene: the river, glassy, golden, with the sun upon it and a blood-stained wake of some wounded creature swimming slowly towards the hither shore. Stella had recognized her fawn and knew by the crimson bubbles his breath expelled that he had got his death-wound.

Creeping alongshore under those same birches, Qui Court, watching for plover, had marked a young white-tail take water from the opposite bank. His aim was instinct; the ball struck low and passed through the creature's lungs. Like Jimmy he then heard Stella's cry, saw her hands flung out, her face of horror, and knew that he had done the deed for her unhappy fawn. Whereupon

Qui Court slipped prudently away and Jimmy, gun on shoulder, came plunging into the open.

He hurried down to the shore and, seeing it was too late, stood in silent pity watching the last struggle. Stella had dragged the beloved's head across her knees; his blood soaked her white lap and trickled through her fingers. She never moved her eyes from his great speaking eyes till they were sightless. Then she turned to Jimmy.

"Now are you satisfied? Is there anything else of mine you'd like to kill?"

"Stella, you are mistaken: that was not my shot."

A passionate gesture with her blood-stained hands refuted the statement.

"Why, if I had meant to do it I would have warned you. And never — before your eyes!"

"I don't suppose you thought I saw, but that shot came from exactly where you stood."

"Some one else must have been there, too."

"You can count yourselves: who would skulk behind you to shoot my fawn and let it fall on you? You did it, and you stand there and try to lie out of it to my face!"

The Long House on the hill was just above them. Barbie had left her mother and run out to learn the meaning of that shot, and the voices on the beach. Jimmy had his back to her, but he heard her call. Stella also heard and started to rise. All down the front of her dress and over her breast and arms, she was a sight of horror. With his hands upon her shoulders Jimmy forcibly held her down. He answered his wife coolly: "Nobody hurt. It's only the fawn; some one fired at him by mistake."

“‘Only the fawn!’” Stella writhed in his grasp. “Liar! butcher! As long as I live I shall never forget this of you, Jimmy Yardley!”

Jimmy had now two women on his hands at once: his startled wife, watching him, — who must not see Stella as she was, and Stella fighting like a witch, determined to escape and rush up to those two delicate women with her shocking appearance and her tale of wrong.

“Barbie, I ask you to go back,” he ordered, in a voice which he could use, but seldom did, to her. Barbie obeyed at once, trusting to know why when the time came. But the wild thing in his grasp he forced ahead of him, step by step, holding her blood-stained hands away from him — who must presently meet his wife. He marched her to the water’s edge.

“Kneel down! Wash your hands; wash your face — your cheek, there.” He thrust her arms in up to the elbow and scrubbed them with beach sand.

“Oh, heaven! What will ever pay for this!” choked the furious girl.

“Take off that apron. Now wash your dress. Get down and do what I say; you are not going up there with those stains on you to frighten everybody.”

“Get down yourself and wash your own blood-stains, assassin! they are old; they won’t come out. — My last friend, murdered for your cabbages! My heart broken and you make me wash my clothes!”

“When your heart does break you will not talk,” said Jimmy through his teeth. He let her go. She could have killed him, yet her primitive nature owned the power of his sex over hers; she envied the woman he guarded in

his home, ruthless to all the world; so a man behaves. And he had not changed a tone of his voice.

A short distance up the beach there was a little cove where she sat out of the wind and hugged herself and brooded in dangerous quiet. "What I need I shall never get here." It was not a husband, though some husbands would have done; it was what Jimmy was to Barbie in spite of marriage: she wanted that fine flower of worship at her command. She had heard the voice in which the husband spoke to his wife; she had also observed how instant was Barbie's obedience. Jimmy had not been wasteful of that tone. "I could obey a man who had earned the right to speak to me like that;"—this was a general answer to imaginary accusations in the minds that came in conflict with her own.

Jimmy among the younger men was the one possessed of that union of fastidiousness, ideality, and force which made his regard worth winning. It was his love she had once aimed for, but Barbie won him back; now she had nothing but his contempt, and not for any one thing she had done,—for the whole of her, what she was and what she lacked, to him. And she must live here and daily meet his eyes with that cool estimate of her back of them.

She contrasted the "fuss" made over Barbie in her delicate condition with the way in which she had been tossed about. The bitterness that leads to crime was in her heart, but the Yankee in her blood sneered at any imagined melodramatic revenge. The cony are a feeble folk. It was mischief—any mischief that came to hand—against the heart-breaking rules of this wilderness prison, that worked in the bottom of her little cynic soul.

A pair of feet in "stogy" boots, with the tread of a

man late for supper, came pounding down the trail — the same path which Jimmy had taken from the uplands. Stella was very nearly in the same spot where Qui Court had lurked when he did his work. She knew the feet of Sam, and laughed subtly.

“It’s all of seven o’clock: wifey has been waiting for him. She shall wait a little longer.”

“Sam!” she called: she could see him plainly now, glowing, tall, bare-breasted, a god of the fields; he carried a wheat-cradle tossed over his shoulder as a girl slants her parasol.

When Sam heard her and looked down, his first idea of that fair picture was that the unspeakable girl had been in bathing with her clothes on; — it was just like her! He blushed as he stared, and turned his eyes away; to his simple mind she was scarcely decent for a grown woman by daylight, yet there she stood, her thin clothing moulded upon her bust and arms and noble hips, slowly rebinding the wet braids about her head, as artless as a child.

“Come down!” she said. “I must tell you something.” She began at once and recited her version of the fawn’s death in a tone as lofty and impassioned as Mary Stuart denouncing the murder of Rizzio.

Sam refused his belief to her statement that Jimmy had fired the shot. “He would n’t have done it that way. There must have been some other fellow behind him in the trees.”

“Do you know any fellow that would skulk behind him in the trees? — you know each other pretty well.” Stella was honest in her charge; she no more thought of Qui Court than of Sam.

"Did you ask him, up and down?"

"I was there!"

"Well, did he deny it?"

"Of course he denied it. Was the man ever born who would n't lie to a woman to get rid of her the easiest way?"

"It would n't be the easiest way for Jim. — No; there's a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere."

"I don't understand your expression, but is there any one of you who has Jimmy's reason for doing it, or his aim? he had to look straight into the glare on the river with the current moving fast."

"If he did do it, he'd no business to," came the gruff admission, at last. "If it had to be done, the job belonged to me: I gave you the beast; I'd have put him out of the way not to hurt him nor you either. I don't say it is n't hard, but it's done. We better let it drop now. Every man makes his mistakes."

"Mistake! Men don't shoot like that by mistake. And then he dragged me down to the river and made me wash my clothes. Look at me! just like sheep at sheep-washing. He forced me in up to my waist."

"What for?"

"Made me wash my face and wash my dress and tore my apron off and threw it away." Stella began to sob and shiver.

"What for?" roared Sam. "Do you mean to say he's crazy?"

"Jimmy — crazy! Jimmy has got a wife who hopes to have a child. She was not to see me the way I was — my poor Nim's blood all over me — sacrificed to his cab-bages! If there's any justice under heaven, that blood will leave its mark on the Yardley —"

“Good God, hush! You stop saying those crazy things! no woman ought to talk like that. Jimmy was perfectly right — that time.”

“Well, let it be so, then,” Stella crawled. “What does my talk matter? every one knows I’ve no need to be careful like other women: I’m done for here. Oh, it kills me to stay, Sam. There’s not a thing to look forward to. This is no place for any one but wives and husbands or girls you want for wives. Why do I have to stay!” The wail was genuine. “Why do I have to live?” she forced the note, but Sam’s ear was not critical. “Why did n’t you drop me off when you were carrying me round those places on the mountains? I want to be done with it all; but I’m afraid to do it myself.”

She came to him timidly, putting out her arms. “Sam, take me up like you used to and carry me out a little way — there’s a deep spot out there. Just take me and drop me in. Won’t you do that one thing for me? I’ll forgive everybody if you’ll only just let me slip out of it.”

There was no refusing the appeal of those arms, though it was not death they asked for. Sam obeyed the gesture, not the words. It was first aid to the injured of the old unschooled sort, — all risks of infection taken in glorious ignorance.

“You are good to me, after all,” she murmured, clinging to the furnace of his big breast. “Trust me, trust me and come along! Why should you all be slaves to Mr. Yardley’s old idea? there’s no freedom for any one in a life like this.”

A disturbance in the trees that stood breezeless, gave them a sudden start. Stella looked up at Sam; she saw his eyes grow blank and his face fire up with shame

and fury. Twisting away from him, there was time for one glimpse of Jimmy Yardley's back before the tree-curtain closed again behind him. They loosed each other foolishly and stood listening to his spurning step tramping away on the pebbles.

Jimmy had not satisfied his wife that his conduct to Stella in her trouble had been what it should be — “or she would n't have gone off without telling any of us about it.” It behooved him, Barbie further pointed out, to be more than merely decent, after the personal loss he and his father could lay to the dead creature's account.

“Do you expect me to go and shed crocodile's tears over the beast? I've wished him dead a hundred times.”

“And let Stella see it! Now do go and show her a little sympathy.”

“I have no sympathy for her whatever; she is the real cause of it all.”

“You've done something, I can see that, and I don't blame you; but do it different, can't you?”

Urged by a few after-pricks of his own, he went, and saw what he saw, and returned possessed by it sickeningly so that he could not talk: he did not have to, as it happened. He and Barbie had gone back to their own house for supper and Mr. Hannington, to keep the subject from annoying his wife, had followed Barbie with some domestic changes to discuss, and she was giving him her attention.

The minister had at last seen it was time to move. He wanted Jimmy's help in packing his books and papers. Like other particular old gentlemen, he began long beforehand to prepare for any dreaded upheaval affecting his daily habits.

“You won’t let mother think it was our proposing?” said Barbie.

Her father assured her there was no danger. “She does n’t notice as she did. I can’t remember she was ever like this in any sickness before. She keeps brushing her forehead — when there ’s nothing there ; not a fly or anything! Have you noticed that ?”

“What day will Mr. Yardley come over — to-morrow?” said Barbie gently. — “Sit down, father, dear.”

“He said Sunday night.”

“Why not Saturday? that will give him two days.”

“He ’ll move most of his things, but he spoke of sleeping there Saturday night. I can rest all Sunday. I want you to stay home Saturday night.”

“But could n’t he come Saturday just as well?” Barbie persisted. “Then you could take his room: you don’t need to sit up all night.”

“Oh, I shan’t sit up. I ’ll bunk down somewhere; don’t you worry. I want to be, anyway, where I can hear mother; I don’t hear very quick after I get sound asleep. No, I would n’t like to hurry him. Let him take his own time.”

Barbie thought there had been no great rush about the minister’s move; but he had felt out the situation for himself; the sacred laws had not been violated. He had also proposed that service on Sunday should be held out of doors; he made the suggestion in the patient’s room, and looked to her for approval and was disappointed that she hardly seemed to notice what he said, but it was a great relief for her sake to the others.

“He sees things,” said the loyal old deacon, “give him time.”

He was as proud as the parent of a backward child whenever the parson "acted like other folks." Every one knew that he could preach, that his mind was not on common things, and that his life was beautiful and stainless: it was the touch for human needs in little ways he lacked and they had ceased to expect it. He gave them, in giving himself, all he had to give. He would never change.

CHAPTER IX

THE DELEGATE

THERE is not much conversation on general topics in a wheat-field after the reapers get to work, but there may be a certain amount of subconscious thinking going on. Sam Kiersted's mighty back and arms went swishing through the resilient grain, twelve feet in a diagonal ahead of Jimmy to give room for the sweep of his junior stroke. Jimmy, slighter and less practised, was doing his best to keep the pace. He had come to work later than Sam and hung his dinner pail as usual on a bough of the oak tree by the spring where it was their custom to lunch together. Sam perceived the old friendly arrangement held good; he groaned in anticipation of that meal. Not that he proposed to open the subject, but he was grindingly uneasy until he knew how Jimmy was going to take it. Jimmy would not forget what he had stumbled upon in the cove.

There was silence at first between them, broken by sounds of healthy mastication. When Jimmy had finished he said, "I have a favor to ask of you, Sam."

Sam's eyebrows twitched. "Now for it," he thought, and drank copiously, to hide his features.

"I want you to go down to the Falls Monday to that convention in my place."

"Why?"

"Because Mrs. Hannington is a very sick woman, and she may get worse. It's entirely too much for Barbie to

be left alone. They want you to bring back a doctor, but we don't let her mother know we are sending."

"When did you decide all this?"

"Yesterday morning I began to see it was coming, only the temptation to show off as a delegate rather fooled me at first. I shall hand in my resignation to-morrow at meeting. It will save time to have a name ready; I want yours."

"Why?" Sam repeated suspiciously.

"Because you are the first man they will think of in my place, but somebody has to say so. They would have chosen you to begin with if they had n't wanted a chance to give me a vote of confidence on account of another matter."

"Rot!" said Sam. "That's all moonshine. I have n't got half your brains and you know it."

"The Committee of Twelve furnishes the brains. All they need is honest opinions on the constitution they have drawn up, and the officers they are choosing for the people to elect. If we can't spare but one man he ought to be the one who will represent us as a company. The parson's a specialist; I'm no farmer; I don't begin to understand the interests of a cattle and farming state as you do."

"How about the man's private life?"

"Well — how about it? You know my record."

"Did I dream it? — that you saw us last evening in the cove?"

"You did n't dream it, and I don't forget it. I decided this morning."

"I want to get to the bottom of this; there's something here I don't understand. Last fall, if you remem-

ber, I spoke a few words for you when they had you up for trial. Don't suppose they helped any, but I did what I could. Does that stick in your crop? clearing off old scores, are you?"

"With what? the people's interests? That's their money. In other words, am I honest!"

"I only asked the question."

"Did you whitewash me out of friendship, at that meeting in Grande Ronde?"

The cases were not exactly similar in Sam's mind; he could not explain in words, but he knew that if *he* despised a man, he would n't care to rest under an obligation to him. Jimmy had followed his thought exactly, and chose to avoid that side of the discussion.

"Before I take anything from you, there's another question I must ask —"

"You don't take anything from me."

"Well, let that pass, for the present. Did you shoot her fawn?"

"I told her I did not."

"Did you lie, then?" Sam roared.

"— To that girl! I lied to my wife, to keep them apart; that's my affair."

"You are too infernal hard upon her. You think she seduced me — no such thing! She has been silly sometimes, like a child who loves a game of romps. Last evening she was wet and cold, — shivering and crying and telling her troubles. She wanted to die right there and be done with it. I took her in my arms to comfort her."

Jimmy smiled: "I have heard her talk of dying."

"We'd better let the subject drop: no two men can agree about the same woman."

"I think they can, about some women."

Sam jumped up and stamped down his overalls. "I will talk to your father. If he says —"

"No you won't talk to my father. If things are as they looked last night, then you and I shall talk. Stella is my wife's cousin. If you have helped her to go wrong again — easy, Sam! — wait till I'm through. Things are *not* as they looked! You've nothing to say to my father; he can't govern your thoughts. The fathers and mothers have been worried enough."

"You may be right on that point," Sam admitted stiffly; "all the same, I know what you mean. You lay it all on her. That being so, I don't care to take your job on your nomination."

"Great snakes, I don't nominate anything! I'm not even on the committee. I won't vote for you if you make it a personal matter."

"I will take your vote if my name's put up, but I won't take this job from you or any man, as a brace for my moral character." Sam had delivered himself at last.

Jimmy colored and laughed. "You'll serve, then? that's all I want to know. Can't you see what a pair of asses we are! Come, let's get to work."

They took up their cradles and waded into the grain.

CHAPTER X

THE WIFE OF HIS BOSOM

BEFORE he slept, however, Jimmy was forced to break his own silence as to Sam's affair. The person he naturally told was his wife. Barbie's grieved surprise and disappointment when he confessed his intention to resign, compelled some better reason for it than staying to help her.

He found the story a difficult one to tell without alarming her imagination; possibly he laid on the emphasis wrong. It took him a good half-hour to quiet her fears for Lottie's happiness, and he worked so hard, in despair at the wreck he had made of his friend's character in her eyes, that he could see her vivid countenance begin to change with anxiety for his own ideals:—had they shifted in the last twelve hours? Was it possible he and she could think differently of a scene like that he had witnessed between Sam and Stella? He had touched on it so carefully, she was convinced he kept back more than he dared tell. He assured her that his own anchors held, but she must allow him to mark a distinction between the two parties to that scene: you could n't have travelled in the same caravan with them all summer and not feel pretty sure where the mischief probably began; results would be the same, but the measure of accountability must depend a little on previous character, said he.

Barbie mused: "It's a totally different point of view. There must be something that supports her: how can she

live under what she knows that we all know about her? She really would die of it, you know; she'd show it in some way. Stella is growing fat!"

"Stella is perfectly reckless; she gambles on every chance that comes her way. Sam is a worker and he's got the real things to work for. He'll do a lot of thinking on that ride. He'll be thrown with men who don't suspect what an ass he can make of himself, and he'll forget it too."

"I wonder if anything can ever change her?"

"Not while she flatters herself that power is enough. Money is her kind of power: for the sake of money she'll give all she is and all she's got at the moment,—at any moment."

"I think you are wrong—about the money—all wrong. She wants life, and a woman's life is—love," said Barbie shyly. "Stella has never been loved."

"Well, she might have been."

"I don't know how! Her mother died; her father may have loved her in a coarse way—he shamefully neglected her. If she had been even half as good as her own mother, the way she was brought up would have ruined her. Father took her for duty's sake. Mother loves her, but not as she loves me. Who does love Stella? who can love her, here? Why should n't she go—and find her own life somewhere?"

"She won't, and I dare say can't, work for her living: that would n't be life to her. I tell you, money is the necessity of her being; she figured that out long ago."

"—When she would have married you? how much money had you to give her!"

"She would n't have married me; she might have said

so, but she'd have jilted me, as she did Horace, the moment she found she could do better."

"She would have been satisfied with you, Jimmy, if you had truly loved her."

"Then she would n't have been satisfied very long. I am not generous enough to sell my birthright for a mess of pottage and stick to my bargain without growls."

Barbie went inside to make her customary preparations for next morning's early breakfast, and Jimmy followed.

"Would it be any easier for you, while your mother is sick, to feed me over there? You are there so much of the time."

"No, it's the greatest rest — it's the only rest to come back here. It's so uncomplicated with only you, Jimmy."

Then she remembered that his father would soon be added unto them and the vague dread of it made her see what her mother had been doing, that they might have this normal beginning by themselves. She was mistaken, though, as to its having been such a cross: persons getting on in years enjoy each other's company; a wealth of associations these old friends had stored away in common furnished their daily intercourse with allusions which their children could not share.

"I think," said Jimmy, "we are about as complicated as we know how to be."

"We're learning: — you learned something, sonny, when you made this chair!" Barbie stuck out the toes of her little moccasins which she wore as a rest to swollen feet; they could barely reach the floor. The Yardleys were long men; — few men of any size can grasp the scheme of a chair low enough for a woman's comfort. Jimmy had made these "seats of the mighty," as Barbie called them, in

the evenings of that first huddled winter, in the Long House.

"I learned the mystery of a girl's mind," said he. "If I was n't building them right, why could n't the girl have said so? she was there watching me all the time. And when they were all done, she made fun of me! but you were n't pleased, miss; I saw that plain enough."

"They were not my chairs; they were Yardley and Yardley's chairs — all hickory and a yard wide!"

"Well, come now, Mrs. Yardley, is there anything wrong with this footstool, that makes you look like a crowned queen sitting there ridiculing your consort? It's in the order of things that a man builds his first wife's throne too high and has to add a footstool — when she does n't make a footstool of him."

"Next time," said Barbie, giggling, "you'd better marry a woman of Brobdingnag and sit in her lap. She'll say, 'Take that thing away! what a poor little doll your first must have been.'"

"I shall tell her you were a dwarf with an evil wit twice your size. My next is going to be stupid. I shall pick a woman who can't answer back."

"What a nice time you will have. I wish I had married a troll; he'd be so handy to bring in wood."

"Yes; and eat more than *you* could cook if you worked nights and Sundays. You'd better be satisfied with a man of your own size. I like a woman about this size!"

He took the footstool's place and laid his brown head on her knees.

"Now, seriously," she said, moving her hands over his hair — "Harder! rub, don't tickle!" — she rubbed and continued: "I won't disguise from you, Jimsey, that I

think you did the right thing, but it's wrong that you should have had to do it for such a reason. You are the man to go, and you don't stay because you married a woman of your own size. Do you?"

"My dear girl, I told you so, but if I allowed Sam to think he was being managed by his little brother for the good of his soul he'd see me in Jericho before he'd stir a peg. Yet I was honest. I did think — and I do — that he's a better choice all around than me."

"But you would have gone? otherwise I must say you are starting wrong. Country does come before family with our stock — it used to: my old Colonel Grandfather Trumbull went to war and his wife stayed home and did more in one day, I guess, than her feeble descendant can do in a week; and he was on the 'Board,' if that's what you call it, of Selectmen; they selected him year after year, and his boys of twelve and fourteen ran the farm. They didn't make money, but they were folks. I liked the way that Mr. Gray talked last spring, did n't you?"

"I did: I'll go next time they give me a chance; but the case indicated, as the doctors say, a change for Sam and a tonic for his moral system."

"Well, that's settled, then. You did do it for Sam."

"I suppose I did — and yet, I say, I was indifferent honest."

"As honest as a man need be if he can honestly say he's giving his chance to his friend?"

"But why say it?"

"— To his wife, can't a man say it? The tonic I need for my moral system is to be proud of you. Don't be afraid, Jimsey! I shall not prepare a pedestal for you yet awhile."

CHAPTER XI

SYMPTOMS OF A CHANGE

AT the open-air service on Sunday morning, before the text was given out, Mr. Yardley read his son's letter aloud with its acknowledgments due the honor he therein resigned and his apologies for declining at this late day to serve. At the words "serious illness in the family," eyes were turned soberly on Deacon Hannington who sat with bent head, working his hands on the top of his Sunday cane; he had placed his chair in the doorway between the sound of his wife's sick breathing and the minister's voice outside.

There was a meeting under the trees after service to consider the choice of a substitute. As time was short and the committee wanted their dinners, the proceedings did not detain them long: Jimmy had already primed them individually. It was Mr. Yardley who proposed Samuel Kiersted in his son's place, and Sam was a delegate before he knew it.

A feeling of awkwardness (meanness and wrath), in Jimmy's presence, still annoyed him. He felt better, however, when the other men came up to congratulate him frankly and cordially, and he saw his wife flushed with pride, the centre of a circle of women pretending to pity her coming loneliness, when each was envying her the honor for her husband.

Lottie's face shone with excitement: "Why, I never was so thunder-struck in my life! I was going to make

plum-jam on Monday. Peter Cooniac said there 's buckets of wild plums only five or six miles up the old Indian trail."

"Well, you 'll have all the more time, with no meals to get."

"I suppose I might go on and do it, though I feel so upset! Sam will have to get off early. Susan-Peter promised she 'd bring me a lot of those plums to-morrow."

"Picked on Sunday?" one of the housewives whispered.

Lottie bridled. "I did n't tell her when to pick 'em. I guess I could n't very well prevent it if she did. Better folks than I be have eat fruit picked on the Sabbath."

"Just a meal, perhaps, but to lay in your winter supply! Of course, if she gives them —"

"She give 'em! She 'll be paid!"

"I would n't really want to pay her: that makes it a regular business transaction."

"Well, I don't trouble myself how other people do business, Sundays or week-days; but if I take anything from an Indian I expect to pay for it, soon or late."

Saturday was a disturbed night for Mr. Hannington, while Barbie rested at home. Sunday would be her watch-night. She rejoiced that her father could now have a room to himself, and she made haste to move him and arrange his clothes on the empty shelves that had held the minister's works on theology. Stella had been missing after service, but came in and helped Barbie get supper, very sweetly, in silence. More than once she had offered to sit up with her aunt for part of the night, but Barbie, meanly she owned, distrusted her nursing. That evening, when she offered again, her manner was such that Barbie could no longer refuse. The girls spoke in low voices,

standing by the door of Stella's room. Barbie moved to go inside where they might consult without disturbing her mother, when Stella quietly pushed the door shut.

"Let us go outside and talk, my room is breathless; it will be cooler after a while. I'll sit up till two o'clock; and now you go home. You'd rather, would n't you?"

"Yes, I think so. I'll be back, then, at two, and *thank* you, Stella."

They were now outside where the trees and the faint distant churning of the rapids filled the evening silence. Barbie sighed: All, all was so beautiful, so full of promise for the future. It was so close even now to the heart's desire, but for this!

"For mother's sake, Stella, because we *are* one family; — for peace' sake, won't you try not to think that of Jimmy? I don't say he's too good to do it, but he never would have denied it. It's dreadful for you to feel that way towards some one you have to speak to all the time."

"I shall have very little to say to your husband after this," Stella answered in a controlled tone without feeling; "but the sun does n't rise and set upon his head for every woman, you must remember: I shall have faith in a few things still."

Barbie caught her breath after this slap. She remained looking off at the river to regain composure before meeting her keen-eyed husband. In that moment Stella came back as if on purpose to add: —

"Saying we are a family can't make us one, you know. We can't help being a human family; but think of my father and Jimmy's father! Is it any wonder their children can't get on together?"

“That seems a very wise thing to say. I will try to remember it,” said Barbie with equal coolness.

“Well, thank *you*, Barbie,” said Stella, changing her tone. “I always thought you were one of the best girls that ever lived. That’s why *we* can’t get on together. Good-night.”

CHAPTER XII

THE EMPTY BEDROOM

FOR weeks they had said, each evening after the wind fell, "This will be the hottest night we have had," but that Sunday night was hot beyond comparison. Doors stood wide and every open window of the small cabins gaped for air. Only Stella's door of her bedroom in the Long House she closed herself after midnight. Inside, in semi-darkness, she changed her dress, adding the articles she took off to a large bundle which she lifted over the narrow window-sill and pushed out; hands below received it and steps moved cautiously away. Very faintly from the wood trail came a stir of horses' feet; leaves of the late summer were beginning to fall; one could almost hear them dropping in the stillness.

Stella was now merely waiting. Her watch no longer occupied her mind; it had been but a subterfuge — she shrank at nothing. Yet, in her fashion, she loved Aunt Silence; this sickness grieved and oppressed her, without in the slightest influencing her personal plans except that the dreams which inflated her imagination included something which she longed to do for her best friend on earth.

She returned to the sick-room and stood by the bed listening. Sightless and deaf to the actual, Aunt Silence lay, her eyes unclosed, going over aloud in the blood-chilling tones of delirium, that old track her thoughts had worn in hours of destructive dread and secrecy.

"Aunt Silence will not live long, here, if she has to stay: they killed her when they brought her away from home." Self can always find a refuge for self, when causes are sought for mischief done to others. Stella did not connect herself as a contributive agent with this mysterious break-down. She stood and listened sentimentally: she and Aunt Silence; — they two, the greatest sufferers, the truly injured by the workings of an old man's implacable scheme.

"Yes, you are bound to die if you stay here, poor dear! Don't I know! But if I could get the money soon enough and pay off the mortgage on the old place, you and uncle could go home."

"— May, June, July, August, September, —" the count went on, the sick woman checking off the months on the bed-sheet with her wasted fingers; "— February," she ended, and with a satisfied sigh as though the question were at rest, — "Fort Hall!"

"Yes, dear soul, 'Fort Hall'!" Stella answered, unshaken. "I don't forget Fort Hall!"

"Fort Hall" was the parting word between them. Her aunt's little rocking-chair stood at the foot of the bed, and because there were real tears in Stella's eyes, she stumbled against it and left it rocking empty in the wind from the open door.

Barbie went over to her mother's at ten minutes to two, Jimmy at her side steadying her steps in the darkness. At the house-steps they paused and kissed good-bye till dawn.

There was not a sign of human, wakeful presence, nor the feeling of it, as Barbie stepped inside: she knew without evidence that her mother was there alone. She had ceased to wander in speech and lay breathing deep and

hard. At intervals a convulsive movement lifted her whole body with a mechanical effort to rise, but she was unconscious. The little rocker, as if she had just left it, rocked by itself empty in the wind. A chill went over Barbie: she remembered a night on the plains. The rocking of an empty cradle is said to bode sickness or death to the child; even so might the rocking of a chair, to the one who is accustomed to use it.

"Mother will never get well." The load of this foreboding made her stupid to all else. Stella's absence did not impress her as particularly strange. "Of course she could not 'watch one hour!' The night was cooler outside; her own comfort called her and she went." Young hearts are bitter when human justice is frustrate in their sight, and God's will is so hard to understand.

The vigil went on till dawn. When Stella was not in by sunrise, nor at six, and it became a question of Jimmy's breakfast, Barbie then awakened her father. While he dressed she looked into Stella's room. One glance showed what use the unhappy girl had made of the trust she asked for. That light jeer, last night as they parted, had been her farewell; with those words about "your husband" she had cast the dust of the settlement from her feet. The rest was pure, cold treachery and desertion where everything was due that is possible for one woman to owe another. Thus Barbie closed her heart and was glad the parasite had fled.

About seven, Lottie Kiersted came over on a fast walk, her boy, still in his night drawers, balanced astride of one hip. With her free hand she swept the untidied hair from her red and swollen eyes. She found only Mr. Hanington doing his morning chores outside; neither one

observed the other closely. Her first question was of the invalid, how had she passed the night? — the answer, as usual, "About the same." Then, in a shaken voice, Lottie asked, "Where is Stella? Is n't she around this morning?"

"Stella does n't seem to be anywhere around," Mr. Hannington replied.

"I knew it! She's gone away with my husband!"

Alvin stared at the little, pale, fierce face of the woman. "Lottie, what are you saying! Come out here! — How did you know Stella was gone?"

"Susan brought the plums," Lottie stammered between chattering teeth.

"Sit down," said Mr. Hannington. She sat down on the milk-bench, hugging the child and shivering.

"She met them on the trail —"

"Met who?"

"Stella and her Injun — horseback. Susan asked him where they were going; they talked chinook. 'To meet the Red One,' he said. That's Sam — the name they call him. To meet him at sunrise on the road to the Falls. They were all going south together, to California."

"What time did Sam start?"

"Oh, early! Time enough to get to the cross-trails easy by sunrise."

"What if he did? There's nothing in it. Low-minded Indian gossip. Lottie, you ought to be a prouder woman than this."

Barbie had returned with a pitcher of milk in her hand. She stood by her father making a silent third. Young Sam glued his eyes upon the milk and howled for it.

"Give him a drink, do," said Mr. Hannington.

Lottie from habit demurred. "You'll rob yourselves. He'll get his breakfast soon."

"Give it to him," Mr. Hannington thundered. The child drank and his mother steadied the cup which he grasped in both hands, her hard-drawn face staring at them over the top of his eager head.

"Barbie, you and Jimmy know — tell your father! I don't care who knows anything. Sam is not as bad as some. It was money she tolled him off with. All summer there's been a lot of talk going on between them, — some scheme she wanted to work out with his help. He told me what he could about it. I said 'no' right flat out. He knew he'd never persuade me to consent, so he's gone and not told me. I don't accuse him of everything: I don't want it said that I'm such a fool as to be jealous."

"Qui Court could easily know a little and guess at more, and of course he has a mind like the others; — suppose they did go together, part of the way?" Barbie saw the fallacy of this persuasion, for Sam would not have given Stella his aid and company, leaving her home by stealth.

"Well, Lottie," said Mr. Hannington, "I've no more doubts of Sam than I would have of Jimmy, but to satisfy you, if you've been worried about other things, I'll go to Champeog myself. If Sam is there, that's a lesson to you! We can't wait for a doctor any longer; if there's the least chance of this story being true, why, there's that to consider. The doctor must be sent back here, and we must give account of ourselves at the convention. But I won't believe Sam's turned his back on his wife and his country, too. You don't think he could look as proud and pleased as he did yesterday, and to-day go sneaking off on a dishonest freak like this!"

"Thank you, Mr. Hannington! It's a great comfort to speak to some one — I mean to one — who —" Lottie wept, while young Sam tipped the cup till it printed his forehead, sucking the last drops.

"Jimmy must do this for you, father: he must go," said Barbie when they were alone. "You can't leave mother now." She drew his head against her and stroked his hot, sticky forehead. The wind that freshened up after midnight had died away at dawn; the morning threatened a day of perilous heat. "Go, dear, and look at her: see if you can leave her!"

"I shan't leave her," Alvin said. "She is n't here! You and Jimmy," — he covered his face.

"Oh, no, you must n't go," she pleaded with him.

"Don't you try to persuade me, daughter. If there's anything in it, this is not a young man's job. Your mother would want me to go," he faltered. Barbie could say no more.

They had their hard moments together, then Alvin went in alone. He drew the little rocker close to his wife's bed and sat on the edge of it creaking; his head sank forward; coatless, unshaven, unaware of the heat or his personal appearance, he sat there in the presence of that supreme change, the summing-up of most earthly things for him. Hardly a pride connected with himself was left which time had not humbled, except his pride in the girl outside, — their child; hardly a possession had he kept, save the treasure of this woman's faith and constancy and the years they had spent together. The altered face seemed no longer hers; it was unfamiliar, awful in its detachment. But his whole sense of her, spiritually, enwrapped him. The tide would be long going out; there would be hours

when he might be sitting here thinking about her, keeping his mind from little things; but the hot Champoeg trail and the crowd of men at the meeting was his duty as he saw it, and he seemed to see it with her eyes.

“Jimmy can help Barbie better than I can; he could n’t do anything with Stella. I won’t be harsh, however it is with her. I promise you that, mother.”

It was not the shape on the bed his thoughts consulted. Even seeing what he saw, it could not seem possible he had nothing left but that. He placed his hand over the dry hand that lay hot and twitching on the bedclothes; it no longer owned his touch. He felt no desire to kiss the face on the pillow. The soul of his wife was far removed from human prayers or longing, transacting its supreme business alone within the veil that shrouds its initiation.

“You will never miss me any more, Silence, Silence! but I shall miss you, my dear.”

So he went on his errand, taking it simply as their mutual errand. He was leaving her on her deathbed and her earthly concerns were over, but reality, at last, is only what we are able to feel. The external semblance of her lying there with fixed eyes, fighting for each breath, sinking hour by hour into that fathomless isolation we emerge from and pass out in, — that part which he was leaving did not govern his consciousness so nearly as her active, human participancy through which he had known her as his wife. He could not lose that; nay, more, they were come to the final unveiling of two reserved souls whom life had united by an imperfect tie, and she would soon be free. But he had nothing to fear. On the road he thought, “I don’t believe I ever made her understand how much she was to me, but she’ll know it soon, she’ll know!”

CHAPTER XIII

RUNNING WATER

THE old Indian hunting-trail showed fresh pony tracks in the dampened dust, as Sam climbed out of valley shadows and met the sun. Stella had been impatient, hence her long wait above, which Qui Court prophesied, grumbling. She had forbidden him to bring whiskey; he had however, incorporated sufficient with his person to make him talkative, and although angry with his disobedience she found him interesting. Qui Court never lied unless he happened to be sober. She listened and obtained information that gave her what she believed to be an immeasurable advantage at the present juncture in her affairs, which unhappily depended so much on others: so she walked down the road to meet Sam in a state of exultation.

As he hove in sight she took her stand playfully in the middle of his path; he did not recognize her at once, the sun at her back shining directly in his eyes. She pushed up the brim of her boy's hat and showed the wreath of fair hair framing her provoking beauty; hands on hips she struck an attitude, laughing in his face.

"You — jackanapes! Now what are you up to!"

Roughness was his refuge from the shock that went through his veins, and the weak confusion that followed. She came nearer and took his horse's bridle in both hands. Sweet as morning in the woods the smile was she gave him, dodging the horse's big restless head, to meet his eyes.

"Get down, Sam, please; I've got a world of things to tell you."

"Tell me, first, what are you doing here prancing around in this rig?"

Stella had prepared herself for a hard journey, sensibly, if somewhat in advance of woman's sense in dress at that time. From a distance, she looked like a boy or a small man, in the semi-Indian costume worn on hunting-trips by all the whites. Nearer, there was no mistaking the conscious feminine glance or the decorative arrangement of hair, just enough of it showing for becomingness.

Her laughter and her mischief were Sam's undoing. She was the witch of the wheat-field who brought him first to shame. The same detested melting in his bones alarmed him.

He got down dizzily, threw his arm across the saddle and dropped his eyes a moment.

"Sleepy, Sam? Got up too early?"

"Where are you going?"

"To Champoeg — with my gold. To show it to some 'male citizen of the future State of Oregon'; — my contribution to the 'Wolf Meeting.'"

"You've run away, then?"

"I told you, uncle, I should rebel. You would n't take me for your niece, all proper in the family. Now I'm off on my own hook. Never was so happy in my life!"

"Is that the wonderful news you had to tell me?"

"Part of it: you are not glad I am happy? But the rest is serious. Sit down, do! When you speak, speak low. Qui Court — *il dort!* There's no knowing, though. He has taken some whiskey which I forbade him, but it leads to things: he's been talking, telling Indian secrets. I hold

the poor wretch's life in my hands! Sam, what do you think! There's going to be an Indian uprising this very autumn. All the young braves, tribe after tribe, are in it. The old men can't hold them back. It's coming, Sam! it means a general massacre. Every American settlement and mission they have sworn to wipe out — they are so enraged at Dr. Whitman. Now they see the game: schools and religion first and heaven and all that, to get their friendship and a foothold; then bring in the settlers. Settlers want land. Catholics and fur companies don't bring wives and children; don't sweep off the woods and spoil the hunting. They have heard about this fall's emigration that's on the way: they know at last what the Americans mean.

“Now, Sam, is that worth telling? It's no cock-and-bull story, I assure you. You've all got to go, somewhere, before next autumn. I hold by my first offer; you are the first 'male citizen' I showed my gold to. Come on with us, and by fall, — long before fall, — you'll be ready for Lottie and the boy. It's a better country, far, than Oregon. It's wonderful! Wait till you see! There are homes for all of you; — not where we are going. They will take their own way. There's room enough, — but time! there's no time to spare. Come with us, now! Send back word why you go, and warn them. The Americans had better leave politics alone and think about their lives. Have I talked too loud? No, he's sound. But, careful with your big guns when you begin to roar!”

Sam looked at her in silence. “Why did you choose to-day for your start?”

“For the sake of your company, uncle.”

“Are you safe with that fellow?”

"He adores me. I belong to his —" She hesitated and Sam broke in.

"He is using you to decoy men into this scheme; he can't work it alone. He wants money for the rest of his life, for whiskey and ponies and Indian wives. That's why he adores you."

"Well, I don't care! I have his other secret now. It means death to him by inches if the Indians ever know he's betrayed them."

"Girl, be careful, for goodness' sake! If you brag to him that you've got his life, your life won't be worth a charge of powder. Stella, you must go home. You're on a dangerous road with that half-breed. You're playing with death — not in one way but dozens. For God's sake, go home! Come with me now!" Sam rose and held out his hands. "Come! I'll take you home: that's all I can do."

"Home!" she repeated in lazy scorn. She let him hold her hands which was the extent of her yielding. "If you are so worried about me, come along, then, and take care of your little partner. Did n't I tell you how I'd take care of you, big uncle?"

"I will take you home to your folks; that's the only road we can take together."

He released her hands from his hot grasp; his pounding blood betrayed the struggle, shamed him in her mocking eyes; yet the mastery was his, if not the pride of one who has no need to struggle. Sam was no Galahad, but the solid manhood in him ruled the folly of the hour.

"There's only one road to Champoeg," she remarked dryly.

"It's open to you, but you can't go in my company, running away from your friends."

"I see: you are afraid, as usual, of the looks of things."

"I'm afraid," said Sam, "of a good many things not necessary to speak of. I start now. Thank you, Stella, for your warning. I sha n't hesitate to pass it on, — no names attached, of course. We will be ready! Our 'politics' has just that end in view: so we can act together when we need our strength combined. Take *my* warning, now, and go home. I am your friend, Stella; too much your friend to let you fool with me. That gold is all a gamble. Drop it, and go home!"

"Then I'm a gambler," said Stella. Her face grew hard. "I shall find some one, some day, to play the game with, never fear!"

"If you go to Champoeg with that half-breed, I will give you in charge of the mission. I shall have to see that you are looked after, by force, if necessary, till your uncle knows where you are. Think of the trouble they are in this morning!"

"Not about me," said Stella, divining her place in the house she had left forever.

"Will you go back?"

She arched her eye at him under the slant of her hat-brim. "Do you really mean that? — that you'll have me kept there by force? Suppose I charge you with abduction and desertion afterward?"

"That would bring up the question of your character and mine, Stella. You're losing your good sense."

"Yes," she said, suddenly giving way, in her subtle, crouching fashion. "I'm getting angry and then I always hurt my own cause."

"Promise me you will go home."

"I will promise you this: I shall chase no big farmer like

you to Champoeg: I don't call you worth it. As to home; if you see them before I do, tell them that warning about the Indians came from me, the outcast, the sinner they took back on sufferance. I call that quits!"

She stepped aside and waved her hand lightly, then mockingly she kissed it. Sam, without looking at her again, swung into his saddle and passed the slumbering half-breed at a heavy trot.

Qui Court raised his head. It took him some seconds to rearrange his ideas of time and place. Stella had reached the spot and stood regarding him severely. He blinked and yawned like a dog embarrassed by the human gaze.

"Where is the Red One, 'Uncle'? — Is not come yet?"

"Come and gone," said Stella; "but you need n't call him 'Uncle'!"

"Goes not with us?"

"He is *that*!" she snapped her fingers. "Cattle! They are all cattle, with thick heads, and horns to push you out of your road. Qui Court, pay attention." Qui Court sat up and straightened the red handkerchief about his brows. "We do not go to the Falls, — understand? I waste no more time on these farmers."

"Madame has learned at last!"

"Can't we cross the river somewhere near here and go straight to Fort Vancouver?"

"We waste our time at Vancouver also, madame. All fur-hunter, — no gold-hunter, there. Good place to eat and drink —"

"At least, there are men there," Stella broke in, "and Englishmen. My father was an Englishman."

"Madame has got friend at Fort Vancouver?" Qui Court screwed an eye at her curiously.

“Captain Bradburn’s widow has friends wherever he was known.”

“He was known at Fort Vancouver, — but it is true! Let me warn madame — all those gentlemen what know Captain Bradburn was not his friend, by — ”

“Hush! Captain Grant was n’t, — that I know.”

“Captain Grant have many friend at Fort Vancouver. Where that flag fly with those letter, ‘H. B. C.’ — those men all stick together. I speak the word to madame; reason, it is not for me to say. There are many stories.”

Stella paused an instant: “Thank you for the hint, my friend; still I shall be Mrs. Bradburn, not in law, perhaps, but in that which is above law to white men. The more bad they speak of him, the more they will pity me. It is a strange thing, Qui Court, that the lady of Captain Bradburn, whom he gave his life for, should be roaming the country begging her bread: — left nothing, nothing but this pinch of gold she owes to you.”

“But it is true, madame! They will listen to madame’s story. There are many such story, but not many such lady, my faith! Madame sees her way through this crooked world; she has had instruction. I also knew Captain Bradburn!” Qui Court waved a polite salutation to the air, as if it held a presence invisible, but wisely propitiated.

“But that gold, madame,” he resumed, lighting his pipe as an aid to extended conversation, — “that makes nothing with Chief McLoughlin. He has many years; much trouble with those American. Too much peopl’, all time more and more! Gold bring peopl’. Ten men go to find land and home, ten thousan’ go to find gold! Chief McLoughlin don’ wan’ to smell that gold. That smell bad to him. But it is true.” Qui Court nodded, removing his

pipe and watching a fresh puff die in sunshine. "All those Hudson Bay gentlemen — what they want is room — room!" — with many *r's* and a wave of the hand, he embraced the landscape. "Fort Vancouver, every year, send out three brigade: Caledonia brigade go north, — sixty, seventy voyageurs. Gran' sight! Steersman give order: strike the paddle, all one stroke! men all sing! Maybe some bag-pipe screechin'. Pilot boat carry that flag, 'H. B. C.': those men go to Okanogan; leave canoe, take horse, — two, three hundred in one pack-train. Tinkle-tinkle in the forest, in the black, dark canyon where the river roar. They go up by Kamloops, country of the Shuswaps; up Fraser River. All that one gran' empire, New Caledonia. Tha's only one! East brigade take in the hunt from Idaho and Montana and Wyoming. South brigade scoop in all that from Sacramento River and Snake River and Salt Lake. Ain't that big enough? What a great chief like Father McLoughlin who look over all that, — what he want with gold? — 'Keep away from me all those peopl' what make me so much troubl' with my company!' He has that kind heart: he see poor settler with leettle children, wife sick, cattle dead, no house, no food, winter come. Fath' McLoughlin put finger in his ear: can't hear order from London; he listen to his heart. But that make him much troubl'. No, madame, we waste our time at Fort Vancouver."

"Then what do you want? Have you any plan of your own?"

"Assuredly!" said Qui Court.

His last words held more fascination for his girl-partner than any chimerical quest for gold. Her spirits sank at the prospect of endless journeying in loneliness, past one

after another of those friendly lights of hospitality. If no one wanted gold, why peddle it at such a sacrifice? There were other sides of life more nearly within the scope of her experience and knowledge of her own powers.

“Would madame feel herself able to travel a little farther and join that South brigade?”

“At Fort Vancouver?” Madame would be enchanted!

“No, no, madame; that would be impossibl’, against orders.” Qui Court grinned a form of explanation. “We pass by and do *not* stop: we go maybe a leetle slow; stop at some leetle trader post and buy what we want. Me, I can buy ver’ cheap! On the road we catch that South brigade. Chief factor ride in front; fine gentleman! Tent all to himself. Young, beautiful Scotch gentleman command that brigade. Madame, we show our gold to him. He listen, both ways!”

“Both ways?”

“To the lady, my faith! — and to the gold.”

“Qui Court, you are too free with your ‘Lady, my faith!’ I am Captain Bradburn’s widow in distress.”

“Madame has right. She sees well her way in this bad world.”

“Does that brigade ever stop anywhere?”

“Sure-lee! It is not for the hunt; it is for trade. It stop at gran’ place, the ver’ place we wan’ to go ou’selves! It is the goodness of God! That young gentleman what goes chief factor this treep, he take command at company, new place at Yerba Buena; what you call — where sheep come in.”

“Sheep?”

“Boat, with sail; big boat for the ocean.”

"Ships! a seaport. Has the Hudson's Bay Company got a port in California?"

"A-a-ah! Everywhere that company lay its hand! Father McLoughlin fix that—maybe twenty year' ago. Now they got land, thousan' acre, fine house—cost four thousan' dollar. This young gentleman get that fine new post for himself. He son-in-law to Chief McLoughlin."

"Married, is he?"

"Not to hurt, not to hurt. The wife does not come down so soon. She stay on the Columbia with her father."

"Is she handsome?"

"She has the beauty that is youth; me, I prefer those Spanish lady, las Mejicanas."

"Are they so handsome?"

"Madame will see for herself. They have not hair like gold thread in the sun, like cobweb in the breeze. They have not the cheek of rose."

"Qui Court, you know quite well that my nose is as red as my cheeks."

"What does that make! It is not wide like squaw, that nose, if madame permeet—"

"I don't permit, but I am in no case to scold you, Qui Court, my poor friend."

"Madame commands from the heart: it is from the heart Qui Court obeys. Trust Qui Court, madame. He go sometime crooked, sometime he go straight; take long trail, long way, but he finish at that ocean. There we play our beeg card, and we win!"

"So be it!" Stella answered gayly. "Lead ahead, Qui Court."

The ponies stepped neck and neck, as the trail gave room, Qui Court chuckling in a sing-song to himself:

“Gran’ time—fur comp’ny fort, gran’ time! When those brigade come in, my God, sometime carry on awful!”

Stella mused in her fashion also. She was beyond settlers’ fences and cabbage-patches, and sickness and preaching and thrift, and the dominion of lawful wives. How had she borne it so long! Bradburn erstwhile had filled her memory with tales, not too select, of those “gran’ time at fur comp’ny fort.” How they dined every night in evening dress, those Lords of Trade in the wilderness, waited on by wives and moot-wives, barefoot, humble as the dirt beneath their feet; of their haughty exclusiveness and merciless memories, punishing Peter in vengeance for Paul; poaching on each other’s territory, stealing each other’s spoils, skin for skin, wound for wound, by the ancient law of the forest. These men were, for the most part, bachelors if not celibates.

She drew the breath of license, of adventures coarse and wild. Need we pretend they had no thrill for her because she was part New England, delicately featured, with a mouth like a cruel little rose? She counted over the contents of her travelling-pack: wisdom is justified of her children! The old Havana lawn was there, fragile but unfaded because Aunt Silence had washed it herself and ironed it with her own hands; the red dot sprinkled on its sheer whiteness, of a red to match the spark in each bead of her garnet chain, which always had brought her luck, if it be luck to win a man’s heart when you have no present use for it. She had use now for all her winnings. And her white silk—a trifle soiled, but men do not notice. It would be daring by lamplight in a smoky, vast, rude dining-hall—off her shoulders, and the turquoise necklace set in silver hooked tight around her throat.

“‘Gran’ time,’” she mimicked gloriously — “‘gran’ time at fur comp’ny fort!’ I am coming back to life at last! The mountains are great graves! Oh, when I see my long white sands and hear that roll of surf again!” All that Bradburn’s passionate boast had promised, she saw in the distance of her dreams: homesick cravings for pure sensation, and for that subtle luxury of climate she was born to. Among the Spanish of old California, she had heard there was largesse like to the house of Job: riding where only servants walk, delicious eating without care for how it came, indifference to time; feasts and lights and dancing and night scenes in that Southern moonlight, piercing memories of which, bringing back her own childhood, drove her almost to cry out. Summer nights, sick with scent of orange flowers in a dim, walled court, and double jessamine climbing up the paw-paw; — where they used to leave her quite alone, the careless servants, — with her old whispering neighbor, the great ken-nip tree that overspread the court, and the palm by the house-corner rattling its long, hard leaves like a patter of rain. Scraps of singing, the shuffle of passing feet, faint, thrilling music from a warship in the harbor where there might be dancing on board — and that muffled, savage beat of gumbies in the African quarter, the jungle of the gay white town with all its jealousies thrown open to the night: — the South, the South! And Englishmen were there who lived the life of men and did not torment you with riddles of the soul.

“*I am not ‘sick of surfeit,’ my lords and gentlemen, and I don’t believe that you are either.*”

CHAPTER XIV

ACROSS THE BORDER

QUI COURT spoke at random when he gave Rae, the young superintendent of the company's post at San Francisco — Yerba Buena, it was then — title of chief factor and command of the brigade. No doubt, though, its object primarily was trade instead of hunting. Since before '41 there had been a Hudson's Bay station on the Umpqua known as McKay's Fort: McKay and Astor's old interpreter, Framboise, regularly ranged the Sacramento, despite efforts of Sutter, who had a fort of his own, to arouse the Mexicans against them. A subsequent arrangement set the limit at thirty trappers allowed on the California side. They must have been hard to count, dressed with the excuse of climate so that even a Mexican could not detect them at gun-range; but there was no general license to hunt or trap beyond the Umpqua River.

It was Sir George Simpson's dream, — which ended as dreams frequently do, — that foothold in California. Not McLoughlin alone, but a strong party of three, Sir George, McLoughlin, and James Douglas, went down and dickered gracefully with the dons. General Vallejo entertained them with mediæval picturesqueness; they talked with General Alvarado at Monterey over his seductive old Spanish wines; but the Scotchmen kept their heads and won every point in the game: a trading-post and shipping-port, the right to defend the trail used by their men through Mexican dominions and to punish Indians who

molested them; to buy hides and stock in California in exchange for English goods from Fort Vancouver. Though all this had nominally been accomplished years before, Rae was the first resident; and he had a delicate mission before him. The English were supposed to be welcome neighbors to the proud old families with Spanish names and Spanish blood, — at least they were not Americans. Still, those lazy temperaments had fire beneath: the eyes of the ladies and the lurking weapons of the men were always to be reckoned with. The English would be tempted, and they would be watched accordingly.

Rae had his own camp servants who pitched his young lordship's tent and packed his animals and took charge of his table luxuries, which he handed out in proper style. He had married into the royal family of Oregon; he "felt his oats," perhaps, but he was extremely charming, as every one knows a temperamental young Scotchman can be, and had magnetism for high and low. To this small but favored retinue, Qui Court attached himself, an entertaining, song-singing, but otherwise inconspicuous follower.

His errant lady, also entertaining but never inconspicuous, came naturally under Rae's protection as her future host: by Qui Court's soberest advice they had waited before obtruding the subject of gold. Stella, following a change of impulse which seized her on beholding Rae, introduced herself by her own name as Bradburn's fiancée, in widowed circumstances due to her lover's sudden death on the eve of their marriage; now journeying with one of his trusted followers to prove her claim to property he had left her in California. Qui Court (to whom this was news) listened in admiration. He much approved madame's change of pose.

Rae asked no inconvenient questions: his experience of life, and of errant ladies, married or single, enabled him to draw conclusions which rendered the fair one at his side no less interesting; but, since fate had sent him this romantic charge, he deemed it quite as well that his young wife Eloise should not be riding on his other hand.

From prudence, or because its piquancy charmed him, he made a special request that Miss Mutrie should keep faith for the present with her boyish disguise: time enough to unpack the "wimples and crisping-pins" and the rest of her woman's arsenal when this wild jaunt was over. They talked of it lightly, Rae casting side looks of more than judicial approval at the subject of this sage advice.

Stella kicked her little moccasined feet out of the clumsy Spanish stirrups, wiggled her toes and said, no more side-saddle for her: the dress had too many conveniences. Still it was a sort of occultation and no one enjoyed more than she the effect of her nightly reappearance upon those silent, smoking creatures who pretended not to watch, but would n't have missed the sight for anything. The pretty lad in deerskins they had ridden with all day sat down a lad, shed hat and head-binder and leather over-shirt, switched off his neck-cloth and turned back his woollen sleeves, and lo, from the waist-belt up, a white-throated maid fronting the firelight, flushed and delicate as a rose; sleepy eyes, brilliant from riding, attitudes careless as a child's! Those lovely, listless arms stretch up to search for combs and hairpins, and down rolls the stream of shadow-spotted hair. There are no embarrassed, foolish smiles, but a business-like gravity while

the ripples are brushed out, with turnings of the head, and the beautiful stuff is re-woven into its arm-length braids and each end wound with one long, spare golden hair, thoughtfully detached, and examined to see if it were a good one or already split.

Women are wonders! Rae's heart went back restlessly to his own girl, half conscious too of a mean relief that she was not there.

Then, quite as if Aunt Silence were beside her with a motherly lap to lend, Stella would roll over on one hip and cushion her head on the nearest knee,—always Rae's,—yet no distinctions appeared to exist for her. We cannot say what this was; it was not love, nor enthralldom, nor the business side of her adventure down the coast. She was too lazy to act; her inborn, insolent honesty disdained prepared effects, and she did not need them. She was dangerous because she was terribly natural—and free for the first time—in ages, she would have said, from a constant sense of shocking others. But in spite of this casualness, others began to feel *de trop*. Long before the Mexican line was passed she and Rae were spending the evenings in each other's exclusive company.

Long silences fell between them charged with the melancholy of shortening days. They were coming to the sea where everything resolves itself into something else, or disappears. She developed moods of confiding wistfulness; unburdenings the most extreme seemed hovering on her lips. In fact she was tired of the ingénue rôle she had assumed; like water she sought her own level if it were the ditch; she was risky and capricious till she found it. She might have been supposed now to be courting Rae's

sympathy as another of the poets' long list of hapless maids deceived, — she of the weary lot, or that other fair one who tied her hair in a horse-boy's trim. These guises pleased her present fancy which luxuriated in sadness. They provoked Rae's passion, as steady drinking on a journey both lazy and exciting inflamed his blood. He may have been no more a libertine at heart than Sam Kiersted, but he needed Sam's large doses of hard work, administered by the natural persuasion of circumstances which preach results. Nightly he tossed and groaned to himself that he wished he had never met the little witch — never known there was anything like her in the world!

CHAPTER XV

HAVING REACHED THE BAY

STELLA had been considering, on and off, her own private interests lodged in the person of Qui Court. Knowing his weakness and the temptations awaiting him, she tried her persuasions to induce a greater frankness between them concerning the discovery they were to share. Qui Court had nothing that he could tell madame; he could only go himself and show; like Bradburn his maps were in his head. If he could have told more, evidently he thought it safer not to. This was by no means Stella's opinion, but she feared to press the matter and thereby possibly excite distrust. She carried the tangible evidence, the grains of rough gold, but the secret of its hiding-place remained incorporate with the person of Qui Court, subject to his well-known liabilities: he promised to take great care of himself lest he become its grave.

With the aid of discipline absolutely he was discretion's slave, on the march; but the fort's welcome to an incoming brigade always had been one of those occasions when discipline was understood not to count.

There was an evening and a night when no official inquiries were made, whatever the sounds from the court below, or outside the walls, or stumbling along half-lighted galleries; and there was an hour or two of darkness and heavy sleep before dawn, when groans in the patio mingled with grunting of drunken men, annoying each other in their dreams. The officials also had been

celebrating. After a bath and tea and hours of inordinate repose, Stella woke thinking she had slept the clock around and cheated herself of the opening scene of this first-night play. A barefooted Indian girl, much wrapped up about the head in a black-and-white rebozo, came in without knocking, shielding a candle from the draught. It appeared to be her mission to light Qui Court who entered in the same frank Latin fashion bearing madame's travelling-packs, his new tinsel-braided sombrero riding atop. The door stood open; she could see, over the kneeling shape of Qui Court unroping her packs, shadows of red torchlight jumping about the court, and a few stars, distant and silver clear in a patch of purple sky. There was also a peculiar rustle of trees that were not pines, a swell of water that was not rapids. Again she sighed: the South — the South!

Something important she had to say to Qui Court when they were alone, but Qui Court managed to make his escape while the maid was asking if the señorita would have supper in her own chamber or with the gentlemen below. Stella answered decidedly, "Below!" She could not recall enough Spanish to order that Qui Court be fetched back immediately — so there was the first mistake! — which Bradburn would never have made. However, one must dress for supper; there was not too much time.

Rae apologized for the patriarchal Mexican fashion in which supper was served for this occasion; but his guest was charmed; she called it baronial. The *engagés*, increasing in color as they diminished in rank, seated themselves in two long rows, below the salt. Qui Court was not among them; his mistress could hardly ask why. Her

place was the seat of honor beside Rae at the head of the board. Each dish of distinction was presented for her approval before the servant set it before his master to serve. Four or five silent young Englishmen completed the official group. It dawned upon Stella that her presence, however delightful, had not been expected below stairs that evening, but her spirits were not dashed: she resolved to be no damper on the company.

Her uncommon ease and fluency seemed to embarrass the juniors, under the eye of their commander, even more than the amazing stranger's loveliness and style. To them she seemed superb — in the soiled white silk and turquoise chain. When nothing else could be thought of to say, each in turn sought her eye, blushing, raised his glass and asked if he might have the honor? The honor was had, more than a sufficient number of times to witness the metal of the company. Rae's official stateliness wore off. Underlings left the table and a fitful booming of guitar-strings mingled with hoarse laughter in the patio. Every one cried upon Rae for a song: he gave them "Her looks were like a flower in May." Concluding, amidst applause, he called a toast with a gallant air "To 'Phemie'" — heroine of the song — and fixed his swimming gaze daringly on the heroine at his side. With his right arm across the back of "Phemie's" chair he held his glass to her lips insisting that she honor it with the first sip. Between them the wine went all into "Phemie's" white silk lap. It was red wine. She rose and backed away in horror, holding out her skirt. Rae supported her while servants wiped off the brutal stains. But her spirits sank at the spectacle below recovery; she said it was Nim's blood and Jimmy killed him, and why did they all look at her!

Later, they were seated side by side on the floor and she was reciting to Rae brokenly her indignities in the past.

“An’ he push me in the water — says, ‘wash my dress’! ‘You can’t go up there, such a shight you are!’ — ‘was Nim’s blood’! — See’s blood?” They reclined upon each other and she wept.

At two o’clock, the afternoon following, a heavy-eyed court of enquiry sat in the crowded filthy patio, upon one of those familiar cases of a grand time when the yearly brigade comes in. It lay with its boots on wrapped in a gaudy serape stiff with dark brown stains resembling dregs of wine, — being that which was left of Qui Court, who had reached the Bay.

Of witnesses sober enough to testify, most had seen nothing and the rest told lies for the benefit of the living: what difference — to the dead! There was languor and decency, but no surprise. The court adjourned with a headache and called for sherry and bitters.

Later, it was necessary that Stella should be told. She stormed, and declared it only another of fate’s ironies: such had been her life, frustration, mockery — the sport of chance. Qui Court should have been put in irons the moment he entered the fort.

Rae forthwith was appealed to regarding that prospective fortune she had come in search of, — her lover’s legacy, — lost by Qui Court’s unnecessary death. She showed him the product of that golden river once more gone back to the fabulous, the unknown.

Rae said it was pretty — squeezed the little hand and its handful of gold, and closed up both in his.

"But that's nothing, my dear, for you to cry about."

"Ah; you can say it's nothing! Of course it's nothing if it is never found — but it was all I had."

"But I say! what's gold to you?" — With his little finger held apart, he lifted one tress of her hair.

She tossed her head away.

"It might have been something to *you*! It was all I had to pay my debts with."

"Indeed!" said he; "and may I ask what debt you owe to me?"

"I have accepted a thousand kindnesses. Why, you picked me up on the road!"

"Did you expect to pay for my 'kindness' with that stuff?"

They were in Rae's office — accidentally private at that hour. The same depressed young Indian girl came in with the same rebozo wrapped about her head, and knelt to light a fire in the stone chimney-place where logs were laid. Then she rose and went to the open window.

"Don't let her close it," Stella cried; "don't you love the smell of sea fog?" She drew up nearer to the fire.

"How is your toothache, Bonita?" Rae asked the girl. "You had better go and do as I told you!" Bonita shook her head mournfully and withdrew. Men were talking loud and laughing in the corridor. Rae sank his voice: "She will be your maid — Bonita."

"But I can't stay here! you are dreaming! A little while, perhaps, till I brush up my Spanish. — Why do you look at me?"

"You hurt me."

She temporized on the old key of pathos: "Everything hurts, whichever way you turn — me, I mean! *You* are

a vice-king down here: you have married the king's daughter. Of course my little kingdom has all gone to smash," she added, with bitter synchronism. — "How hard and extremely high your vice-regal chairs are: I think I shall take the floor. Really you don't belong down here; this is my place."

"Don't I?" — he stretched himself on the bearskin rug beside her. "This is how it used to be."

She pushed his arm away peevishly. "Did I hear you say just now, 'my God'! — what was that for?" He did not explain.

"Well," she subjoined: "a very pleasant time was had, and now it's over. It has n't ended very well for me. When I looked at my poor frock, this morning, all over those dreadful stains, *I knew!* Something of mine was dead. I knew the sign! Qui Court's death finishes everything for me, unless some one will go shares and help me find that gold. There are n't more than just so many rivers in California. It was in the sand — you washed it out; I mean you washed the sand out." She was watching him while she rambled; the bait had not taken. "I see! I can't tempt you?"

"— Not with gold."

"I thought you were young enough perhaps to stake something on the chance? It is my last chance, you know. I suppose you are ambitious?"

"I hope so."

"Well; I've nothing but my bare hands," — she showed them. "I was n't brought up to work, but I dare say I can learn."

Again Rae muttered "My God!" His color deepened hotly. Whether it was prudence in the king's son-in-law,

or principle or ambition, it goes on record that he made a pause. The proper enquiries followed. Had she no friends in the States whom she could write to? "I only make the suggestion for your sake, of course, you must know!" he added hurriedly.

"I have the relatives I told you I ran away from. They are Yankees, up in Oregon, in a raw settlement just begun. They brought me out with them across the plains, on a sort of crusade, founded on religion and hard work; — old New England Calvinism, I suppose, when it was ministers who ruled."

She threw a little more light, from her own direction, constructive rather than revealing, upon her relations with these quaint folk. Rae had seen specimens — of the same sort, as he imagined from the descriptions she dashed off. For a creature like this, a born exotic of fairest Saxon blood, framed for pleasure and to give pleasure, what an existence! — what a sacrifice!

He rose and she stood up languidly and faced him, with a curious smile.

"I want that gold, Stella, my dear! Will you give it me?"

She opened her hand — "It's worthless to me!"

He freed her palm of the clinging grains. "You will deposit this now with me; and you shall draw on your banker: let it signify to the extent of my means whatever you feel it might have been worth. That is the way to arrange it."

"Do you know that you insult me? You make me a child! — boasting of something that is all imagination."

"Is n't your pride mostly imagination? — and what about my pride! You were going to pay me off with a

share in a gold-mine! I don't do that sort of business with ladies."

"How idiotic we are!" she sighed. There might be such a thing as carrying the point of pride too far. — "Alas for those who succeed too well!"

"Listen: don't fret about terms." He was quick to perceive her hesitation. "Be a noble-minded girl! Here is your true account with me: you can break *this* bank, but, till it does break, your drafts will never be dishonored."

Her hands were taken and pressed against his velvet waistcoat — a very splendid affair, where indeed she might have felt the same disturbance she once caused in Sam's perspiring breast, in Horace's poor cheated organ, what time she had carried Jimmy's boyish outworks and he was defending the citadel. Bradburn we leave out of the list of her victims: she was his.

She drew her hands away, wondering at this odd distaste: was she already blasée? Her bracelet caught in his florid watch-chain arrangement, and an open-faced locket jumped out and dangled in full view. She glanced as he put it back.

"The queen?"

His face turned crimson.

"When is she coming down? — You will think me rude again, but is n't there danger of our two accounts getting mixed? Mine of course is a fable. What, may I ask, have you to offer me except charity, — suppose I were 'noble-minded'? Do you mean really to be generous? How generous can a man be, I wonder?"

Rae studied her with gloom and with some excusable resentment. She had been high-fed on the way down with flattery and fun and adventure, and just enough fatigue

thrown in to give health and youth the spring of resistance; and the fresh wild scenes they rode through, day by day, were an equal stimulus to the imagination. Last night's celebration — what he could remember of it — showed her no less in a coming-on disposition; but it was the day after for him; he should have remembered it was the same with her. It could scarcely be called a convincing tie that they had sat on the floor together.

“And when Sarah turns me out of the tent . . . ?” she enquired brutally.

“Sarah!”

“Don't you read your Bible, Scotchman? It begins with Genesis.”

Without being remarkably clever he began to suspect that this fury was potential yielding. She was prepared to punish him for his power.

He petted her. “Lovely one! I shall find a place to wear you — ‘lest my jewel I should tine.’” He drew her in to that place, fain to play his part as a gentleman should; but she criticised him savagely — him and his part. No doubt she despised him for the lies he would tell his young wife. She had lately lived with men who, if they did not make you in love with the Puritan ideal, taught you at least to respect its strength. Her thoughts ran strangely upon things of no relevance to being kissed by Eloise McLoughlin's handsome husband: there was Qui Court in the room across the patio; she had looked in at him a moment — stretched on two boards with candles at his head. The candles flared, a draught trembled the faded fuchsia blossoms Bonita had propped in his dark stiff hands. She had never seen Qui Court still except he was asleep. That he should not move! And there

was Aunt Silence rocking in her funny old chair by the camp-fire on the mountain; she saw the far sky wells tall pine tops make when you lie and look up and see stars drowned in their depths. The camp-fire roared and crackled and sent up flights of sparks and the pines made their rushing sound like great wings overhead in the dark. Aunt Silence would not speak; and then she did speak! "Do you expect me to be ugly to you? I never shall be."

"Never! no, she would pity me now. *This* would discourage her!" The sick incoherence of her emotions, which she hugged under the name of despair, wrought her to the point of sobs, hard sobs! Her head lay on this other man's breast like a broken flower; and he pressed her to him thinking, "I have misjudged her: she is as pure as a child — a lost child." Was he doing a greater wrong than his conscience or his code could take care of? But it was too late. She was his.

"Now, God help me to behave myself *in every other way*."

How this unhappy young gentleman succeeded in his resolve, history must tell. I have never found but one allusion to the story — a brief summing of its close; but it quite answers the purpose.

They had one of their sporadic revolutions down at the Bay and our young Scotchman took the insurgent's side. It was not expected he should take any side, but he did: the rebels disliked the Americans and favored the English. Rae furnished them arms, but they were beaten. Under these circumstances we do not pay our debts. He found himself responsible for \$30,000 of the company's money risked on the lost cause. This may have been the final stroke on the sundering wedge.

He and his wife had frequent quarrels. "Rae certainly drank hard ; he may have cherished errant loves," says the cold chronicle. There was one high scene early on a winter morning in the young couple's apartments over the stores. A woman's cries, — two pistol shots in quick succession — a fool and his brains are soon parted ; and the "bank" we have heard of closed its doors for this life upon those sporting securities and sadly mixed accounts, and awaited the Examiner.

"Sir George Simpson ordered the San Francisco post closed. The one thousand acre farm, which would have been worth more than all the company's furs of Oregon if they could have held on to it till San Francisco became a city, was relinquished without any compensation," says history again. And we sincerely hope that Eloise McLoughlin did not spend her life grieving, and that she ultimately married a stronger man.

CHAPTER XVI

A MAIL FROM THE SOUTH

To Mrs. Lottie Kiersted, up in Oregon, from Samuel Kiersted; dated San Francisco, January, 1850 (Extracts)

MY DEAR LITTLE WOMAN:—

I am just about as homesick for you as I can be, yet every time I look around I see reason to be thankful that you and the kids are not here. There is just one word for this *hell-hole* of a place. Make it two and a hyphen, and there you are. I shan't be here but a few days more. Have got my stuff and expect to start for Hawkins Bar on the Stanislow Monday, I guess, or Tuesday. I don't know as it is on the Stanislow, but it's either that or another river with a name I can't spell: begins with "Too—" [Tuolumne.]

Well, say! I wish you could see the shipping in this harbor that only woke up day before yesterday from a trance that must have lasted since creation. Spanking tall great clipper ships from round the Horn don't seem to feel it any condescension to tie up in front of this mud-wharf town. On Long Dock it is half-leg deep. Houses?—a mean collection of wood and canvas shacks strung along the bitter windy sand-hills; streets that are wallows, full of the God-forsakenest crowd on earth.

It is going to be another story, though, before many years. The Bay is another story now! They call its ocean entrance the Golden Gate. Sounds fancy, but it is n't any too fancy if you could see it. Give me the treeless mountains, after all—the colors they get at sundown!

Well! and how about all of you? Haven't heard a word yet and I don't suppose you have had anything from me. Don't you get to worrying, that's all. The mails can't be regular. I am as hearty as a steer; feeling fine, and glad I don't drink, if you know what that means. There is n't a dozen or a hundred, but thousands of men, gambling in this town at one time and most of them drunk the rest of the time. One single house gets \$150,000 a year for the rent of the monte tables. Of course the sharpers and black-legs scoop all the money; the fools go back to the mines and dig. Sunday here is no different from any other day, only more drunkenness. — As for the women!

I must tell you something — but don't let it get to any of Mr. Hannington's folks — I've seen Stella! What do you think of that! She was with a man who looked dressed good enough for a Congressman or a college professor, but a card sharp, I guess, by his eye. I expect better men than him have been hung. They were right in the light going into one of these common variety shows that I would n't think any lady could sit through. I saw she recognized me by the look she gave, and then *she did n't see me!* I stared so hard the crowd looked at me and sort of laughed, and I said right out before I thought, "Why, I know that lady!" — and they laughed more.

She is as handsome as ever. I guess there is n't any handsomer woman in this town, which is saying little enough, but a lot of money is spent on women here. Her face looks awful small, somehow. She had on a little white flaring bonnet with a pink wreath inside and her curls hanging down and a lace shawl over a splendid silk dress. She did n't look to be in want! It is only the last step on the road she was going when I saw her last, but I was dumb-

struck. You can't believe it of a woman you have known ! And I don't know why I tell *you*, only I don't seem able to get it off my mind. Aunt Silence's niece that she'd have done anything for, — here in this town, — alone : I could n't make it seem true. I asked a little Mexican gentleman, in a shawl, if he knew who that lady was that just went inside. A funny question, but they all acted more or less as if they knew her and every eye was on her. He took off his big cart-wheel hat, and his cigarette out of his teeth, very polite, and said some words in Spanish, never cracked a smile. I only caught *señoras*, but a white man with him put it, without any bones, into Bible English, so there is n't any mistake about it. I found out since what that Spanish was, the little señor called her. It meant one of the Light-hearted ladies. Tried to soften it, I guess, thinking she might be some relation. Well, it did n't help the matter, for me, any.

Nobody here knows her right name, and I shan't tell you the name she goes by. She chose it to hide herself, and there she showed some little feeling. We don't need to ever speak of it again.

There will be wives and children by the ship-load, whooping it in here before another Christmas. Then we will start some real families. There's a good deal more in this country besides gold. The gold has made all this pandemonium rush that brings the scum of the earth, but scum is generally on top. There are decent men here — as good as I be ! Come, now ; don't spare my blushes ; say that's good enough ! And there are shrewd, quiet chaps, minding their own affairs, picking up money hand over fist in real estate or commissions or starting freight lines. Freight to the mines is sixty cents a pound. Any sort of a jack

mechanic gets his ten to twenty dollars a day. The price of food is scandalous, ridiculous!

This country where I am bound is a happy Canaan, so I hear, — beautiful oaks and patches of grass and little valleys, — gulches, they are called, — that stay green most all summer. The river comes out of a mountain gorge — Say, sis! can't you see us planted on a little ranch, raising our own stuff and maybe a trifle over — old man in his shirt-sleeves washing gold on the sandbar — our own little gold-mine — own little cabin and pigs and hens and calves — own little wife and kiddies! Eh? Now, get that everlasting sewing done before spring — pack up your goods and auction off the furniture. You ought to get good prices, so many folks coming in. Make Jim Yardley stick to his word about taking the place on shares — don't want to sell the house from under you, in case anything should happen. And before the salmon begin to run expect to hear me hollerin' for you down here. We will keep our Sundays and spend them in the woods. You and the chicks can hunt wild flowers and I'll get some fishing; and game is plenty — deer and mallards and plover — and the mountain quail, which they say for eating beats anything.

I expect to be quite a few days getting up country. Teams can't make more than three miles a day across those boggy flats and post-oak quicksands. That's from Chinese Diggings to Hawkins Bar. In summer I s'pose it will dry up and crack open. Well, we can't have everything and have it all at once!

Talk of chances! Sacramento City is just a mushroom village, on a flat point that's part of the year a foot or more below high-water. Lots that could have been bought six months ago for two and three hundred are selling now

easy for thirty-five hundred. Of course I shan't break into that yet awhile, but I hain't forgot how to farm. If I should happen to stake out a poor claim and can't make wages, as wages are here, I will turn to, I guess, and raise foodstuff and sell to these other fellows at boom prices. That's what Jim Yardley said: he laughed at me! You go down there and dig your gold — when you find any. Oregon will feed you! Well, Oregon is n't going to do it all. This country is going to be some on wheat and grass, and cattle and various other things. — Tell Jimmy not to fret! . . .

From Samuel Kiersted at Hawkins Bar to James Yardley, dated six weeks later.

DEAR JIM: — I'm in considerable of a rush, but there is something I want to talk to you about for your opinion. Been thinking about that money Mrs. Bradburn said she would n't take and wanted it put into a church or a school-house in memory of the man she thought she knew, and we could n't see it somehow, and your father said it would hurt her to send it back. As I understood, we voted it should be held in trust for Stella, and if it was too late to do her any good 't was to help any young woman in similar trouble or likely to be. And we never had any case to call for it. We are not that sort of a community, are we? — and not likely to be for some years to come; but it is different here: I am speaking of *now*. I am glad you and your wife have kept what Lottie told you about Stella. I did n't mean it should reach the elders. It *is* too late, I'm afraid, for her. She has more money than is good for her slipping through her fingers every day. If she could have had it — come by honestly — in

time, she might have felt less hemmed-in. She never liked the life up there. You can't blame her. If she had had the means she might have gone back East (might, I say!) and perhaps married that first man she told me about once, that she broke with for Bradburn: I guess he would have taken her. Now, she won't need money till her capital is gone. You know what I mean, poor thing. But the women are coming in here fast — all sorts. Some the worst, some only risky. The Southwest gets in a good deal of beauty and a soft kind of disposition; there are French and Creole and the half Indian Spanish — Well, I could think some of that money might perhaps do a little good out here. I don't mean sending the money here. But — to finish about Stella: ten to one I'll never come across her again. We are a hundred and fifty miles from the Bay. She is a first-class planet of the night. She will never hide her light in a mountain camp — and, as I say, no amount of money could help *her*. But there are young girls like wild weeds around here something might help if you catch them in time. I thought your friends back East might perhaps know some good hard-twisted women with their livings to earn who would n't be scared to come out here if their passage could be paid. Suppose they were to marry right away! They would be doing the best kind of missionary work wherever they make their homes. I expect Lottie to be a shining little light when I set her on my hill. You *can* touch pitch and not be defiled! Inside, is your affair! The outside will take care of itself. Lottie, like enough, will be the only decent woman in this camp, but where there's one there ought to be more, and when two or three are gathered together, the men will begin to straighten up. Little Sunday supper invitations will be at

a premium, and picnics in the woods with nice women-folks and baskets, with clean napkins, full of good home things to eat. Why, the boys would just tumble over each other to get a front seat at that kind of thing. Of course the dregs of both kinds would keep where they have to be. But what we principally need out here now, *I* think, are good, plain old-fashioned women-folks that you can't budge from their hymn-books and their cook-books and the old Ten Commandments, and who are not afraid for their own righteousness, as if it was a white starched skirt. . . .

I said something to Lottie about our land — not more than half joking. Of course, Jim, if you don't feel to do it — what was said was only verbal. I don't expect to hold you, but your father urged me not to sell out, and I saw he had reason. I might get hurt or something might happen and then I should want Lottie to go right back among you all. Well, I've talked enough: you can put the idea about that trust money better than I can. I don't want to poke myself in, and may be it's all a bum notion arising out of the contrast between things *here* and to home. The country is all right — never saw a better — but the social side, the moral side — to talk big! — that's another story. But you can't help liking these fellows, and there's no market for humbug here, more than with a gang of schoolboys.

Now, Jim: here's a word for you which I never could say to your face, bless you! You did me a man's turn that day up in the wheat-field, and I was mad enough then to have licked you, because you were too damn right! If I had n't been red-hot with shame those few cool words of yours would n't have kicked up such a splutter on my chest. I want to tell you: she waylaid me, the

last thing, the little monkey. She waited for me on the road to Champoeg and gave me the fight of my life, for just a minute: I saw then you were right. She is as God made her, but she is n't safe to pet or play with for a plain chap like me. — To do her justice, she did give the first warning about the cussed Indian troubles that were heading up that fall — Perhaps she may have cancelled with that one word most of the actual harm she's done, for she never hurt any one, I guess, who had n't the taint in him first, and if she had been revengeful she could have kept still. To be sure — come to think — she made it her last argument for me to quit and go along with her gold-hunting. But let her have what credit we can; the benefit was the same. It makes her for once the means of good, as she has been the means of evil, I dare say, many times; but evil was done to her, and whoever she has tempted had his trial to stand — if not from her, some other way. Hear me preach, will you!

And I wish you would tell your father how *good* it all seems to look back on. I am not for going back, — I've got to work out this blame restless streak, the part of me that's never grown up, — but the life was all right, and I start in here a stiffer sort of man for those years in our little church community where we were n't ashamed to sing the old hymns and pray together (this is n't into you, Jim, — I got started on the wrong tack, that's all) and sit under a good man's preaching. Best of all, the babies coming along, and that other fellowship of our families when we carried Aunt Silence up on the hill, shoulder to shoulder; Jim — I could have cried that day to look at your wife and her father. We don't have that kind of funerals here, nor the babies — but they are coming.

Good-bye, old man. My best regards to all. I'd put it stronger, but what's the use! You know how I feel. And here's my hand on everything that ever was between us, Jim. It's been good, every bit of it, — and I guess you're glad I'm through!

Yours truly,

SAM.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GREATEST GAMBLE OF ALL

VERY few among San Francisco's tide of strangers who called themselves men of the world would have deemed their study of the city complete without an introduction to a lady who flourished there in '54, under the temporary name of Cassie Clayton. Her true name, as well as the days of her past (which no doubt had been better days since they could hardly have been worse), held but a speculative interest for the friends her life permitted her to make. Herself, it would be hard to say which she could have had least use for, memory or hope. Miss Clayton was thirty-one and fast losing both her health and her beauty.

For seven weeks before this warning birthday, she had been suffering from the effects of a neglected cold. The weather did not improve; her habits could not change. She and a friend were seated at late supper, in the inner room of a draughty gambling-palace on Market Street. The swing-door at her back fanned her bare shoulders with frequent gusts of wind sucked through the intermediate bar-room from the rainy night outside. Following a frightful paroxysm of coughing prolonged till she could scarcely see, her companion rose with a friendly oath, wrapped her shawl about her and placed her in his own seat. "Now," said he, "you quit this! You get out of this fog or you'll die!"

She thought it quite likely and professed her absolute

indifference, one way or the other. What did cause anguish that could not be discussed was the ignominy, the ugliness of these seizures. Having caught a glimpse of herself in the mirrors that lined the gaudy little cabinet, she knew the worst; — positively, a gorgon! muscles around mouth and nostrils coarsely distended, eyes watering, forehead in wrinkles, swollen lips, hair dark with perspiration; and nothing could be hid! — no protecting handkerchief or extenuating fan; both hands were needed to brace your pain-pierced sides.

There had been another mirror opposite: — the man's face who watched her. It was enough! Miss Clayton understood. Naturally she had not often been looked at like that before. There was no reason why it should not end in death as her mother's cough had ended, in a better climate than this; among one's other misfortunes — to have had a consumptive mother!

“ Well, if I have to come to it, I won't die where any of them can see me.” “ They ” were all the friends she had, but they were not for rainy days. She was the lady of their mirth.

Of course she had memories — if she chose to let them come. It was noon next day when she awoke, coughing. Her windows had been closed but the room was cold and damp. Cotton plush and gilt girandoles and Nottingham lace did not add to its comfort or its cleanliness. There was an empty grate and a tobacco-stained pan beneath heaped with gray cinders. It would be another hour before the Chinaboy came with breakfast and the breakfast would add insult to injury. Neither was there joy in cock-tails, for spirits made her cough. And if you dragged yourself to sleep, you compounded with that

wolfish cough at usurious interest. So there was no help in anything.

She remembered how absurdly well she had been in Dugdale, through all that iron cold! — going to bed in the icy northeast chamber, your nostrils sticking together when you breathed, your breath a cloud of vapor; waking up under mounds of covers to watch Barbie, out on the cold carpet, start a fire in the fat jolly monster of a stove, and going off to sleep again lulled by its tremor of heat, and the good strong roar of seasoned oak wood inside, turning its black cheek a cherry-red; and the frost tears trickling down the window-panes. Unconscionable way of life, cold as the moral law, but so clean — and good! yes, sometimes; there certainly was a side to it if you had n't got to swallow the whole. This had been Miss Clayton's quarrel with existence: that you cannot pluck the rose of each situation without encountering the thorns. And so few persons you call your friends seem willing to take the thorns and leave you the rose; certainly no men. In short, if you consent to live you must accept regrets. But no philosophy known to ladies of her profession could meet this falling-off in looks, this perpetual harrowing cough that pulled your hair out by dreary handfuls, ravaged your figure, took away the desire to eat and the strength to drink. Some forms of sympathy might have been tolerated if they embraced the general tragedy of lives like hers without going into personalities, but let no man whose company she had suffered in a tributary sense, presume to turn upon her and pity her for her looks.

The Sierra foothills were then almost untouched in their lofty draping of pine and fir, and as if Nature had

planned her virgin water-courses to attract gayer company, deciduous families of flickering gray-stemmed trees lined their gorges, stretching up for such touches of sunlight as the forest aisles let in. It would be a luxury to count over these young Western cousins with old names from the East and North: the aspens and willows and birches and buckthorns and alders and lindens; the rhododendron and the mountain-laurel, perfectly at home with California's wild white lilac of the coast range. And here a madroño thrusting out a bare cinnamon-colored arm from his resplendent cloak of leaves, or a company of those gallant little native sons, the canyon-oak brotherhood, captains all, stiff and prickly and glistening, but subtle in drawing and rich in light and shade as the most trepitant birches and aspens.

The tall flowering dogwood and the wild lilac's plumes announced that it was May. In this high region they blossom full late, according to the season. A few miners were washing gold in a new camp on Deer Creek, and up in the foldings of the hills an old Mexican couple had squatted near a mountain stream; they sold to the boys in the gulch for pinches or spoonfuls of "dust" what was then rarer — new-laid eggs, fresh butter and buttermilk richly specked with cream, which the homesick ones from Eastern farms said tasted better than Old Rye.

Innes, the Louisianian, had come out with Colonel Webb's party by the fearful cholera route of '48-'49, which disease took thirteen of their number before they reached Rio Grande; where about twenty more gave out and went back with their discouraged leader, who practically had deserted them. The others entered into a compact with Audubon the younger (son of the great naturalist) to stick

by him for one year if he would lead them through. Some went back with him when the year was up; but many more remained, careless victims of the gold-craze, and drifted from camp to camp through fortune and infortune, thinking each year would be their last. Innes had reached the mature age of twenty-seven and was still his mother's knight, tall and limber and handsome; great-grandson of an adventurous young Scotchman and a gentle Creole lady of pure French blood; very attractive ancestry but in the men it had not held out very well against two generations of leisure in the South, and the sporting habits of a slaveholding aristocracy. With warnings back of him, Innes had taken a few silent resolves which the face of his lovely, tragic mother helped him to keep. He was by way of being a Catholic, but took that part of his inheritance lightly.

He shaved every Sunday morning and presented his clean, handsome countenance at the señora's spring-house for that drink of buttermilk she saved for him fresh from Saturday's churning. The señora's mouth would moisten like a good cook's while she watched him swig it down.

"If you drink buttermilk," she told him, "and behave yourself, you will have a hundred years."

Through these transactions at the spring-house it came about that he heard of the señora's boarder, the sick young lady from town (who had not behaved herself overwell, the señora suspected). He often saw her on his tramps over the hills, with her white dog racing ahead of her, or both of them lying out on the pine slopes in a streak of sunlight. Having observed the White One, his build and breed, Innes carefully left his own dog at home. Personally he had a way with dogs, but he would

have given the pair a respectfully wide berth save for Mike's insufferance. At the first spank, which opened their acquaintance with the impact of Mike's body against his thigh, the young lady had sprung to his assistance — was seized herself by a fit of coughing and sat down on the pine-needles to finish it, by which time it was seen he could take care of himself (she would have scorned a man who could n't). Presently she wiped her eyes, lifted a flushed and laughing face and sighed out an apology for Mike's assault. She was no gorgon now: she had been six weeks in the mountains.

There was no stiffness after that. He found her irresistible in her free passes of talk, and her amusing manners with the dog. They had a little language of their own; he learned to talk it and he and Mike's mistress bestowed it occasionally upon each other. And did she spare this fresh-faced boy? Not at all! she was too proud of him. His ardent, modest gaze conveyed a challenge as delicate as it was assured. Young Southerners and a few Northern boys of innocent daring bring that look alike out of their provincial homes. Here was compensation for Jimmy's rankling scorn. Who can say, but for that unbearable recollection which time had never cured, she might not have let this one go?

How did Miss Clayton (who was not Miss Clayton there) ever come to know of Paradise Valley? One with her assortment of friends to draw upon may hear of everything, but the name need not deceive: there are hundreds of such paradises hid in the long laps of the foothills as they stretch down towards the Sacramento, greeting strange buttes of the valley that rise like peaks out of a polar sea, in the season of fogs which roll up and cover the lowlands.

The old couple made much of their guest and gave her good, homely advice; sent her to bed early, fed her on eggs and olive oil and new milk. When his wife brought the milk, Señor Zapato (Old Shoes, the boys called him) would fetch a certain bottle: "Un poco?" tilting a little whiskey into the milk, and a voice as coaxing as his glance would answer, "Poco más, padrecito!"

The wife approved less of a "stick" in those glasses; in her judgment there had probably been too many "sticks" already in the young lady's draughts of existence. She mentioned her suspicions of the señorita's past. The old man smiled. "It is possible; she is very pretty and she wears no wedding-ring." Neither spoke much English and they were not talkers, outside. A shrug finished the matter: it was all the same.

Innes, whose pans would not pan out as the fame of the Gulch had predicted, went oftener to the rancho till his partner began to spread the news hilariously, and the señora hinted that her boarder had left the city to escape from too much company; a plausible fiction well meant, a motherly arm cast about her favorite. With him it was not all the same. She saw there was a little devil in his eye that had never done much harm as yet; the señorita knew how to loose that side in boys who were not yet men.

The hint was taken. Still the young spring rovers crossed each other's path in the pine woods as before: Mike took care of that.

Innes had no experience by which he could have placed this woman, in her regenerate mood. As to instinct? Nature had taken back her wanton child and was curing her of the unbelievable past as deep as Nature goes, irrespective of habits of the soul. She did not believe it herself, when

she sat beside the unsuspecting boy, with Mike between them, his chest across her knee, his calloused elbows digging into her lap, her feet crossed under her like a school-girl and her long braids sweeping the ground. That beautiful hair had ceased to fall, there was no powder on her face nor black around her eyes; she had given herself up to the sun's painting. She wore a short skirt of miner's jeans and a dark blue flannel blouse of a mannish cut, strained across her bosom. The old curves had come back. At this time the boy had excuse enough for his innocence in playing with fire.

Miss Clayton had decided nothing — except to drift. She refused to think. Moonlight nights were breaking her heart with their beauty, unshared. The boy's partner rode to Downieville to buy supplies, after the winter's embargo of snow: he could do as he liked with his evenings now, without risking profane comment. He came and stood one night in the entrance to the trellised porch where her hammock swung. He came no further, but stood and looked at her in silence. She could not see his face distinctly, but his hovering, troubled presence spoke his longing. Had she not been calling him with her thoughts?

"Oh, there you are!" she saluted him lightly; "I wondered if you were going to waste all these lovely nights down there alone?"

"You have never asked me to come."

"I don't ask people: they ask me. I thought you liked your own company best."

"No, no; you could n't think that," he stammered. "You must have known I was waiting to — to be asked." He took a seat on the low bench along the house-wall close to her hammock and sought for her hand. She let

it lie a long time in his while neither spoke. Every symptom of her power she was deady familiar with, but his resistance had been new. He had reason for resisting, — not through any doubt of his need of this woman, but because of crucifying needs at home.

“Do you really want me, here — now?”

“How could any one in the wide world not want you?” she cooed.

He drew the hammock close and bent over her, going down on his knees, only to sink back and close his eyes trembling. His fear of her was a luxury so delicate beyond dreams, that she would have made it last longer but that she dreamed also of his kiss.

That night his heart was torn from him, poor boy; and the woman lay awake, her soul in tears.

“He is good! O God! he is as good as *they* were, and he does n’t know it! He ’s not thinking about it and watching himself. He is n’t watching me. He is n’t afraid; a child could deceive him. O God! save me when he knows! It will kill him, or he will kill me.”

His worship she must expect to lose — even she knew that; but wives lose their husband’s worship, about that time when the first holy fear departs. His passion was enough. Wives lose that, too: who could know it better than she?

“What men never tire of is beauty and courage and naturalness. If I tell him what I am, — if I don’t pretend to be anything but myself, — he can’t despise me so much. But I must tell him, before any one else gets the first word. How many people,” she groaned; “how many I have known!” She heard her life told everywhere.

“‘What I am’! But I am *not* that. I could make my-

self all over for him if once he could know the truth and love me — not the same but love me! I can show him heaven, for I have seen hell." This was a speech to her own ear: she had not considered, before this wonder came, that her life was hell. She had been a very powerful person in her way and liked it more than being a nobody in a better way, which does not say that her heart had not been touched. She was humbly, fearfully in love; she was stunned by her boy's trustfulness and awful ignorance.

"I shall die of his knowing it! but I can't say now that I have n't had my chance equal to any woman, except —" It crossed her mind with a shudder, — if it should come to marriage, — Parson Yardley's dreadful words: "No 'pleasant vessel,' no 'vessel of desire' shall hold the sacred offering."

"But I need not have a child." That was beyond her daring, or, indeed, her wish. "I will not have children; children lay you open on every side. No one has any life of her own or any safety who has a child."

So she arranged the future, taking Nature's springtime flattery for the tale of the whole year. Yet, she had known the tricky old mother in her bitter mood of consequences.

What she was truly sick of were those base alloys, old issues unclean, defaced with use which she had played with as specimens of men. Here was unstamped metal put in her hands to spend, and she had not been accustomed to save or to spare. But a superstitious fear pursued her that if she held back the truth now some dreadful woe would come of it. She took her courage finally in both hands, and told him an incident quite sufficient to enlighten any man not a Pelleas.

"The boys were passing the hat, one night . . ." she

mentioned where and paused to see if he knew the place; he did, as a spectator. "They were making up a purse for the widow and the kids of a man who went broke and shot himself there, the night before. I wasn't in funds just then, so I drew on the bank—a woman's bank. Some one helped me to cut off a curl; I picked out a good long one; I wasn't mean . . ." she hurried on recklessly; now that she was launched, she entered into the excitement of her own daring. "He doubled it—so—over his bowie-knife, close to my head—ugh! It did n't pull, but I heard it grind. Then he helped me up on the table where I might have waded in gold. I pushed the stuff away with my feet and I showed them *my* gold. 'Here,' I said, 'boys, is what came from "dust." It will sure be dust again if you don't save it; I can't use it any more. Put it into charity for your sins. If you let this little bit of me go cheap, I will burn it here before you. You know I'm not cheap!' The bids were fairly howled. I thought they'd tear me off the table."

She gave one long hard sigh. The boy was breaking pine straws into bits (they were sitting out in the woods); as fast as one needle was used up he began upon another. She waited, and added, pleading—

"What do you think it brought? The widow went East and bought a house and farm, and her children go to school. I've kept track of my curl." Still no word from her listener. "But, oh, laddie lad! I'm glad *you* weren't there."

"So am I," said the white-faced boy.

"You would n't have stood a show; and I would n't have seen you go broke for one curl, when you might have had the whole garden where they grow!"

"Do you think," said he, looking up at last, "I would have touched a hair of that curl, to save it from hell fire?" There was a change in his voice. Her own voice froze to match it. They stared into each other's dreary eyes.

"Oh; and the Garden, perhaps . . . ? (I have done it now, and being good is no use," she thought. "Fate is worse than God; it laughs when it has killed you.")

"Everybody knows the price of those Gardens . . ." he measured his words with great urging breaths, as if his heart were expiring. "In my family we don't ask the price. There are men, I believe, who think they can have love cheaper than by marriage: they are welcome. When I come into my Garden . . ." He gathered breath again. "Oh, don't you understand! There is not a hair of your head that is n't sacred to me in the very sight of God, except those you cast before swine."

He took her hands and laid his face in them and she, weeping like a real Magdalen, kissed the bended head. Truth lay bare between them and he was only paying the first instalment of the price.

He did not die nor back out, as he would have called it. He had power left to think (as he called it, too), but he had drunk the cup of witchcraft and its madness was in his blood, which was the blood of gamblers, like her own. There are many sorts of stakes: his race had probably gambled for them all. We generalize in a case like this out of charity to the individual.

It took him some three nights to do his alleged thinking. On the day before the third, his partner came home, having had speech with men in the streets of Downieville.

"Who do you suppose she is, our little ground-dove

up there at Zapato's? Awful joke on good little boys—so careful not to intrude! Say, kid, she's Cassie Clayton!"

The boy got up and went out; he did not blame his partner and he could not fight every man who knew his lady's past.

The week after, a couple rode to Downieville, camping overnight in the dark woods, for the moon now was old, and were married next day before a justice of the peace. A crowd of starers watched them ride away man and wife, on the supreme adventure. He gave his age—all he could give—twenty-four; she placed hers at twenty-six. He believed her and in a sense it was true: happiness had taken five years from her appearance and many more from her heart, by this lesson of faith. She defied memory even, at the boy's request, and was married under her own name. He was bold enough to call her his life's star.

They rode away to his new claim, and Señor Zapato followed them with a couple of pack-mules loaded with their equipment for a summer in camp. In the intervals of prospecting, the man who was a boy in spring would build a winter hut for his woman. They had decided to begin as the world began and do without the rest of humanity that had accumulated since, to no end that seemed just then to concern them.

"That may do," said the old señora, "till a child is coming." She was deep in Nature's confidence.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GRAVES

THE idyll lasted, as the señora had said, till flowering time was over and summer seeds were ripening on the withered hillsides. The wild sunflower's glow had passed from the gulches; only dry, coarse leaves were left curling in the sun. Most of the spring's delicate virgins had disappeared, blossom and stalk, shrivelled back into the earth. There were cool, autumnal mornings and shivering nights of frost in the mountain valleys, and troops of vagrant little butterflies flittered in sunny spots of the forest trails through the short, still afternoons.

The woman lay in her blankets all day and refused to eat or to do anything towards the man's eating, who digged and delved without complaint, in words. He had never been sick himself as she was, and it seemed to him that she made too little effort for her own good and for other reasons usually thought to be paramount. He possessed, under his capacity for high stakes, a fund of common knowledge such as men acquire from living on their own land, amidst animals and chattels valued as such. He felt that he was part owner in this case, but he was a gentleman, also, of his breed; he could not urge his wife to use her hands or feet, even to save her soul. There was no spur now, in the head nor of the heel; the woman's case was in her own hands, — and the boy's case and that of their future offspring. He did not share her feeling as to children, — not yet.

But the prospects failed ; there was no water left for washing gravel. The cabin itself was of no more use if the woman could not exist in it and eat the food camp-life gives. Wild meat, tiresome trout, strong-flavored honey on soda bread, smoky camp-stews and bitter camp-coffee : these were the abomination of desolation to her sick appetite, and appetite weighed with her now more than the love or respect of man. She was famished and she could not eat, and so she begged for the old stimulants which she had renounced sitting on his knees and weeping on his breast. How could he deny her ? He was firm, however, on the question of drugs. So, when want of exercise and toothache and hunger kept her awake at night, she would steal from his side and help herself to the relief he refused her — out of a store that she kept hidden from his heart-sick, contemptuous vigilance, and he left her in the mornings a dead log. Lying thus one day when he was at his poor-paid diggings, a sluice-robber who had watched their camp sneaked in and stole the boy's little board, saved up against troubles to come.

So the struggle ended ; and they went back to bondage for the sake of the flesh-pots. The woman had friends enough to welcome her who would have shared their pots and she was disposed to dip in freely and say nothing, — neither pay. She took pride in getting without the customary return. Innes never questioned her, but her virtuous explanations were hard to bear.

He had no profession or aptitude for any special work ; he had been bred on the theory that ownership was to be his part in the social economy, but he knew horses. In course of a month or two, he found himself driving stage on the San José line. It kept him away from her a

good deal and gave him time for more thinking. She had promised to forsake cards among her other abstentions, but he knew that she gambled regularly with what little money he could give her, in the hope of "helping along"; she made it a virtue of necessity. When his money was gone, her friends lent her the stakes, and if she won they paid, and if she lost they waited in equal good part, knowing she would never pay. Poor girl! she had done for herself. They pitied her forlorn experiment.

Innes they laughed at and despised. He had strolled through the city, as they remembered him, looking on with his hands in his pockets, — a "cool little cuss; thought he was stronger than the game." He had got out with most of his senses and his money intact. "Now he's in double harness with Cassie Clayton! He can't pay for her shoe-strings; but if you go in there and make free, she'll stick that wedding-ring in your face. That's what she's vain of."

She wore frocks which Innes knew he never paid for. When his eyes brooded upon her, she tried to guess his thoughts. Confessions as to cards and their results poured from her, lest he should accuse her of worse. He never did. He knew that she adored him still and feared him, but as she feared nothing else, his power could not last; it was already gone.

There came a day when he saw as in a terrific vision what ultimately lay before them. One of his passengers on the incoming stage was a woman, once handsome and still young. She had with her a scabby babe about two months old. Both were filthy and the woman was delirious drunk. She slept at last on the bottom of the coach, her dishevelled head rocking against some man's knee. The

other passengers were all men. They did what such men could for the wretched babe, jeering at one another as it was mauled from hand to hand. When its cries of hunger grew unbearable they roused the woman and forced her with oaths to feed her offspring, supporting her and guiding her dulled instincts in the maternal office.

Innes, on the driver's seat, took one look at the scene inside. What it said to his new experience of life may be imagined; he had the beginnings of it in his home. It must have cut through all defences to the knowledge that is without hope. We are trying to account for what he did a few hours afterwards.

He had stopped in the street on his way for a drink of brandy, feeling physically undone. It was his first breach of a pledge he had given his mother, because he knew her reason for imploring it. It had been nothing to him, except the foolishness of his being supposed to need it, to give it then. It was less than nothing now, that he should break it.

At the foot of the dirty stairs going up to the dirtier rooms he called home, he waited for a man who was coming down. He knew it must be one of his wife's former friends, for Mike was with him clattering down the stairs. The men were forced to stop and exchange a civil word while Mike greeted his old acquaintance from the country. Mike's master had reclaimed him months ago; he was a gambler of sorts, formerly Mistress Boy's platonic adviser. He could not afford to take ladies of her profession seriously, having serious aims of his own in a profession that is understood to be foreign to the emotions. As they parted, Innes observed Mike's master smile sarcastically under his waxed mustache.

His wife's pretty head of fair gold hair looked just as charming to him as ever, when he opened the door and saw her back. She was seated at a table. He fancied that she gave a little start, but she did not turn or rise.

"If I find her so again . . . !" he had vowed, when he drank to keep his strength up. He went around the table to speak to her, and he saw at a glance that he must now either keep, or break, that vow. "I shall never have more courage . . ." He thought of the woman and child on the bottom of the stage.

She put up both arms languidly in their full, laced sleeves, to clasp his neck, turning her head away; she was conscious, yet befooled. If she did not speak or let him kiss her lips she fancied he would not know that she had "taken anything," though it was too late to put away the wine and whiskey before her. The friend of course had had something. Cigar ashes were scattered on the table; with one forefinger she puddled them into a little blot of spilled wine, intently, like a child making mud-pies. The front breadth of her flounced silk dress was turned up over her lap, he noticed, as if to hide something which apparently she forgot, for when she rose her skirt fell and the secret exposed itself, rolling and clinking over the floor, quite a "pile" — not his, nor hers: the philosophic friend's, no doubt. Innes was free from any unphilosophic soreness on that score. He had been hungry, but he no longer felt that either. At the opposite end of the table he made room for ink and paper and began to write. He wrote fast, while she groped about the floor recovering her scattered spoils of friendship. Her movements it were a shame to watch. He kept his eyes on his writing.

She was conscious of him, conscious of something wrong

in herself which she began to exculpate, stammering excuses that were too foolish to call lies. The money was an old bet her professional friend had owed her since last year, before she went up to Paradise Valley. ("Paradish," she called it.) Her friend had found the place and sent her there, when she was so sick; Innes might infer, as another irony of the game, that this useful friend had in effect made the match, the idyll of Paradise Valley.

There was no answer, and her temper rose. Why should she talk (with such difficulty) and all for nothing? She threw herself upon him, clutching his shoulder for support, and snatched at the pen.

"Go in there," he said in a voice she feared: he opened the bedroom door, holding his writing out of reach. It ended in his taking her, and laying her weeping on the bed.

It was a disgraceful, a tawdry room, but he was grown used to it. It was scented with her soiled clothing and stale perfumes, and with anonymous cigar-smoke which however improved the air. It did not concern him. He was too deeply seared to feel such pricks. His mind endeavored to clear itself from all lesser shames with a last effort to be just. Careless familiarities from other men he could not count against her having known what he knew: nothing but what was blameworthy in her own eyes. His wife's friends were good-natured, when they were flush; she was become an object of common commiseration and off-hand charity to those whom he had called swine.

An hour later the crowd that filled the room and blocked the stairs from the street, did not pause to observe a sheet of writing on the table weighted down by a little heap of

coin, as if trusting that the gold would call attention to what lay beneath. The spectacle that drew was in the bedroom, where the fool lay martyred in his folly with his victim and conqueror by his side. He had died first and his death had sobered her: as Jimmy said, "When your heart does break, you will not talk." She died with his head in her lap which was soaked with his blood, and she uttered no complaint.

An improvised investigation which cleared the rooms took cognizance of the fool's death testimony. It was addressed:—

To whom it may concern:—

I married this woman by whose side I soon shall end my troubles, because we loved each other, and we were mad enough to think that love is the whole of marriage. I loved her too respectfully to want her any other way, and I believed that by honoring her to the utmost in my power, she would be able to honor herself in spite of her past. With what she has not killed in me I love her still, but our married life is a scandal. I still believe in love, but there are some things it cannot alter. Fathers and mothers know that, and why not husbands and wives?

She had been drinking and so had I. I have a father at home who wanders about the house a harmless spectre. He is not old, but his mind is gone through drink, as mine will go if I begin, and what's to prevent me? I don't do this in anger or through jealousy. I believe my poor wife has been "faithful," as it is called in marriage, though she could not be faithful in anything else. Still, I knew her past, and when a man commits a crime against society he ought to take the consequences of his act. The trouble

is, there are some consequences he can't take, nor see the end of. She is going to have a child. God only knows what she would do with it, or what the child might do if it should live to grow up. I saw a mother to-day who is what she will be a few years hence. I may be no better. So this madness must stop . . .

It stopped, in the bedroom, a short time later.

Few women of Stella's history ever brought the soul test home to better types of character, men and women ; even in death, it was said, she sorted out the city. The whited sepulchres in silk hats and frock coats were there in numbers at her funeral, but where they had been bold in the past to look at that beautiful face, they were troubled now. The city was changed and changing. By common impulse all those respectable citizens in white shirt-fronts avoided mutual recognition. They passed each other as if each by an act of will had been rendered invisible. Some of them would meet that evening again at their wives' dinner-tables, practising the discretion of bad boys under the eyes of unsuspecting parents. Or, would these be the ghosts — of men who had departed this life of the spirit, and were going about in the flesh, never suspecting their own demise ?

CHAPTER XIX

A WEDDING-GIFT DELAYED

THE following chapter was purposely held back in order to give our settlers the last word, which surely belongs to them in this story, and we think that the builders will always have the last word in any true story or one that pretends to be true, — though the gamblers shall be there, foremost in every race for achievement or possession: they run as torch-bearers, and end as incendiaries who perish in their own fires.

We return then to the common chord, our "resting-place in this life." It is September; before the winter of the Whitman massacre and before the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill. Mr. Yardley is pacing about in front of the wagon-shed, watching his son perform a task which commands the minister's respect because he would have exceedingly disliked it himself. Jimmy is greasing his road-wagon for a trip to Champoeg. We suppose there was not such a thing as a jack-screw in Oregon at that time, but much may be done with patience and a crow-bar and a stick of wood the right height to prop an axle.

"Now, son," the parson resumes a suspended argument with spirit, "don't flinch at the price. Make it *twenty-five*, no matter what Lewelling holds them at."

"He will hold them high," said Jimmy, wiping his fingers before putting away the grease-pot. "You won't get one of those trees for less than five dollars, coin."

"Let it be five — or ten! This is my present to Barbara.

And every tree will be worth a field of oats, yearly, in less than five years' time."

Jimmy laughed at the enthusiasm of the amateur. His father had brought to these new outside interests all the concentrated fervor of his cloistered mind.

The road team, in harness hitched to a tree, swung their heads around at the rustle of straw. "Nothing in your line, old chaps," said Jimmy, bedding down the bottom of his wagon-box; he went back to the barn for an armful of old sacking which he crowded in upon the straw.

"Take plenty," his father urged. "It's coming off hot." He cast a watery eye upwards at the sun's progress back of the slow, September fog. "Think you've got plenty of that sacking? you don't want to let their roots get dry." Jimmy did not answer.

"Now make it twenty-five — not a tree less! Call it Barbie's silver tea-set. I never gave either of you a suitable wedding-present that I remember."

"Well, father, you married us! I never gave you a suitable fee, did I? It is n't a question of tea-sets. However, if you insist, I can't say she would n't rather have a young orchard than almost anything you could give her."

"That settles it, then!" The minister's face relaxed. "Twenty-five trees will just about set out that southwest slope, under your bedroom windows. Mr. Hannington thinks that will be the place for them."

"Oho! so you've been and talked to father Hannington? Well, I guess Barbie knows all about it by this time. I asked her what I should bring her from the Falls: she generally says a diamond necklace or a set of sables! This

morning she sort o' twinkled at me:—"A big red apple'!"

"No!" cried Mr Yardley, beaming; these jokes on the grandfathers were a matter of course, but Barbara's answer pleased him almost to tears; he repeated it childishly. "A big red apple'!"

"'Scuse me, father: did you happen to see where I put my coat just now? Ah!" The coat was recovered and given a good shaking to windward, folded and laid across the wagon-seat. The parson sneezed. But nobody could interrupt him. He was accustomed to keep the thread of his own discourse through the hum of family distractions, much as an old clock with a last century strike intones the hour reflectively over the heads of a chattering generation.

"I have noticed Barbara's cravings are always healthy ones. There's virtue in the apple! I believe the apple-eating habit has helped preserve our race in New England —"

"—From the pie and the preaching habit," Jimmy threw in casually. He was in rude spirits, impatient to set off. "Must go now and say good-bye to the lady of the house. Will you take in that broom, Dad, after I'm gone? it's one of her good ones; I stole it for a purpose. Brooms are Barbie's pet economy — do you think it's a healthy craving in a full-grown woman?"

Mr. Yardley smiled, indulgent of his son's nonsense. He forgot all about the broom. He and a brace of hens wandering about whom he knew by sight and knew to be hens of no character, having fed their neglected offspring, had the silence of the sunny place to themselves. He enjoyed an acquaintance with all the farm creatures now,

remarked their habits, drew analogies from them and felt the kindly influence of their dependence on man. Many little sides of life he had been wont to pass over in abstraction won his smiles in these days. It was part of a general unreefing and shaking out of sails, like the broadening of his scholarly hands through garden practice with a spade, and his fresher color and livelier eye. He had lost the housebound look. Barbara's children helped him, too, as they grew and cut their teeth and crushed his heart with their mysterious little ailments and learned to walk and to call him "Gan" and "Ganfa-a-!" with long-vowelled sweetness. He smiled ten times a day where he used to smile once, and his Sabbath texts were chosen from a need to speak lovingly and hopefully to his young church in the wilderness. He was pondering, now, something sweet to say to Barbara — out of the Scriptures, of course — when her little fruit-trees should arrive at the door with the earth of home still clinging to their roots.

He thought of her good, dear mother, asleep on the hill; a familiar way of putting it — not true to her memory, though, his old friend with the big warm hand. She was not up there quiescent, nor down here querulous and weak as that last summer when she had begun to "fail." She was cosmic. The Bible alone has expressions for that sort of nature-woman.

"I raised thee up under the apple-tree; there thy mother brought thee forth; there she brought thee forth that bare thee." It was a misapplication of the text, to be exact; but Mr. Yardley used even his Bible now more humanly. The tender, dove-voiced repetitions moved him to think of willow copses full of nests in foldings of the old New England hills; memories stirred within him of

certain long spring twilights with a slender moon, that call young folk out of doors and make old ones loath to go in and light a fire, though none are left to share them with.

To understand the good man's mood — why his heart should melt into poetry and break into song over twenty-five little sticks of fruit-trees not yet in the ground (nor paid for) — it should be counted how few their homely kindred were, west of the Cascade range, in 1847. Squawberries grew on the mountain, wild plums were had for the price of gathering, wild-grape blossoms and wild strawberries scented the rich air: these belonged to the camper, the mover-on, the Indians. When a man sets out an orchard in a new land he plants for his children's children; that soil is his home, and the fate of Oregon's homes had now become a national question. The South had been fighting the Oregon Bill in Congress, step by step: it contained an anti-slavery clause highly offensive to Southern sentiments at that time. The North, equally determined, did not wait to win the fight in Congress. She sent men of brains and character, who moved their families out there, on the ground, making the venture a species of crusade. They were helping to anchor the future State in principles of a nation's faith as dear to them as their fathers' religion; they were the next generation of "fishers and choppers and ploughmen" who "shall constitute a State."

"Lo, I uncover the land
Which I hid of old time in the West."

Here was a new "Columbia of the Rocks which dip their foot in the seas." The great pathway had been cut from ocean to ocean; toil of countless feet of men and cattle

with sweat and blood had worn it wider, every year. This was the year before the feet branched off and sons of the Trail were bearing southward with a new hunger in their bones.

That summer's emigration brought out five thousand persons, mostly dreamers:—builders for the Northwest, gamblers for California. This is a loose classification. We have already told how one fair, average fellow (builder and gambler too) went off at the first call, but did not sell his home; went for the larger fun and the chances, holding himself ready to go back into harness again and pull a plough or drag a harrow, if he failed to get a lead in the race.

But the dreamers do things, although they suffer, so we say, and their joys are incommunicable like the joys of childhood. Among those who dreamed to some purpose in that summer's caravan, first place should be given to Henderson Lewelling. With untold care he brought across the plains his Travelling Nursery, the greatest contribution Oregon ever received from one man:—seven hundred young fruit-trees and shrubs planted in wagon-beds. Homely, delightful inspiration! Worthy of Benjamin Franklin. Where is there a stroke of genius that has not in it the directness and the unconsciousness of the soil? They came with the rest of the pioneer babies, rocked in those continental cradles of our race, curtains over their heads when the desert sun burned too strong, fed from every wild brook and river that flows east or west from the three great divides, and always safe-rooted in the earth of home.

Eyes must have watered (and mouths, too) as the pencilled pine labels were read, attached to each little graft-

ling's stem, giving its native State, its foundation soil, its name and pedigree. Now these were the forbears of all the great orchards of Oregon: "Rhode Island Greening," "Newtown Pippin," "Northern Spy," "Spitzenberg," from old Esopus, "The King," bless you! "of Tompkins County." The "Jonathan" apple, aha! (but was he born then?) Russets and Belleflowers and Pearmains, and Winesaps, perhaps: we don't know if he was born either, in 1847. But all the best families of the orchard aristocracy were there, although it was a Northern propaganda. In each of these little wands no bigger than a man's thumb, some old parent State sent a little of the sap from her own veins to build up the blood of the Northwest.

There was a fury of participation in Lewelling's great idea. Farmers must have driven for days to buy treelings at a price they dared not tell their wives. Jimmy Yardley thought himself quite abreast of the times, deciding for one dozen, when his father made it two, and one over for luck, and called it Barbara's tea-set.

"Yes," he mused, "I shall tell her that she herself is like 'a young apple-tree among the trees of the wood.' She won't remember it was written in praise of 'my beloved among the sons'!" said the cunning parson, with apologies to Solomon. "Surely the apple-tree is in every sense feminine: in her beauty as she stands covered with flowers in spring like a young bride; in her abundance in autumn; in the keeping quality of her gifts that we can store them for the old age of the year; in her modest stature; in her girth and her stoop as she grows old in burden-bearing, and in her habitat which makes her the peculiar treasure of homes;— I should say Northern homes. In the South, of course, she has her rivals."

CHAPTER XX

THE SAME DAY

“WHAT are those blessed grandfathers up to now!” Barbara spoke aloud in sheer astonishment. No one could have heard her except her eldest, who did not answer, having no interest in the question and showing it with the *sang-froid* of your only true aristocrat. She is three, and her name is not “Sister” nor “Polly-my-lamb,” nor “Doodleums” nor “Piggsy-wigs,” nor any of the foolish things her parents call her to avoid her real name, which is Silence, they regret to say. It had to be — although there never can be another Silence. Barbie feels that, and she knows Jimmy does not like the name, but — father! He was so wistful and humble about it. It just had to be.

The morning’s work done and husband well on his way to the Falls and baby having his long after-bath-and-feeding nap, Barbara has taken her sewing out upon the bench under her bedroom windows where the house shadow falls; where she can listen to baby and keep little sister reasonably quiet if amused.

The sun has come out hot as Mr. Yardley predicted. It shines on the vest-backs of the two old men, coats off and waistcoats unbuttoned, who follow each other’s steps methodically in silence over the slope of autumn grass. One lays down a sort of measuring-rod, the other drives in a sort of stake; they repeat the process at some little distance from the last stake, sighting with a string. It looks earnest

though not strictly technical ; something might come of it, however. Something has come of it: an Indian in a red calico shirt is digging up the sod where no one who loves the mistress of this house would dream of driving a spade unless by her special orders.

“ For goodness’ sake! I wonder if Jimmy knows about this ? ”

“ Fo’ doo’ness’ sate ! ” the lamb recites, without lifting an eyelash.

There is a feeling of general distrust in Barbara’s mind whenever the grandfathers get to work in Jimmy’s absence, unless she knows that Jimmy *does* know. The present case is no exception. “ What in the world *are* those old Blessedds doing down there, by themselves, and who set them at it ? ” She rambles down to see.

The grandfathers are not communicative : they are indeed rather provoking. They behave as she often does when busy making pies, and Polly-my-lamb hangs around asking for things — but then !

Barbie came up the slope quite fast with a flushed face, and saved herself from my lamb’s onset almost without a smile which did not give perfect satisfaction either.

“ Mama *’peak* to me, *’peak* to *me* ! ”

“ Softly, *soft-ly* ! ’Wake little Brother ! ”

“ Sof’y, sooo-f’y ! ” came the fascinating echo. The two sank down, laughing, on the grass together, one in the other’s lap. The lamb nestles and tries to suck her thumb ; is prevented. A guilty pause, with an embarrassed smile as we sit up again and pretend that we don’t care.

“ It looks like setting out trees, Doodl’ums. It certainly looks that way ; and we’ve only just got rid of them ! Grass is so nice, and the sunsets and all ! They *can’t* be

going to plant trees all over my beautiful west slope as ever was! I wonder if Jimmy can have known!"

This would appear to be the nature of most surprises prearranged by man to pleasure his women-folk: with woman in general, as with poets, "it is not the What but the How." The What was perfect, but, alas, the How! And Barbie's own father had done it. She thanked father Yardley with much loving grace, for his wonderful gift; she knew how to do that sort of thing — or even to overdo it. And she was able to put a tolerable face on her own father's deed, considering what a blow it was, and that he *was* merely her own father. But to Jimmy, in private, she almost wept.

"My lovely, clear slope all dug up into holes. A lot of little sticks (darlings, of course! it was *lovely* of father Yardley, I can never thank him enough) always right in your eyes when you want to look at the sunset; and the woods turn dark early now against the west. And the color we used to see — Jimmy, do you remember? (he did) — over the west woods, when we were skating, just before dark, — that strange apple-green, and pink and old rose! And little Sister *does* so love to stand on my lap in her nightgown and watch the crows come pouring home, as if they were emptied out of the sky."

"Wait, girlie; only a few years. You'll be comforted. It will be different, but it will be good."

"'He comforteth those who fail in patience,' — mother used to say that —" Barbie choked. "Yes: He gives us something else, better for us perhaps, but not the same. It is n't the orchard, Jimmy; it's — everything! It's the time of year, I guess."

Jimmy hugged her in silence.

The next spring they carried handfuls of their first precious blossoms up to "mother" — she and Jimmy did that alone, but father knew. The second year she and little Sister did the same; the men were busy; and there were many blossoms left — more than the young trees were allowed to mature. The third spring it was a festival, like the wonderful May orchards at home, only the trees were so low. You looked into the faces of the flowers, — crowds, masses, hugging their pink little buds like babies' cheeks pressed against the pale young mothers'. Of course some of the mothers were pink, too, and all the blossoms seemed very large. Then came a new moon setting early behind the low white-veiled trees, and a breath of river-damp heavy with perfume, thrills of the old spring sweetness borne on the same soft rush of wind that used to carry the sound of freshets in the hills. Life to those pioneer women must have been heavily fraught with the restlessness and the melancholy that home memories breed; as the first years of marriage are haunted by memories of girlhood; as, all through life, we advance from one pioneer stage of experience to the next, attended by whisperings that clutch at our beating hearts out of the hearts which have ceased to beat in the countless generations that conducted us hither.

Barbie wondered what it must be like, the acquiescence of the old. She watched her father walk his evening rounds alone, and Mr. Yardley walking by himself, the two wifeless old men. They seemed wonderfully content. She felt almost hurt that her father should take his loss with such cheerful submission. She would have predicted a complete breakdown, that first summer, an illness at least. Are men such objective creatures? Was it possible to imagine one's Jimmy taking such a healthful interest in everybody's affairs

and she not four years "under the sod"! and they had lived together such a little while comparatively.

She went about her own life (which she would have considered a rather hard life to watch another woman living it) with extraordinary zest and satisfaction in finding that her capacities rose with each demand. She took pride in justifying her mother's defence, when grandma used to complain of her persistent reading habit and call her an idle child, a dreamer.

Her mother would answer, "She'll take her head out of her books when she needs it somewhere else. A good reader means a good thinker; and every woman ought to think out her work for herself. Housekeeping is n't a treadmill," and then she would add with a sigh: "As for dreaming, I hope the time may never come when she can't dream." Grandma was not aware of the fact that she herself had been a master dreamer. Had she not dreamed out William's future in the West? That she called common sense. It was William who had the common sense which took counsel of prudence at every step, which waited to know everything before daring to decide.

Barbie's dreams were not world-wide, but they were less self-centred than when she wanted one thing only, that she was ashamed to pray for. Now she had it, and Jimmy himself to pray for; three lives beside her own, in which her own life was merged to the point of extinguishing almost every individual desire. Yet she had an intense personal consciousness which gave her those thrills of melancholy, those bursts of lyric joy. And now and then an obscure want possessed her: she wondered if Jimmy were keeping to himself something which in a man corresponds to it, the loneliness of sex. However it started with her, from

various small causes, it usually climbed and broke in a longing for one of the old woman-talks with one's mother. Barbie knew not the love of sisters, and she had never had an intimate girl friend: the mother had been her sole other feminine. If forced to be honest with herself, she must have admitted these woman-talks had occasionally been rather hectic; she and her mother had not been always perfect companions for each other. A long old age rarely is a blessing to those we wish to keep with us; the dear mother Silence herself might have lost her "controls," grown fussy and tiresome, and even intrusive when grandchildren came along (those seeds of joy and dissension). It was better in every way that both should be spared the closing chapter. Barbie would have admitted the truth of all this in a general sense, but it could n't have been true of them! "The grandmothers are not like that in our family: think of Grandmother Trumbull; and she could never have had just the quality that was mother, and no one else."

Often she wondered at her own complete happiness. She would say to herself, "Supposing I had known, the winter Stella came, that mother — my mother! would live only two years? I could not have borne it, — and here I am!" So that is love, might have been one inference; it was not Barbie's. She remembered a saying of her mother's which satisfied her: "When you are married to a good man and have learned to love each other, there is n't much in life you cannot bear."

Did the wonderful mother mean that, whatever sort of love you may think you marry on, you have to learn another kind to live on? — the kind that is said to bear all things, believe all things and seek not its own?

With her and Jimmy the one last hitch was that old

agony of human forbearance, the Body of Doctrine in which Barbie was brought up and which her mind had accustomed itself to in a manner which she called belief. Jimmy said she could n't possibly believe its code of salvation, for instance, and preserve her sanity. He would not acknowledge that his own father believed it in any vital sense — dooming, as it must, his only child to eternal torment. The good man ate his three meals daily and laid him down to sleep at peace with that terrific God of his Orthodoxy. On the other hand, Barbie smiled to herself to see her haughty mentor carry his little girl in to bed, if mamma were detained, and hear her say her ridiculously illogical prayer with the sweetest gravity. What did he think of that for sincerity! She never asked him: far too wise was she! But if she had he would very likely have "come back" with the reminder that "consistency is the bug-bear of little minds."

We trust no reader of this tale will ask the author to reconcile the inconsistencies of her characters, taking them one time with another. There can be no doubt Mr. Yardley was conscientious in that priestly sentence of his which he stood by and saw put in execution. And yet he suffered hours of anguish, as doubtless he deserved to, in thinking of it afterwards; and the shock of reviewing his own action (though he justified it in words to the end) broke down the very tissue of his ancient theology and made him at the time of his death one of the broadest and tenderest religious teachers which his generation had known. Mr. Hannington, who was ready to repudiate his sister's child and who handed her over to punishment professing not to feel a qualm, left his wife on her death-bed to go after the homeless girl, prepared to resume his

guardianship with all its responsibilities underscored. Bradburn, unprincipled egotist and hardened sport, kept the love of a pious, clever woman, touched her life with the color of romance, and hoodwinked her to the last. Jimmy, in theory, would have parted with his right hand sooner than raise it deliberately against another man's life for any fantastic notion of so-called honor; yet, confronted with the alternative, he chose the course least repulsive to something in himself which he could not reason about. And though by every effort of love and friendship, and even his own conscience, he was freely absolved, the cold horror of those moments alone with Bradburn's body on the mountain were never quite forgotten. Through all the intricate sources of culpability in and out, without any pretence of justice, his soul retained a deep-seated rage against — not the man he fought, but the weak and winding nature he fought for, that his hand for her sake must wear this stain. As for his tenderness to one woman's sensibilities and the remorseless way in which he could crush another's, we must admit he did what a man is called on to do to protect his own from possible harm, but we should have been sorry to see it done as he did it. It takes a certain hardness to do such things, and hardness by the nature of it must be hard: Jimmy Yardley, before he was through, did more and better work, as a citizen, than all the young brains of the Yardley tract put together.

As a final poser, there was Dr. Whitman; the most practical of men, wise, far-sighted, for others; who was besieged with warnings and would not listen. No, but held on at Wailatpu (place of bloody grass, that winter of 1847), and brought destruction upon his faithful wife and friends and died a martyr, sooner than abandon the

mere material part of his great creative work of years, which the nation remembers while it forgets his pathetic human obstinacy and rashness.

And the missionaries? After so noble a beginning their work showed rather small in its immediate results. The Indians remained savages and behaved as savages do; here and there a life was altered, a sincere convert made, but far many more acquired a cynicism as to the Christian's Road to Heaven that was very sad for the Christian hope of bringing light to souls in darkness; and yet those bigoted men and women did not break the trail and their own hearts, in vain. Mr. Yardley's boast may remain unchallenged and history has since supported it. It was not the two-hundred years' traffic in dead animals' skins, nor the skin for skin wars of the hunters among themselves, nor national jealousy, nor race expansion, nor scientific exploration that first uncovered the new Columbia of the Rocks which dip their foot in the North Pacific seas: it was a wretched intermontane flat-headed Indian tribe, groping for a better way of life in the imperishable hope of a Something hereafter.

THE END

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