A SCARLET POPPY
AND
OTHER STORIES



HARRIET P. SPOFFORD

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A SCARLET POPPY, AND OTHER STORIES ***

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and
Other Stories

BY

HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD



NEW YORK
HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS
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A SCARLET POPPY

A SCARLET POPPY

"IT was only a quarter of a dollar, Mark."

"Only a quarter of a dollar! It isn't that quarter I complain of; it is its multiplication. Four of them make a dollar. How often have I told you, Helena, that the little foxes—"

"Oh, so often that I'd like to be in at the death of them all, and hang up the last brush on the wall!"

"Very likely. That's quite in character. I fancy there'd be no wall to hang it on by that time, though. That's all," pushing back his coffee-cup.

"How perfectly absurd you are, Mark! Because I buy a scarlet paper poppy with a black curled paper heart, eight inches in diameter, to hang outside a lamp-shade, and pay twenty-five cents for it, you are brought to the verge of bankruptcy and I am to be reduced to beggary!"

"It isn't the poppy at all. It's—"

"It seems to me that I might commit that extravagance every day if I wished and not ruin you. Three hundred and sixty-five quarters—ninety-one dollars a year. How poor you must be if ninety-one dollars a year can put you into insolvency! But I don't wish. I—"

"It isn't the poppy at all"—his face growing purple.

"Oh no, it isn't the poppy; it's the twenty-five cents. It isn't this poppy; it's the next one," clasping her pretty hands behind her head, as she leaned back in an insolence of attitude.

"It isn't the poppy at all; it's the principle," cried the

exasperated Mr. Dunmore at last, raising his voice so that it could be heard over his wife's treble, and over the screaming of the wild March gale outside.

"Oh, of course," said his wife then, "if you choose to talk to me in that tone, it's the end of argument. I can't roar, and the strong lungs have it. But it's very ungentlemanly and unhandsome. It's quite as mean as grudging me the original twenty-five cents for a decoration to my lamp-shade."

"Helena, I can't allow you to go on in this way."

"You can't allow me! As if I were going to ask you to allow me! I should suppose it was time you entered sufficiently into the spirit of the age, Mark, to know that wives nowadays are not slaves. They are not allowed or disallowed. And they can spend twenty-five cents without asking; especially if it's their own," added Mrs. Dunmore, with sharp emphasis, her great blue eyes sparkling in a way that great blue eyes can on occasion. "Go, lie down, Sauveur!" as the big St. Bernard, aware that something was wrong, came and laid his nose on her arm.

"Very well, then, Helena," said Mr. Dunmore, with great severity; "since you drive me to it—when it *is* your own."

"Really?" said the young woman, with a severity quite as cold as his own. "How long since my own income ceased to be mine? I don't think my poor father when he left me my little property ever had an idea that any one was going to deny its being my own. 'Free from marital control,' he said," cried Mrs. Dunmore, triumphantly. "'Free from marital control,'" she repeated, with force. "Does that mean that you, or that I, have the spending of it?"

"You, assuredly, Helena," said Mr. Dunmore, with

more calmness. “How many times this year have you had the spending of it already?”

“I must say, Mr. Dunmore, I fail to understand you.”

“I will enlighten you. When you made your Christmas presents on a scale entirely incommensurate with our means, and I remonstrated, you said you were going to pay for them all yourself out of your January dividends. But when your January dividends came in, the bill for your new cloak came also and took the whole sum.”

“Most men pay for their wives’ cloaks themselves,” said Mrs. Dunmore, with some bitterness.

“Not when their wives order four-hundred-dollar cloaks, and they can only afford one-hundred-dollar ones without running into debt.”

“You have brought me up here into this frigid zone of a climate, Mr. Dunmore, and I certainly expected before I came to be clothed sufficiently to meet the rigor of the weather.”

“You are,” said her husband. “And you were before you spent the whole of your January dividends to pay for a seal-skin cloak. However, that’s neither here nor there. It became necessary then, after the system of genteel beggary in our civilization, to make Laura Kerna a wedding present.”

“We didn’t have any wedding presents ourselves, I suppose!” said the wife, witheringly.

“And I thought one of the twelve ladles that were given to us would do.”

“The idea! So perfectly disgraceful! Some men haven’t any sentiment,” addressing the universe.

“And you insisted on nothing less than a gold-

mounted vinaigrette."

"Dear knows she'll need it, if all husbands are alike."

"And you would pay for it out of your January dividends," said her husband, not noticing her interpolations. "But close upon that came my birthday, and you wished me to make myself a present of a new watch; and when I said it was impossible, you said you would pay for it out of your dividend."

"If I ever heard of such unparalleled meanness!"

"A little later, when we were getting a fresh carpet for the drawing-room, and I thought Brussels would do, and you declared for Wilton, you assured me that you were to pay for that out of your dividend."

"Well, if I couldn't carpet my own house, I wouldn't twit my wife for doing it."

"You said the same about the India rug you ordered home without consultation, at two hundred and fifty dollars. It is a beauty, of course; I admit your taste; it is soft as velvet, and colored with sunbeams. But I knew if I paid for that I must go without paying for something else; and you said you would pay for it yourself with your dividend."

"Pshaw!"

"You must remember that you wanted some moonstones, when they came into fashion; for luck, you said; and about the same time a tall piano-lamp; and, not long after, a big Limoges vase; and in spite of my reluctance—"

"Reluctance!"

"You got them all, and charged them to your dividend again."

“But, Mark—”

“Pardon me! The next thing that arose was the necessity of educating that young lad in art; and as I didn’t have that money to spare, you drew the money from the house-keeping fund, and said you would replace it from your dividend. Then you started to go down to the city and attend the Friday afternoon concerts, for which your ticket cost thirty-five dollars, and that of a companion thirty-five more; and when you were snowed in on the train, in just such a storm as this, if there ever was such a storm before, and obliged to have a doctor, and a set of bills—ever so little ashamed, perhaps, that your folly had brought about such unlooked-for expense—you said you could settle all that with your dividend. How many times do you think you have used up your dividend money already? Do you think, this March morning, there is twenty-five dollars or twenty-five cents of it left? And don’t you know that my one wish in life is to keep out of debt, that if I am called off suddenly there may be something to take care of you with?—you who spend recklessly many times your own income every year, and would mine if you could get at it! I shall make a will the next time I go to town, Helena,” said Mr. Dunmore solemnly, “in which I shall put every dollar of my property in trust; for you are not fit to be charged with a bank-note. Money melts out of your hands like morning dew, and you may be the most beautiful and winning woman in the world, but in money matters you are a child. You never go into a shop without telling the dealer how cheap his goods are, and asking him if he can’t take a little more.”

“I won’t listen to another word you say,” cried Mrs. Helena, springing to her feet. “I knew you were so

careful as to be canny. I never knew a person with Scotch blood in him that wasn't. So proud of your Scotch blood as you are! But I didn't suppose you looked askance at your own wife's doctor's bills. I'll pay them myself out of my very next dividend, that I will! I never imagined you wanted me to stay stived up in a prison-house, going without pleasure or society. If it costs you so much more than you can afford to keep me, I can go to my aunt Potter's. And I will go, this very day."

"Hardly," said Mr. Dunmore, looking out of the window at the storm, whose clouds of flying snow hid even the great mountain shapes from view.

"I don't know why the storm should stop me. It isn't any colder than my husband's heart," said Mrs. Dunmore. "And I'd as lief hear it now as hear you. It will be April and spring to-morrow, and no storm to be seen, but it will always be winter in your heart. You can leave your money, that you treasure so much more than you do my happiness, where you please. I don't want any of it, or anything else that belongs to you. I wish I was dead and out of your way! You can keep it for your second wife to spend, if she can get hold of it, which is more than I can do. I never want to look upon your face again! If there's anything in the world detestable to me it's meanness and stinginess and parsimony and miserliness and—" And here, words failing her and tears coming in their stead, Mrs. Dunmore rushed from the room and sought the seclusion of her bedchamber, where she hid her head in the pillows and cried herself into hysterics. And Mr. Dunmore, feeling that the house was far too hot to hold him, strode into the hall, and put on his great fur overcoat, and buckled the hood about his ears, and slammed the door behind him,

refusing to wait for the stout cob that usually bore him, and going out afoot into a storm that was no fiercer than the one raging within him at that moment.

A pretty sort of a home he had! his thoughts ran. The hospitality of the tempest was gentleness beside it. A shrew and a vixen and a spendthrift for a wife, who cared nothing for him but what she could get out of him, and made no acknowledgment of that; who scorned and flouted and fleered him, had no regard for his feelings, called him—called him names! What a fool he was to submit to it! Why didn't he send her —*why* didn't he send her back to her aunt Potter's, and sell out, and clear out himself? This life he lived was—it was no use saying what it was! It was the life to come, and he had been damned into it! He wished he had never seen her face! What an idiot a man was to give up his peace, his liberty, his pleasure, his everything, for the sake of companionship with a woman who thwarted him at every turn, in his feelings, his wishes, his will, till there was no peace in the house, and a struggle with the wildest storm that ever blew was rest, was relief from home and her! And in a white heat of angry commotion he plunged along, he hardly knew and hardly cared whither, although really bound for the upper fields, in order to give some directions to the shepherds of the great sheep farm he carried on. And the wind roared above him and about him unheeded as, with head bent forward and hands clenched in his pockets, he labored on; and the snow whirled and fell and rose again, and built up its fantastic drifts on either side, and, occupied in his bitter musings, he saw and heard none of it.

And none of it did Mrs. Helena hear or see, with her

head buried in her pillows, crying now partly with pity of her own wretchedness, partly in the subsidence of her anger at she hardly knew what, and partly with the unspent force of her nervous agitation. Occasionally she sat up and twisted the long coil of her fallen hair, and enjoyed a sensation as if she were in some manner wringing her hands and tearing her hair. She called herself the most miserable woman under the sun, condemned to a living prison, bound to a man who detested her, and whom she—yes, whom she detested! A man? A brute! Oh, why had she ever given herself up to such a fate? What was there she had seen in him in the first place? Why hadn't she divined his sordid and tyrannical nature then? Why had she let herself be overcome by his false promises, his smile, his face that used to seem to her like the face of a god, and now was that of a satyr—yes, of a satyr! A great bluff wind-blown satyr! How infamously he had talked to her about her dividend! He grudged her the clothes she put on; she was a burden to him, and he made her feel it, and, quite unconscious of the uncommonly congenial feeling in this regard, she wished she had never laid eyes on him. It was a shame for a man to treat his wife so! And there was more crying and wringing of hands; and then the great shoulder of the gale came pushing against the house so it startled her and made her shudder, and she lay back silent a moment, and then bunched the pillow about her ears, and in five minutes, worn out with her temper and her tantrum, was fast asleep.

And Mr. Dunmore, with the gale whistling about his ears, ploughed his way along the hillside to the upper farms, more to satisfy himself that the sheep were all folded than for anything else, now and then shaking the snow from his shoulders as a shaggy dog

shakes off water-drops, and again bending his head and working onward, the new snow already ankle-deep and drifting wildly with the wind that at every gust seemed to blow more fiercely. At last he reached the little house of the shepherds, all glowing with his successful struggle with the storm, and half forgetful of the rage with which he at first dashed into it; quite forgetful before his business with the shepherds was entirely finished, having disburdened his mind of all that had been weighing on it, feeling in a somewhat forgiving mood towards his irate little wife, who, after all, was not so much to blame, he said to himself; only a pretty woman a little spoiled, who liked to have pretty things about her. He would go into town himself to-morrow, and get her that Royal Worcester she had been longing for, the poor child! Perhaps he had been too severe: it was the coffee—strong coffee always did fire up his nerves. A man was a wretch to talk so to a woman, anyway. And thus rambling on in his thoughts, he took the path down the hill, hardly remembering the tempest that hurtled round him, until all at once he felt as if it were making him its rallying-point, and found that it was all he could do, by summoning his strength, to stand up against it, while it sifted its fine icy particles under his coat and in about his neck and shoulders and ears in a way to make him eager to get out of its reach. No matter; a storm on the last day of March couldn't amount to much, even up in these New Hampshire hills. It would soon blow over. He would leave the exposed and winding highway, take the short-cut across the fields and down through the sheltered piece of wood, and so get home in time for lunch. He rather pictured Helena to himself, as forgiving as he was, dressed in her pretty tea-gown of green plush and white and gold, waiting for him

at the head of a lunch-table set with especial nicety.

But Mr. Dunmore made a mistake when he left the open road. Let it wind about as it would, it had its protected sides and places, and at the end arrived. But these pathless wastes of the open pastures, snowed over and utterly unprotected, arrived nowhere. Turning his back once or twice on some broader pressure of the blast, he failed to orient himself; he could not see a rod before him for the driving snow; he ought by this time to be near the end, but there was nothing of the little piece of wood to be seen or guessed; he attempted to go back and recover the main road; he paused at length, a mere atom in all the wide whirl and bluster of the storm, uncertain if the way led to left or right, before him or behind. He began to feel some slight apprehension then. He remembered all the dreadful stories he had read of Highland shepherds and their sheep in mountain snow-storms; and all at once he saw that he, too, in the bitterest blowing gale of the winter, had lost his way upon the hill. Very cold and very tired, half-desperate too, he thought a moment of sitting down to rest. But that would never do, and he took heart of grace and plodded and struggled on, only succeeding in making sure that he was going down the hill and not up, but not at all sure that he was not skirting the hill to arrive at the stream and the houseless banks of the other side of the mountain; not at all sure either that in the dizzy blindness of the snow the next step might not lead him over some precipitous rock and out into nothingness. He paused to thrill at the thought, and then he lurched on again. At any rate, his only salvation lay in keeping in motion; it was of no use to halloo; although he tried it once or twice, the gale blew his voice back down his throat and made him

feel a more powerless mote than before, and he plunged along conscious that he must have wandered wide of the mark, and that the day must be drawing to a close. Helena, in her pretty gown at that pretty luncheon-table, began to fade out of his mental view. She had waited for him, doubtless, hoping he would come back in better humor. She had forgiven him. She would be thinking he was still in a rage with her. She—she might never know that he had forgiven her.

For Mr. Dunmore was now acknowledging to himself what he had only dimly and unconsciously felt before, that it was doubtful if the night did not overtake him up here in this pathless wilderness of snow and wind and fury, and bring death to him upon its wings. But not if he could help it. His heart beat up strongly with his determination, and he swung his arms and shook his shoulders, and still waded downward through the drifts. It was hard to move one foot before the other in the heavy snow-fall; hard to breathe in the force of the gale; impossible to hear anything but the resonance of the great gusts through the thick sky; impossible to see before him, the light growing less, not with the gale alone now, but with the declining day. Night was coming on, and he was lost in all the tumult of the tempestuous elements.

Still he labored along. They were bitter thoughts now in Mr. Dunmore's mind. He must keep going. Helena would never know—Helena would always think—and he so young, so well, so strong, to die like a dog of the cold—like a beast on the plains. If he could only find himself on level ground once more; if only the storm would cease roaring; if a friendly light would shine out anywhere! How trivial here seemed all the concerns about which he had vexed himself!

What mere dust and ashes! It wasn't possible he was the man that had those undignified, those cruel, words with his wife this morning! This morning? Oh, it seemed a year ago! If he ever reached home again, it would be another man; he would not suffer the winds of heaven to visit her too roughly. Then the beads of cold sweat broke out on him an instant to think that possibly now he should never reach it. His knees trembled; his feet were like balls of ice; he moved them as if they belonged to somebody else. Every few steps he stumbled—he fell—and every time it was harder to rise. At last, utterly helpless, he lay there, numb, freezing, breathless, hardly conscious, the storm whistling and screaming over him, the drift covering him. A dull red light swam across his sight; yes, he thought vaguely, the glow before his eyes of the blood bursting upon his brain. And yet, he thought again presently, life reviving within him, was that the way death by freezing came? This red glow, was it not possibly some lantern, some lamp, with its little blaze magnified by the driving of the snow? If he could halloo and make any one hear him—He tried again and again, and yet again; but his voice fainted, and he fell back, slowly losing consciousness of all things but that red glow, as it shone and broke and formed again under the shifting clouds of flying flakes. How soft and rich its ruby warmth, like the heart of some great flower—of some great poppy! And then the truth smote the wretched man, smote him with a crueler blow than any smiting of the storm. He was doomed, he was dying, he was freezing to death, two rods from his own door!

Tired out with her temper and her tears, Mrs. Helena slept for several hours the sleep of those whose cause is just, her head buried in the down, deaf to all the noises of the outside world. When she woke at last it was some stronger thrust of the turmoil of the tempest that made her suddenly sit up on the bed and shiver with an indefinable terror. She hurriedly bathed her face and smoothed her hair, and ran down-stairs where the maids were, and the cats, and the great St. Bernard dog, a need of some sort of companionship overpowering her in this war of the elements.

But the maids were busy, and Sauveur was asleep, and the cat sat on the window-sill watching the eddying snow in an uncanny way, and the only thing to reassure her was the portrait of her husband over the fireplace, the handsome, smiling, loving face, the eager, tender eyes that seemed to follow her. She looked away angrily, and then she looked back in spite of herself, and then she fell into her own low chair, and covered her face with her hands, and tears began to trickle through her fingers—tears of lonesomeness, of down-heartedness, of—yes, of repentance, repentance that she could ever have said what she had said that morning to her husband. How kind he had always been to her! how indulgent! how fond! And just because he had felt a little captious and irritated she had insulted and outraged him, and abused him in her thoughts afterwards, and had let him go off in the storm, thinking she never wanted to see his face again. She had said—yes, she had said—she never wanted to see his face again. Oh, what if Fate took her at her word, and she never did? What sort of a thing would life be to her without him? What— But she could not let herself think such a thought. She ran up-stairs and put on her pretty

green gown, and brushed a fresh curl into her yellow locks, and picked some of her geraniums to lay on the luncheon-table, and had the fire brightened, and went to the piano and began to play his favorite love-songs, and when she ceased the luncheon-time had long passed, and yet her husband had not come.

It was later than she had thought; it was wearing into the afternoon; the gale was increasing. If it was like this up here among the hills, what must it be down on the sea-coast, with the sailors clinging to the icy shrouds? Ah, what must it be here to any one out on the hills alone in these blowing clouds of sleet and snow? Her heart stood still with the thought. Was Mark out yet? No; he had only gone off in a pet; he had stayed out just to frighten her. Was it possible that he could do so? For a pause her anger flashed up again; and then with a wild, stifled cry she began to walk the floor like a wild woman. No; it was not possible. Mark had always tried to save her from all worriment and vexation. He would have come back if he had not been hindered. He never stayed angry an hour. He had gone up the mountain to the shepherds, and he had become bewildered and had lost his way.

In a heart-beat now, Mrs. Dunmore had the house alarmed, and the servants sent out in all directions, only to return reporting that it was out of the question to catch the breath in the wind and snow, and that Mr. Dunmore must long since have taken shelter somewhere, for no man alive could undertake to weather such a gale as this. No man alive, Mrs. Dunmore kept repeating then. Perhaps he was not alive; perhaps he had gone down under the stress of the mighty blast, and the drifts had deepened over him—her husband, her darling, her Mark! She sat a

little while looking into the fire stupidly, while a thousand scenes of their younger days started up before her eyes—summer mornings in the boat upon the narrow, shadowy river; winter evenings in each other's arms; long, slow drives about the flowery country lanes; strolls on starry nights; the love, the hope, the joy, in those days when they were all in all to one another, and wanted nothing more; and then she started and ran to the window and searched the storm, so thick and white as to be impenetrable; and suddenly now so gray, so dark, in the quick falling of the night, as to be full of horror.

Oh, to think that she, with her sharp tongue, her evil temper, had shut her husband out into such a wild night as this! How wicked! how infamous! If he did not come soon her heart would break. If she could only put her arms round him once again and beg him to forgive her!

Sauveur came and stood with her, gazing as wistfully into the storm, and whining softly. And the maid lighted the lamp with the red poppy shade upon it; and then she could see nothing but the flakes sweeping by the pane, like sparks of fire; and she sank on her knees by the window, the dog beside her, and knew and felt nothing but blackness.

Suddenly she felt the dog trembling through all his great shaggy frame; he sat up, his ears pricked and alert, and then all at once he sprang to the door with a single bound and a sharp cry; and she sprang after him, calling the maids and the man, and threw wide the door and rushed out, regardless of all things but the one, the others behind her, floundering, falling, without breath, up again, on, till the dog's glad cry told the story, and among them they had Mr. Dunmore's shoulders up, and they dragged him

inside the gate and the porch, and shut hard the door against the storm, and felt ready and willing to faint, but knew there was no time to do it in.

Mr. Dunmore had his breakfast in bed the next morning, languid, but uninjured by so much as a serious frost-bite, and feeling supremely blest among his pillows, with the fire crackling on the hearth, the flowers blooming in the window, and the storm still roaring on outside, while his wife fed him with daintiest morsels, and Sauveur now and then laid a caressing nose on the coverlid.

“To think,” she said, “that I ever could have spoken so to you, my darling! I must have been out of my head. Oh, I will never spend a cent again without consulting you first, Mark dear!”

“You never spent a cent too much in all your life, my precious!” he exclaimed. “Did I say you did? Some evil spirit took possession of me. It was never I—”

“Just think what you have suffered—oh, just think of it, dearest! And all for the sake of a red paper poppy! I will go and throw it into the fire this moment.”

“You will do nothing of the kind,” he cried. “I never in all the world saw anything so beautiful as that red paper poppy. It was a lucky day you bought it; it was my preserver and benefactor; it gave me strength to halloo and be heard. I mean to treasure it all my life, and have it buried with me at last.”

“And with me too,” she cried, falling on his neck, to the danger of the breakfast things; “for we will be buried in one grave.”

BEST-LAID SCHEMES

BEST-LAID SCHEMES

CERTAINLY it was a charming home, that in which Mr. Pearmain had installed his young wife: a stone cottage with mullioned windows from floor to ceiling, with pointed gables and divers roofs and vanes, and with an infinitude of prairie-roses and Virginia-creepers planted beside the walls, to grow in the future till the house should be a bower. And inside it was what all good house-keepers called fairy-land. Here Mr. and Mrs. Pearmain had given full scope to their notions, whose name was legion; not a bit of paint in the house to be cleaned, no carpets to secrete poison, but hard-wood, inlaid floors and rugs, and then a conservatory and grapery on a tiny scale, and closets without counting; while as for the kitchen, the conveniences there were simply miraculous. And when all this was done and inspected and occupied and enjoyed, it was no wonder that Mr. and Mrs. Pearmain looked about for something else on which to expend their whims and vagaries. Their way of life was so good that it would have been selfishness not to wish others to share it. Little Harry Pearmain was exactly three years old when they had fully decided to convert to that way their next neighbor, but lately arrived, a school-mate of Mrs. Pearmain's who had married a dear old friend of Mr. Pearmain's—little Mrs. Morley, whose black eyes had a strange sharp snap in them when things displeased her. And it was one morning when Mrs. Morley had come over to profit by her friend's experience in the matter of dainty needle-work that the campaign began.

"I always meant, when I could have things as I

chose," said Mrs. Pearmain, as they sat and sewed, "to order my table so that not one ounce of flesh should ever sully it. I don't proselyte my neighbors; because I believe in individual liberty; but since you inquire, I will say that I've tried it long enough to feel sure, and as there never has been a piece of meat cooked in my house, so there never shall be!" and she nodded her pretty head like a piece of mechanism.

"But what does Mr. Pearmain say?" asked the other.

"Oh, he agrees about it, fortunately, so there is no difficulty there. In fact, it was Mr. Pearmain's remarks, before we married, that first led me to think seriously of the subject. He always used to call it cannibalism whenever the beef was cut and the blood followed the knife. And I thought so much of his opinion I began to turn the matter over."

"Well, I declare! I don't believe I shall ever think so much of any man's opinion," said Mrs. Morley. "And did Mr. Pearmain's conviction really affect your appetite? What an idea! And you ceased eating meat in consequence of Mr. Pearmain's conviction?"

"Well, in consequence of my own conviction," said the priestess. "It grew disgusting to me. We boarded together, you know, and when my plate came, and I began to help myself to salt, Mr. Pearmain would glance at it, and say, 'Dead flesh.'"

"I should think *that* would have been disgusting."

"I did feel vexed a little at first, but presently I was saying the words to myself. And presently I couldn't taste it at all."

"The idea!" said Mrs. Morley, hunting for her lost needle.

“Oh, if you just run the matter over yourself, you won’t be so scornful, Teresa. If you remember every time you take a bit of mutton that you are eating death and corruption—”

“Well, I never!” said Mrs. Morley, catching her breath.

“Why, only think of it!” said Mrs. Pearmain, warming at her work. “How can you expect anybody to be good that is constantly fed and nourished and kept alive on a lower form of life?”

“But, bless my heart,” cried Mrs. Morley, struggling up from under the avalanche of words, “vegetables are a lower form of life, and one must live on something.”

“Vegetables are innocent life, at any rate, with no vile propensities or impure parts. And, moreover, we are half vegetables ourselves.”

“We? Oh, what in the world do you mean, Emily?” exclaimed Mrs. Morley, in a terrified manner, as if she had just received a revelation as to how fearfully she was made.

“Certainly. Didn’t you know that?” said Mrs. Pearmain, with a superior air. “The movements of our bodies that are voluntary are animal; those that are involuntary are vegetable, such as the circulation, and all the processes that go on while we sleep.”

“Isn’t it dreadful?” gasped Mrs. Morley.

“Dreadful? I think it’s beautiful. It’s a sort of union in ourselves of the three kingdoms—vegetable, animal, and spiritual; for when the nerves come in and control the great brute muscles—”

“But, really, Emily—”

“Now don’t be silly, Teresa. A woman of your power of mind has only to look at the thing rationally to feel just as I do. For, as I was saying, how can those people be good who receive all their increase from a lower animal form, from brutal instincts and actions —how can they help receiving those instincts and being tempted to those actions, and becoming, under the guise of men and women, a baser sort of animals themselves?”

“I don’t know—perhaps so,” said Mrs. Morley, a little moved, it may be, by the reference to her power of mind.

“There must be an inherent principle in man that will rise whether or no, or else we never should have gotten along as far as we have. But it would be so much faster, so much further, if it wasn’t for this food on which we sustain our growth. And while we eat it, I don’t see how the great perfect race can ever come at all. It never will come, Teresa,” said Mrs. Pearmain, resting on her elbow and looking through her friend as if to the far-distant future—“it never will come till people cease to eat flesh, and live on the things that nature provides without pain or slaughter. To think, every time you sit down to table, that some creature which enjoyed life has had to give it up for your appetite! *That* makes *me* sick!” said Mrs. Pearmain.

“Well, it’s very wonderful. I never thought of it before. I really will look it all over. But I don’t see what there is to live on—I should starve on bread and butter.”

“Butter! We only allow butter as a rarity.”

“Well, milk, then.”

“Milk, indeed! Do you suppose that, while cows are kept in the unnatural condition in which the milker keeps them, we should drink their milk? Oh no, indeed, seldom milk, seldom cream, do we touch.”

“My goodness! Then you’ve nothing left but eggs.”

“Well, once in a while an egg; but rarely. I never can get over feeling that to break an egg is the murder of an innocent.”

“Why, then, you can’t have cake, or—”

“What do you want that for?—unhealthy, indigestible, poisonous—no, we never have it.”

“Nor doughnuts?”

“Doughnuts!” with ineffable scorn.

“And you can’t have pies?”

“Never. But we have delicious sauces—apple, cranberry, grape, and all those.”

“But what in wonder do you do when you have company?”

“Oh, you have no idea of how many delicious ways there are in which the grains can be cooked, or of how many delicious forms of bread there are. You can get up a perfectly harmonious dinner of the various vegetables that really leaves you nothing to desire; mushrooms are as good as steaks; beans can be made to imitate roast beef; and with fruits and sauces, as I said, there is enough of everything, and those who want meat needn’t come to us.”

“I should die!”

“Not after you were used to it,” said Mrs. Pearmain, seriously. “You would learn to like the new way and detest the old.”

"It would set free a great deal of money, to be sure, to be used on other things," mused Mrs. Morley.

"Oh, a great deal! And then you would be twice as healthy and strong, and your children would be an improvement on you. In fact, it is for the sake of Harry chiefly that we are so strenuous about following up the matter. It may not make a mighty difference with me, beginning after twenty, but I expect to see Harry—I can't help seeing Harry—a very different person from other people's boys. And if he could only find and marry, when he grows up, a woman who had been nourished on the same sort of food—just think, Teresa, what we might expect of *their* children! It would be the beginning of a race that would conquer the world, the beginning of that great perfect race which will do such wonderful things as pass our comprehension."

"What makes you talk so ecstatically of that great perfect race, Emily? How do you know anything about it?"

"Why, don't geology and those things show us that race after race of animals has passed away, and only left its bones behind it? And should we suppose that man would be an exception to the general fate? But as each race passes, something takes its place a little superior to it, sprung from it, perhaps; and this great perfect race is to take the place of man, sprung from man and woman, but from the first man and woman that ceased to eat death and corruption. Oh, Teresa," said Mrs. Pearmain, her cheeks and her eyes glowing, "if it should be your child and mine!"

The last stroke did the work. Mrs. Morley, it might be said, threw up the sponge; she was a convert from that moment to Mrs. Pearmain's theories. She went through the house that very day; she inquired into

everything; she took notes of everything; she learned how to do everything; and she went home at night all prepared to convert Mr. Morley, and to give her Louise to be married to Harry—if it happened to be Louise.

Poor Mr. Morley! He loved his juicy steak; he rolled under his tongue the sweet morsel of the oyster out of a side bone; he considered pepper-pot a dish fit for the gods; he was fond of broiled liver and a rasher of bacon; a cold pickled shoulder of pork he thought good enough to invite the king to partake. In fact, he was a murderous cannibal, pure and simple, according to Mrs. Pearmain's lights, who enjoyed his dinner without being, as he thought himself—and as we think, so we are—either exactly an epicure or a glutton.

But it was of no use. When Mrs. Morley unmasked her batteries that night, and went over Mrs. Pearmain's plan of campaign, with a whole added troop of exclamation and emphasis and entreaty and embracing, he knew he must surrender. He made a faint resistance, but on the whole he didn't believe it was to be a permanent affair with his little Teresa; he didn't like to deny her anything just now either; it was probably only an incidental whim that would pass, and so he yielded handsomely, and promised that she should have her own way. And then the idea of marrying his girl to Pearmain's boy was a pleasant one: Pearmain was rich and generous and good, the friend of years. Yes, he would promise.

"Kiss the book!" cried Mrs. Morley.

"No, I won't do that," said he. "I'll promise, and my word's as good as my bond."

"Well, then, George, you've as good as taken an oath,

and I expect you to keep it."

"I mean to keep it," he replied—"at least, till you release me."

"That will be forever, then." And she plumed herself like Victory just lit upon a banner.

But it was a dismal breakfast to Mr. Morley next day, when dry toast preceded oatmeal, and butterless baked potato without salt brought up the rear; a dismal dinner, when watery squash and lumpy turnip were the only variation of a table gorgeous with carrots and beets and silver. "I'll give my whole mind to it," said Mrs. Morley, cheerfully. "Mrs. Pearmain will lend me all her experience, and we shall have it very palatable yet." But he hankered after the fleshpots.

It was shortly after the beginning of the new régime that Miss Louise Morley came into the world, and there was much rejoicing at the christening, although the christening-cake consisted of a sort of sweet bread with raisins in it, of which Mr. Morley partook so eagerly that he made himself ill, and became presently so prostrate that the doctor, being summoned, ordered—perhaps at his whispered suggestion—a course of beef-tea.

Mr. Morley attended to that beef-tea himself. He was not going to be put off with slops and dissolved Liebig; he had pounds of the thick red steaks laid before him on the slab in the kitchen, where he went, and fairly gloated over its preparation. But his rapture was of short duration. Mrs. Pearmain, running over one day on an errand, saw him whetting his knife, and flourishing it like a savage, and tiptoed away to find Mrs. Morley. "Oh, my dear," she said, "you never can see the evil effects to

better advantage. Look at him! That is the very way the primitive butchering people whetted their knives over a victim's throat. Oh, it is dreadful! it makes me shudder. It is like a mania for blood; it is certainly near insanity; he will be murdering you in your bed."

"I am ashamed of you, Emily!" said Mrs. Morley, tartly. "My George, indeed! Why, the doctor ordered it."

"But the doctor didn't order it forever. The very ferocity shows he has had enough of it. I should take it away and put him on cream-of-tartar water directly. Don't be offended, Teresa; I am speaking for his good—and the children's. These men—they have to be managed; Mr. Pearmain is a singular exception."

Mrs. Morley did not allow her displeasure to overcome her principles; and when Mrs. Pearmain brought her visit to a close, Mrs. Morley brought the administration of beef-tea to a close too. For Mr. Morley's intention being to be as good as his word, it needed only a little argument and some tears to convince him that the beef-tea was a breach of contract.

It would be hard to tell what Mr. Morley suffered in going about his business in town from day to day for many a month thereafter. The sight of the wild-duck, hanging, with his wide wings and brilliant breast, at a poulterer's door, almost broke his heart; the men who came up out of the victuallers' cellars, wiping their mouths, excited in him a feeling akin to hate; and he had to skip by the kitchens of the Revere House and the Tremont so rapidly, in order to escape the tempting smells which they cast forth, that finally he altogether eschewed Bullfinch Street, and every other that commanded a restaurant kitchen.

For Mr. Morley's particular vanity, as you know, was that he was a man of his word.

Every once in a while Mr. Morley made a feeble remonstrance, futile as feeble; for Mrs. Morley had the whole thing pat now, and was, moreover, a woman with whom it was idle to argue, for when obliged to abandon her position logically, she always did physically also, and either banged out of the room, or else came round where he sat, put an arm about his neck, and if kisses wouldn't stop his mouth, stopped it, to the accompaniment of much laughing and teasing meanwhile, with his handkerchief.

"A devilish pretty breakfast!" said Mr. Morley once, pushing back his plate in a pet. "Pea-nuts!"

"I don't complain of pea-nuts, George," said Mrs. Morley. "On the contrary, I am thankful for them. They're sweet and sound and well-baked; there are plenty of them. I am sure they are a very poetical food; and then they're a national one; we can always think, you know, when we eat pea-nuts, that we are encouraging the poor freedmen down in North Carolina."

"Oh, hang the freedmen!" groaned Mr. Morley. "How do you expect me to go in and out of the city every day on such food as this? I'll have no strength left in a year—living on husks."

"Look at those oxen, George, dragging that immense load after them. There's strength—and it all comes from husks."

"I'm not an ox!" roared Mr. Morley.

"No? Anybody'd say you were a Bull of Bashan."

"Mrs. Morley, can't you apply a little reason—"

“Not a scrap. Not now. You know this is a subject on which I don’t want conversation before Louise,” as that little damsel demanded her groats, and looked with wondering eyes from one to the other. “I don’t want her ever to hear her diet called in question.”

“Me likes me’s bwekus,” said Miss Louie, with some comprehension of the coil.

“It’s more than I do,” muttered her father.

“Take some of Louie’s groats, then. Like them, precious?”

“Berry mush,” said Louie, with some point, and pushing the dish towards her father, with a dim idea that her mother was abusing him.

“I really can’t understand what the difference is between eating these oats and eating the flesh of the animal that is made out of these oats.”

“A horse’s flesh, for instance. But you wouldn’t eat that if it was set before you.”

“I don’t know that I shouldn’t,” said Mr. Morley, grimly. “People who are starving eat anything. People wrecked and on a raft eat each other,” said he, looking at his wife as if it were not impossible he should eat her. “Sometimes,” said Mr. Morley, “I feel dangerous.”

“A depraved nature,” said Mrs. Morley. “See what flesh has done for you,” while he gave a glance at Louie that might have made a weaker woman shudder.

“She’s fat, isn’t she?” said Mr. Morley, whose mind really seemed now to run on morbid things, and with the air of one who smacks his lips. And then, as he caught the chubby hand and carried it to his lips,

Mrs. Morley found herself watching him with a breathless scrutiny—for it really crossed her mind that Mrs. Pearmain might be right, and Mr. Morley's wits might be a little wandering—until he had kissed the little dimpled fist and laid it down again. "For my part," said he, "if I were to have a plate of roast veal set before me (and I used to despise it)—roast veal, brown, and swimming in gravy—swimming in gravy," he repeated, unctuously—"I don't think I should eat it like a civilized being—I've left off being a civilized being, eating nuts and prunes and things that don't require any civilization: a savage never needed to reach the boiling-point to eat them—I should put my face down and wallow in it, and eat it like a dog."

And then Mrs. Morley snatched Louie, and ran out of the room in virtuous wrath.

Unhappy Mrs. Morley! The path of virtue was a thorny one, but she persevered in it even with bleeding feet. And if she was not ready with an answer, she always had what her husband called her knock-down argument of leaving the room. And she had one last resort, better than the others, which she used at such times as those when Mr. Morley, recurring to the charge, wanted her to see that you might scatter pulverized marble over a soil forever and do it no good; but if you scattered the pulverized bones of beasts there the harvest became trebled, plainly showing that matter which had passed through a form of organized life was superior to that which hadn't, and that inasmuch as animals were higher in the scale of organized life than vegetables, the grain that was converted into beef was nobler food than the grain that had never known that higher form, and so—Then Mrs. Morley had ready

the best answer of all, and it consisted in simply maintaining silence so rigorously that nothing short of thumbscrews could extract a syllable from her, while she looked the serene embodiment of pretty scorn.

But Nature will take her revenges, and in her own way. One night Mr. Morley did not return from town. Mrs. Morley sent the carriage to every train; it came back with nothing but the Skye sitting up on the seat erect as a shako. Mrs. Morley sent one servant up to the Pearmains', and another over to the Farwells'—they knew nothing of Mr. Morley. She could learn nothing from the train hands; the gentlemen going up and down every day had not seen Mr. Morley. She telegraphed to the town station with no better result; she telegraphed to the counting-room, and received no reply at all. It had never happened before. She was wild with alarm; lights were dancing about the house till cock-crow; she walked the floors all night. Mr. Morley had fallen unnoticed in the dark between the cars, she was sure, and train after train had rolled over his mangled remains, and her mind could not fix him in any single spot, so great an extent of surface was he covering. Or else he had been delayed in the counting-room till dusk, and had been garroted on his way to the station, and robbed and murdered and tossed up an alleyway. Or perhaps he had fallen and broken a leg, and, tortured with pain, lay in the black street at the mercy of passing wheels. Could it be possible that Mr. Morley had tired of her and her whims, and had left for parts unknown? Had Mr. Morley's fancy ever strayed from little Louie's mother? She could not say; for the man that hankered after butcher's meat as he did was proof against no temptation. And yet—her George—as he did hanker, how she had made him suffer! If she only

had him there, she would cook the reddest beef in the servants' larder for him with her own hands! In a wild whirl her fears and fancies, her indignation and affection, chased each other up and down in her mind till day broke. And then, by the common accident of ill-luck, there was an informal conclave of the neighbors at the front gate, and Mr. Pearmain, going in, volunteered a journey to town in search of Mr. Morley, and was welcomed by the wretched wife with bursting tears. "If I only knew," she sobbed, "whether he is dead or alive, I could endure it."

"There is no need of any alarm of that sort, Teresa," said Mrs. Pearmain, who had come down early. "Anybody without much moral force is sure to be a backslider. Mr. Morley has merely been eating meat, and is ashamed to face you."

It was too true—at least the first part of the statement; the second part was a work of imagination: Mr. Morley would have been only too glad to face his wife, for, stretched on a bed of sickness, and tossing with pain and fever, his wife's presence would have been like cold water to his burning lips. He had indeed fallen from grace. On his way to the station a friend—a long-unseen friend, worse than any garroter—had begged him to dine with him; he had listened, longed, hesitated, yielded; he could at any rate enjoy his friend's society, if he could not dine, and could return to Teresa by a later train. Vain thought! When that mulligatawny soup steamed in its tureen, when that striped bass in its port-wine sauce lifted its handsome side, when that breast of a mongrel duck saluted his famished eyes, when that single sip of Château Yquem made him think the world well lost, Mr. Morley fell. Four hours of delicious banqueting; twenty-four hours of dust

and ashes. The stomach so long used to husks spurned the rich offering of blood and gravies, sauces and condiments; and no drunkard after a debauch ever suffered in body and in soul what Mr. Morley was suffering after this not too luxurious good square meal. Mrs. Morley buried her head in her husband's bosom when Mr. Pearmain, with the kindliness of a man and the severity of a regicide, having carried her to the place next day, closed the door upon the interview—and surely we cannot do less than Mr. Pearmain did.

Poor Mrs. Morley! It is to be hoped that her husband promised better fashions. But on what was she to rely? On his word? A broken reed—and he had broken it. Poor Mr. Morley! He was thoroughly wretched. He went about with a craven air, conscious of suspicion. What is life without respect? And he knew that his wife's respect was doubtful, that the Pearmains' was not at all doubtful, and felt that even little Louie might learn to despise him. And, meantime, all the neighbors, aware that something very much out of the way had taken place and had been hushed up, regarded him as the culprit of a veritable escapade, of some vague and awful departure from rectitude, and looked upon this quiet, sober, steady citizen, who paid his taxes, went to church on Sundays, voted the right ticket, and never did anything very wrong in his life—except when he gave his wife the trusteeship of his diet—as little other than a regular Don Juan.

Really one cannot help thinking that it was too bad of Mr. Morley. He had promised his wife, and lulled her into false security, declaring that his word was as good as his bond; and he was a business man, and knew what his bond meant. Moreover, he knew that

his wife had grown to have the affair very much at heart, being, like all converts, wonderfully bigoted, and convinced that it was a matter of life and death. “Why do you worry so over it, Teresa?” asked Mrs. Pearmain once. “You have established your own and Louie’s habits. There is no likelihood of your failing for yourself, or of your not securing her great destiny for her—yes, her great destiny. And why not let him return to his idols?”

“My George! oh, Emily, how can I? I had rather go with him. What satisfaction to me is it to be any better than he is? I want his blood to be pure, his life long. I want him to rise with me, and if all this is to separate us and make us a different race at last, I will have fried pork on my table every day, and eat it too! I wish I had never heard a word about it all! I don’t see that it makes us a bit better. George and I used to agree about everything, and now we quarrel about everything!”

Evidently indignation was not the weapon with which to meet this outbreak, and Mrs. Pearmain wearily went over all her fantastic premises and logical sequences till she had at length triumphantly welded the chains afresh on Mrs. Morley’s reason, and Mr. Morley’s œsophagus.

Of course, while all these agitations went on, time went on as well, and Harry Pearmain and Louie Morley were not standing still: their childhood was passing too. They were really beautiful children, and whether or not animal diet is good for the rest of us, their bright eyes, round limbs, and rosy cheeks, their boundless grace and happy natures, showed that the opposite diet was good for them. But then, on the other hand, nobody could dispute the fact that little Fanny Farwell’s cheeks were just as rosy, her pretty

flesh as sweet, her grace as airy; and Fanny had been fed on the richest of steaks and the fattest of oysters ever since she had cut her teeth. They were the three best friends in the world, and the only drawback to the felicity of certain of the parents was, that Harry always persisted in calling Fanny his little wife, and Louie his dear sister, although it is uncertain if he were stimulated to that nomenclature by the gibraltars and the silver pieces that Mr. Morley now invariably bestowed upon him whenever he heard it. Sister or wife in the future, they were exceedingly affectionate in the present; they ran across the grounds to each other with their games and their secrets, and Louie was as much at home in Harry's house as Harry was in hers; and Mrs. Pearmain used to look exultingly at Louie as upon her especial work, portray the future to herself, and rejoice over a daughter-in-law after her own heart. Meantime Mrs. Farwell had some thoughts of her own, the character of which may be known by the pitiful way in which she used to smooth Fanny's sunshiny curls as she remarked to her husband upon the inconveniences attending the preparation of two different tables, that it was a pity if what was good enough for our grandparents wasn't good enough for our grandchildren, that, after all, women were nothing but the slaves of men's caprices, and that the whole of these new-fangled reformatory notions had not succeeded in making Louie Morley half so pretty as her Fanny: though when she had had her say, it is not impossible that the complacent sparkle in her eye as she now and then overlooked the Pearmain property was due to the consideration that it was her Fanny who might one day queen it over that fair demesne. Mrs. Farwell, however, if she pondered these things in her heart, kept them there so well

that it never entered the heads of the other two mothers that any power could possibly arrange matters differently from the way in which they had arranged them themselves. So the three happy things grew up together, the girls skating with the boy in winter, and bird-nesting with him in summer, the boy playing house with them, doing their examples and threading their needles at times, astonishing them with his daring feats in riding and shooting and wrestling, while Louie's great black eyes and brilliant colors gave her a certain prominence in their counsels, and her dashing courage made her assimilate most to the boy's ways, and Fanny's tenderness and timidity and soft sweetness moved his heart in quite another fashion. They were happy years to the children; they were years of apparent contentment with the Pearmains; they were years of a perpetual and open struggle with the Morleys. If Mr. Morley missed a train, or was delayed by conversation at the station, if he were late in returning from town-meeting or from the lodge, Mrs. Morley's nerves began to twitter and her heart to flutter; now he comes, and now he doesn't come; this foot-fall was his till it went by, this one surely was, and her heart beat like a forge, and fell with a mighty blow at the disappointment. "It is killing me, I know it is," she would say to herself. "All this hope and fear and doubt and worry keep my pulses going so that I shall have a dreadful heart-disease fastened upon me. It really does not seem as if the good our plan may do outweighs the evil it does do." And then she would take her work and run up to Mrs. Pearmain's for some words to fortify her. Mrs. Pearmain always had them. More than once she had intimated that that was her branch of the business, and had even admitted that the person who

furnished all the ideas ought not to be expected to furnish practice too, like those old-fashioned temperance lecturers who aroused their energies with a good nip of brandy before converting their audience to do away with brandy altogether.

“Never mind, never mind, Emily,” she would say. “It is worth any amount of heart-ache. It isn’t that it will so much benefit you and me—it would do little hurt to our plan, I suppose, if we took our bone in our cupboard—but our example is necessary to keep the children at the mark.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Mrs. Morley. “Length of days is as desirable for us as for the children; and when we discard Death from our diet, he has to stop long enough to seek some other approach, at any rate.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Pearmain, “that is true. I feel as if these children might acquire immortality—at least return to such age as Melchizedek’s and Methuselah’s. And just think what work might be accomplished in such lifetimes as that will bring about! Now a person no sooner knows how to handle his talent, his inventive skill, or his learning, than off he goes, snuffed out like a candle; but then the man who invents a spring for a railroad car at thirty, at three hundred will be ballasting a road to the moon. What a period it will be after a few such generations! There will be no such thing as typhoids and diphtherias and all that ilk; we shall have killed off the plants that nourish the germs of parasitical disease; the organs of our bodies, no longer clogged with foul matter, will run on undisturbed indefinitely; the reducing of the temperature of the blood and abstracting the stimulus of strong flesh will abolish another class of disease and all the

hereditary horrors that spring from it; and I can't see that there will be anything but sudden accident to stop the machine any more than to stop a planet."

"Well, that is for them, not for us. They will never give us a thought, nor dream of all our trouble and struggle to achieve it for them. They will only despise us as we do the wretches who sawed human bones with flint for the sake of the marrow."

"I think such a race will have no room for contempt. They will pity us with every fresh gain. Why, Teresa, I can even think the time may come when there will be no eating at all, but science will have learned the required elements of food, the nitrates and phosphates and all that, and supply them to us in gaseous shape, great reservoirs feeding our houses through pipes: we will open the tubes in the dining-room, and sit a certain length of time together there, talking gayly, stimulated by the gas we are all breathing together, of which the system will take only what it needs, and then go our ways again without soil, grease, or trouble."

"But, goodness, Emily, our teeth, our stomachs!"

"Well, teeth are useful in various ways. And as for our stomachs, they may be turned to the secretion of —now don't you laugh at me, Teresa—I have really read a paper about it—to the secretion of wing material—"

"Wings!"

"Yes, wings—why not? If the first fish that ever dreamed of being a bird had seen a penguin with his flippers, transmigrating fins, he wouldn't have thought himself visionary. But being determined to be a bird, he became a penguin; and some penguin probably determined upon becoming an eagle. We

only have to be determined, Teresa, and we can do anything—in time—allowing, you know, that the 'eternal years of God' are ours to work in."

"We can determine upon being angels," said Mrs. Morley, slyly.

"And become so in time. How do you suppose the bodily idea of angels arose, if not from the forefeeling of those wings? It isn't for you and me, Teresa, but it is for Harry's and Louie's descendants to have as fine

'Sustaining wings of skyey grain,
Orange and azure deepening into gold,'

as any angel of them all."

"It will be very awkward for dress-makers," said Mrs. Morley, her needle on her lip, and rather too well accustomed to wonders from her friend's lips for much surprise.

"On the contrary, it will simplify dress-making."

"But, Emily, it will take more than our Harry and Louie to bring all this about. Their children will have to marry among the flesh-eaters, and all our work goes for nothing."

"I know it. And that perplexes me a great deal. Really it doesn't seem right to throw up the matter for that. Still it was an awful oversight. Sometimes it almost reconciles me to the bouillon and chops that Dr. Bonnamy ordered last fall."

"Last fall?"

"When I grew so poorly from eating the lemons, you know."

"Oh yes, to keep your bones—"

“From turning to chalk. I went too far. Oh, if we could only live up to our theories!” said Mrs. Pearmain, with a sigh.

“I can, and I will,” cried Mrs. Morley. “And George Morley must.”

“Now if we had only found two other mothers to begin life as we did, we should have been quite secure,” said Mrs. Pearmain, reflectively. “Then there would have been no need of abandoning our experiment.”

“Abandoning! Who talks of abandoning?” cried Mrs. Morley, with snapping eyes. “If it is right to do, I shall do it irrespective of the possibilities of Harry’s and Louie’s descendants.”

“But it is for them we are doing it. And all that wars against us is appetite—no, not even appetite, but the mere sense of taste. Why in the world cannot science take up the thing, and invent flavors for us, so that with a few drops of this extract we can give the flavor of roast fowl to this vegetable, with a few drops of that turn our porridge into turtle-soup, and with another get all the satisfaction out of a biscuit that we should out of a chop? But no,” said Mrs. Pearmain, wearily, “it never will, and I for one am almost tired of going against the stream, when all our work is to end like those rivers which are lost upon the desert.”

Then it was Mrs. Morley’s turn to exhort, to assure her friend she had been overworked, and was morbid, and must have a dish of strong gruel made immediately, and must stimulate herself with some cress and onion and tomato-salad, and presently must go away from home on a little visit. “Change of scene to us is like change of food to others,” said

Mrs. Morley, and Mrs. Pearmain thought there was a great deal of wisdom in what her friend said. And so Mrs. Pearmain went away to a water-cure, where, as the authorities could not find anything the matter with her back, they began to concern themselves about her brain, upon which she returned home in high dudgeon.

She had been gone just long enough. A great deal of mischief can be accomplished in three months when people are seventeen or eighteen years old—between which years Louie now hung; and Mrs. Morley's attention had been called off by a series of tergiversations on Mr. Morley's part that had threatened not only to make her a widow, but to destroy her system of operations. Her own nerves had been badly shattered by his behavior, and by the impossibility of knowing her fate from dinner to dinner, and subsequently by the long watching and waiting that his illness devolved upon her when indulgence in corned pork and cabbage at a restaurant had produced an inflammation of the stomach that nearly proved fatal to him. On his recovery a demon of hunger had seemed to be gnawing at Mr. Morley's vitals, and all the fancy grits and groats in the market did not meet his demand. Mr. Morley no sooner returned to business than a porter-house steak learned to expect him on the noon of every day.

But you may be sure that this was very mortifying to Mr. Morley. "Skulking round a corner like a lean dog for his bone," as he used to grumble, was enough to make a sneak of any man, and he had always been proud of his uprightness. The consciousness that he was sacrificing his birthright for a mess of pottage made him exceedingly morose; and, convicted of his

own dereliction, he was daily and hourly trying to find some fault in Mrs. Morley that should balance it, till life became little but crimination and recrimination in the household where it had been expected to bring about the millennium. Not in all this time being able to summon the courage to fight it out with his wife, he was every now and then swearing off again, every now and then suffering a relapse, making himself a martyr to dyspepsia and remorse; and, forgetting all old ties, he was encouraging something like hatred of the Pearmains, with every pang that came from yielding the right, from abandoning the pleasant, or from indigestion. Good Mr. Pearmain went on his patient, plodding way without giving Mr. Morley and his struggles a second thought; but Mr. Morley, in turn, never gave a second thought to the atmosphere of conciliation that of late years had seemed to grow up about Mrs. Pearmain's manners. Things were imbittered for him, too, by the knowledge that the world had so well prospered with him that he was fully able to gratify his wishes, but with all his good luck and good bank account was obliged to live on prison fare. He lived, though, only in the hope of one day breaking his bonds; and the thought that his darling girl was being reared to belong to anything belonging to the Pearmains grew daily more obnoxious to him.

Mrs. Morley, however, had but a slight knowledge of what went on in the little cosmos of her husband's emotions; she had no doubt that he broke faith with her frequently in the matter of his diet; she used to make scornful observations as to the freedom of a man to do wrong unobserved, but she had no idea to what extent that faith was broken, and only once in a while dimly felt herself trembling on the edge of a rebellion before whose outbreak she would go under.

She was not at all happy, only triumphantly right, and she nailed her colors to the mast, and swept bravely forward.

Mr. Morley had little pleasure at home in those years; somehow all conversation led to the one theme, as all roads lead to Rome. He found hardly any other satisfaction than in walking with Louie in the woods, or else taking his book on the windy upland of the hill behind the two estates of Pearmain and Morley, and in dreaming his life away in the sun, now and then bursting out of calm repose into a storm of expletives that must have startled the ground-mice and the birds, as he thought of the pleasure he might have taken with his dear little Teresa "if that Pearmain woman had never fallen foul of her."

Once, just as he was relapsing into quiet after such a burst, an arm stole round his neck, and a soft dimpled brown hand, with a big pearl on it, laid itself over his mouth. "Aren't you ashamed, you dear profane Pa Morley?" cried Louie, and her laughing face came round in front till the great black eyes looked into his little gray ones. "Where do you expect to die when you go to? What makes you swear so, sitting up here in the sun? Is it some tender reminiscence connected with a beef-bone? Listen! I'm going to tell you a great secret. Do you know, I think turtle-soup is almost as good as mock-turtle!"

"Louie!" he gasped.

"Yes, indeed," she said, with the gayest sort of a mischievous laugh, pulling herself round by the sod to her father's side. "I mentioned that to show you how high up I am in the graduating class. Turtle-soup and terrapin are like a degree *cum summâ laudâ* in the comestible line. I should like mutton-broth and

gumbo every day when I didn't have oyster-stew or chowder."

It is true that in the instant, despite his own wishes, Mr. Morley recoiled as from a cockatrice inadvertently hatched in his bosom.

"Now, Pa Morley," whimpered the sweet voice, in distress, "as if you weren't really glad of it!"

"But—but, my dear—"

"Oh, now stop, please. I'll tell you all about it. And it isn't our fault at all. Ma drove us to it."

"Our?"

"Well, yes, Harry's or mine. When we found out what ma and Mrs. Pearmain were after—How would you like it, I want to know, Pa Morley," she suddenly cried, "to have folks manœuvring about you in that way; to be set apart from everybody else in the world in that indelicate, indecent way; to be talked over as the—the—the beginner of a great future perfect race —"

"It's nonsense! it's nonsense!" cried Mr. Morley, springing to his feet.

"Now, pa, you just be quiet. I am. And I'm the party most directly concerned," and she coaxed him down beside her again. "I don't care anything about that great future race. This race is good enough for me. And I think ma and Mrs. Pearmain might be ashamed of themselves. And so does Harry."

"What! you've talked it over?"

"We've heard *them* talking it over—oh, times! And, pa dear, now don't you go to being cross; it's of no sort of use to speak to them about it; and—and the fact is, I like Harry very much indeed, very much,

and so does he like me, but there's somebody I like worlds, worlds, worlds better."

"Oh, there is, is there?" And her father caught her shoulders in his two hands, and held her at arm's-length till the face drooped and the eyes veiled themselves, and the little brazen thing was blushing and half crying. "And I know who it is!" he cried, releasing his hold and clasping the pretty head all at once into his breast, to the great damage of crimps and starch. "You don't suppose I've seen Dr. Bonnamy's gig waiting round these lanes so long for nothing?"

"You don't care, do you, pa?" she whispered, looking up from her resting-place.

"I don't know about that," he answered, smoothing the rich hair in a reckless way. "What am *I* going to do?"

"Threaten ma with a lunatic asylum, and make her behave herself."

"No, no, ma has her rights. She believes in her principles thoroughly, and so do I. But the trouble is I never did have any backbone."

"Nobody could have, or any other bone, living as we do."

"I'm—I'm ashamed of it, but my senses are too much for me. Your mother ought to have married a better man."

"For shame, Pa Morley! As if she could!"

"She'd have been a great deal happier, and perhaps have founded her great race. It does seem a shame that such a mighty plan should be thwarted just because I love gravy. She'll say, Louie, that the

reason you love soup is because of the rebellion of my senses against the—"

"Acquiescence of your reason." And then they both laughed like two children. "It isn't only soup, though," said Louie. "I love everything that's good, and take it whenever I can get it—chicken, calf's-head, pork and beans—"

"O Lord! we might as well give up, then," groaned Mr. Morley.

"We might as well give up," repeated Louie, with great cheerfulness. "And you'll help us, pa?"

"I? I? Why, how can I—"

"Oh, I know how! Just say you will."

"If—if I dare to, my darling."

"Well, I won't trouble you much; not till after it's all done, and can't be helped. I love John Bonnamy, and I hate the great future race"—and all of a sudden she burst out crying inextinguishably, and it was all her father could do to kiss her and soothe her into calmness before walking away with her, her little elastic step hardly crushing the grass, into the wood where John Bonnamy was waiting.

It was an hour or two later in the day, just as the first tinge of sunset began to transmute all the summer world, when Mr. Morley came walking back alone over the brow of the hill, very quiet, very dazed, a little stunned it may be, a little wondering if nature were not on his side and requiting his wrongs after all. For what was this he had heard in the wood—as if Louie's story were not marvel enough? Harry Pearmain, Fanny Farwell—those two children; he not a day more than twenty-one, she less than his Louie's age—just seventeen; a secret whose seal no one

dared to break. He didn't know how to believe it all. It was like a dream. He felt that he must have a night's sleep on it, and see if he dreamed it again, before he dared to think of it. He saw a great vista of release opening before him, if he could but find a sword to hew through the first hedge.

There was a shorter cut down the hill, that took him round under the Pearmain windows—those pretty mullioned windows all opening on the ground; he followed it. And he never knew what fate it was that suddenly made him turn, and tiptoe towards a certain window of them all, and pause there, looking in—whether some arresting sight had caught his eye and directed his feet while his conscious thoughts were otherwhere, or whether it was simply perverse curiosity. Whatever it was, he delayed there some seconds, his eyes glaring out of his head, his nose flattened against the pane of the narrow pantry window till it shone leprously white and blue. And in that plight, as if magnetized by the fixity of his gaze, Mrs. Pearmain turned and surveyed him.

"Oh, Mr. Morley! Mr. Morley!" she cried, as well as the circumstances allowed her to enunciate. "Don't, don't betray me!"

Mr. Morley chuckled. It was a moment of glorious recompense. Here was his sword. He pushed up the sash. "I'll take a bite," he said.

Mrs. Pearmain stared in a sort of stupor a moment. "I—I can't help it, Mr. Morley," she stammered then, with pale and shaking lips.

"It's very well done," said Mr. Morley. "It shows a good deal of experience—"

"Oh, the doctor ordered it long ago, and the habit grew upon me; and although I gave up hope for

myself, I've tried to keep the way straight for the others—"

"Straight and narrow," said Mr. Morley, wiping his mouth.

"—And I've talked and written about it, talked to every one, argued with every one—you know I have, Mr. Morley," she cried, breathlessly, the tears gushing—"tried to convert every one—"

"Enough to strike a balance. I understand—whited sepulchres, Pharisees, and all that. You've been like the hero of the ballad who sat in the corner eating his Christmas-pie. You've been the means of starving me for nearly twenty years on oatmeal mush, while you've picked your bones and—"

"Mr. Morley! you can still insult—"

"Not at all, not at all. I don't wish to insult you. On the contrary, I think you've shown the first ray of sense I've seen in you for twenty years. Only," said Mr. Morley, lifting his finger impressively before his victim's eyes, "now there's to be no backing down."

A stormy half-hour afterwards Mr. Morley might have been seen springing over the railing between the grounds as light as a boy, and he ate his supper of oatmeal mush with the relish of Jack sitting at the foot of the bean-stalk he was about to fell; for he never meant to partake of that viand again in his life.

The phaeton was coming round to the door to take Mrs. Morley, in the long twilight, to one of her poor women whom she helped on certain vegetarian conditions. The pony was rather gay, and pranced a good deal as Thomas held the bridle. "It is wonderful the strength these animals get out of grains," said Mr. Morley, artfully.

“Wonderful!” said Mrs. Morley, falling delightedly into the trap.

“And the weakness other animals get,” continued Mr. Morley. “My dear, did you know that Mrs. Pearmain had been ailing for some time?”

“Triflingly,” said Mrs. Morley, drawing on her gauntlets.

“My dear, if you saw Mrs. Pearmain standing behind her pantry door, holding in one hand part of a cold sausage, the rest of which was in her mouth, and in the other hand a pickled martinoe—”

“Do talk common sense, Mr. Morley.”

“I call that very common sense—on Mrs. Pearmain’s part. As I was saying, in such case what should you think?”

“I shouldn’t think at all; I can’t reason on impossibilities.”

“Do you believe it would make any difference as to your tyranny over me?” urged Mr. Morley, with a laugh.

“Tyranny, George!” said Mrs. Morley, turning her still charming face wonderingly upon her husband.

“I said it advisedly,” replied Mr. Morley, with sudden acrimony.

“Is that tyranny to which your reason so fully consents?” asked Mrs. Morley, pulling off her gloves for a combat, in reverse of the custom of those knights who, before the fray, “pulled their ringing gauntlets on.”

“Teresa,” said Mr. Morley, with a firmness that surprised himself, “I adore your principles, but I abhor your practice. Don’t pull off your gloves, my

love; that poor woman is famishing for her porridge. Go your ways, child; but if on your return you run over to Mrs. Pearmain's I think you may learn something to—shall I say your?—no, to *my* advantage."

And little Mrs. Morley went her ways, with her mind in a state of bewilderment, and shivering as she remembered that the ancients held high spirits to be a presage of sudden death.

"Louie," said Mr. Morley, when his wife was out of sight, "it is very wrong to disobey your mother."

"Yes, pa."

"But if your mother has given no orders, you can't disobey them."

"No, pa."

"And it is equally wrong to disobey your father."

"Yes, indeed, pa, dear."

"And if your father gives you orders, you can do nothing else than obey them."

"Certainly, pa, of course."

"Very well, then, I order you to take a goose which you will find in the servants' larder, and tell Jane to dress it and roast it at once. And when that is done I shall have some further orders to give you."

When Mrs. Morley returned from her visit the house stood dark, with open doors and windows, and the fragrance of the honeysuckles blowing all about it, but with nobody inside it. She remembered what her husband had said, and hastened across the lawn and up to Mrs. Pearmain's lighted mansion, arriving there just as Mr. Pearmain descended from the coach that had brought him to the end of a long journey. She

spoke with the worthy man, looked up at him admiringly in the dusk, and yet paused one instant to think that her George, of whom no one stood in awe, was a pleasanter person for a husband after all. In the next instant a sound of revelry smote her ears, smote Mr. Pearmain's too, and they went in together. The sound came from the dining-room. What odor was this that never before had profaned that pretty room? What sight was this that saluted the outraged eye?

There stood Mr. Morley, at one end of the freshly laid and glittering table, with his fork in the breast-bone of the goose and his knife in the air. There sat Mrs. Pearmain, pale, with traces of tears, daintily picking apart, but with no appetite whatever, a slice of the brown breast. There sat Fanny Farwell, blushing like a rose, with Harry's protecting arm just thrown across her shoulder. There stood Louie Morley at one side of her father, flourishing a drumstick, and her great black eyes dancing to the music of Dr. Bonnamy's merry laughter as he stood upon the other side.

"My dearest love," said Mr. Morley, laying down his knife and waving his hand towards the remnants of the goose, "allow me to reintroduce to you an old but unforgotten acquaintance—"

"Oh, indeed!" cried Mrs. Morley, too much stupefied to express indignation, "as if I had not seen a goose every day of my life for twenty years!"

"Not roasted. Pardon me; your looking-glass reflects, but does not roast. Permit me also to remark that in future this acquaintance shall always be a welcome guest at our table, to which—while I accord you personally all liberty of groats—so help me Heaven, I never mean to sit down again without a joint! I told

you this afternoon that I admired your principles, my dear Teresa. If I had known Dr. Bonnamy earlier and better, I never should have made so foolish a speech, and we should have been spared some years of trouble. Let me see. You declare that I inject dead flesh into my veins when I partake of this delicious morsel," refreshing himself with a bit of the goose. "Do you, when you manure your hill of corn with barn-yard compost, inject that disgusting material into your ear of corn? No; the chemistry of sun and air absorbs from that compost only the proper constituents of corn. The stomach is a fine laboratory; it acts in the same way; it sends no dead flesh to the veins, but it separates that food into its elements, and sends merely the proper constituents of life along to their absorbents. Moreover," continued Mr. Morley, wiping his forehead, and amazed at his eloquence and temerity, "you urge me to live according to your ideas, because comparative anatomy shows that animals with cellulated colons are herbivorous, and man has a cellulated colon—man and the ape. Is that right, Dr. Bonnamy? I am now convinced that the first ape that forsook his herbivorous diet and smacked his lips over some smoking flesh began to differentiate into man; and you may send this cellulated colon to Mr. Darwin as the missing link—"

"Bravo, papa, bravo!"

"And now, Mrs. Pearmain," said Mr. Morley, "shall I speak for you?"

"I—I can't speak for myself," said Mrs. Pearmain, bursting into tears, and seeing twenty husbands with twenty valises all about to leave her forever, and gazing at her with awful austerities of farewell.

"Mrs. Pearmain, as Dr. Bonnamy will assure you,"

said Mr. Morley, “was ordered by that physician, in whom you all believe so heartily, to resume her pristine diet some years since. This she stoutly refused to do; but learning that her life depended on it, I have brought this bird over here, and, as I may say, have forced her to share it with us. The rest,” continued Mr. Morley, happier than he had been for years, “I hope explains itself. Let me introduce this young lady”—as the little thing shrank closer and closer to her proud and defiant young husband —“formerly Miss Fanny Farwell, but for this three months past waiting an opportunity to confess herself Mrs. Harry Pearmain. And that done, let me present to you, my dear wife, Dr. Bonnamy, who became your son-in-law an hour ago.” And, quite out of breath, Mr. Morley sat down.

The whole English language failed to do justice to the occasion. There was silence in heaven for half an hour—that silence echoed here for half a moment, perhaps, but it seemed longer.

“I hope you will all be very happy,” said Mrs. Morley, then, with majesty, but a tremulous voice. “And as you have shown yourselves so capable of it without me, I—”

“Now, mother, mother,” said Mr. Morley, bending over the goose and waving his knife and fork affectionately towards her, “you know it would have been of no sort of use to talk with you, and it was a great deal better to clear your skirts of all responsibility.” Mr. Morley stopped and regarded the others. Mr. Pearmain, wide-eyed and open-mouthed and silent till this juncture, had suddenly broken the spell, dropped his valise, and bent and taken his wife in his arms. “Emily, my darling,” he was saying, “why didn’t I hear of this before? Do you suppose I

would have sacrificed your precious health, your life, for a whim?" And he kissed the weak woman tenderly before turning to the others. "And as for these children," said he.

"Hear! hear!" cried Mr. Morley, hilariously.

"Hear! hear!" cried Louie, who had never been afraid of Mr. Pearmain. "And will you sacrifice us for a whim, ma?"

"My dear," said Mr. Morley, pouring out a bumper, "here's to the great future perfect race. Let us wish it long life and—posterity. We have only postponed it a generation."

AN IDEAL

AN IDEAL

AGE comes to some people only like the wider opening of the rose, the gentle drooping of the creamy outer petal; and one must needs think of this in looking at Mrs. Fernalde. “I have had my threescore and ten,” she used to say. “I have had all that nature has to give, and now I am living on grace.” It was a sunny spirit that informed her, a lightsomeness that never let the substance of a tear penetrate beneath the surface that could endure nothing but happiness. Her unfailing good-nature was like a fairy wand that smoothed every trouble out of her way and out of the way of every one about her. If her hair was white, no great sorrow had made it so; and its contrast with the soft brilliancy of a black eye and the velvet flush of a cheek unwritten by many lines, made her perhaps as lovely as one standing in all the full radiance of youth. As for Mr. Fernalde—tall, dark, spare—he was by no means unattractive, and his courtly manners had a unique elegance. He loved his ease; and annoyances, when they chanced to break through the magic circle his wife drew about him, vexed him, as they usually do a nervous person. For the rest, he was one of those men who, having led a singularly fortunate life, maintain to themselves a fancy that they have just missed the last stroke to make the crystal complete, who have a vanishing ideal always just beyond sight and reach.

The Fernaldes were neighbors of ours. Wealth required no exertion of them, and advancing age secluded them in some measure from general society; their home was always cheerful; they were always in

it; and if there had been no such person as crabbed old Mrs. Talliafero, who had spent the last six months with them, it would have been hard to see how heaven itself could be much improvement on it. However, she was going at once, and then where would be the crumple in the rose-leaf?

These old people loved young people. “The new generation lends us a part of its freshness,” they used to say. They always welcomed any of us, and indeed made me so particularly conscious of their flattering favor that I spent a good portion of my time with them, threaded the sweet little lady’s needles, read and wrote more or less for Mr. Fernalde, and was gradually taken into their confidence, which I am about to violate.

“Could I imagine a happier old age than this, my child, with my wife, my health, my flowers, our birds and pets and friends?” he said once, repeating my question. “Why, yes, my dear, it was much happier before my wife brought Mrs. Talliafero to stay with us. Some old school-mate or girl friend of hers—I don’t quite know—for the fact is she nettled me so the first day she came that I wouldn’t ask Rosalie a word about her, for fear I should show my displeasure at her having brought her home when she turned up. It is astonishing how an invisibly small thorn will destroy your equanimity. And then this woman has a quality that would turn honey into vinegar, I do believe. She has changed our quiet, peaceful, sunshiny life, that seemed like one long day in June, into a sharp, raw day in November. There is something very rasping about her. I don’t see what my wife invited her to spend such a season with us for. I wonder if she thought that at the end of the time I should press for a continuance? My dear, I

have counted the days—it sounds sadly against all hospitable rites—I have counted the days till I should see her consult a railway time-table, as she did yesterday, about going home to-day. I believe she is not in affluent circumstances now. I would be glad to meet the expense of boarding her at Buckingham Palace if that would keep her away! I am speaking strongly. Yes, Rosalie," looking at his laughing wife, "I know you say too strongly. But it is argument, assertion, contradiction, differing, bickering, finding fault with the servants who have suited us half a lifetime, questioning the expenditure, disordering the arrangements from one day to the next. Think of it, when she comes into my study and inveighs about my wife's patience in enduring such a den of disorder in her house. She wonders that I do not wear a scratch. She warns me of indigestions, she threatens me with nightmares, she reminds me of my age, she interferes with my pipe! And then she wants so much fresh air! Thank Heaven! her time is up to-day, and my wife will not invite another guest for a half-year without giving me time to arrange a residence elsewhere! And such a voice, too! When one hears it, one longs for the proper infirmities of age that dull the hearing—sharp as a file, piercing as a locust's whirr! What are you laughing at, Rosalie?"

"Ah, you are not quite just, my love," said the sweet little old lady. "Mrs. Talliafero has a fine mind. She is really waking us up. She prevents our sinking down into a jelly-like existence, as so many of our age do. She keeps us bubbling."

"There, there, there, my dear! Don't say another word about your Mrs. Talliafero! Go and spend a season with her at Saratoga, if you ever want to see her any more. I'll go to Richfield. Bubble! She'd

make sulphuric acid bubble out of the sands of the desert! I've no doubt she worried Talliafero, poor man, into the grave! But there, I've said too much," he added, directly. "I beg your pardon, my sweet, if I hurt your feelings about an old friend, but really—Now, Rosalie, my love, if you don't care to go over these accounts, our young friend will." And then Mrs. Fernalde tripped off with as light a foot as a girl of seventeen, and I drew up the great folding-screen around our chairs, stirred the fire a little, and took pencil and paper to add up the figures Mr. Fernalde was to read out to me.

But Mr. Fernalde was in a brown-study for a little, and I let him stay.

"It was strange you should have asked me that question, child," he said at length. "I used, at your time of life, to imagine a very different old age from this, if I may so call that imagination, for, in fact, old age never entered into my calculations. I imagined nothing about the passage of time, only of the continuance of a condition. And that condition was the perpetual paradise of Alicia's smiles."

"Rosalie, you mean," said I.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Fernalde, shortly. "I mean Alicia."

"Alicia?"

"Alicia, who, when I was twenty, was the light of my eyes and the loadstar of my life."

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Of course you don't, of course you don't. I've half the mind to tell you, though. It's a long time ago—a long time—and no harm done. One is perhaps a fool at seventy," said Mr. Fernalde presently again. "I'm

not quite eighty. One is certainly a fool at twenty. I was, at any rate; but I didn't know it, and I walked in a fool's paradise. And to be a fool and not know it! Is there, on the whole, any further paradise? Pretty, pretty as a peach!" he began again, after another pause. "Ah! that would have sounded to me then like profanity. That heavenly fair face! those eyes like the stars in a blue midnight! that smile of exquisite innocence and purity! I used to tremble before her sometimes as before some young saint stepped from a shrine—one that I dared to desecrate by loving. Ah, how I loved her! The sight of certain flowers brings her back to me now! When the apples are in blossom, that pink and white snow, that ineffable delicacy of perfume, calls her before me like a revelation! There are times when this eternal smoothness of things in my life palls on me—times when I cannot bear the sound of evening bells coming across the water. It so renews for me that evening—that evening when I lost her—when I lost her, if I found Rosalie!"

"You lost her, then?" I said, to break the silence that followed.

"I will tell you. The two were inseparable. If I walked or rode or sailed with one, the other was not far away. Rosalie was a little gay, tormenting sprite; Alicia a pensive saint. It was Alicia's home; her father was a man of wealth, and Rosalie was visiting her. Rosalie had no home, no fortune; she had just finished school and was to be a governess, dreading it as a butterfly might dread being broken to harness, dreading it all the more for this glimpse of luxurious life in her friend's home since school. I myself had a fortune in my own right, and had been guilty of the follies of most of the *jeunesse dorée* of that period,

which, if comparatively innocent, were troublesome enough to the authorities of my college to need discipline, and I was passing a year of most unhappy rustication in the place adjoining Alicia's home. Never shall I forget the first moment in which I saw Alicia running down one of the orchard aisles with her white garments fluttering about her, and her fair head bent over the branch of apple-blossoms in her hand. If lightning had fallen, the revolution that seized me could not have come more quickly. I seemed to be changed in a twinkling, to have been borne into another planet. I felt as if sunshine had pierced and penetrated once impenetrable gloom. When I fell asleep in the grass of that orchard, and woke with that heavenly creature bending over me, I rose only to walk on air. The little brown face of Rosalie, with its carnations, with the glint and glance of its great brown eyes, with its flood of brown curls that had a touch of gold on them, with the glittering teeth of its beautiful laugh, was just over her shoulder, but I merely know I saw it by remembering it afterwards. She was only a shadow to me in those days; and as for me, I was only Alicia's shadow myself. She lived and moved in some exalted atmosphere, to my perception. She does now. Her father wore the front of Jove; I could not say that he did not carry the thunders. I felt myself a mote in the broad beam of their sunshine, as though I were something hardly visible in their large range of vision, as if it required an effort to make myself perceived by them. I hesitated to make the effort—I worshipped from afar. When she spoke to me my heart beat so I had hardly voice to answer; when she touched my hand it thrilled me through and through. And I asked no more. I thought of no more for a while than just to continue so forever; to see her

from my window walking under the long aisles of the low-branched orchard, like some mediæval picture; to walk beside her sometimes; now and then to venture reading from the same page with her, now and then to be her partner in the dance. That Rosalie should be about with me, riding here, strolling there, walking to church, reading with the old pastor, in whose charge there was a fiction that I was, and so, in a way, studying with me—that was all a matter of common-place; she was sweet, she was fresh, she was charming. But what was all that when an angel was in the room?

"One night I was on the gallery just outside their drawing-room, looking in at the long window, and Alicia was singing. Ah, how delicious was that voice! The cherubim and seraphim who continually do sing, if I ever hear them, will not sing so sweetly. I wonder to whom that voice is singing now! Beside her, that night, was the scamp who had come to the place more than once—a proud, commanding fellow in his undress uniform, a man whom her father plainly intended she should marry. I can see the scene now—the rich and dimly lighted room full of purple shadows, the air laden with the scent of flowers; Alicia in her white drapery, more mystical, more beautiful, more holy, as she sang, than if revealed in the glow of her beauty; outside, the violet depths of the sky, and the moon just falling, like some great golden flower, low in the west; and as Alicia's voice became silent, a choir of bell-tones coming far and fine and free across the water, like echoes of her song in heaven. My heart swelled with a fulness of rapture, life seemed too rich, too sweet, too sacred—and then I saw that man stoop and kiss her brow!

"The action turned me to stone for a moment, till he

came sauntering to the window, and I knew no more what I was doing than that bronze Perseus in the corner would if he moved. I lifted the hand that had seemed stone, and as he passed me I struck him on the mouth—the mouth that had done the profanation."

And Mr. Fernalde was quiet a little while.

"And that was the end of all things," he resumed. "The fellow laughed at me for a mad boy. Her father launched one of the thunderbolts, and forbade me the house. What a stricken day and night of wretchedness! What a week of hopelessness, of annihilation! But perhaps Alicia felt differently from these creatures. Why should I not discover? Why should I suppose she had any other sympathy with that wretch than the sympathy of the star with the worm? And if my glad peradventure were true—why then we could fly from these places that should know us no more; the world was before us, heaven's gates were open to us. And I wrote—my hand trembling at its sacrilegious daring—just a dozen lines, without address, without signature. She would know what it meant. And I sent it by the parson's boy. And I waited for her, lying on the grass beneath the orchard trees, in the deep gloom just gilded by the influence of the unseen moon. There came the rustling of garments, the tripping of a foot; my heart beat, my eyes grew dim. Was it she coming up behind me, as I lay lifted on my elbow, kneeling and putting her arms about me, raining swift kisses on my face?—wild sweet kisses in that shadow; wild passionate whispers in that silence! And then a great pang smote me; and I rose and went out with her into the less dim darkness—and it was Rosalie.

"She never knew," said Mr. Fernalde, "she does not

know to-day, that I died that night. I can't say how I lived through those moments even. They were but moments she had stolen away. She had to return at once. We parted at the foot of the mock-orange walk, and I went to my bed and lay there in a trance of despair. Perhaps sunlight brought some relief. The parson told at the breakfast-table the news that Alicia was betrothed to the army officer I had seen. I wrote a word, saying I was called away. And I was gone a week or more. But in that blank I must have something to love me—to have an interest in. Better Rosalie than the absolute negation of those days. She thought nothing of my absence—after my return. She was as full of romance as a flower of nectar. And, to sum it up, if she was not the rose, she had lived with the rose. One day we married; and here we are. A long life, a happy life, and I have never regretted the day in it that made her my wife. After all, one cannot marry among the angels—clay must mate with clay.

"What do you say? Not love her, my child? You never were more mistaken. I love her tenderly, absorbingly. She is a perfect woman. She has been a perfect wife. She has made me calmly and completely happy. If once in a while the old hope, the old dream of a passion arises and sweeps before me in its bloom and light, it is because it means youth to me—that youth which we do not know till we are old—is itself the ideal that it holds up for worship. Yet, perfect as my wife is, fifty years of this smooth life with her wear something of the commonplace, and if across their dead level of same content sometimes gleams the shining of Alicia's face, it is not in any disloyalty to her. I often wonder what became of the lovely creature. Once I could not have spoken of her. At seldom times, when I sit alone by the fire, she comes and sits beside me, and gleams of

light and shadow make a face with her sweetness, her beauty, her pensive and ethereal grace. Dear girl! I suppose she sleeps in her grave by this; but she is a shaft of the light of heaven in my memory!"

And Mr. Fernalde rose, walking to the window, just as the screen began to tremble, and a smothered cough, and then an undisguised one, betrayed to me, if not to him, that Mrs. Fernalde had heard the chief part of the monologue.

"And I had heard it in fragments and sections more than once before," she afterwards told me with her pleasant smile. "I know it means nothing—that he is just as wholly mine as I am his—that our love is the imperishable sort—that we are welded into one by fifty years together. And perhaps it was ignoble of me to break the pretty bubble, to take away his little ideal, with which he has found comfort whenever I would have my own way too much. Yet I thought it was about time."

But she said nothing of this at all as she came bustling round the corner of the screen that morning.

"There is such a gale blowing outside," she said, "that the dust really rises in the house fit to choke one."

"You haven't caught cold, Rosalie?" said her husband, turning in concern.

"Not the least. But I shall if the hall-door is open another moment. There she comes now. Make haste, and bid Alicia good-bye, my love. She is just going."

"Who?" he cried, suddenly opening his eyes like lamps in their deep settings.

"Alicia—Mrs. Talliafero—dear. She married again, you know. Oh, it has been a fine jest," she cried,

with her low laugh, “to think that you should not have recognized Alicia in all these weeks and months!”

Mr. Fernalde was silent for a few moments, looking at the cruel little lady before him, with her color like the half-tarnished rose, with the soft brilliancy of her smile. Then he crossed over the hearth before me, and he took her hands and bent down and kissed her mouth.

“My Rosalie,” said he, “will you not make my adieus to Mrs. Talliafero yourself? Tell her—tell her I have gone to the funeral of an old friend!”

MRS. CLAXTON'S SKELETON

MRS. CLAXTON'S SKELETON

SHE always carried it about with her; but it was not her bones. And as this is not a conundrum, I may as well say at once that it was—well, it was connected with her domestic difficulties.

Nobody, casually observing Mrs. Claxton, would have dreamed her to be the possessor of so disagreeable an article, least of all one that was constantly a companion, and that could not be locked up in a closet, and left behind when she went where folks were gay and happy.

For my own part, understanding how unreasonable it would be to expect any lot to be a perfect thing, and inclining towards the old saw about a skeleton in every closet, I sometimes used to wonder what earthly material there was from which Mrs. Claxton could get one up; yet felt tolerably sure, for all her smiles and her pleasant manners, for all her fineries and luxuries, that there must be something to make her resigned to the necessity of one day surrendering her hold upon those desirable things surrounding her at present in such abundance.

For why should Mrs. Claxton be an exception? Look up and down the hills, with the familiar sight that neighbors have, and you could have seen trouble in too many houses to be able to believe the Claxton house exempt. For in this house bitter, grinding poverty and pride had their perpetual battle-ground; that house death had robbed of its sunshine; in the next house the disgrace of a defalcation had made life a burden; still beyond, a cloud of insanity hung, ready to fall; here a drunken son, there an unfaithful

husband; in such a house a frivolous wife, in such another idiotic children: up and down the streets, in every house, something; no matter what the compensations were, no matter how much happiness otherwise; yet always some one bitter thing, perhaps to give a better relish with its tang to all the sweet.

So what could Mrs. Claxton's trouble be? She lived in the finest place in the town, her handsome house upon a sightly knoll, a shaven lawn dotted with noble trees sloping away from it on all sides. Within, it seemed to our rustic eyes a witch-land of beauty and of all the cunning appliances of art for comfort. She had her open landau and her span for summer driving, her sleighs full of costly robes for winter, her servants, her overflowing purse, her husband and children, her dresses. Yes, her dresses; no one in Claxtonberg had any to compare with them. She had the glory of setting the fashion, and of holding a lofty pre-eminence in it, and the bliss of knowing that the last new wrinkle in her pouf, or her sleeve, or her back hair was being studied every Sunday with an assiduity that put the prayer-book to open shame. And besides all this Mrs. Claxton was very pretty: everybody admired her; everybody else loved her. She had company when she pleased, so far as we knew; she went on journeys when she chose; and when the bishop came he always stayed with her. What was there out of which Mrs. Claxton's skeleton could be made?

It could not be that this skeleton had found existence because her husband was not a distinguished man in politics, for no woman who had any regard for her own happiness, or his either, would want her husband in politics; and Mrs. Claxton had the greatest regard for the happiness of both. It could not

be because she had no children, for she had four, fine ones. It could not be because her children were not boys or were not girls, for there were two sisters and two brothers among them. It couldn't be because her husband was still in business, since his mills brought him in a royal revenue every year, and he would be lost without the business. It could not be because her husband was tired of her, for everybody in Claxtonberg knew to the contrary, knew that he surrounded his wife with everything heart could wish, knew that the breath of scandal had never approached him. It could not be because of any impending disease that was to darken her house, for they were all in a state of notorious health. What in the world could this skeleton be?

I had just as lief tell you as not—if you will listen.

When this lady first met the gentleman who became her husband, his high-bred courtesy, his knightly manner, rivalled that of the great dignitaries around them; he, not any of them, seemed to her the true nobleman; and, not to weary you, she accepted him the moment he asked her. She was the governess of a friend's children, and the family were staying at some wonderful foreign baths where the marble basins were more than a mile around, and where the court came to bathe. Every morning the Majesties and Sublimities and high and mighty Excellencies went into the bath, king and queen and chamberlains, grand duchesses and princesses and ladies-in-waiting, and from unobserved chinks the commonalty watched the shoal of nobility disporting itself. And what a scene it was to watch! For the flannel bathing suits were under water, but out of water what elaborate hair-dressing, what a blaze of jewelled tiaras and coronets, what flashing diamond

necklaces upon white throats, what point-lace fichus and berthas overlaid with strings of resplendent gems to the water's edge, what loading of bracelets on bare arms, what glancing of rings on fingers! for the court was in full-dress in the presence of the sovereign.

As Mr. Claxton looked from the window of his room upon the brilliant scene he felt a lofty republican contempt—indeed, contempt was Mr. Claxton's forte —which was not lessened when the crowd of commoners went in, in their turn, aping the bediamonded ways of those who went before. One young girl among the throng, who wore only the dress suitable to the occasion, and was without any other ornament than the shrouding veil of her own long hair, attracted him—in the first place by her simplicity, and in the next place by a manner that seemed to be at once sweet and stately: there was a sort of shy and startled look in her great soft brown eyes if one addressed her; there was so rich a color on her cheek too; and the features of her lovely face were so finely in keeping with that half-defiant carriage of the perfect head. In such a pack of frippery her plain attire was pre-eminence to Mr. Claxton, whose feelings were exceedingly ruffled; for he was accustomed to obsequious consideration at home, and here he was less than a cipher; and revenging himself by despising the whole affair, he knew no better way of proclaiming it than by passing over all the titled and spangled beauties, and devoting himself to this simple young girl. If, meanwhile, the titled beauties did not know of his existence, that was something he never suspected, and he lost no time in making the young girl's acquaintance. It mattered not to him that she was a governess, as it would not if she had been a beggar

and had attracted him. He was one of those men who consider their actions their own justification; his desires were a law to themselves. After he married her she would be Mrs. Claxton—a glory which every Claxton that had ever married felt to be quite capable of blotting out all that might ever have gone before in the lives and histories of the poor brides. As for the young girl, treated kindly by her friend, but kept in the background, and not wont to have the attention of young men, and with that vague longing for it natural to girls, somewhat lonely, and altogether dependent, her heart leaped up in gratitude to this stranger, with whose family and antecedents her friend was well acquainted. People said he was like a young prince: she never remembered to think, in liking to hear them, that princes are the masters of slaves, and that for a plain private to be a young prince simply meant that he was a person who would have his own way if he had to be a tyrant to do it. When he proposed she accepted him, as I said; she already loved him with devotion; she married him in all haste—to repent in all leisure.

And Mr. Claxton, making the tour of Europe like a good American, was suddenly summoned home by an event which left him the possessor of the great mills and the great business, and he installed his wife in his great house, and he felt that he had done more for her than she had a right to ask, and he expected from her thenceforward a slavish obedience.

To tell the whole truth, though, Mr. Claxton did not know that he expected a slavish obedience. His intention was to do right exactly, and perhaps lean to mercy's side. He had been reared in a school that held the wife to be, so to say, a chattel, and he would

have been as much surprised to find his wife differing from him as he would have been to hear his wooden dining-table speak up and complain of the dinner: he looked for absolute agreement. If you had asked him if he believed that a man had a right to beat his wife, he would have indignantly answered no, and demanded of you, furthermore, what it was you took him for; but if he himself had chanced to strike his wife, he would not have felt it an act to be questioned by anybody. His wife was his. That he did not put a rope round her neck and sell her in open market was out of his abounding condescension. He allowed her many favors—such, for instance, as the liberty to breathe. For her to reward him by having an opinion of her own on any subject would have astounded him. If he had chosen to take her children away from her he would have thought her complaint monstrous; if he had knocked down her own mother and trodden on her he would have thought her remonstrance culpable, and would have punished her for it to the best of his ability, not by whips and stocks, not by imprisonment or deprivation, but by withholding his royal favor in some signal manner. In fact, in Mr. Claxton's ideal household there was but one will, one mind, one identity, and that was Mr. Claxton's. And that household was a not at all uncommon instance of an unrecognized tyranny worse than Diocletian's own.

In spite of all this, if you can believe me, Mr. Claxton loved his wife—not as he did his own soul, indeed, but next to that, one might say. She had only to ask —but ask she must—to have her wish gratified. If she were ill, he knew no peace, and let no one else know any, till she were well again. He admired her beauty, her lovely manner, her stately air; he did not object to that *soupçon* of spirit when directed towards

other people; he felt that she added a lustre to his station. He was, in short, very proud of her; but he would not for the world have had her know it. For where would discipline be then?

Well, it might perhaps have answered with somebody else, but it did not answer at all with Mrs. Claxton. In truth, Mr. Claxton had been married hardly a year before he began to suspect that he had a rebel in his house, or, as he phrased it, a viper in his bosom; and he prepared to take extraordinary measures.

As for Mrs. Claxton, her feeling for her husband was of the warmest; she regarded him for a long time as the best and greatest man alive, and by far the handsomest. She knew he had faults, but understood that all men abounded in faults, and presumed that other men's faults were very much worse than his. She thought it likely that he could not have written the Iliad, but then she didn't know that it was desirable to have written the Iliad; yet she was sure he could have written Tillotson's *Sermons*, or Macaulay's *Essays*, or Mill's *Logic*, and that he could be President of the United States on any day he wished it, and confer new dignity upon the office. There was only one thing she would have liked different about him: she would have liked him to consider her more on an equality with himself.

And yet at first she used to question if that were not an unreasonable exaction on her part—she, who had been nothing but a poor little governess, to demand so much, and he the owner of the vast Claxtonberg mills, the descendant of the old Claxtons of Claxtonberg, a castle across the water that had defied assault for generations, and in which monarchs had held state, if the Claxtonberg legends could be

trusted. Though, between ourselves, I always imagined that the person whom Mr. Claxton's grandfather employed, after he had acquired wealth, to hunt up his family traditions for him, his coat-of-arms and crest, found only and exactly what his employer wanted him to find.

However that might be, Mrs. Claxton's eyes used to follow her husband with an adoring look in them. His noble figure, his lofty bearing, the large, fair comeliness of his fresh face and its aquiline contour, his great gray eyes and his bright, curling hair, seemed to her a representation of the noblest type of manhood; the sound of his voice was music, the sound of his foot-fall was something she always ran to meet—that is, in the first year.

It was an odd little circumstance that caused Mrs. Claxton's cloudy suspicion of her husband's injustice to settle into an absolute curd of sourness. Odd, because so slight: it was the naming of their first child.

"You are looking peculiarly well, my love," said Mr. Claxton, condescendingly, happening to see his wife in the glass as he drew his razor over the hone. "Like a flower in full bloom," jocosely.

Mrs. Claxton blushed and looked lovelier yet. "I am so glad you think so," said she. "I was really afraid I was falling off. And that would be such a shame, for I want the baby to remember me when I look my best."

"Let me hear him," said Mr. Claxton, gayly, "expressing any opinion other than my own on that subject, if he thinks best!" And he kissed his wife as she came and stood beside him while looking for something in the dressing-case drawer, and then he

plunged into the business on hand.

“I think,” said Mrs. Claxton, after a few moments, looking up timidly, from the seat she had taken, to the spot where her husband stood holding the tip of his nose with one hand while he flourished his razor beneath it with the other—for Mr. Claxton never risked his greatness sufficiently to have a *valet de chambre*—“I think Henry would really be the fit name, after all, being yours, and your father’s—and your grandfather’s too, wasn’t it? And then, do you know, it was my father’s also. And I should so like to unite them all in one!”

I doubt if Mrs. Claxton would have ventured to reopen this subject, after a previous conversation, but for the little compliment she had received, and for the fact that when a man stands holding the tip of his nose in one hand, with his upper lip stretched like an apron beneath it, he is not altogether an object of awe.

But Mr. Claxton did not give an immediate answer. He seldom did; whether to signify that he was on such an altitude above common mortals that it took some time for the sound of their voices to reach him, or whether it cost him an effort to acknowledge the independent existence, and therefore the voluntary remarks, of anybody else in the universe, though just now he had the excuse of a delicate use of his razor. When he sought his shaving-paper, however, he turned and looked at his wife in some displeasure, reminiscent of that previous conversation.

“This is quite unnecessary, my love,” he said. “I told you I intended to revive an old family name sunk in desuetude.”

“But, my dear,” persisted Mrs. Claxton, “it would be

so nice to continue the one name for four generations; it is a sort of immortality in itself—as if Henry Claxton never died."

"Never died!" cried Mr. Claxton, nettled, since this very thing had been a temptation to him before resolving to rekindle the ancient family grandeur with one of the legendary names—"Never died! What blasphemy is this!" And he made himself livid with fresh lather.

"Blasphemy? How you talk! Why, you know what I mean, dear."

"Pray how should I know what you mean? I know what you say. And it shocks me."

"Well, never mind; it's of no consequence."

"Of no consequence that you shock me?" began the young prince.

"Oh, no, no, indeed!" said the trembling subject, shocked herself at offending him. "I mean it is of no consequence what I say. I talk so heedlessly, you know."

"Indeed, I have reason to know it," was the severe ejaculatory.

"And I am really sorry about it. I try to think twice before I speak, but—"

"I wish you found more success in the trial. A year ago it would have been less matter, but now Mrs. Claxton should never forget the dignity of her station, and that inconsiderate babbling detracts—"

"Oh, I don't think I do anything like that!"

"When you say that it is of no consequence whether you shock me or not, you do."

“But I didn’t say anything of the sort.”

“Don’t contradict me again, if you please.”

“Don’t you allow people to defend themselves?” said Mrs. Claxton, opening her brown eyes in a spirited way.

“I don’t allow people to insult me.”

“Insult you! What nonsense!” cried the wife at last. “But that is neither here nor there. We were speaking of the baby’s name. I am sure I had no intention, no idea, of offending you by suggesting a choice in the matter. It would give me such pleasure to remember my father in the name, and unite yours with it—Henry Claxton, Fourth,” said Mrs. Claxton, musingly, her thimble on her lip.

“We have had enough of that,” said Mr. Claxton, firmly, and quite vexed with her persistency. “The child’s name is Reginald.”

Mrs. Claxton stood up a moment in one of her sudden little angers that she was always under the necessity of humiliating herself about afterwards, and looked at the man as he engaged himself just then with his chin in a manner that made silence imperative, and she took advantage of the opportunity.

“I never heard of anything so outrageous in my life!” she exclaimed, passionately. “Anybody would suppose your wife was a mere bondwoman, the mother of your child a nonentity, that it was not as much mine as yours, more mine than yours! It is an odious piece of tyranny!”

Mr. Claxton gathered his mug and materials with one sweep of his hand, and faced her. “When you apologize to me for your utterly inexcusable

language," said he, "I shall re-enter this room, but not before." And he intrenched himself in a spare chamber.

And after a couple of days of blank silence and loneliness and misery, of course Mrs. Claxton gave in, and apologized with tears for her utterly inexcusable language. But the peculiarity of the dialogue was that at the time of its occurrence the child to whom reference was made was not born, and when it was born it was a girl!

But Mr. Claxton was made of flesh like the rest of us, and when he was called into his wife's darkened room, and the little bundle of flannel was put into his arms and declared to be his daughter, he kissed it fondly, and laid it on the pillow beside his wife, and as he saw her so pale and faint, so starry-eyed and beautiful, looking as if she might vanish out of his sight at any moment, he bent and hid his face beside her own.

"My dear love," said he, in magnanimous concession, some little while afterward, "we will call this baby Henrietta."

Now of all the names in or out of the calendar the one that Mrs. Claxton the most detested was Henrietta. Mrs. Claxton, however, accepted the concession in the spirit in which it was made, offering, indeed, on her part, an exchange of Henrietta for Regina, which offer was not listened to for a moment; and during her convalescence her husband so invested her with kindness that she looked forward to a happiness of which she had begun to despair in the midst of that wilderness of rebellion and altercation where she had almost lost herself.

But it was an easy thing for Mr. Claxton to be kind to a sick person; since it is the part of an invalid to have no will, to receive favors, and obey orders. And if Mrs. Claxton had been an invalid all her life, paradoxical as it sounds, she would have had no skeleton. But, on the contrary, she was a healthy young thing, and in a few weeks was as rosy and vigorous as ever, as spirited, and perhaps as wilful. The presence of her baby, though, turned her thoughts, more from herself, and she anticipated in her absorption less opportunity for strife than before. Accordingly she was very much discomposed when one day her husband being present, accidentally and for the first time, at Miss Baby's toilet—which the mother found as much pleasure in attending to herself as she used to find in playing dolls—he insisted that everything should be done precisely the other way: that the water should be cold and not tepid, that the soap should be castile and not scented, that the towel should be a crash and not a damask one.

"I never heard of such a thing!" cried the young mother.

"There are probably many things of which you have not heard, my love," replied the young father.

"But a rough towel on this little soft flesh!"

"It will make it the firmer and healthier."

"It will take the skin off. And castile soap—why, the doctor says it should never be used except for healing, it is too drying for a healthy skin."

"My mother used it invariably."

"Now don't begin to quote your mother—the way men always do; don't imagine your mother knew

more than the doctor."

"I imagine," said Mr. Claxton, feeling it worth while to control his vexation for the child's sake, "that her experience was as good as his books."

"Well, your mother did as she chose, and this child's mother will do as she chooses. Crash towels, castile soap, and cold water! Cold water, indeed!"

"Certainly. And don't repeat my words in that offensive manner, if you please. Any moderate intellect would understand that if the child is to be strong, it is to be early inured—"

"I never shall use it—never!"

"Indeed, my darling, you are mistaken. You always will use it in the future."

"Well, we will see," said Mrs. Claxton, laughing and shaking her head. "Cold water on such a mite of a baby! That is all men know."

"Decidedly we *shall* see. For I shall make it a point to be present until it has become an established custom."

"Then I shall take my baby and run away. The law gives every woman her child—at least, till she has weaned it."

"I don't think I shall have recourse to the law for possession of my own child."

"Take it!" cried Mrs. Claxton, in a passion; and she dumped the little naked morsel into its father's arms, and was running from the room.

"You are a wicked and unnatural woman!" cried Mr. Claxton in his absolute bewilderment, not considering such remark at all in the light of inexcusable language when used by himself, and

completely at a loss what to do with the thing that he found himself as free to handle as if it had been a jelly-fish. And in another moment she was running back, snatching her baby, hugging it to her throat, and crying over it.

“You are making yourself sick with your temper, and will hurt the child accordingly,” said Mr. Claxton, calmly now. For a person can very well be calm after having wrought the opposite party to a fever.

“It is your temper,” she retorted. “As if a mother didn’t know how to dress her own baby without a man around!”

“I shall not be moved by anything you say in such a mood,” said the husband. “But as the child is mine, I claim the right to see it properly attended to. And to resume: I want, in the first place, all the pins abolished that I observe you using in its flannels.”

“Pins! Why, everybody uses them. They are every one shield-pins, and couldn’t prick her if they tried. Why, Queen Victoria herself invented them.”

“I don’t care who invented them,” said Mr. Claxton, possibly regarding royalty rather in the light of rivalry. “I want them abolished. Strings are equally as good.”

“Oh no, indeed,” said Mrs. Claxton, quite forgetting her temper; “they make knots, and the knots are so hard for the little soft body to lie on.”

“Then sew the things on when you dress her. The needle is likely to prick only in the sewing, the pins all day and all night.”

“It is sheer nonsense, Henry. I assure you the pins couldn’t prick if they were alive. Do you suppose I want to hurt my own baby?”

"That is nothing to the purpose."

"Well, I will compromise with you," she said, laughing now as easily as she had cried before. "I declare, if you're not perfectly ridiculous! Come, I will sew on her flannels and things every day, trouble as it is, if you will forego the cold water."

"I shall make no compromise as to my rights. I insist on the cold water, on the castile soap, the rough towels, and that no pins shall be used."

"I should like to see you hinder it!" said Mrs. Claxton, stoutly.

"Very well," said Mr. Claxton, and he took up the pin-cushion to show her; and as at the same instant his wife darted for it, he began to strip it of its pins in a haste very disagreeable to a man of his deliberate dignity. But unable to retain the accumulating pins in his unhandy hands, he suddenly turned away from her and slipped a few of them into his mouth—for great men can be driven to desperate expedients; and just as suddenly swallowing his breath, perhaps in amazement, he found himself obliged to cough or to strangle, when Nature took the matter into her own charge, and the pins flew in every direction, so wildly and so instantaneously that one of them, he was morally sure, had lodged in his throat. "Help! help!" he gurgled; "I have swallowed a pin."

Mrs. Claxton tossed the baby into the cradle and ran to slap his back, in a terrible alarm; and Jane, answering her screams, burst into the room with a dish of crusts and a pitcher of water. And only after the coughing-fit was over, and he had examined his throat with a hand-glass and a powerful light, did he convince himself that there was no pin there, and

become as grand and majestic once more as he could be with shoulders that were nearly black and blue from the pounding that Jane had perhaps been only too glad to administer in the effort of dislodging the suspected pin.

But Mr. Claxton was very sore. His wife had contradicted him, had resisted him, had threatened him with the law, had threatened him with desertion, had thrown the baby in his face, had all but said, “Bother your mother!” had hazarded his life with that pin, and, worse than all, had made him ridiculous to himself, to her, and to a servant—he, the great Mr. Claxton! A fish-bone would have been bad enough, but a pin! He felt as if there were nothing nobler in the world than he, when, seeing that he could not spend another moment from the business that had been waiting, he started to go, and turned at the door to say: “Your conduct has been, this morning, of the most reprehensible description. But you are the mother of my child, and I will not leave you in anger, and as such I forgive you.”

“I don’t want any of your forgiveness,” said the sinner. “I shall do just as I please with my own baby, for all the men in the world. So!” And then she ran and sprang upon the seat of a chair, and threw an arm round his neck, and turned his chin up and his great sulky face, and laughed at him, and kissed him. “Oh, I’m a little wretch!” she cried. “But, indeed, you mustn’t ask me to use the cold water. It would break my heart to do it.” And somehow Mr. Claxton felt his august demeanor of no sort of consequence beside this little hysterical creature hanging about his neck, and—well, he kissed her.

“Why didn’t you say so in the beginning, then?” he said. “I will overlook the cold water; but I insist

about the pins!" And he returned to his own dressing-room, which he had left for the sake of a little pleasant conversation.

Poor Mrs. Claxton! If she thought she had reached the end of her troubles in her happy convalescence, she was sadly mistaken. Previously she and her husband had really nothing material to dispute about. Now they had the baby; and it was an unfailing source. If the baby had the colic, and she wanted to use anise-seed, Mr. Claxton's mother had used gin; and as anise was innocent and gin deleterious, of course the struggle was to the knife. If it had the croup, and she wanted homœopathic treatment, it was altogether certain that Mr. Claxton's mother had used the allopathic, and of course in their mutual opinion the difference involved life and death. If it were ill through teething, and she wanted to administer a remedy, Mr. Claxton would have the child go into fits, though his own heart ached, rather than have anything done before the doctor came. If she wished to rock it, Mr. Claxton was strenuously opposed, and she might declare till she was tired that the process had not injured Daniel Webster or Martha Washington; he would declare in return that at any rate his child should not have its brains addled on a pair of rockers, although I do not think he said "addled"—he said "undergo tabefaction." In fact there was no aspect of the child's existence, from its being sung to sleep to its being kissed by strangers, that they did not differ about. And when the twins came, the differing was not merely doubled, but tripled. After that, too, Mr. Claxton in some way became haunted by the fear that his wife's beauty would be impaired by care and illness. He fancied he might have been neglectful of her in his concern for his children, and

experienced a sensation as near remorse as became a Claxton, and then a new cause of dispute arose: he undertook to separate her from her children, he insisted that their perpetual presence occasioned a feverish nervous solicitude, and he contrived one or another method of isolating her from them in the daytime; and, let them cry their little hearts away at night, he would not allow her to go to them; they had a nurse apiece, the very best to be had; Jane and he himself were to be called if the matter were serious, and that must answer; for his wife, he assured her, was worth more to him than all the children in Christendom, and if she wouldn't take care of herself he must take care of her—which, of course, made Mrs. Claxton as happy as he thought it should, and kept her from wearing herself to a white shadow!

Mrs. Claxton had by this time divined that one way to have your will was to submit in pale patience. Sometimes she was able to practise it, and sometimes, as Paul says, she kicked against the pricks; generally, indeed, she kicked, and in this affair she kicked to such purpose that after one of the twins had had a night of convulsions in her absence, Mr. Claxton found that a strait-jacket would conquer the mother's instinct sooner than he would, and the household was allowed to resume its normal condition.

Its normal condition was a wrangle. Should baby-talk be addressed to the babies, or sound English? Should the milk be boiled in the coffee or not, when cream was not to be had, and should the coffee be settled with an egg or with fish skin? Should the crusts be given to the poor, or should money be given to the poor and the crusts saved for a bread-pudding? Each

day brought its fresh point of debate. If Mrs. Claxton had expressed the first opinion, Mr. Claxton's natural tendency was to differ, both because she had no right to the first opinion, and because he wished her to understand that her judgment was unsound; but having expressed that opinion, Mrs. Claxton was bound to maintain it till the sky fell; and there it was. If she wanted the horses, she must mention it at breakfast, and go over the matter with statement and question and answer till she wished she had gone afoot without speaking of the thing; but if she did go afoot, then woe betide her!—she had thrown a shadow on the Claxton name which it took a day and night of Claxton severity to brighten.

And what else could be expected of a man in a place, as Mrs. Claxton sometimes thought, where a thousand men hung on his will for a livelihood, where the doctor kowtowed to him, and where the minister would have lain down and let him walk over him?

If on one day Mrs. Claxton wanted to send the children to walk in the mill-stream woods, then Mr. Claxton was sure they would be kidnapped. And if on another day Mr. Claxton suggested their picnicking with the nurses up on the lovely reservoir grounds, then Mrs. Claxton was sure they would be drowned.

"Drowned!" cried the husband, indignantly—for the reservoir was his especial plaything, having been constructed under his supervision to turn the mill-wheels by damming into one basin the course of two small streams, and insult to that was felt like insult to himself. "Drowned! Pray what should drown them?"

"Water," was the short reply. "I've heard that it could."

"I really don't know how it could in this instance," replied Mr. Claxton, with great disdain.

"By bursting that absurd dam!" cried the mother, out of patience. "It will burst some day, and it may as easily be to-day as another, and sweep them away in a breath. I'm sure I wake with every tap of the vine on the pane all night, sure that now it's going!"

"Let me hear no more talk of the sort," said Mr. Claxton. "It is enough to demoralize the whole valley. If such things were known to be uttered by my wife I could not keep a hand. There is no more likelihood of that dam's bursting than of the mill's falling. On the whole, though, I don't know that it *is* a good place for the children to visit. They might, as you say, be drowned, and without waiting for the dam to burst."

"What under the sun can drown them, I should like to know, if the dam does not burst?"

"Water," replied Mr. Claxton, in his turn.

"Water! As if they could tumble in with all that slope of the green banks a mile above them, and the nurses with them too! I should as soon think of fire."

"I presume that would be quite possible to an inconsequential mind," said the lofty party of the first part.

"I never pretended to any sort of a mind. If I had—But I know how to take care of my children," she cried, suddenly. "And certainly neither of the twins could climb if the carriage left them at the foot of the hill itself, and Retta always obeys."

"Henrietta, my dear. Understand that I will not have any abbreviations used in my family. The names given in baptism are their only names, and are those

by which my children must and shall be known."

"Well, you can call her what you please, and I'll call her what I please."

"You seem entirely to forget, Caroline, that I am the head of this house."

"I don't know how I can forget it. You reiterate it often enough."

"I reiterate it!" he cried, in a blaze; for his magnanimity was one of his darling virtues, and though he might taunt till he was tired concerning the benefits he conferred, he not only wished it held that he never taunted, but believed himself that he never did, probably because his unused capabilities of taunting were so much greater than those he used.

"Yes, you do," she responded. "And I don't care anything about the house. The family, at all events, is as much my family as yours, and if I choose I shall use pet names there to the end of time. So!"

"Is it possible that I comprehend you—that under my own roof you defy me in this manner, and dare to say you will do this or you won't do that?"

"Yes, it is!" cried Mrs. Claxton, with a burning face and a trembling voice. "I wonder if I sha'n't have to ask you next if I may breathe through my nose or my lips. Let me tell you, sir, you married the wrong person when you thought you would have an abject slave in your wife. I had rather have stayed a governess all my days than endure the life you lead me! And I rue the hour I ever set my eyes on you!" she cried, in her passion. And then, to give confirmation to her words, her lips began to quiver and her breath began to catch, and she sank in a little heap in the armchair, sobbing fit to dissolve

herself in tears.

As for Mr. Claxton, he dared not trust himself to reply. He felt as if he must shake her, and if he shook her he was very much afraid he should do something worse, and so the *noblesse oblige* of the Claxton dignity took him from the room speechless, but glaring.

"I wish I was dead," sobbed Mrs. Claxton, growing more hysterical with every sob. "Or else I wish—" But she did not finish the sentence.

By this time you have doubtless become quite well aware of the nature of Mrs. Claxton's skeleton, and see how it was that it walked abroad when she did, and always ran before and opened the door for her when she came home; and she was slowly growing to see its likeness in her face every time she looked in the glass—that pretty, gracious face, where the lines had yet hardly deepened into settled frowns. She felt herself stripped of identity and all personal importance—made a mere puppet; she was not sure of peace from one moment to the next; she had no fixed happiness in life but the love of her children; and she was convinced that the moment they were old enough to exercise intelligence, the habit of contempt would be caught, and they too would set her at naught. Every day of her life she wished herself free, and she began to recognize the phantom of a perception that the only escape from her skeleton was through the door of death—death for one or the other of them; sometimes she could not have been sure that she was altogether unready to say which one, and that it would not be herself. She thought that she was the victim of a wicked injustice on the part of fate, for she realized what it might be to have the love of a husband who regarded her as

an individual, as a mate, who, far from tyrannizing over her as an odalisque and a piece of acquired property a little more valuable than Towser or Dash, wooed her still with kind observances and unfailing respect. She loved her husband, but her temper and his vainglory were always crossing swords in the way of the love; she loved him, and she hated him; she was harassed by opposing forces and feelings night and day. For all her sweet smiles and her tranquil manners out-doors, she was an exceedingly wretched woman within the house.

As for Mr. Claxton—But words fail to convey the emotion of that good man when convinced of the rebellion in his household—the cockatrice upon his hearth!

Mr. Claxton was indeed at a loss in his own thoughts. He was so much aghast at his wife's outbreak that he did not know how to formulate the statement of affairs to himself. He felt unable to reach a solution of the problem as to what could have caused such a mood of mind in her, and his powers were inadequate to devise a fit punishment till he should have looked the affair over more coolly. He stayed in his counting-room that afternoon a good while beyond business hours, partly to reflect on these matters, and partly because a thunder-cloud had burst over the valley and among the hills, and he knew that his wife was apt to be utterly prostrated by fear of thunder, and thought it best to give her a more realizing sense of her dependence on him through his absence at such a crisis.

However, he would not have been able to say what contradictory impulse it was that made him at last, while the heavens were still pouring a thick, suffocating sheet of rain, throw over his shoulders an

old pilot-cloth coat hanging in the place, and sally forth for home. Certainly he had reason to regret it directly afterwards, for in three minutes the rain had penetrated his umbrella and it was only a sodden rag, and he shut it to find that in three minutes more he should be wet to the skin, if not to the bone. Then the question was, should he return? No, "returning were as tedious as go o'er." To retrace one's steps was to acknowledge one's error. Then should he run? Run? Mr. Claxton run? Well, let him run never so swiftly, the rain was swifter yet; he would be just as surely wet, since it was some distance. If he could not retain his comfort, he might retain his dignity, he might solace himself with the reflection that either Plato or Pericles or Aristotle presented a much more preposterous appearance with the tail of his gown turned up over his head in a shower. And accordingly he stalked along in great strides, his hat ruined, his clothes too heavy to carry, the rain running a cold river down his back and into his boots, blinding his eyes, and streaming off a hundred little points of his hair, and most humiliatingly off the end of his nose and chin, feeling ignominiously like Lot's wife in a rain-storm, and hearing an ignorant little boy in the distance hoot at him. Certainly he was not at all a worshipful object; no clod-hopper ever presented a more abject appearance. Of what value to him at that moment was his money? Of what value were his horses and carriages? He was as wet as the nakedest man that ever swam. And as he had really, after all his anger with her, been hastening home on Mrs. Claxton's account, he transferred to that account all the chagrin arising from the situation, the more readily that it was of no use to be angry with the elements, and he was very angry with something, with the

indignity practised upon him by the weather, with his wetness, his general discomfort, and with the little boy.

And of course, when at length he reached the house, the rain still raining a deluge, and the lightning falling round him every step of the way, he expected doors to be thrown open before him, and a tumultuary welcome to make itself heard, in which all the disagreements of many days would be forgotten. He expected the house-servants to run this way and the nurses that, and the children to shout and prance about him, and his wife to fall on his neck, and hot flannels and toddy and dry clothes to appear by magic. Instead of all which not a soul was to be seen, not even the dogs; the servants had the children in some remote part of the house, where they were telling of dreadful deaths by lightning, and awful apparitions in the heavens; and he marched along to his room, solitary and unheard, his feet squelching his soft French boots like pulp, conscious of every separate toe, and the water dripping from his clothes in puddles upon the bright carpets as he stepped. He saw himself in this plight in a long mirror of the hall, and surely for one instant the starch was taken out of Mr. Claxton—a limp and helpless filter of rain-water. Possibly if anybody other than that thing in the glass had seen him, he would have dropped on the floor and resolved into a dew; but no one did, and the moment he had closed his bedroom door he was all buckram again. For there was Mrs. Claxton in bed, with the room darkened, utterly oblivious of his coming or staying, her head wrapped about with the blankets, deaf to the bubble and squeak of his boots, deaf to the thunder too, blind to the image he presented, blind to the lightning, totally unaware of his return, and

indifferent to his condition. This was what a man got for exposing himself in thunder-gust! Mr. Claxton did not swear: the Claxtons never swore; possibly because if they had sworn it would have been seen that they could not have things all their own way, or else they would not swear about it: but he slipped himself out of that entanglement of dripping garments and into dry ones with as much desperate haste as became him; and without uttering a word save a muttered vow that there should not be a feather-bed left in his house by to-morrow, he went down to the dining-room. There dinner, in spite of the delay, had not yet been served; partly because it had waited for him in the first place, and partly because the storm was so tremendous that all minor interests had been forgotten in it, and partly because Mrs. Claxton had been lost to the household in the sheltering recesses of that feather-bed. Dinner, however, after his exertions, was not a minor interest to Mr. Claxton, and he forthwith proceeded to raise —Those readers whose faulty house-keeping may have discovered to them the possibilities of the hungry and infuriate animal can supply the hiatus.

So Mr. Claxton ate his dinner in what Thomas afterwards called “single cussedness,” having declined the proffered company of Miss Henrietta—which he would not have, for the sake of feeling like the forsaken merman—and having refused to let Mrs. Claxton be disturbed, goading himself with every mouthful into a completer sense of the outrageous way in which he was being rewarded for his magnanimity in overlooking the morning’s occurrences, in getting wet through for his wife’s relief, in making himself a ridiculous spectacle, in enduring the hootings of that little boy in the distance. He read his evening paper, and turned over

the evening mail; wrote a few letters, in which I am afraid he wreaked a poor sort of vengeance on his correspondents, for want of other opportunity to relieve his surcharged spleen; and finally went to bed, to be greeted by the pleasant sight of Mrs. Claxton enjoying a peaceful sleep after the weariness of her day's emotions.

For Mrs. Claxton had had her headache that always attended an electric storm, had cried herself into a worse one with her fear of the lightning, and with the fact that, for the first time, her husband had failed to appear and to sustain her through the thunderous trial, and when, later, one of the nurses happening into the room, had mentioned Mr. Claxton's return, and she saw that he had designedly left her to suffer alone, indignation dried her tears; and having satisfied herself that the children were safely upon their pillows, she made her own toilet for the night, and went to bed with her wrath, to fall asleep instantly with her fatigue.

But Mr. Claxton was tired himself—a man is not hooted at by little boys without some wear and tear of the sensibilities. He did not attempt to wake his wife, but followed her example, and slept soundly till just before daybreak, when, in the gray dawn, he was disturbed by one of those little noises that disturb nobody but a householder. It was only a faint and rather pleasant murmur—an incessant drip, drip, drip; but there was no occasion for such a murmur, since it was not raining then, and he listened anxiously to discover the cause of it. It was not long before he surmised that it came from the overflow of the tank in the roof. That was a matter easily remedied by opening the pipes, though some slight damage had already been done, and he rose to

investigate the matter with some inward grumbling about there never being anybody but himself to see to such things. Having concluded his investigation, and having done all there was to be done at present, he was so thoroughly awakened that it did not seem worthwhile to go back to bed again; so he dressed himself for the day noiselessly, and went out to the stables for his horse. The overflow of the tank had suggested to him the advisability of a visit to the great reservoir between the hills, and an inspection of the state in which the thunder-storm had left it. It occurred to him, too, that thus early he might surprise the keeper off duty, which idea had an alluring relish to him; and then it would be a pleasant morning ride, and he would be back to find breakfast ready, and his wife perhaps amiable, and the domestic storm as well blown over as the thunder-storm.

As Mr. Claxton rode forth the sun had just sent a blush over all the skies in advance of his coming, and the world was at that heavenly hour before the full yellow lustre pours over the edge when all the softer shades of color—the pure pale roses and grays and purples—seem striving to convince you how much lovelier they are than the brilliant gold and azure of broad day; the birds were warbling full-throated still, and all the boughs were glittering with dew and with the last drops of the night's shower, till the whole earth looked as if it had been freshly made that morning. I don't know that Mr. Claxton thought precisely that it was a special demonstration on the part of Nature in honor of his early ride, when the colors grew more and more gorgeous and the grand transformation scene finally sublimated itself into one central spot of ruby fire, out of which the sun came rolling up in majesty; but he certainly had an

idea that the common people turning out to their work did not have such sunrises every morning, and he rode forward briskly, with a gratified sense of being in a species of partnership with Nature—if she got up the show, he got up the appreciation, and if the sunrise was the greatest thing in that valley, he, at any rate, was the next greatest.

It was a pretty path, in its steep ascent, up which he rode, a bridle-path where the velvet sward, with its sparkling cobwebs, only half disclosed the traces of old footprints, every here and there turning out of its way to wind round some huge mossy bowlder. Overhead the young birches and maples were waving their boughs, as if groping for the light that fell on the treetops far above, now tossing the dew down on him from the brink of some sheer face of rock, now shaking in the sweet wind in cranny and crevice of the cool wet wall upon the other side, and yet in shadow. At one point the path descended into a little hollow, a green dimple of fern and brake; then it rose rapidly, and passed beneath a group of gigantic oaks that had braved the storms of centuries, the Century Oaks they were called, indeed, their roots twisting into the ribs of the solid rock itself; and at length it came out beside the brook that went leaping down the hill from the gateway on the east side of the reservoir, fuller that morning than he remembered to have seen it—now dark and strong, and now, where a sunbeam touched it, a swift sheet of foam and rainbows. “It takes such a storm as yesterday’s to swell a brook like this,” said Mr. Claxton to himself, as his horse’s feet left the velvet sward and began to clatter over the pebbles, and the great face of the reservoir, with the green sod of its bank, rose over the wood like the vast base of some mighty unbuilt tower. “We must have an immense backwater now,”

he said; “enough to run the mills if there should be a drought till the fall. I’ll take one good look at the dam before I go, if it does spoil the waffles.”

It was just as Mr. Claxton uttered these words, half aloud, that a shiver ran from head to hoof through the good beast that bore him, and which stood still with planted feet and head erect so suddenly as nearly to dismount his rider. Mr. Claxton looked on this side and on that for the object of alarm, saw nothing, and sprang to the ground. The shiver was in the ground: a thrill, a slow and terrible thrill, was pulsing through the earth, that seemed to shake like a shaking breast, that was rising to meet him—to meet him who was trembling like a reed himself.

For what was this? The end of the world? He gave one look at the awful glory up there at the crest of the hill, the awful deathly glory of the bristling, rushing, monstrous thing smitten with the full splendor of the risen sun, and then threw himself into the saddle again, wheeled about, and spurred his horse down the valley like a madman. But the muffled thunder of his horse’s hoofs in his ears was drowned by a louder sound—a dull growl, a hollow roar, a whistling of all the winds that blow in heaven; and fast as he fled a fierce foe followed faster.

In the great Claxton house upon its knoll, with the trees softly bending and bowing below it, the morning light had gently entered, and it fell upon the portrait of Mr. Claxton just as Mrs. Claxton was opening her eyes. It was a handsome portrait of him, with all that bright and ruddy comeliness that made his youth so imposing to her. It seemed to her at that moment that the face was smiling on her as it used to do at the time when she hung the picture at the foot

of her bed, that it might be the first object on which her eyes should open. In a forgetful recurrence of the old emotion she did not immediately call up the events of later days, and was smiling back at it, when all at once memory resumed its play, and she turned to behold the other pillow vacant.

It was something like dismay that overcame Mrs. Claxton, for seldom had Mr. Claxton's displeasure survived a night's sleep. "He has gone away in anger, then!" she exclaimed. But directly her own anger ran to the rescue. "If I had shown a proper spirit in the first place," she said, "he would never have presumed to abuse me so. I had rather be a kitchen-girl than such a slave as he makes me. The sport of all the kitchen girls! I had rather die than live so any more! I don't care what happens if I can only escape from this. Nothing can be worse!" And with such ejaculations hovering round her like Venus's doves, Mrs. Claxton bathed and dressed, and, fresh and fair as any flower, for all her troubles, went to find her babies.

But the babies were lovely enough to distract her thoughts for the time; and it was only after a frolic with them, in all their dimpling rosiness and laughter, that, somewhat softened, she went down with them clinging about her, Henrietta ushering the procession, and the baby astride her shoulder, to find the breakfast on the table, and Mr. Claxton she knew not where. He had saddled the red horse himself, the man said, to get a plumber, maybe, for the pipes had been leaking from the pressure.

From the pressure. Mrs. Claxton glanced up at the window, half startled, yet her face bright with a hovering triumph on the point of pouncing. Then he had probably gone up to see after the reservoir, she

thought—not so sure of the dam after all! And she went to the window to look up the valley road. Yes, there was an object discernible against the bare face of rock, moving far up the hill, just beyond the Century Oaks; it was going up—no, it was standing still; now it had just turned about. A horse and rider. Yes, without doubt, that was Mr. Claxton: he had been up there to see his pet construction, but hunger was recalling him to breakfast: he hardly deserved that she should keep it hot for him. Now she could see plainer. Oh yes, that was Mr. Claxton and the red horse. But why were they coming so fast? Was there a gust up there? It looked as though a thick whirlwind were behind him. Mrs. Claxton lifted her eyes to the sky, looking for clouds; as she did so, they rested one second on the top of the hill. In that second—great God in heaven!—in that second she saw the whole east side of the reservoir move out in one mass, and a flood, a stupendous volume of water, pour in one prodigious leap, this instant transfigured in the sunshine like a supernal apparition, and the next instant precipitating itself, a dark and horrible torrent of clay and water and stone and tree, tumbling and boiling down the valley, stripping bare the rock behind it, driving the earth before!

One shrill cry from Mrs. Claxton's lips, "It has come at last!" one bewildered look for somebody to lean on, and that was all the weakness she allowed herself. Immediately she had summoned the servants, and had the outside hands all rushing into the kitchen from garden and stable, two of them sent back to bring the long ladder into the main hall, and the others hurrying to bolt doors and drop windows and put up shutters.

"Up-stairs now!" cried Mrs. Claxton, seizing her baby, just as the alarm-bell of the mills began to ring. "If the water comes so high, we can retreat to the roof. No, no"—as the girls began to cry and show hysterical tendencies—"we are safe. The house must stand. It is stone. The walls are thick; and the force will be partly spent before the flood reaches us. It isn't we who will suffer; it is your master, who is out in the way somewhere; it is our neighbors whose houses stand in the plain. Plant the ladder beneath a second-story window, Thomas—quick, I say!—that they may see the wisdom of running here. You simpletons! Can water run up the ladder?"

"She's the right stuff," said Thomas to Jane. And she was hardly obeyed when the neighbors were seen running for the knoll and springing up the terraces, men with their mothers, and women with their children, people saving themselves wherever they chanced to be, tripping and falling and fainting and dragged along, unable to make for the hills on the valley sides, and seeking the nearest security as it was offered by the great Claxton house upon its terraced knoll, thronging at last into the doorway which Thomas stood ready to close, and scattering through the upper rooms, these in a dumb horror, with wringing hands, and those with sobs and screams and cries for one another.

They were still running for the house when some were seen to fall as if prostrated by a furious wind behind them. There was a moment of intense stillness in the house, as the gazing groups beheld it, and into that stillness crept the whisper, the muffled rumble and roll, the wide roar of the open flood-gates. Thomas slammed the door, and sprang up the stairway after his mistress and the rest. "Say your

prayers," said he, putting his arms round Jane, who hid her head in them, "for here it comes!" And with the word they saw a wall of water pushing down the valley, too swift to break and fall—yellow and polished as a jewel through all its burnished front, its crest curling in a terrible foam of ruin, where toppled uprooted trees, struggling, drowning men, crashed roof and rafter, and capsized dwelling—and in another heart-beat the whole wide valley was afloat, and the flood was upon them, billowing and bellowing and surging on over the main road, over the hay field, across the gardens, up the knoll, the waters piling themselves like light from terrace to terrace. Would they rise higher? Would the house go, too? There was not time to ask it before they were foaming up the lawns, were rushing round the door-steps, were carrying away the ladder, were pouring through the windows. A shock—it was a long beam swirling in the torrent and grazing the house. Another shock—the ground vibrating to it—and they saw the great mills swing and totter and fall in a cloud of wreck, and wash away. And then one long tremor that made the hair stand on end: the shoulder of the great water was pressing full on them. One dizzy, swimming moment—they felt the strong stones and timbers quiver, felt them lift and strain and rise and settle, and then, with a great cry of joy, they saw that the house, opposing its angle to the tide, had divided its volume, and the waters flowed on either side and left it safe.

It was not a half-hour since Mrs. Claxton had seen the bursting of the reservoir before she gathered her children into her own room and shut the door, leaving the rest of the house to its sudden guests and the watchers of the passing and subsiding flood, that she might betake herself to her knees. She and her

children were safe; but her husband—God alone knew where he was! She did not fall on her knees, though; she walked up and down the room like a wild woman, stopping at every turn to embrace one child or another, to exclaim in misery with a storm of tears. A half-hour ago she had seen him turn about, dashing homeward with that horror behind him—dashing homeward to save himself perhaps, perhaps to save her and the children. Now the waters must have gone over him. He must have fallen before them. And the terror and agony he had endured in that dreadful moment when he saw there was no help for him rose before her like clouds of darkness and enveloped her. One hour passed, and another; the nurses had come in and taken the frightened twins; the baby fell asleep, and little Henrietta kept awe-struck guard over him. But Mrs. Claxton saw nothing that occurred. She was realizing what her bereavement would be; she was seeing all the mistakes of her life suddenly, as if lightning had stamped the whole thing on her; she was suffering a torture of remorse; she was thinking how her husband might possibly have escaped, wondering about him, contriving for him; she was crying out that she should never see his face again; she was falling upon the bed and hiding her face in his pillow, and wetting it with scalding tears. Yes, she had told him she rued the hour she ever laid eyes on him—well, perhaps she would never lay eyes on him again! And then a striking clock seemed to be tolling a knell. The baby awoke and cried; little Henrietta tugged and pulled it off the bed, and, clasping it in her chubby arms, lugged it, in a fashion, from the room: her mother never noticed her. She had sat down to listen for the clock again. Clang, clang, clang, it measured out noon: now it was impossible

that he should have escaped and not be there. Yes, she was free—free from all her troubles; she was no longer a slave; the mistress of her own house at last. But oh, to what purpose! There was no more a skeleton in that house, only in its stead a fearful phantom to rise and shake its gory locks at her. For it was she who had caused her husband's death, if he were dead; and she started up to walk the floor again in a suspense that was worse than certainty. It was her sharp anger—yes, yes, it was her contentious tongue of yesterday—that drove him forth this morning. Ah, great Heaven! but for her wicked words he would have been at home when the reservoir burst; he would be safe and thankful now. She had murdered him, and she had murdered her own peace—her own words were the flaming swords that shut her out of hope and happiness forever. She loved him. And she had lost him. Oh, what was a little matter of every day to contend about, beside the great love of a life, the praise, the encouragement, the sympathy, the tenderness!—and she remembered how he had seemed to adore her once; how she had leaned on him and believed in him once; what warmth there used to be in his smile, what comfort in his presence. And she should never have them again. She had shut him out from the light of day, from home, from children, from life. He had left her, too, in anger; he had gone out without kissing her; he was unreconciled with her in death!

"Oh, do not let it be death!" she cried. "Spare him, Lord! save him! Do not let it be too late! Give me back my husband!" She flung herself down in wild supplication, yearning and agonized, praying for him in a passion of prayer, and growing still and silent in that ecstasy as if she were turning to stone.

There was movement and bustle now about the house, for the waters had passed, leaving only their slime behind them, thick mud on carpet and floor, ropy filth on wall and wainscot, and the people had left shelter, and were wading through the knee-deep mud in search of the spot that had been home. The servants were already beginning to see if there were any possibility of setting things to rights where the tide had flowed through below-stairs, crushing partitions and sweeping doors before it, and wondering where to find the shovels, when in the going and coming a poor creature staggered into the door, and, just as Thomas came picking his way along in high boots, fell on the floor at his feet—a poor creature, bruised and bleeding and in rags, caked with the ooze and mire, a noisome and disgusting wretch more vile than anything else on earth.

“Look here, you!” said Thomas, touching him with the end of his stick. “Get out of this, will you? It’s no place for to be lying about drunk, and no day neither. Get out, I say, or I’ll set the mastiffs on you. Here, Towser! here, Dash!” And in a moment the snarl of the dogs was heard as they made for the despicable object.

“Thomas!” cried a feeble voice, as the poor creature rose on one elbow.

“Oh, good Lord above us, Thomas!” cried Jane, on the stairs. “Don’t you know who it is?”

And in a moment the other men had been called, and among them they got that sorry fusion of humanity and alluvial deposit up the stairs and into the bath-room.

But nothing of all this stir did Mrs. Claxton hear. In

that ecstasy of petitioning she was lost to all that went on; listening for some voice out of heaven, she heard no earthly sound. There was a chorus from the children outside, but she did not hear it; the door opened again, but she did not know it; and then two arms were about her, two tired and trembling arms, and a face over which the tears were pouring was beside her own. She started back quaking as if it were an apparition; and then she flung herself upon her husband's neck.

"Oh, He has heard me! He has heard me!" she cried.

"My darling," he was murmuring, "can you ever forgive me?"

"Oh, my dear one," she was sobbing, "how are you and God ever going to forgive me?"

"I saw it all," he said, presently, as she sat on the bedside where he lay, "while I was buffeting that water, and just as I had given up and was swept into the arms of the old Century Oak—the only one of them that stands now, Caroline. I was nothing but a mote, a speck, in that great surge, and all my arrogance and evil pride, all my abuse of you, seemed to be bearing me down into the flood. Oh, my child, I prayed to Heaven to save me that I might be a better husband to you! And when I came to the door my own dogs didn't know me." And Mr. Claxton cried again.

It was some mornings after that, when things were in a degree restored to place, and the family breakfasting together alone for the first time, that Mr. Claxton gazed smilingly at his wife, and thought, with a little self-congratulation, that he really was a better husband to her than he had been, as she beamed back at him all smiles and velvet blushes. He

had never seen himself as he was, he thought, before that calamity overtook him; it had needed what they call an act of God to open his eyes. And now—Between ourselves, I don't believe he became an angel all at once, for that despotic principle was bred in his bone, and Noah's flood itself could not have washed it out. I should not be surprised if he were still apt to be found a very exasperating man, and I imagine that she was always liable to the reproach of the vixens, though if that temper of hers ever struck fire again, remembrance of one morning's agony could not but quench the spark.

"How happy we are!" said he. "I don't feel prepared to call the accident a calamity, after all—that is, so far as we are concerned," said Mr. Claxton, checking himself. "People have supposed us enviable beings for a good while, Caroline, never dreaming of the skeleton in our closet. But in the future we shall be enviable indeed."

"Why, so we are now!" exclaimed Mrs. Claxton.

"That old bickering of ours was a sad skeleton to carry about—it was like a babe in the arms to you, wasn't it?"

"I made as much of it!" she said.

"Well, let us thank God that there is nothing to hold its bones together; let us thank God, my love, that there is no longer a skeleton in the house, and that we have buried it—"

"Fathoms deep," she cried.

"—in the mire of the flood."

And at that Mrs. Claxton looked at him, and her lips began to tremble and her eyes to fill, and she forsook her chair and ran to her husband, who, once ready to

be shocked at such an indecorum, now clasped her in his arms with tender whispers, stroked her hair a moment as her head rested on his breast, and then led her back to her seat with a lofty sort of courtesy, but paused to kiss the tears off her cheek.

And Miss Henrietta, recalling the scene in after-years, wondered what in the world the skeleton could have been over whose burial her father and mother were making such an ado.

THE TRAGIC STORY OF BINNS

THE TRAGIC STORY OF BINNS

THERE is no use in making any pretences about it. It was no dark and splendid young pirate fascinated by a rosy rustic maiden. It was no foreign prince in disguise attracted by the grace of an unfettered shape balancing water-pails at the spring, and ready to override all the conventions of society and make the girl his wife. It was Binns, the butcher-boy.

A scrap of a fellow he was; so short, so slight, so pale, so insignificant, that it seemed as if, should he take off his long blue blouse, there would really be nothing left of him—but his freckles. And Roxy, she was half again his height, and buxom and blooming, not to say blowsy, deep-colored, and altogether with a great deal of her.

If Roxy were not Roxy, the cook, talking at the kitchen storm-door with Binns, whose scraggy horse dropped his head so low with the dropping of the reins that he looked as if he would drop in the street altogether if the authorities did not interfere—if Roxy were not Roxy, but were Gladys tossing a rose over the drawing-room balcony to the gallant young cavalry officer on his prancing Abdallah that had carried him through the terrific skirmishes of an Indian campaign, then I will admit that more entertainment and much finer company might be had out of the affair. The dinners which we might attend together in the course of our acquaintance would be very different from the surreptitious turnovers and custards with which Roxy regaled Binns; the music we might hear would have far other charms than those strains which Roxy, in her hours of leisure, called out from a bit of comb wound with a bit of

paper; the dresses, too, would be far more satisfactory to the soul and the soul's eye than Roxy's dirt-colored calicoes, bought to wash and hide the dirt as long previously as might be; and we will say nothing of the diamonds, the pictures, the operas, and all the rest that we might arrive at in our experiences; for Roxy had no diamonds but her tears, and very few of them in the beginning; no pictures but cuttings from the comic weeklies, which she pinned up about the kitchen; and as for the dinners, again, I doubt if we should bring better appetites to our sumptuous banquet, with terrapin and canvas-back and champagne *frappé*, than Binns had when grinning over his apple turnover, wiping his mouth on his blue sleeve after it, and giving Roxy a resounding smack, to receive in return as resounding a slap. "She's a clipper, I say," Binns would chuckle, as if it were a love-pat after his own heart. Meanwhile not an opera of all the list is to be heard with more satisfaction than that wont to be evinced by Binns as he sat, during his evenings "on," while Roxy, after her voluntary upon the comb and paper, which she kept in the drawer of the kitchen table with the nutmegs and allspice, sang in her loud and clear, if somewhat nasal, voice the simple ballad of "Whoa, Emma!" or

"I don't know why I love him,
  He does not care for me,
But my poor heart will wander
  Wherever he may be.
If I had minded mother
  I'd not been here to-day;
But I was young and foolish,
  And easy led astray";

or reverted to older tunes—"Oh, where have you

been, Lord Ronald, my son?" and "Drownded, drownded, in the middle of the sea," with other like tearful selections. To be sure, Binns's delight was chiefly manifested by a frequent use of his coat-sleeve in the manner of lachrymose individuals without a handkerchief, in a very luxury of woe; for if the comb and paper tickled the cockles of his heart, as some mellow flute or honeyed violin might do, the enjoyment was just as ecstatic which made the tears pour forth over the sad fate of the lovers "'Way down in Salem town," while he thought nothing of an unprotected outright boohoo, with his face twisted into all sorts of a coil, over the last words of the wretched person who implores,

"Oh, make my grave quick, brother, make my grave deep;
The sooner I lay there the sooner I'll sleep;
For why should I wait from this sad world to part,
When the girl that I love so has broken my heart?"

Nevertheless, it was not of love, at any rate not of love of Roxy, that Binns would ever die. Roxy's turnovers and gingersnaps and five-fingered doughnuts, her liberal bowls of coffee and secret draughts of mineral water, were very agreeable variations in his daily fare. When Roxy asked him to come in and spend an evening with some friends of hers and have a game of forty-five, he saw visions of the same run of dainties, and was much pleased by the rosy apples and tingling cider and roasted chestnuts of the regale. Come again? Of course he would come again—one did not need to be asked twice to things of that sort. He came again, and this time the nuts were butternuts, and there were cookies as nearly pound-cake as it is the nature of cookies to approach, and Binns munched and

cracked and picked and sipped, and thought that Roxy was a mighty cute body to be able to have the kitchen to herself at this hour, and to have whatever she chose in it, moreover. And so he came again.

Was it Roxy's cakes and ale alone, then, that allured Binns? Was not the face reflected in the pewter platter she scoured, as she sang her doleful ditties, as fair to him as the face of Gladys thrown up from a golden salver would have been to the cavalry officer? Sooth, I know not. I only know that a cosey kitchen, with a hot stove and bright tins, is a pleasant place, and a capacious rocking-chair with long rockers, in which you are allowed to travel all about the kitchen, is a comfortable thing, and that hands never look more kindly than when pressing toothsome dainties upon you, and that if one has nothing better to do one is rather inclined to repeat such experiences than not. If, then, it is suggested, very palpably suggested, to one, in return, that the old butcher's nag should be hitched into the pung, with the horse-blanket for a robe, and a sleigh-ride should be given the generous purveyor of doughnuts and peanuts, could one do less? And as for scaring Roxy from any repetition of the suggestion by tipping her over into a crusty snow-drift, one's mind would have to move a great deal more quickly than what answered Binns for a mind was able to do in order to be up to such an opportunity.

"I'll tell you what," said Roxy. "The next time, Binns, I'll take the big red comforter off my bed for an extra robe, and a couple of hot flat-irons—or bricks would be better, wouldn't they?—wrapped in newspapers, and we'll be as warm as toast. Say Friday. There'll be a first-rate moon. And we'll have a real egg-and-cider flip with the hot stove-lifter in it when we get back."

“If—if—he’ll let me have the horse,” said Binns, doubtfully, and not with radiating pleasure.

“Oh, of course he will. Now you put the blanket on him and come in, and we’ll have some hot hash—I’ve got some left over all ready to warm up—and a little taste of sangaree.”

If I should say that Roxy’s sangaree was made of vinegar and hot water and brown sugar and nutmeg and other like substances, you would not believe how Binns smacked his lips over it; so what is the use of saying anything of the sort? But it is true that Binns went away repeating to himself, “Well, for getting sunthin outer northing, she’s a beater!” And so I am sure—in view of Binns—she was.

When—hardly knowing how to help it, Roxy having taken it so for granted, feeling that he was driven by an inexorable fate when Roxy said that on Monday the moon would be good, as if the moon wasn’t always good—Binns asked for the horse the third time, his master slapped him on the back with a force that sent him half across the shop. “Well, Binns,” said he, “so you’ve got a girl, you sly dog! I never thought you’d muster face enough for that. Have the old horse and welcome, there’s no danger of fast driving when two folks are in love.” During this kindly if not altogether delicate address, Binns was pink and purple, yellow, green, blue, and white, by turns, with fright, with shame, with gratified vanity, with a sense of manly power, but, above everything else, with a prevailing awe and terror of it all, anyway, as the full meaning of his master’s words overcame him, and the gulfs of the future yawned before him. To eat Roxy’s turnovers was one thing—to marry her was quite another. The possibility had not occurred to him before, only a

vague consciousness of the impossibility of anything else was beginning to oppress him—all the more vaguely, perhaps, because of his extreme unwillingness to utter anything of the sort even to himself.

If Binns had not had to stop at the house for the dinner order, it is doubtful if he would have seen Roxy that day. But "there was no going back on the shop," he said to himself, and, looking like a sheep, he went prepared to take the order for beef.

"Roxy!" the old gardener called, opening the door—for Binns, on the idea of getting it over with, was a little earlier than common, and Roxy was not upon the outposts as usual—"here's your young man!"

"Roxy!" cried the mischievous and vulgar Kitty, "here's your feller!"

"You go along!" said Roxy, making her appearance, and wiping her hands on her pink print apron. And there stood Binns, as pink as the apron; and he stammered something about to-night at half-past seven sharp, and hurried off, forgetting all about the order. He had to come back, of course, and he found Roxy sitting on the edge of a water-pail inside the storm-door, with her pink apron thrown over her pink face, sobbing fit to break her heart.

"Why—why—Roxy—why, what's the matter, Roxy?" he exclaimed. But Roxy only sobbed, the sob none the less affecting to a tender-hearted hearer because broken by a hiccough. "Why, Roxy—why, what on earth—has anybody been a-hurting of you? Why don't you tell me?"

But Roxy's sobs still preserved the secret.

Mr. Binns really began to feel bad himself. What man

unmoved can see lovely woman shed tears? “Come now, Roxy, don’t you be a-fretting,” he urged. “You just wipe your eyes and tell me all about it.”

“Oh! No! I—I can’t.”

“Oh, come now, Roxy.”

“It’s—it’s—that hateful—that—oh, I can’t—that spiteful Kitty—a-calling you my feller.”

“Well,” said Binns, “ain’t I?”

Wretched Binns! To have taken pains not to call Roxy *dear*, to tell her to wipe her eyes, not her bright eyes, and to be caught in this unguarded way by three chance words! It was all over now; he was in for it, he saw plainly; he might as well give up handsomely. And yet—he couldn’t. All that he could do was to take to his heels and clip down the steps and into the pung and drive away as if Wild Ladies—or something else—were after him. It was Roxy’s voice that was after him, shrill as a view-halloo: “Oh, Binns! A tenderloin roast! First cut! Don’t forget—ten pounds—”

But Binns had to face the music that night or else Mr. McMasters would have to get another butcher-boy, as otherwise he would not dare face Roxy to-morrow, and there had been too much trouble from people needing employment in those overcrowded days for him to give up his place for a trifle. Well, he would go. And he would say, “Roxy, now let’s be friends, two friends, two fellers together, two folks bound to have a good sleigh-ride, with no sparking about it, no nonsense, no—you know—no spooning. You’re a first-rate girl, and I don’t know such a hand at turnovers in all the kitchens I see; but that’s no reason we should be a couple of fools with nothing to be fools on. If I was in the marrying way, there’s

nobody I wouldn't marry quicker 'n you," and here he knew his conscience would twinge him, but he would say it. "But I ain't, and you ain't, and so we'll just continue the services as we were going on before."

And did he say it? Did Binns say it? Not a word of it! Roxy was at the gate, all alert, peering out, with the bright red comforter over her arm; and running back for the hot bricks, she had whisked into that pung, and tucked the comforter about them, and chirruped to the old nag, all in a moment, and Binns found himself slipping along the road without a word, but —I am ashamed to tell it—with a shrewd suspicion that somehow he had better not lean back, for that was Roxy's arm behind him.

"I declare!" said Roxy. "Splendid sleighing, splendid moonlight, warm as toast, and your—your—you know who—beside you, a-driving as if he could turn round on the point of a pin—I don't know as any one needs to be any happier."

Perhaps the compliment on his driving was soothing to Binns's perturbed soul; but he was naturally reticent, and at that moment he did not commit himself. One thing was safe—music; and presently he had piped up a warlike song:

"Ne'er shall oppressors brave us,
Or foreign power enslave us;
Our stripes and stars shall wave us
To glory or the tomb!
Hark! 'tis the war-trump sounding!"

followed by another effort indicative of the leadings of his fancy, whose refrain rang:

"Pride of the pirate's heart!"

This failure of Binns to improve his opportunity evidently struck no chill to Roxy's ardor. They were approaching Trimble's Hollow, where a bridge crossed the frozen mill-stream, and Binns leaned forward for the whip in order to accelerate their motion—one could not say speed—when suddenly Roxy flung herself a little on one side, crying out, "No, no, now, you mustn't begin that!"

"Mustn't begin what?" said Binns, gruffly.

"Kissing me at every bridge we come to, just as all the other boys do. It's something I never did approve of."

"Nor I nuther," said Binns. But what if you don't approve of a thing—when a rosy cup of wine is held to your lips, and the fire tingles there, and the color sparkles, and the aroma is that of a garden of flowers under your nose, do you always have the strength of mind to set that cup down instantly? Instantly; for the man as well as the woman who hesitates is lost. And Binns, with those sparkling eyes sparkling into his, that rosy cheek close beside his own, those wholesome rosy lips—I am sure that neither you nor I would have done the like—but Binns was only Binns. And what you have done once it is so easy to do again. Before they reached home, that wicked Binns—the poor guileless little fellow—felt himself quite on the way to become what, in his ignorance of the existence of Don Giovanni, stood for the same thing. But as for Roxy, she felt very well satisfied with herself and her excursion. Binns was hers; he himself had said it that morning; and on the sleigh-ride that evening he had conducted very much as, in her imagination and belief, all lovers should conduct. The horse was blanketed at the hitching-post, and Binns was brought in whether he would or no, and

some sequestered turkey-bones were grilled, and a flip was made, and there had been daring possession taken of a mince-pie, the goodly share of which transformed into a part of Binns might have caused a procession of the ghosts of all his grandmothers since the Flood to walk across his counterpane that night. And Binns ate and drank, and actually made several little jokes, and apropos of the pastry he sang:

"When Washington was but a boy
As big as you or I,
He climbed his mother's cupboard,
And he stole her apple-pie,"

appearing to Roxy as he sang as delightful a personage as an end man. And when he went away Roxy bent and put her arms about his neck, and gave him a good fair kiss on his mouth, as any girl should kiss her sweetheart.

It was not in these days Binns dealt Roxy the hearty smack, and received the no less hearty slap in return; that was when smacks and slaps meant nothing, and in the innocence of his heart Binns was treating Roxy as he did most of the other kitchen girls upon his rounds. Later on, when the nature of Roxy's attentions, and of her intentions too, became more pointed, these little occurrences were susceptible of misconstruction; and Binns had even been embarrassed as to the return he should make for her tarts and jellies, without, however, being able to forego the dainties offered by the assiduous charmer. But now—well, if one must be kissed, Roxy's was a sweet and wholesome mouth, and that whip of frothy cream with plum preserve at the bottom of it was sweet and wholesome too.

It was generally understood in the household now that Roxy and Binns were "keeping company," and

no one was surprised to see Roxy always, in the afternoon hours, with a piece of white cloth in her hand, sometimes a part of what appeared to be an elaborate trousseau made chiefly of tucks and insertings and edgings, sometimes a table-cloth she was hemming, or towels she was fringing, with a pride of possession that needed no bashful concealment. She had a sewing-machine of her own in her attic chamber, and who would have had the heart to stop its low melodious thunder, long after every soul in the house was in bed? If it were Gladys, softly stitching folds of lace on sheer lawn, and you saw the light in her lattice, she would indeed have been a subject of romantic interest.

It was not exactly a pleasant thing, all this unreserve of Roxy's. And it was really a relief to know that it had its side of maidenly delicacy and diffidence. This was exhibited in some faint degree when one afternoon Binns, who had been belated, stopped at the door, with a cargo of up-country calves, to take the order for next day's provision, and suddenly there was a hurrying and scurrying, and Roxy was hiding something white and bunchy under her apron, and then throwing it under the table, very red in the face herself, half giggling, half crying, and Kitty, making a dive, was drawing the article from its temporary refuge, and holding it up in the face of all creation.

"What's that?" said Binns.

"Oh my, Kitty! Oh, don't! How can you, Kitty? Ain't you 'shamed?" cried Roxy. And up went the apron across the hair, making a muss of all the crimps that had cost her an hour over kerosene lamp and slate-pencil when the kitchen work was done.

"Why, what's all the fuss about that?" said Binns,

good-naturedly, with Kitty's contagious laugh.

"As if you didn't know!" said Kitty.

"I don't see anything particular in a cotton bag," said Binns.

"It's house-keeping goods, you stupid!" cried Kitty. "Isn't it, Roxy?"

"Well, what if it is?"

"Oh, Binns!" cried Roxy, pulling down the apron and showing a face where the mismated eyes were full of liquid brightness, and the ruddy cheeks were redder still with blushes. "It's—it's ours!"

"Ours!"

"And I've got a dozen of them!"

"A dozen—"

"I've a dozen of everything," cried Roxy, exultantly, all barriers burned away, "except towels, and I've six dozen of them. I sent up to the great sale where Rivers is running linen goods against Black's running of gloves, and got 'em for ninepence apiece. Think of that!"

A long whistle escaped from Binns's pursed-up lips, round as which his eyes had opened, and then, without another syllable, the astonished bridegroom and prospective householder darted down the back steps and into his cart, and galloped away, looking as nearly like one of the calves inside the rack as a human being could.

It must have been a rather tremendous moment for Binns. Up to that interview with one of the dozen of them he had been comparatively a free man, with nothing definitely pledged, with everything that was really decisive so far away that he could look at it

without shutting his eyes, and with all the contingencies of time and space between. But now—house-keeping goods! Bought and paid for! Every article of them was like a winding-sheet that bound him hand and foot. He felt himself fettered, with all the world for witness; and even if he could have escaped otherwise, here in some mysterious manner, a complication of moral forces, were the great firm of Rivers and the great firm of Black, in the great metropolis, brought in as restraining influences. Something like this must have wrought on Binns's inner consciousness as nothing ever did before, for he wound himself up to the pitch of coming that very evening for a voluntary and unappointed call upon Roxy, who, sitting on the back steps—for it was late in the spring—had just put the last thread that she could see into her hemstitching.

"Roxy," said Binns, after a preliminary skirmish, "you're a great seamstress. But don't you think, say—that—that this is a little previous?"

"I'm so glad you feel so, Binns," said Roxy, demurely, taking only the latest usage of the word. And then, looking up with her happiest smile, she added, "I think it's a little previous myself."

"Then what in the world are you doing it for?" blurted out Binns.

"Doing it for?" said Roxy, in amazement. "Why, for our house—for us."

"Don't you think we're a couple of fools, Roxy?" he said, in a tremulous voice, looking in the direction of Europe or Africa, or anything but Roxy.

"A—couple—of—fools?"

"Not to let well enough alone," he contrived to add

before his voice failed and went out.

“I don’t know what you mean, Binns,” said Roxy.

“Well,” said Binns, moistening his lips in order to articulate, “I mean—you’re very well off as you be, and so’m I at home. And how are we going—to live—with nothing—to live on? And where? And what’s the use of all your house-keeping goods?”

“Binns!” cried Roxy. And there was ominous silence for a moment before the flood-gates of her eloquence were opened. “When we only want three rooms!” she cried. “And can hire them in your own mother’s house. And I’ve money enough put by for a carpet and a cooking-stove and a rocking-chair. And I’ve got a chamber-set of my own, and a sewing-machine, and a dozen napkins, and six table-cloths, and a dozen sheets, and a dozen pillow cases, and six dozen towels, and four blankets, and a comforter I made myself, and patchwork quilts enough to make a circus tent, and two worked motters, and no end of braided mats—for I’ve always, always been getting ready! And there’s all the wedding presents yet, and clothes enough to last me a couple of years and more, and I’ll never come upon you for any. And you with six dollars a week and some hens, and I able to run a kitchen-garden myself while you’re at the shop, and raise all the vegetables we’ll use, and the ladies of the house here going to give me their clear-starching to do, anyway, and you to have your clothes mended and your washing done with no expense, and no board to pay—”

“I don’t pay board now,” stammered Binns, his words a straw upon the flood.

“And after a little we could take a couple of boarders, you know, or I would have shoes to bind

from the shop, or we could do both, and have the cheerfulest kind of evenings, and you could get your butcher's meat first cost, of course."

"How many turnovers and whips and jellies and sangarees and hearts and rounds and doughnuts do you think we could get on six dollars a week?" asked Binns, with courageous sarcasm.

"Well, I guess we sha'n't go without doughnuts," answered Roxy, scornfully. "And as for turnovers, there's apple-trees right in your mother's yard."

"But they're mother's."

"What if they are?"

"I guess you'd find out if you went to picking mother's apples for your sauce."

"Well, then, we can set some out ourselves. And as for sangarees, I rather think I know how to make them as cheap as the next. And maybe we can keep a cow after a little. *I'll* milk her, Binns. And I'm sure I mean to have a couple of little black pigs. And by-and-by, if we can manage to raise turkeys, it will be money in our pockets. Yes, Binns, there isn't any doubt about it—it will be money in our pockets to go to house-keeping right away, and I make no question I will have silver spoons given me here, and money and everything. And then, Binns, you're nothing now but McMasters's butcher-boy—but then you'll be a married man—McMasters's man; and they won't be calling you by your given name, and ordering you round. You'll be somebody, and receive consideration; and I think the sooner we set the day the better, on account of getting the garden started. What do you say to this day fortnight? That'll give me time for the cake."

"I—I'll see," cried the agonized Binns, who may have felt as if an anaconda had swallowed him. And he stood up and listened to a lad whistling as he went up the road unseen behind the high garden wall, his hands in his pockets, a free spirit, while he—

He turned and looked at Roxy. She was not attractive-looking, she was only good-natured; her teeth were uneven, although her mouth was wholesome, her skin was rough and red, her hair was frowsy, her snapping eyes were not a pair. He sat down upon the steps again, and hid his face in his hands, and groaned aloud. "I—I don't see how I can leave my mother," he said.

Poor Binns. He was no beauty himself, with his red head and his freckles, his pale eyes and lips, and his dwarfish stature; and it is doubtful if another girl in town would have thought of him as lover and husband. But what did he care for that? He had not thought of another girl. Nor of this one either. And how it had all come about he was sure he did not know. It seemed to him as if he were in a dreadful dream, where one thing happens and another follows without any relation, till it all becomes a nightmare.

The next day no Binns arrived to take the dinner order. And on the following day a tall, thin fellow, who looked like Binns pulled out and flattened, appeared at the storm-door in his place; and on the third day we learned that Binns was sick in bed at home.

Anything like Roxy's importance and bustle now was seldom seen in the house. At first her reddish hue waned, and then she went about her work with one tear trickling after another along her nose and glittering suspended on its tip. At last, however, nature gave way, and Roxy sat down in a corner of

the kitchen and gave way too.

“Well, if ever!” said Kitty. “If you ain’t as big a baby as Binns is!”

“I guess you’d cry,” whimpered Roxy, “if—if—your —”

“Well? My—”

“Your—sweetheart was—suffering—at home—and he might as well be in Egypt, with that mother of his —and you didn’t know—”

“As if ’twas worse for Binns than for the rest of us to have a toothache or his head hurt him! What on earth are you worrying about it for, anyway?”

“Because it’s my duty to,” said Roxy, severely. And it being her afternoon out, she put on her things and stalked up the road to Binns’s home, where she made herself and her errand known, and remained till after nightfall; to everybody’s surprise Binns himself returning with her.

Binns and Roxy, however, did not occupy the whole attention of the family, and after the first glance it was not observed whether they came into the kitchen or went strolling down the vegetable garden together. But some time after the house should have been closed and Roxy should have been reposing by Kitty’s side, it was found that she had not come in, and the hat and feather with which she exaggerated her stature were seen conspicuously touched by the ray of the late-rising moon outside the high street fence. Needless to say that Binns was not seen at all.

But Binns was present all the same, as in the active conversation going on out there, in answer to Roxy’s shrill expostulations, a gruff little growl seemed to rise from the bowels of the earth—the voice of Binns.

"But I'm all ready, Binns. I've got everything except the carpet and the cooking-stove, and I haven't asked you to get a thing, and I've spent all the money, except enough for them, that I've laid up since I've been having my wages myself."

"You needn't," said the unseen owner of the growl. "Nobody asked you to."

"I didn't wait for anybody to ask me. It isn't my way. I like to be generous. I meant to surprise you and please you, and show you that I came to you pretty forehanded." And here Roxy's voice was apparently drowned in tears.

"I can't help it," muttered Binns, in the pause. "Mother says it's ridic'lous; she says side by side we look like a clothes-pin and a clothes-pole, and we'll have everybody laughing at us."

"I'll have everybody laughing at *me*," sobbed Roxy, her voice rising to the surface again. "They'll say—I don't know what they won't say! And that spiteful Kitty! And oh, Binns, when I'd counted on such a happy home!"

"Mother says there never was such a tall woman in the family," growled the bass tones again.

"As if tallth made any difference in hearts!" cried Roxy, very reasonably.

"And I ain't old enough to go and be married. And I don't want to be, either. I never said yes, hi, or no about it. And when I don't want to be, I don't see—"

"Binns," said Roxy, solemnly, "I could sue you for breach of promise to-morrow"—as she paused an inarticulate rumble spoke for Binns's shudder—"if I was so mean as some folks," she added.

"Then you ain't going to," he said. "And besides, what good 'd it do you? I 'ain't got nothing."

"Your mother has," answered Roxy, with repeated solemnity, as became the implied and dreadful threat, which again gave Binns pause. "But I'd scorn it," said Roxy, after letting the idea work a moment. "I don't hold my affections so slight that any money —Oh, Binns! If you feel too young to settle yet, and want to have your fling out, I'll wait—"

"There's no use in waiting," ejaculated Binns.

"That's just what I say," cried Roxy, in a sudden flush of hope and misinterpretation. But the dead silence told her mistake. "Do you mean to say it's all off?" she cried, in despair.

"It's all off," growled Binns, in the boldness of desperation. "My mother says—"

"Oh, bother your mother!" exclaimed Roxy.

Perhaps Binns looked aghast at such a proposition, for she added at once, "I mean—I don't mean—any disrespect to her. But I never knew that mothers could—"

"Mine can," said Binns, comprehending the hiatus, and still under the impulse of his last access of courage. "My mother stood by me when I couldn't stand alone. And now I'm going to stand by her."

"I never asked you not to!" cried out Roxy. "I'd be as good a daughter to her as any she's got. I know she'd like my short-cake. And oh, Binns, it would have been so nice and cosey for you when you came home, and I had onions all smothering in the spider, and there's nobody can fry the rind any crisper than I can." And at this juncture a rush, a stumble, a quick patter of footsteps, might have been heard, and Binns

had resorted to his last refuge, as usual, and was running away up the street and out of sight as fast as his little legs could carry him. And Roxy came into the house, and sat down by the kitchen window in the moonlight, and cried as if she were doing the weeping for all the disconsolate damsels in the world, and got up and found herself some tarts, and ate them with a relish, feeling in every mouthful that Binns would never have those tarts to-morrow, and went to bed and to sleep.

The next day an air of expectation kept Roxy all alert, and her hope that possibly Binns had run home to ask his mother, after all, alternated with her despairing certainty that she should never see him again. Occasionally she burst forth in a song that showed the drift of her thoughts:

"Go ask your mother for fifty cents
To see Bill Barnum jump the fence,"

the quickly following tears obscuring the rest of the words that had once come home with her from a circus. But the despairing certainty became a fixed one when a week passed, and the long, thin young man still came to take the orders. She made no attempt at pride or concealment. She tried to do her work, and she failed. And she went away at last, saying her heart was broken, and she could live no longer in a place full of cruel associations.

A year afterwards, Roxy having been heard of as established in another home, and paying her attentions to another object, it was presumed that the old wound was healed; and her former mistress, happening to meet her one day in the street-car, was pleased with the smiling face that towered over her under its tall hat and scarlet feather. This lady had what she called a warm interest in humanity, but

what her husband was daring enough to call an intense curiosity, and the unexpected meeting with Roxy inspired her with a keen desire to know something further of the tragic story of Binns. But she could not bring herself to the fateful point, and was spared the trouble by Roxy herself asking her if Binns came for the dinner orders nowadays, and closing the brief conversation that ensued by turning a melancholy eye upon her former mistress, and sighing, as she left the car,

"Oh, it hurts there still!"

And so one year passed and another, and the world rolled over on its sunny side, and rolled over again on its dark one, and the clouds of sorrow broke in their sad deluge, and the sun burst forth again, filling the horizon with transformation, and new points in every landscape rose in brilliancy or sank into shadow, and Roxy was one of the points that sank into shadow—the shadow of forgetfulness.

It is a singular liability we have, after losing sight of any in whom we have had interest, to feel as if they remained exactly where we left them, heedless of the way in which the forces of the universe are building up and tearing down, and of the fact that fate and fortune never let us remain at rest. If any of the old household thought of Roxy, it was still as some one's kitchen-girl laying her sieges and approaches to an unwilling heart. Is not Gladys, in our memory, still at her lattice gazing after the cavalry officer? But fate and fortune, despite our indifference, were conscious of Roxy as an integral atom of the great cosmos, and in the interval of forgetfulness were as busy with her as with any other of the lovers whose loves give the *raison d'être* to the universe.

It was late one summer afternoon, a few years after

that eventful night when Binns's footsteps had been heard pattering up the street, that Roxy's former mistress, having been taken by her liege lord on a little tour of their native county, passed slowly along a rural lane, some dozen miles away from home, and held the reins while her husband paused to throw back the top of the phaeton, looking about the soft afternoon landscape meanwhile. On one side, a thick woodland shut off the view and the easterly winds, but on the other was a rolling hill-country broken by farms and orchards, and just at hand was a tiny cottage, with open windows and blowing curtains that allowed sight of the interior and its various mottoes framed upon the walls. A cow grazed in the grass-plot beyond; there were symptoms of a pig-sty, and a decided hennery in the rear; and there were lines of cabbages like great green roses, and potatoes and onions and beans and blushing beet-tops, and a honeysuckle and a rose-bush, and a bed of sweet-peas and a beehive, and a gigantic elm-tree overtopping everything. What a picture of content and comfort it was! "What a country this is," said the lady in the phaeton, "where the poorest can have such a peaceful home as this, where some happy young farmer has brought home his timid little wife, and their cares are few, and they have nothing to regret, and little left to wish for!"

Somebody was bustling about inside the pretty nest, a white cloth was spread upon the table, there was a clatter of dishes, and then there stole forth an odor—an odor of nectar and ambrosia to the hungry travellers a dozen miles from home—an odor of onions smothering in the spider. Suddenly a figure appeared at the side window beckoning some one, a tall, an immensely tall and gaunt young woman, and on her face, her reddish face, with its snapping,

unpaired brown eyes, surmounted by a wilderness of slate-pencil crimps, a smile that could only be the habitual smile of perfect satisfaction. “Stop a moment,” said the lady in the phaeton—“one moment. Surely—that must be—it is—” Just then the young woman sat down by the window, and began to beguile the tedium of her waiting with music—nasal, to be sure, but still a familiar tune. “Hark!” said the gentleman. “Did I hear a bagpipe?”

“A comb and paper,” said the lady. “I wonder if she keeps it still in the drawer with the nutmegs?”

I don’t know why neither of that guilty couple cared at that crisis to leave the phaeton. It would seem natural to have delayed a little, to have asked some questions, to have tasted, perchance, the contents of that redolent dish, to have learned if there are any in the world to whom their very wishes give them not their wish, to have learned if cruel fate were as cruel to any in the fact as in the fear. But the lady shrank into her corner, and the gentleman laid an urgent hand upon the reins, and they went on and up the winding road. Who is it cares to see the struggle of the fly in the web? For at the moment that they started up, as if for the capping race at Coulterlee, there appeared, coming slowly round the row of pole-beans, the person who had been beckoned—a little scrap of a fellow, stout and stocky in his long blue blouse, pale-eyed, red-headed, freckled, holding in his arms a teething baby, which he soothed with a monotonous melody as he sang, half under his breath,

“If I had minded mother
    I’d not been here to-day;
 But I was young and foolish,
    And easy led astray.”

Unmistakably it was Binns.

A COMPOSITE WIFE

A COMPOSITE WIFE

WHEN Mr. Chipperley lost his wife he was for a time very unhappy. He felt a little angry when he saw other women walking in the sunlight. He missed the flattery, the affection, the object of love. And he seemed to think all that furnished him with sufficient reason for marrying again, which he did speedily. He lived very happily with the next venture, although now and then the pale and pretty young face of her predecessor slipped in across his mental vision of the other, and it was a little difficult to separate them. And when a third young woman ruled his affections, it was an effort for him to say if it were May's lower lip that looked as if a bee had stung it, or if it were Mary's upper lip that had the Cupid's-bow curves, or if it were Maria that smiled with the deep Greek corner in the mouth; and in his memory gleams of Mary's eyes shot through May's glance, veiled with Maria's long lashes. May's pale cheek wore the rose bloom of Mary's; the outline of Mary's broad brow melted into the oval of Maria's Madonna-like forehead; and in this composite memory of a wife May's frown and Maria's smile were fast becoming indistinguishable when he first laid eyes on Honor Humphreys, who overshot the whole picture with her great shining hazel eyes and black brows, her full red lips, and the faultless teeth that flashed with white light in the dark countenance where the rare red only now and then blossomed—a tall and superb young creature, whose health and vitality and lustre completely wiped out the whole mental photography of poor May and Mary and Maria.

"Gracious!" said Honor to her gentle cousin, Marian

Marcy. “Don’t talk of him! He’s married all to pieces. Do you suppose I will take a fragment of a husband? Am I going to make one of a harem? What does papa mean? The idea of my marrying an old man like that!”

Poor Mr. Chipperley was only forty-five, but such is the point of view of youth that forty-five was all the same to her as one hundred and forty-five.

“I don’t care if he is made of money!” cried Honor. “He looks as if he were—of old bank-bills.”

“Old bank-bills,” said Marian, “make a slag, you know, almost as splendid as precious stones.”

“He hasn’t reached the slag stage. The fancy of his daring to send me roses!” as her cousin opened for her a box that had just come in. “Put them all back in the box, Maddy, right away; I won’t touch one of them!”

“But, Honor, look at these great beauties—an armful—the stems more than half a yard long. Why, they cost a dollar and a half apiece,” laying one with its soft reflection on the pale oval of her cheek.

“I don’t care if they cost a fortune apiece. Wear his roses, indeed! I’d rather have a green leaf of Ted’s picking. Here, Pinky, take them away; throw them out, every one!”

“What a gorgeous twenty-five-dollar breast-knot Pinky will wear with her best young man to-night.”

“I hope Mr. Chipperley will see her then. Make haste back, Pinky; you must have the rose-red chiffon out presently—there! I declare, what can papa be thinking of not only to be willing I should accept that old Mormon, but to want me to! Why, I might as well go out to Utah, where they drive their wives

forty abreast, and be done with it!”

“But, at any rate, Mr. Chipperley has the decency to drive his wives tandem.”

“No, he hasn’t. The law compels him. Oh, you make me shiver!” she exclaimed, with a mock shudder, as she turned over the laces and ribbons in the drawer before her. “The idea of going tandem with three ghosts! Poor ghosts—poor dead women! They must have lost all identity by this time. Mrs. Chipperley—Mrs. Theodore Chipperley—which of them—all of them—none of them! And to be a fourth, and put on their name! I should feel that I was putting on their shroud! Oh, oh, oh, I hate the ground he walks on!”

“And love the ground Ted dances on.”

“Poor Ted! Poor Ted! Oh, Maddy, what does make all the inequality? That horrid Chipperley man with millions, and Ted, the delightful, the original, the good, the brilliant Ted, without a penny to his name!”

“Mr. Chipperley has been brilliant enough to make a fortune.”

“Well, he may keep it,” smoothing out a Honiton flounce. “I don’t want it.”

“As if you could do without a fortune, Honor, you who have always had so many luxuries that you don’t know what the necessities are. Look at that flounce—”

“I know it. I should never have another inch of real lace if I married Ted. And—well—will you tell me, Maddy, why Ted doesn’t say anything?”—her face the color of a damask rose—“I can’t ask a man to marry me—”

"I could, if need were."

"You! Well, for a demure little cat that dares to look at a king you would take a prize in a tabby show," said Honor, folding away the flounce, and leaning both round elbows among the rings and pins of the toilet cushions, while she looked at a dark and handsome siren in the glass. "I shall never forget, Maddy, how you went and took your mother's necklace off my mother's neck. I think that did papa good to the core of his heart. And when mamma got over being startled she always rather admired you for it. Only she will be even with you some day." And then she fell to tying bows and snipping ribbons with twinkling fingers. "I should make a capital milliner if—oh, if! Well, Ted does everything except say the word." And again the flood of color.

"How can he say the word? What would he do with a wife? Just think, Honor! Why, he'd be a wretch if he did speak! A man with no more possibilities than Ted and with so many attractions, ought not to come where you and Helen and Teresa and the rest are—you butterflies who have only fed on the roses and lain in the lilies of life."

"Marian, you are just an old maid—a puritanic, conscientious, cantankerous old maid! There—don't you think these little lavender and mignonette bows add to the butterfly appearance of this particular butterfly?"

"You are perfectly hopeless, Honor. You forget there is a future. You just dance in the beam to-day. Your father's interest in the Humphreys estate dies with him. It's a big interest to-day; but it reverts to the co-residuaries, and all his children inherit is the nice little family quarrel—that has given the General occupation ever since lawyers and surrogates and the

rest ate up the whole of your mother's fortune—and a parcel of most expensive tastes and habits. And here is Mr. Chipperley, a nice young man—"

"Old Chipperley!" dropping the scarf over her hair, while Marian colored and coughed.

"Young—ah—comparatively," stammered Marian.

"Twice my age, at all events," tying the scarf with a bewitching knot.

"A worthy gentleman!" exclaimed Marian, the blush still enlivening her fair cheek, "against whom there is nothing to be said, and who offers an ante-nuptial settlement of a million dollars. And you have been out three years, and have let Ted keep every eligible man away. And your father feels his life insecure—and you've all lived so at the top of the wave that there won't be a dollar left the day after his funeral —"

"Marian Marcy!" turning on her with a diamond stick-pin in each hand. "How can you talk so? My dear old father! How can you be so indelicate—so, so cruel?"

"I hope you are not going to stab me. I am not cruel. I am speaking for your good—"

"Great good!" with half a sob and half a laugh. "I shall have a hysteric if you don't take care!" and the eyes were flaming and the teeth flashing.

"Have twenty if you want to." And Marian stood up beside her and looked her in the face with steady gray eyes that had a steely point behind their dewy softness. "When it comes to the point," she said, "and you are married to a poor man, and your mother and Helen and Teresa and the boys are homeless and penniless, do you believe you won't regret Mr.

Chipperley?"

"What a mercy it would be, Maddy, if you were struck dumb."

Marian laughed. "I'm not angry," she said, "because your temper shows that you are beginning to listen to reason. You marry Ted to-day, and have a happy year or two. And presently you are shabby. And presently care and anxiety about making bricks without straw have taken off your bloom, and given your face lines. You go nowhere—no balls and dinners and operas for you with nothing to wear. You grow irritable. He finds other places pleasanter than home. He reproaches, you cry. You reproach, he goes off. And you are more lucky than I think you'll be if you settle into anything like tolerable content with him at last, if you don't leave him and go off and earn your living as a milliner or a lady's maid."

"Marian!"

"But you marry Mr. Chipperley—you have, possibly, a bad quarter of an hour, regretting a handsome face and a dashing manner. But you meet with absolute devotion. You tread on rose-leaves and eat and drink nectar and ambrosia, and wear purple and fine linen. You have your palaces, your horses, your servants, and your path through life is a perfect milky-way of diamonds."

"I never knew you could be so eloquent, Marian," with sarcastic seriousness.

"And the long and the short of it is that you become accustomed to the way in which your husband surrounds you with sweet observances, and you are grateful to him, and have a friendly feeling for the rest of your life. And that is about all you would come out on in the end if you had married your

ideal."

"And you leave out all the companionship, the oneness, the—the—"

"Three uncommonly nice women have found companionship with Mr. Chipperley very satisfying."

"Yes; they had all they wished of it early, and left for parts unknown. Oh, how bored they must have been!"

"Bored! With Mr. Chipperley!"

"I believe that you are in love with that man yourself, Maddy!"

"Well, now, Honor, I've said all I had to say. If you think it over quietly, and remember that all this time Ted hasn't whispered a word—"

"Oh yes, he has—whispered—a plenty."

"He hasn't spoken out."

"And not to do that?"

"Is very unmanly."

"And if he had?"

"It would be very scoundrelly."

"Marian Marcy, I'll never speak to you again!"

"Till next time," said Marian, as she left the room. "There!" she murmured, her face taking on more than its usual pallor, as the door closed, "I believe I've said every word my uncle asked me to say."

And Honor burst into tears, tore off her lace scarf, and hid her face in it, and snatched it away, conscious in the midst of her trouble that every tear was a spot upon the ribbons, and sobbed out to the image of herself in the mirror: "Oh! oh! I am so

afraid I shall be tempted into marrying Mr. Chipperley!" And she rummaged out a photograph of Ted from a chaos of sachets and beads and ribbons and laces, and looked at it, magnified and haloed through the mist of her tears; and then she had to bathe her eyes in hot water, and then in cold, and to powder the lids, and to pale them, by comparison, with a little rouge upon her cheeks, before Pinky returned and clothed her in the gown the color of the heart of a damask rose, in which she went off to dinner, where she was to meet Mr. Chipperley, who hated the color of the heart of a damask rose.

Mr. Chipperley's wives had all been pallid women, dressing in pallid colors. One or two of them would have liked to wear a grass-green gown, or one even of sea-blue; one more daring than the rest had appeared in a primrose-colored silk, but it aroused such uncomfortable remarks that she only wore it once. No; soft grays and mauves were the only wear for them; and now when their likeness rose on his memory, the fawns and drabs of their garments were the only distinct thing about it. Those, too, as delicate eyebrows had merged into dark, positive lines, as blue eyes had become gray, and now darted forth hazel gleams, were swiftly suffusing themselves with deep reds and dazzling pinks and glowing purples. And he felt as though he had forbidden it, and May and Mary and Maria were wearing these colors in spite of his expressed will. It had the effect of unmarrying him more than anything else—more than death itself; and he was decidedly displeased with himself to find that he was more wildly and passionately in love with this brilliant creature in her burning reds and yellows than he had been with all his tender little pearl-gray and indistinct wives put together. It seemed to Mr. Chipperley that he had

been an indistinct man himself till now; he found himself growing to the measure of his love; he had had to stoop before; now he must climb; this gorgeous, glowing young woman was like a light in the sky; one must aspire to her, not stoop; that was a new sensation. She spoke of politics, and the kingdoms of the earth made new combinations, and the destinies of nations rearranged themselves. She talked a little theosophy; he felt this world enlarged to all the borders of the vast unknown. She spoke of a symphony; he entered into the secrets of music that he had not dreamed existed. She sang, and he heard the trumpets on heaven's ramparts sound. Yet she knew next to nothing of politics, or theosophy, or music; he rose only to the demands of his imagination concerning her. If sometimes the exercises were a trifle wearisome, there was Marian's gentle denseness to fall back on and find restful.

One thing, however, concerning Honor, he had not yet learned to explain, and hardly to endure. How could she love animals in the way she did? Four great Persian cats haunted her every footstep in the house; there they lay on their cushions in the drawing-rooms, in the music-room, in the library; a sleepy, snowy creature, like some half-animated ostrich plume; a satanic black thing with fiery eyes that to Mr. Chipperley's perception were informed with the very bottomless flames; another like a golden fleece, caressing, half human; and a little mouse-colored imp, whose bounds and springs and feathery tail-lashings not only did infinite damage among the Venetian and Dresden knick-knackerie, but among Mr. Chipperley's nerves. And Mr. Chipperley hated cats. They gave him nausea; they made him sneeze; he had an indescribable antipathy to them; he was, as Honor said to Marian, afraid of

them. He schooled himself to lay a very gingerly hand on the white one, feeling a chill up and down his spine as he did so; to suffer the yellow one to rub against his shoe, although that also made his flesh creep; he said nothing about certain scratches given him by the little gray Astarte devil, as he called it, for Honor's eye was on him; but when the black Asmodeus looked him in the face, Mr. Chipperley quailed. Then, too, there was a great buff-bodied and black-muzzled mastiff, and a spitz, and a poodle, and goodness knows what else; a parrot, an owl no bigger than your fist, a little silken marmoset. Sometimes, when Mr. Chipperley saw her, in a gown the hue of a pomegranate, with her cats in her arms or on her chair, and her dogs fawning around her, he had a moment of such feeling as he might have had were she Circe and he another lover just undergoing the enchantment, and about to become one of them himself.

"Well, it's of no use," Circe had said. "He admires the colors he hates; he caresses the cats he fears; he loves the dogs he detests. It does look as if he were hypnotized. Can't I undo the spell?"

"You talk like a silly girl," said her father. "Mr. Chipperley does you the honor to make you a proposal of marriage—"

"A proposal? Twenty proposals!"

"And I wish you, I advise you, I command you to accept it." And General Humphreys looked at her with eyes accustomed to authority, gleaming from the shadow of a pair of brows like epaulets that gave a military force to his glance. But his daughter had seen that glance before, and knew just how much it meant.

“The Humphreys, papa,” said the young rebel, “have not been in the habit of being commanded. I should hardly like to break the family traditions.”

“You are a disobedient and insolent girl!”

“Nor have the Humphreys been bought and sold in the past—do you think I will be the first one placed upon the market? I wouldn’t marry Mr. Chipperley if he were made of diamonds and set in the sky!”

“I don’t know how you could in that case,” said her father. “But you know, without any more words about it, what the circumstances are, what is likely to become of your mother and the rest of the children at my death, and that it is in your power, with the settlements I call for, to make their condition all that it has been.”

“That is to say, you sell me and my happiness for their ease and comfort. It is pleasant to know which you care for the most. It leaves me quite free. No, Mr. Papa Humphreys, you needn’t promise to deliver what you can’t get hold of! You will have to go very long indeed on this particular block! I heard De Puy say once it was a good plan to go short on a rising market!” And just then the name of Mr. Theodore Dane was announced, and the father’s eyes flashed fire at the daughter, and the daughter’s eyes flashed fire in return, and cousin Marian was not the only one who knew how much Mr. Theodore Dane had to do with the fortunes of Honor.

“Oh,” said Honor to Marian, when this conversation and struggle with her father had been reported and summed up with her mother’s dark hints that her supplies should be cut off, that she should be sent into the country, or shut up in her room till she promised different fashions, and balanced against her

own declaration that mediæval customs were impossible in this *fin de siècle* period—"oh," said Honor, "if I could only dress you in my clothes and make you pass for me, and marry you off to Mr. Chipperley, how I should like it!"

"And I, too," said the poor Marian.

"Marian! Could you really endure the thought of marrying that man, for one instant?"

"What an idiot I should be if I couldn't!"

Honor looked at her a moment, large-eyed and silent. "Marian Marcy!" she cried, then, "you shall! You shall marry Mr. Chipperley, you shameless dear!"

"How strangely fate moves," said Honor to her mother a little later. "Here is Marian Marcy, pale and drab, just like all the women he naturally prefers, wearing pale and drab gowns, thinking pale and drab thoughts, doing pale and drab things—exactly the one Mr. Chipperley ought to marry; she would melt into that composite wife of his without a wrinkle. And here he is possessed to marry one who sets all his ideals at defiance, whose whims and ways would eventually drive him mad, whose colors would startle him blind, who would be as much a blight on his life as strong sun on tender grass."

"I never heard such indelicate and improper remarks from a young girl's mouth before. Marian think of marrying Mr. Chipperley when he has not asked her!"

"My goodness! Oh, my goodness!" cried Honor, teeth and eyes flashing out of that brown face in one dazzle of light along with her ringing laugh. "Oh!" she cried, running from the room, "if I die the next minute I shall have had my share of satisfaction! I

mean to make Marian do the one thing in her life that shall be neither pale nor drab!"

But if Marian was a timid and conventional person in the main, she had more than once proved herself capable of rising to the occasion, and certainly she was doing something unusual and daring when uninvited she took Ted Dane's arm one night as he stood, rather dark and dour in the face, leaning against a window, and walked with him into Mrs. Roberts's orchid-house. "Oh, there is Honor!" she said, as they paused where a swarm of rosy flower-butterflies fluttered in their faces. "Is it not wicked that such a girl should be sacrificed—"

"Should be sold!" said Ted, suddenly beaming on her, with his blue eyes shining and his manner for the first time showing, as he bent from his lofty height, that here was an unexpectedly delightful person in that Humphreys family. "It is infamous!"

"I dare say he would make a very good husband."

"He ought. He has had enough experience in that line."

"Then I should think he'd see how very unfit she is."

"Unfit? For that beggar? No, no; Chipperley's a good fellow—but there's no one good enough for her."

"At any rate, she doesn't love him," hiding her face in the butterfly flowers.

"She doesn't? Look at her, then!" gazing at Honor down a vista, where she stood graciously extending her hand like some young queen, with Mr. Chipperley bending over it like some seigneur swearing fealty.

"Very well. They are obliging her. It isn't worth

while for her to quarrel with a man on whom she may be forced to rely for all the happiness she can have."

"Forced! Who can force her?"

"Father, mother, a whole household. And break her heart."

"Has she any heart?" biting his mustache as if he meant it an injury.

"Heart? Honor Humphreys! She—well, *you* are the last person to deny it!"

"I? What have I to do with it?"

"Oh, certainly—if you have been meaning nothing"—frightened into the propriety she had forsaken in her desire to help both Honor and herself.

"Meaning nothing? I? What do you mean?" exclaimed Ted, suddenly facing her. "You know I am meaning something! You know I love Honor with all my heart and soul! You know I would spend my life for her! You know I haven't a dollar in the world—"

"I know she loves you, whether you have a dollar in the world or not!" And the next instant Ted Dane, in a thoughtless, breathless ecstasy, had clasped Marian to his heart for one swift second. On such an avowal it was impossible not to embrace some one.

"Oh, Marian," he said, "you are the best friend a man ever had."

"No, no, no!" she gasped, pink with her blushes. "What do you do such things for? Oh, I am sure Mr. Chipperley saw you."

"What if he did? What do I care for Chipperley? Oh, Marian, you have made me the happiest man in the

world!" And Mr. Chipperley, whom some dancing fellow had robbed of Honor, saw the act and heard the words, as he came down the orchid-house, and noticed for the first time that Marian Marcy, in her misty toilet of lavender satin and tulle, was really a most attractive person and most becomingly dressed. He knew that Marian had little or nothing of her own except her mother's jewels, and that it was owing to Honor's determined insistence that she had everything as if she were a daughter of the house, and it only made Honor seem more charming still. How well that young woman would spend a big income, with what generosity, what nobility!

As for Ted, when Honor had finished that dance he was awaiting her. And what took place out in the grand hall where two people sat on the pedestal of the Psyche and Eros group, in the broad glare of the candles, one opening and shutting her fan, the other leaning towards her eagerly and taking the fan into his own hands at last, all the world might see, but only two of all the world might know.

"It is time," said old General Humphreys to his daughter, a week, perhaps, after that night, "that Mr. Chipperley had a definite answer. He is very impatient. Your mother thinks your conduct is fast becoming scandalous." And he cleared his throat and straightened his collar in preparation for the fray. "Yes, fast becoming scandalous."

"She will think it is quite scandalous before I am through, I fear."

"I can't imagine your objection to a man of Mr. Chipperley's worth—"

"Oh, he is worth too much."

"This is not an occasion for trifling, Honor."

“Well, then, the chief objection is that I prefer some one else,” said Honor, carelessly swinging her lorgnon.

“Some one else!” and the eyebrows, like epaulets, lifted themselves and fell again ominously.

“Yes. I presume that at least my preferences are my own.”

“May I ask who this some one is?”

“How can I hinder your asking, papa?”

“Let me know the name at once!”

“It is Theodore Dane.”

“Great heavens!” cried the general. “A fellow with nothing but a pedigree! A man of family without a penny, a lawyer without a brief, an idle, dancing, driving, shiftless—”

“I wouldn’t talk so, papa, about a man to whom you may by-and-by stand in the relation of a father,” said Honor, calmly.

“Never! The day you married that fellow you would cease to be my daughter!”

“Nonsense, papa; you are just like my mastiff! Old Proudfoot’s bark is very much worse than his bite. How can I ever cease being your daughter?” And then she had her arm about the old hero’s neck. “You know very well, papsy, you would never wish to make your dear unhappy.”

“No, certainly, no; of course not, no,” disengaging himself. “And this is the very reason I wish you to marry a man quite suitable in himself, and who can indulge all your extravagant tastes, and hinder you by-and-by from the unhappiness of seeing your mother and your sisters deprived of all their

gratifications on my death."

"How absurd, papa! As if you were going to die! It's perfectly ridiculous!"

"I'm glad you find it so amusing."

"Hale and hearty and strong and good, with a father and mother that lived to be ninety, and their father and mother before them. I won't listen to such talk! Besides, if worse came to worse, mamma and the others could live with us. We shall have a home of some sort—"

"Shall?"

"Yes, we shall live in an old house of Ted's in the country—an old place on a river—quite a place once—and had such lovely gardens. He will come into town to his office every day, and I shall raise asparagus."

"You, Honor!" he groaned. "Do you know what you are saying? Is it all cut and dried?"

"Yes, papa," she said, "the plan, not the asparagus." And again she made the movement to imprison him. But General Humphreys caught her in time, and held her off at arm's-length, looking straight into her eyes.

"Do you mean to say you can talk this way without a blush—"

"You know I can't blush, papa. I'm too dark. I can turn purple, if you want me to."

"I've as good a mind as ever I had to eat to call in a justice of the peace and marry you out of hand."

"I wish you would," she exclaimed, "to Theodore."

But as he released her she flung herself upon his breast. "Papa, papa!" she cried. "You must help me! I

love Ted—I hate that old Mormon! And oh—I should think you would find it such fun to get the better of mamma—and you remember the traverse she worked on you when you wanted De Puy to marry Kate Appleton, and she arranged it all for Henrietta von Frump—"

"I don't know what that has to do with this case. Your mother has much the best sense of all of us. De Puy's has turned out a very comfortable marriage, if he is a little hen-pecked. Yours—"

"Oh, papa, I shall simply throw myself in front of the train if you make me marry Mr. Chipperley! I should like to have some identity of my own. Just think of my being a band of sisters with those three poor ghosts hovering round old Chipperley!" And as the ghosts did not seem to move her father, she had resort to the last argument—tears.

"There, there, there!" said her father. "You know very well that I abhor tears," taking her in his arms. "I—I will confess that I had just as lief let your mother see that I had a will of my own as not. But the fact is, you will be a pauper. And I can't think of that."

"I told you, papa, that we—that Ted has a house. It will be the greatest pleasure in the world to make it habitable. And you've no idea how profitable my asparagus beds are going to be."

"Honor!"

"Oh, we have figured it all out. It's a delightful old place. Maddy and I went out to see it."

"Maddy—there's another thing. What is to become of Marian, as well as all the rest, if you persist in this course?"

"Why shouldn't Marian marry Mr. Chipperley, papa, and keep the money in the family?"

"Simply because he doesn't want her."

"He does. She is just and exactly the very thing he wants. Only he doesn't know it yet. He would find it out. For Marian is precisely the sweet, pale, quiet nun that would make him feel as if it were all a bad dream that he had ever had any other wife—as if they were all nothing but different phases of one woman. He is bejuggled with me just now, but oh, he would so regret it in a little; my canary and ruby colors would drive him wild, and he wouldn't live a year with all the exactions and exasperations that I should bring to him. Can't you reason with him, papsy?"

"I could reason with him a great deal better than I could with your mother."

"Well, we won't try to reason with mamma. I've heard you say many a time that she never would hear reason. Of course you know, darling, I'm not doing anything imprudent. Ted is only waiting for Mr. Lorton to come home to have his appointment as attorney to the Creamery Trust, with a salary of I don't know how many thousand a year; and a family that can't live on that ought to starve. And, besides, that is only a beginning. When people see what Ted is the big cases will come in, and we shall have an income to astonish you. That ought to content mamma. And it isn't as if Helen and Teresa wouldn't marry. Now, Papa Humphreys, you are an old soldier, you named me Honor because Honor was the dearest thing on earth to you. And I'm not going to ask you to do a living thing contrary to your principles, only to take mamma on a little journey, to Washington or to New Orleans—anywhere. You

press that button, and I'll do the rest." And it was at the end of a delightful half-hour that Mrs. Humphreys found Honor sitting on her father's knees, all smiles and tears and tangles.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Humphreys, "from the appearance of things, that your good sense has come to the rescue, my child. Of course, Mr. Chipperley's fortune is our last consideration. It is himself, his intelligence, his breeding, his goodness that we think calculated to make you happy. But it is outside of the possibilities that a young girl should refuse the settlements he offers—"

"Well, mamma," said Honor, moving from her pleasant seat and twisting up her hair, "I give you fair warning that when I marry Mr. Chipperley I will not accept a settlement of any sort."

"My child!"

"No. No man shall think I marry him for his money."

"But, Honor, what an absurd, high-flown notion!"

"No matter, mamma. I give you my ultimatum. If you want me to marry Mr. Chipperley, no settlement, no gifts, not a ring, not a flower. And you may tell him so."

"Humph! I suppose he can give it to you afterwards, just the same. But I must say it is the most quixotic nonsense—"

"Never mind about that. You are willing to sell me—but I have some rights, some feelings—I will arrange the terms myself!" And she swept out of the room.

"Well," said her mother to the old general, who stared confused, not quite accommodating his ideas to Honor's words, but keeping a wise silence in the

presence of his superior officer, “I am so glad, so relieved that she consents at all, that I will say no more at present. You had best see Mr. Chipperley at once, and give him to understand that she must be approached most delicately.”

“My love, you would do all that much better yourself —a man’s blundering bludgeon—your dainty rapier —”

“Very well, then; leave it all to me,” said Mrs. Humphreys, with great good-nature. And, satisfied that events were shaping to her mind, she wrote a note summoning Mr. Chipperley, and when he came she gave him to understand that at last his suit was accepted, but that, in fact, as some one in *Shirley* said of all women, Miss Honor was very kittle-kattle, and there must be no mention of gifts or settlements, or, in fact, of the understanding itself. “My daughter is exceedingly sensitive, and the idea that it might be thought your wealth was a factor in this happy conjunction—”

“Oh, precisely, exactly,” said the delighted Mr. Chipperley. “I understand, I understand,” and did not understand in the least.

Poor Mr. Chipperley! It was not really a blissful period to him that followed this rather peculiar betrothal in which the bride had given no promise, signified no assent, and expressed no feeling. He would have liked to press that hand of hers, but it was snatched away before he had more than icily touched it. He would have liked to drop the opera-cloak on those lovely shoulders, but that officious Ted Dane was allowed to be before him. He longed to fold his arms about her and press one kiss upon those luscious lips—he would as soon have offered such a familiarity to the Tinted Venus. When he saw

her at a charity concert, playing on the violin, looking like one of Fra Angelico's angels, in a long red gown, spangled with golden stars, with the loose sleeves falling open over an arm fit for a tawny young Cleopatra, he wanted to cry out to all the world, "She is mine! She is mine!" But you would have thought she had never seen him before. All the same, he was quite positive that when she was his wife, fast and sure, she should never wear a red gown again. In this red gown she was so unlike his dreams, so brilliant, so overpowering, so effacing, that she gave Mr. Chipperley the singular sensation of being unfaithful to a wife; he felt as if there really was something unlawful in his passion, and it was far from being agreeable to him. "If it were anything but herself," he thought, "I should declare that gown could be worn only by the Scarlet Lady. It puts out a man's sight. It almost puts out his love. How much more womanly, how much fairer and softer that silvery thing her cousin wore—a very sweet woman, that Marian Marcy. I must really speak to Honor about her vivid toilets. As for the gentle cousin, she's altogether too nice to waste on Ted Dane! 'A creature, not too bright or good for human nature's daily food.'" And then vaguely and obscurely Mr. Chipperley thought what a pity it was that a man might not marry two women at once.

Somehow or other Marian Marcy was always in the room now when Mr. Chipperley was admitted to the presence. It was not so much of an effort to follow Marian as he had found it to keep up with Honor's flights and vagaries; she soothed him after the attempt; she always agreed with him; and he felt with half an uncertain sigh that Ted Dane was going to have a very restful person for a wife.

"Mr. Lorton has returned, and we are talking of their domino party," said Honor. "A wilderness of flowers and Seidl's orchestra. Maud Van Wieck is going as Catherine de' Medici, and Rose as Catherine of Russia, and Belle Devers as Catherine of Aragon—"

"And you?" said Mr. Chipperley.

"We thought first of Petrucio's Katherine and Camoens's Catharina—"

"'Sweetest eyes were ever seen,'" quoted he.

"And then of Iris and Charmien, pearls and asps, and all that, you know. But it's too much trouble. We will go just in our brown dominos."

"'I'll wear my brown gown, and never dress too fine,'" quoted Marian.

"Yes, we will just go in our brown dominos. That is exactly the way I should like to be married," Honor said, suddenly, looking up with a flash of eyes and teeth. "No fuss, no feathers, no company, no cards. Just Ted and you and Marian and I, all at one time, all our own witnesses—stealing out from the ball, going to the minister's, and going our own way afterwards!"

"It would be admirable!" cried Mr. Chipperley. "It is one of your brilliant thoughts. No need of waiting for paraphernalia; that can be had in Paris. A hand-bag in the carriage, and over to the *Utopia's* dock directly afterwards; she sails at sunrise that night—I mean morning."

"What do you say to it, Ted?" asked Marian, as that young man joined them.

"What do you say to it?"

"Oh, whatever Mr. Chipperley thinks best."

And to Mr. Chipperley it seemed that he was about to enter a charming family, where even the remote cousins were so engaging.

“A capital notion,” said Ted. “For of all things to be dreaded the marriage ceremony is chief. If one could take ether now, or nitrous oxide, and wake up and find it all over—”

“Pshaw!” said Mr. Chipperley, before he thought, “it’s nothing at all, nothing at all.”

Still, Mr. Chipperley was not displeased with the anticipated privacy and quietness. For, feel as you may, the world will have a little fun over a man’s fourth nuptial. And then the elopement-like process gave a color of poetry to the affair which it otherwise lacked. When they parted, Mr. Chipperley made haste to send his berth-trunk and steamer-chairs and rugs on board the *Utopia*, and to secure the best state-room to be had for money, and Ted to see about the licenses and the minister. It gave Mr. Chipperley a jolly feeling of being young and rash and reckless and romantic.

“I shall wear my glory gown,” said Honor, when she and Marian were alone. “It will stun him out of his wits when I open my domino. You have the hardest part, Marian. Oh, how I pity you!”

“You needn’t,” said Marian, quietly. “I am equal to it.”

“But you dread it—just a little.”

“Just a little. I would rather not, if it could be arranged in any other way. But I sacrifice myself,” she said, with a quiet laugh, “to my aunts and cousins.”

“Marian, to say you are a trump is to say nothing at

all. You are a whole straight flush!"

The day before the Lortons' domino party Mrs. Humphreys saw two of Honor's trunks taken down on an expressman's back before her very eyes, under the supposition that they were either Pinky's or her own packed for the Washington trip with the General, which her cold had deferred. Another trunk was sent later from the house of the Humphreys to the steamer. And it wanted hardly a couple of hours to sunrise when Ted and Mr. Chipperley, with two dominos masked *au marveil*, left the Lortons' lights and flowers and music, entered the coach in waiting, and drove across to the Church of St. Peter-cum-Paul.

There was but a dim and solitary light burning at the altar. The rector, who had been napping in his study, was hardly more than half awake now. He examined the licenses perfunctorily, and hurried through the service, as he had been begged to do, as if he were expecting a policeman to interrupt him. For the first time Mr. Chipperley took with permitted tenderness the hand, he thought, that he had so often longed to take. Joyful moment when it returned the pressure, when he heard a whispering voice in the responses, when those swift and sleepy tones pronounced them husband and wife. He hastened down the dusky aisle with a trembling, clinging shadow beside him. Ted delayed a moment or two for the certificates, following with the other domino, and then, the curtains of the carriage closely drawn, they drove through the gray morning twilight of the empty streets that seemed to belong to some other life, breathless, wordless, over the ferry and to the pier.

The gray was growing silver on the silent water as they crossed. A star was melting back into the light like a pearl dissolving in a cup of gold. Suddenly a

ray lit all the mast-heads and tipped them every one with fire. And it was in that moment, as they stood on the deck, that Honor flung open her domino and let the sunshine kindle all the radiance of her glory gown—a sheen of satin of an intense yellow, embroidery of gold-thread rippling all over it in lines of lustre, the breast, the throat, the hair, the waist, a blaze of deepest tinted Spanish topazes, with here and there a ruby. So dark, so rich, so splendid in the full light, the brown skin, the great luminous eyes, the flash of the laughing teeth—Ted's heart stood still as he glanced at her and looked away and glanced back, finding it hard to believe he was awake, that he saw her, that she was his.

But it was with no such eyes that Mr. Chipperley beheld her. That yellow gown—it should be food for fishes as soon as they were in deep water! Those burning topazes and rubies—he was very tired from want of sleep, from hurry, from uncertainty, from emotion—they forced his eyes open and pinned the lids back! As she stood there, for one swift second she seemed to Mr. Chipperley an embodiment of the sin of the world.

And he was bound hand and foot at the chariot of the blazing creature. He saw instinctively that he would never be master again. The three Mrs. Chipperleys rose wavering before him, wringing their hands and vanishing into thin air. He felt, while he gasped and tried to collect himself, that he should like to go to sleep and never wake.

But Marian also had thrown off her domino and mask, and she stood, in a soft moonlight-colored velvet, a shawl of white blond lace, pinned on her blond hair, falling about her like a veil while she gazed at him. "Ah, now," thought Mr. Chipperley,

"she looks like a bride, she does. But that yellow abomination! Why, Ted Dane was right when he said of her once she dazzled when, the sun is down and robs the world of rest. She's about to rob my world of rest!"

But all this was in the twinkling of an eye—intuition, not thought—while Marian was hanging her domino over her arm and Honor was folding hers about her again, as people came hurrying by, and the confusion of starting became noticeable; no one pausing to think twice of a gay party accustomed to going and coming, who had hastened on board in their ball dresses.

"Well, Marian," said Ted, "here is your certificate. No; this is Honor's and mine. You will find it all right, Mr. Chipperley. Honor and I will be thinking of you in these moonlight nights as you go parting the smooth seas. You'll be quite in time for the carnival. You have helped us in a way not to be forgotten, and we—we—Honor and I—shall always associate you with the happiness of our lives."

"I—who—what—what is this?" stammered Mr. Chipperley, hearing Ted's voice like a voice in a dream, and at the same time looking over Marian's shoulder at the scroll of paper she unfolded. "Theodore Chipperley—Marian Marcy. There is a mistake here. There—"

"No, no," said Ted, calmly. "Nothing of the sort. No mistake. That would be impossible. I have married Honor and you have married Marian, just as we intended. We could never have overcome Mamma Humphreys if you hadn't entered so fortunately into our scheme. It's of no use to try and thank you; we can't. There go the last people off—there isn't a moment—good-bye, good-bye!" There was a hurried

shaking of hands, a hurried embrace of Marian and Honor, and Ted and one of the dominos were on the pier waving farewells, and the *Utopia* was slowly sliding seaward.

For an instant Mr. Chipperley stared at them, at Marian, at sky and water, all aghast, and then his eye rested on Marian again in her soft pearl color and lace, and in the midst of the whirl in his brain the words of an old, old lover came back to him: “And her eyes are doves.” Yes, her eyes were doves. And then he was caught in a wild revulsion of feeling, a sense of having cast off a gyve, a sense of having come home into peaceful twilight after long revel and riot, with thick wines honey sweet, flowers, and burning sunshine among Circe’s beasts. He remembered the reds and yellows, the mastiff, the spitz, the poodle; no more treading on a soft fur in the dark hall, and having it turn and rend you; no more sitting down on some softly-cushioned seat, and hearing a yell and a snarl from the cushion; no more tracing of resemblances between yourself and a marmoset; no more starts, no more dazzles, no more nips from the paroquet, no vociferation of canaries, no staring out of countenance from the owl, no menagerie in his house, no mother-in-law, with her courtship that always seemed to mask an assault! He took Marian by the hand and led her into her state-room. “May,” he said, “Mary—I beg your pardon—Maria—I mean Marian! you have made a great sacrifice for me. You have perhaps saved me from a great unhappiness. Let me recover my equipoise, and the devotion of a lifetime shall repay you. You knew me better than I knew myself. I was benumbed! I was bewitched! I was blind! It may take me a little time to get that other image out of my mind, but I shall do it—it had not become a habit. Be patient, and you

shall find a tender husband. Great powers! to think that I might have yielded to that sort of temptation, and been disturbed, wearied, wretched for life! I thank Heaven for your wisdom and courage that rescued me. You could never have done it if you had not loved me. I thank Heaven that you are Mrs. Chipperley!" And May's smile played around Marian's mouth, and Marian's eyes looked up with Mary's gentle imploration, and echoes of Maria's voice fluted in Marian's tone, and Marian's lips trembled with a kiss he had known before, and Mr. Chipperley, with a deep and quiet satisfaction, felt again that he had never been a widower.

MR. VAN NORE'S DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

MR. VAN NORE'S DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

THE Van Nores were present at the creation of the world. Some people say they made it; but one really knows better than that. If it had not been for their unaccountable belief that the builder of the ark that rested on Mount Ararat was a Jew, and their unutterable contempt for the race of Spinoza and Mendelssohn, of Heine, Auerbach, and Disraeli, to mention no greater, they would not have hesitated to conceive that the family name of the Patriarch was Van Nore.

At any rate, you may understand that the Van Nores were an immensely ancient family, so old as to be really worm-eaten. In the dust of the Van Nores there were soldiers and statesmen, and even a less regarded author or two. In this century there was nothing at all to speak of. If, however, any one says their family tree was like one of those old, wide, and deep-rooted fir-trees sometimes seen, with but a single gnarled and lichened branch left of all its forest glory, the best part of it underground, you can see that the person is no friend of the Van Nores, but one whose eyes have been hurt by the dazzle of their splendor, who has been forgotten at their banquets, looked at with a stony glare upon the street, or possibly knocked down and bruised and ignored by their fast horses.

Being immensely ancient, immensely distinguished, and also immensely wealthy, it goes without saying that the Van Nores thought immensely well of themselves. They never soiled their garments by

contact with the crowd; they bought their pictures and statues straight from the manufacturers before they had been profaned by the vulgar gaze; they would have liked the gold they spent cast with a Van Nore device, and the die broken. They could not hope to keep all the knowledge in the universe to themselves; but they did not care so much for that—there were always tutors and chaplains to be had, after the custom of certain of the South Sea Island chiefs, who maintain a Fila-oma or Talking Man of Knowledge. If, once in a while, they allowed themselves to come before the public in a matter of suffrage, it was not altogether without the sensation of some wicked scribe who has written the Sacred Name with unwashed hands; and, being usually defeated, they relapsed into a more profound contempt of the people than before, and talked glibly of the advantages of a monarchy, although not without an undercurrent of feeling that in the event of a monarchy the Van Nores would be monarchs. They intermarried, of course, only with families of a pedigree and assumption one degree less than—it could not be more than, and could hardly be equal to—the Van Nores.

Judge, then, of the bewildered and amazed wrath of the Van Nore family when the son of the house, the heir of the name, the last of the name, the only male Van Nore left to go down the ages with the weight of the family illustriousness upon his shoulders, married a young girl in the West, unknown, obscure, poor, and a Jewess!

Nore Van Nore had a sister older than himself—a dark and imposing creature with the Van Nore nose. He had a sister younger than himself, pallid, bloodless, with her mother's delicacy of feature, and

with nothing about her but her haughtiness to distinguish her from the herd of young women. He had one Van Nore cousin, a little apple-blossom hardly coming up to the family requirements. He had four Van Nore spinster aunts, who, if they quarrelled among themselves like birds in a wood, presented an unbroken phalanx of family integrity to the public, and who, with the idea that they had the manners of duchesses, really gave some reason to believe them directly descended from the Patriarch, they looked so extremely like the wooden women in the children's toy arks. His father embodied all the dignity, pomposity, and grandeur of all the Van Nores before him, as if he were the flame of their ashes; he had but one gift, and that was a faculty for satirical speech, which he exercised with impunity upon his wife—his wife, the line of whose descent was so long that it had worn to a colorless, attenuated thread in her; a thin, pale, languid woman, of whose condition it expressed little to say she dared not call her soul her own, because, in looking at her, or looking through her, rather, it was not clear that she had a soul—a woman without intellect, without individuality, and almost without vitality. Into this assemblage Nore Van Nore had dared introduce a person absolutely without a grandfather, and whose grandfather, had she had one, would have been named Shacabac!

Mr. Van Nore and his household would treat this vile and vulgar intriguer, who had thrust herself upon them, and had thought to lift herself by pulling them down, as she deserved. In their heart of hearts they had a complete, if inarticulate, consciousness that no one could have married the bridegroom in question for any other purpose. And Nore Van Nore received a letter of repudiation from his father, disowning and

casting him forever into the outer darkness of the world of people who were not Van Nores.

And who was Nore Van Nore? He was a young man of twenty-six years, whose mental processes had mastered the rudiments of learning to such an extent that he could read the newspaper and could make change. All attempts to cultivate those mental processes much further had failed; if he entered the university at last, it was because tutors and proctors and family influence, a fortuitous chance, and perhaps money, all wrought together. Entrance was all, however. Before the first term closed Mr. Van Nore had private but authoritative information that unless he wanted expulsion for—stupidity approaching imbecility were not the exact words—he had better withdraw his son. In a hot and self-righteous fury Mr. Van Nore turned the tables and expelled the university. He withdrew his son with a wild show of anger and scorn for faculty, curriculum, endowment, and career. “They have graduated no man who comes to anything in the last twenty-five years!” he said. And that the matter might be the sooner forgotten, he gave Mr. Nore Van Nore a purse and a travelling companion, and despatched him to the Far West. It was probably but a case of retarded development; perhaps he would do a little exploring and discovering; when he should return the affair would have quite blown over, and he would marry him to some maiden who had been so well brought up that she would feel herself taking a proper place among dominations, princes, and powers by marrying a Van Nore of any calibre. All the same, he did not fail to make his wife’s life a burden to her by sarcasms on her feeble wit that had been strong enough to adulterate the strength of the Van Nore; while the very sense of his son’s incapacity, thus

forced upon him, was another argument against the woman who would marry an imbecile for the sake of climbing into his rank and position.

It was not altogether to be wondered at, then, if his wife did not fully sympathize with him in this extremity, and if, being of an affectionate disposition —so far as she had anything to impart, having imparted that also to her son—she wrote a little surreptitious letter—she who had usually not a thought nor a deed nor an emotion of her own:

> "My darling Boy,—I send you all my love. Any wife you choose to marry will be the dear daughter of your mother."

That was the letter written so secretly; it meant volumes to her; it meant volumes to her boy. She was frightened to a trembling ghost of her ghost-like self when she stopped the carriage and asked the footman to drop it in a street-box, for she felt that if her husband knew it it would not be impossible for him to blow out her flickering flame of life altogether, or stamp its feeble spark into the earth. He never had struck her; but she never knew what he might do yet.

The father's letter, when it came, was not at all unexpected by Hero Van Nore; nor was the mother's a surprise. She was a girl of twenty, superbly tall and fair. Her mouldings would have fed a sculptor's eye with rapture, her coloring would have driven wild another than Titian; the great braids upon her head seemed made of strands of spun gold; she wore them like a crown, as became a daughter of the royal tribe of Judah—she was undoubtedly a Jewess—but as Miriam, as Deborah, as Susannah may have done she had the large beauty of that Clytie in her sunflower whom some think to be Isis in her lotus. She waited

in her father's shop; and she sold Mr. Van Nore a pair of gloves there.

He had given his purse, with his *congé*, some time since to his travelling companion, and he was waiting in this little place till he should receive a fresh remittance from his father. When he saw Hero he had something else to wait for. He hung round the shop corners, and when she went home he followed her. *Vera incessu patuit dea*—she stepped as if the earth were air; he said to himself that it was because his heart was under her feet. He knew intuitively that she would not give him a second look. What were the Van Nores out here in the wilderness? He was able to see, for all his deficiency, that she was on a higher plane of being than his own. But if he could not hope he could at least suffer; he could gaze at the star he might not win. He bought another pair of gloves. Ah, heavens! to feel the touch of those pointed fingers of hers as they stretched the kid from side to side on his hand! The next day he bought another pair. Before he was through he had bought the whole stock of gloves in the shop.

Of course this attracted her attention, and she made some inquiry concerning him. "You had better go away," she said, when he came in again. "You do not need gloves, or ties, or any of our goods. You are making yourself ridiculous."

"I have nothing to do with it," he replied. "I was made so when I was born."

And so one word led to another, and in the course of time he had told his story, which somehow seemed full of wrongs—the story of a rather feeble-minded youth who had been browbeaten and ill-used by a disappointed father from his birth. Her heart was stirred with pity; she let him come to the house.

Hope bounded within him. If the star should fall from the sky to his arms! He wrote his father—I forgot to say that he could write—that he wanted his influence to help him marry the most lovely, the most virtuous, the most brilliant of women, who waited behind the counter of her father's little Jew-shop. The answer to his letter made his hair stand on end. Sneering, vindictive, cruel, threatening. What should he do but show it to her? Her blood would have been cold and thin stuff had that not made it boil. "I can never go back to him," said Nore. "I never will go back to him. It is the last blow he shall strike me."

"Would you be happier here in the shop helping me?" she asked.

"Beyond measure!" he cried.

So she told him to see her father that night. She meant about the situation. He meant about a wife. And her father, in as good and strong contempt as Mr. Van Nore himself could feel, ordered the fellow from the house.

"The worthless varlet!" cried the old man. "Can he earn his salt? What do I care for his name and his family and his entailed moneys—the dog of a Christian! He can have them all; but he cannot marry my girl to an idiot!"

"He is not an idiot, father," said Hero. "There is more in him than any see," and she calmly canvassed the subject. "He has been made to look up till he does not know how to look straight ahead. Some day he will assert himself—"

"You?" said her father. "You? I believe you care for the lout! When you have sweethearts to fill a regiment! When you can marry any man in the

county!"

"I don't know," she said. "I am sorry for him. I care to have him happy—he has had so much unhappiness." And at that moment they heard a groan outside, and they ran to the door to pick up Nore Van Nore, helpless and just returning to consciousness, with a broken leg.

Hero installed herself as his chief attendant. In the long hours of patient pain, in the devotedness of his silent worship for her, something stirred her heart that was not pity. Heaven knows what it was! There are some strong natures that must wrap themselves about the weak. The first time that he could stand upon his feet again they were married. And then Nore Van Nore went down to help her wait behind the counter in the shop, where she consulted him and referred to him and honored him till she was likely to make others share the strange respect she had for him. "He is single-hearted," she said to one of her old lovers in that primitive community, who felt the right to make some outspoken complaint. "He is upright. He is unselfish. He is kind to the fly on the wall. He loves me and no other. What more do I want in a husband? He suits me. And as for his religion, what does that signify when, at any rate, we both worship the same God?"

A year from that time Hero did not go to the shop much; she had a little son—and not such a very little one either—a bouncing, magnificent boy, with his mother's colors and eyes, full of life and joy and spirit, and quite the most remarkable baby in the world. And so, when the child was six months old, it seemed to Nore Van Nore, in his happiness, that he was wrong to deprive his family of the blessing of knowing of such a blessing, and he wrote home for

the third time; but this time to his mother.

This was shaking the red rag in the face of the bull. Mr. Van Nore trampled up and down his wife's sitting-room awhile, reared and stamped and snorted and bellowed, and not till he had reduced her to tears for having brought such a son into the world, and had pursued it till she gasped for breath, and had to have the maids and ether and hot bottles, did he subside into silence and thought.

That this son of a beggarly shop-girl of a Jewess should be the Van Nore! Never, never, if he had to put out the light of all the Van Nores at once! Jocelyne, his eldest daughter, should marry young De Vere, and he should take the name of Van Nore. For a sum of money Nore should break the entail and renounce his name, taking, instead, that of his low-born wife. And so Jocelyne's son, who was a foregone conclusion in Mr. Van Nore's mind, should be the great Van Nore to come. He had a satchel packed within an hour, and he slept that night, for the first time in his life, in a vulgar sleeping-car, always before having left the train at nightfall rather than be one of the promiscuous canaille sleeping a common sleep. Days and nights and days and nights of this wretched contiguity. It was a hard experience for Mr. Van Nore. He added it all up against his son. And the selfishness of the modern traveller did not tend to increase his appreciation of his kind. His kind? Not the least bit his kind! Mr. Van Nore was more than ever persuaded that he was a superior integer of the race—marking, perhaps, one of those points of progress from which one development steps to a higher.

At last he stood in the presence of his daughter-in-law.

A shapeless little greasy Jewess, selling old clothes—or a stately young goddess assuming a human smile? One convulsive sensation thrilled across him of pride in Nore's taste at least, souring instantly to anger to think that taste was all. And then he opened the subject.

"No, father-in-law," said Hero, firmly, despite his wincing, and after the fashion of speech in use among her people—"no, father-in-law. We do not want your money. Nor will we surrender our name. It is our name by all right and law that it is yours. And, as for your grandson, we have no power to forswear his birthright for our mess of pottage."

It was a will as strong as his own that opposed him. Storming was of no use here. He left the house without another word, and left Hero dancing her crowing boy in the broad transfiguring sunbeam, looking up proudly at her husband, yet fondly, to see if really she and the boy compensated him for all he had lost.

An hour afterwards Mr. Van Nore was brought back to his son on a stretcher. Two trains had collided, and he was among the killed and wounded. An artery had been nearly severed, and before a physician could reach him he was bleeding to death.

When at length the flow was stanched, and he lay fainting and sinking away, "It is almost hopeless," said the surgeon. "There is little blood left in his body."

The sight of his dying father had changed the current of Nore's irate feeling. "If I could but give him mine!" he cried.

"It would do him small good," said the doctor, looking at the pale and spindling fellow with an

anatomist's contempt. And from him the glance travelled to Hero, standing near in her abundant life, with the dancing boy in her arms, still followed by the sunbeam. Hero read the glance in a moment, and had given the child to her husband.

"Here, doctor," she said, baring an arm that Hebe, carrying life and nectar to the gods, might have lifted.

"Do you know what it means for you," said the doctor, "and for your child, perhaps? Loss of strength, it may be of health—"

"I know it is my husband's father, my child's grandparent," she said, slowly. "If my blood can save him, it is right that he should have it." And when she came to herself after the first fainting-fit of her life, save for fatigue and languor, she did not know that she felt much the worse, and her father-in-law was smiling at her with lustre in the eyes that she so lately saw nearly set in death.

Strange and awful moment to Hero! She had given life to this man. She had gone behind the veil of death and darkness, and worked with the forces of creation. There was a bond between her and him such as there could be between no other people in the world. For half a fainting heart-beat she thought she had made him; for half as long again he thought she had. She felt her heart irradiate with a tender warmth towards her husband's father. She fell on her knees beside him and kissed his hand. "Oh, my father," she said, "you must forgive us, for we love you!"

As for Mr. Van Nore, I never saw anybody happier than he was, some weeks afterwards, on his way home with his party. His son accompanied him, with

the nurse of a superb rosy baby folded in white fleecy wools, and a lady, stately as any princess ought to be, but seldom is, with her black fox robes about her. “She is very teachable,” thought Mr. Van Nore. “A month of our life will give her all the *savoir faire* she needs. Her tact is inestimable.” And then he wondered if she could hold her own with Jocelyne. “My grandson, the future Van Nore,” he said to every acquaintance he came across, and they all seemed to be travelling on various portions of that trip. “Hero, my dear! My daughter-in-law, Mrs. Van Nore. My daughter-in-law. A great addition to our circle, I assure you. An old family, an old family. We—we are not exactly, so to say, related, but we—we—we have some of the same blood in our veins!”

THE END

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