MAUD WILDER GOODWIN



TREDITION CLASSICS

Flint

His Faults, His Friendships and His Fortunes

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FLINT: HIS FAULTS, HIS FRIENDSHIPS AND HIS
FORTUNES ***

FLINT

His Faults, His Friendships

and His Fortunes

BY

MAUD WILDER GOODWIN

AUTHOR OF "THE HEAD OF A HUNDRED," "WHITE

APRONS," "THE COLONIAL CAVALIER," ETC.

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Dedicated to Miriam

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Flint:

His Faults, His Friendships, and His Fortunes

CHAPTER I

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

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"Say not 'a small event.' Why 'small'?
Costs it more pain that this ye call
'A great event' should come to pass
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed
Power should fall short in, or exceed."

The following chapter is an Extract from the Journal of Miss Susan Standish, dated Nepaug, July 1, 189-.

We are a house-party.

To be sure we find pinned to our cushions on Saturday nights a grayish slip of paper, uncertain of size and ragged of edge, stating with characteristic New England brevity and conciseness the amount of our indebtedness to our hostess; but what of that? The guests in those stately villas whose lights twinkle at us on clear evenings from the point along the coast, have [Pg 2] their scores to settle likewise, and though the account is rendered less regularly, it is settled less easily and for my part, I prefer our Nepaug plan.

We are congenial.

I don't know why we should be, except that no one expects it of us. We have no tie, sacred or secular, to bind our hearts in Christian love. We have in fact few points in common, save good birth, good breeding, and the ability to pay our board-bills as they fall due; but nevertheless we coalesce admirably.

We are Bohemian.

That is, our souls are above the standards of fashion, and our incomes below them, and of such is the kingdom of Bohemia. A life near to Nature's heart, at eight dollars a week, appeals to us all alike.

We are cross.

Yes, there is no denying it. Not one of us has escaped the irritation of temper naturally resulting from ten days experience of the fog which has been clinging with suffocating affection to earth and sea, putting an end to outdoor sport and indoor comfort, taking the curl out of hair, the starch out of dresses, the sweetness out of dispositions, and hanging like a pall

over all efforts at jollity.

Irritation shows itself differently in each individual of our community. As is the temperament, so is the temper.

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Master Jimmy Anstice, aged twelve, spends his time in beating a tattoo on the sofa-legs with the backs of his heels. His father says: "Stop that!" at regular intervals with much sharpness of manner; but lacks the persistent vitality to enforce his command.

My nephew, Ben Bradford, permanently a resident of Oldburyport, and temporarily of Cambridge, sits in a grandfather's chair in the corner, "Civil Government" in his lap, and "Good-Bye, Sweetheart," in his hand. Even this profound work cannot wholly absorb his attention; for he fidgets, and looks up every few minutes as if he expected the sunshine to walk in, and feared that he might miss its first appearance.

I, for occupation, have betaken myself to writing in this diary, having caught myself cheating at solitaire, —a deed I scorn when I am at my best.

Doctor Cricket, his hands nervously clasped behind him, has been walking up and down the room, now overlooking my game and remonstrating against the liberties I was taking with the cards (as if I had not a right to cheat myself if I like!) and then flying off to peer through his gold-bowed spectacles at the hygrometer, which will not budge, though he thrusts out his chin-whisker at it for the fortieth time.

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"The weather is in a nasty, chilly sweat," he says grumpily; "if it were my patient, I would roll it in a

blanket, and put it to bed with ten grains of quinine."

"Not being your patient, and not being dosed with quinine, it may be better to-morrow," Ben retorts saucily.

Ordinarily, the Doctor takes Ben's sallies with good-humored contempt. To-day, he is in other mood. He smiles—always a bad sign with him, as the natural expression of his truly benignant mood is a fierce little terrier-like frown.

"My poor boy!" he says sympathetically. "The brain is going fast, I observe. Steep a love-story, and apply it over the affected part!"

I see Ben wrestling with a retort; but before he has it to his mind, something happens. The door opens and a girl enters. Ben's face lights up. The sunshine has come.

There is something more than a suggestion of sunshine about Winifred Anstice, even to those of us who are neither of the age nor the sex to fall under the glamour of sentimental illusions. I have often speculated on the precise nature of her charm, without being able to satisfy myself. She is not so extraordinarily pretty, though her hair ripples away from her forehead after the American classic fashion, to which style also [Pg 5] belongs the little nose, straight in itself, but set on at an angle from the brow, which, to my thinking, forms a pleasing variation from the heavier, antique type. The classic repose is wholly lacking. The eyes are arch, bright, and a little daring; the mouth always on the verge of laughter, which is not quite agreeable, for sometimes when there is no visible cause for amusement, it gives one an uncomfortable feeling that perhaps he is

being laughed at unbeknown, and a person need not be very stingy not to relish a joke at his expense.

Perhaps this sounds as if Winifred were hard, which she is not, and unsympathetic, which she never could be; but it is not that at all. It comes, I think, of a kind of bubbling over of the fun and spirits which belong to perfect physical condition and which few girls have nowadays. I suppose I ought not to wonder if a little of this vigor clings to her manner, making it not hoidenish exactly, but different from the manner of Beacon Street girls, who, after all said and done, have certainly the best breeding of any girls the world over. Ben doesn't admire Boston young ladies; but then he hates girls who are what he calls "stiff," as much as I dislike those whom he commends as "easy." Of course he gets on admirably with Winifred, who accepts his adoration as a matter of course, and rewards him with [Pg 6] a semi-occasional smile, or a friendly note in her voice.

After all, Winifred's chief charm lies in her voice. For myself, I confess to a peculiar sensitiveness in the matter of voices,—an unfortunate peculiarity for one condemned to spend her life in a sea-board town of the United States. Like Ulysses, I have endured greatly, have suffered greatly; but when this girl speaks, I am repaid. I often lose the sense of what she is saying, in the pure physical pleasure of listening to her speech. It has in it a suggestion of joy, and little delicate trills of hidden laughter which, after all, is not laughter, but rather the mingling of a reminiscence and an anticipation of mirth. I cannot conceive where she picked up such a voice, any more than where she came by that carriage of the head, and that manner, gracious, yet imperative like a young queen's. Professor Anstice is

a worthy man and a learned scholar; but the grand air is not acquired from books.

"How glum you all look!" Winifred exclaims, as she looks in upon us.

At his daughter's entrance, the face of Professor Anstice relaxes by a wrinkle or two; but he answers her words as academically as though she had been one of his class in English.

"*Glum* is hardly the word, my dear; it conveys the impression of unamiability."

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"Precisely," persists Mistress Winifred, not to be put down, "that is just the idea you all convey to me."

"Why shouldn't we be unamiable," answers Ben, eager to get into the conversation, "when there is nothing to amuse us, and you go off upstairs to write letters?"

"You should follow my example, and *do* something. When I went upstairs Miss Standish was in a terrible temper, scowling at the ace of spades as if it were her natural enemy; but since she has taken to writing in that little green diary that she never will let me peep into, she has a positively beatified, not to say sanctified, expression. And there is Ellen Davitt hard at work too, and as cheerful as a squirrel—just listen to her!"

With this the girl stands still, and we listen. The waitress in the next room, apparently in the blithest of spirits, is setting the tea-table to the accompaniment of her favorite tune, sung in a high, sharp, nasal voice, and emphasized by the slapping

down of plates.

"Tell me *one* thing—tell me trooly;
Tell me *why* you scorn me so.
Tell me *why*, when asked the question,
You will always answer '*No*'—
No, sir! No, sir! No-o-o, sir—No!"

The voice is lost in the pantry. Smiles dawn upon all our faces.

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"A beautiful illustration of the power of imagination!" says Dr. Cricket. "Ellen is contentedly doing the housework because she fancies herself an heiress haughtily repulsing a host of suitors. It is the same spirit which keeps the poet cheerful in his garret, or a young Napoleon in his cellar, where he dines on a crust and fancies himself an emperor."

"Steep an illustration and apply it over the affected part!" drawls Ben.

The Doctor prepares to be angry; but Winifred, scenting the battle and eager to keep the peace, claps her hands and cries out, "Excellent!" with that pretty enthusiasm which makes the author of a remark feel that there must have been more in his observation than he himself had discovered.

"There, Ben, if you are wise you will act on this clever suggestion of Dr. Cricket's, and travel off to the land of fancy, where you can make the weather to suit yourself, where fogs never fall, and fish always bite, and sails always fill with breezes from the right quarter, and whiff about at a convenient moment when you want to come home—oh, I say!" she adds with a joyful upward inflection, "there's the

sun, and I am going for the mail."

"I'll go with you," volunteers Master Ben.

"Thank you, but Mr. Marsden said that I might drive his colt in the sulky."

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"Not the *colt*!" we all cry in chorus.

"The *colt*," she answers with decision.

"Not in the sulky?"

"Yes, in the sulky."

"Surely, Professor Anstice—" I begin; but before I have time for more, Winifred is out of the room, and reappears, after ten minutes, strangely transformed by her short corduroy skirt and gaiters, her cap and gauntleted gloves, to a Lady Gay Spanker. I do not like to see her so; but then I am fifty years old, and I live in Massachusetts. Perhaps my aversion to the sporting proclivities of the modern woman is only an inheritance of the prejudices of my ancestors, who thought all worldly amusements sinful, and worst of all in a woman. Even the Mayflower saints and heroes had their cast-iron limitations, and we can't escape from them, try as we will. We may throw over creed and catechism; but inherited instinct remains. The shadow of Plymouth Rock is over us all.

Just here I look up to see Winifred spin along the road before the house, seated in a yellow-wheeled sulky, behind the most unmanageable colt on this side of the Mississippi, as I verily believe. Of course Mr. Marsden is very glad to have the breaking process taken off his hands; but if I were Professor

Anstice I don't think I should like to have my daughter take [Pg 10] up the profession of a jockey. I must admit, however, that she looks well in that tight-fitting jacket, with the bit of scarlet at her throat, and her hair rippling up over the edges of her gray cap.

I wonder why I chronicle all this small beer about Winifred Anstice and old Marsden's colt. I suppose because nothing really worth noting has occurred, and it is not for nothing that a diary is called a commonplace book. I find that if I wait for clever thoughts and important events, my journal shows portentous gaps at the end of the week, and I promised myself that I would write something in it every day while I was at Nepaug. For my part, I enjoy the old-fashioned diary,—a sort of almanac, confessional, receipt-book, and daily paper rolled together; so I will just go on in my humdrum way. As it is only for myself, I need not fear to be as garrulous and egotistical as I please. Besides, a journal is such a good escape-valve for one's feelings! Having written them out, one is so much less impelled to confide them, and confidences are generally a mistake—yes, I am sure of it. They only intensify feelings, and at my age that is not desirable. At twenty, we put spurs into our emotions. At fifty, we put poultices onto them.

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CHAPTER II

MINGLED YARN

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"The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together."

The road from the station at South East to Nepaug Beach was long and dusty, tedious enough to the traveller at any time, but especially on this July afternoon when the sun beat down pitilessly upon its arid stretches, and the dust, stirred by passing wheels, rose in choking masses.

Jonathan Flint, however, surveyed the uninteresting length of highway with grim satisfaction. It was the inaccessibility and general lack of popular attractions which had led him to select Nepaug as a summering place. Mosquitoes and sand-fleas abounded; but one need not say "good-morning" to mosquitoes and sand-fleas, it is true. The fare at the inn was poor; but one was spared that exchange of inanities which makes the average hotel appear a kindergarten for a lunatic asylum; and, finally, the tediousness of the journey was a safeguard [Pg 12] against the far greater tedium resulting from the companionship of "nauseous intruders," striding in white duck, or simpering under rose-lined parasols.

The horse which was drawing the ramshackle carryall in which Flint sat, toiled on with sweating haunches, switching his tail, impatient of the flies, and now and then shaking his head deprecatingly, as if in remonstrance against the fate which destined him to work so hard for the benefit of a lazy human being reclining at ease behind him.

Flint was, indeed, the image of slothful content, as he sat silent by the side of old Marsden, who drove like a woman, with a rein in each hand, twitching them

uselessly from time to time, and clucking like a hen to urge on his horse when the sand grew unusually deep and discouraging.

Ignoring his companion, or dreading perhaps to let loose the floods of his garrulity by making any gap in the dam of silence, Flint sat idly inspecting his fishing-tackle, shutting it up, then drawing it out, and finally topping it with the last, light, slender tip, quivering like the outmost delicate twig of an aspen as he shook it over the side of the carryall. In fancy, he saw it bending beneath the weight of a black bass such as haunted the translucent depths of a fresh[Pg 13] water pond a mile or two away. In fancy, he could feel the twitch at the end of the line, then the run, then the steady pull, growing weaker and weaker as the strength of the fish was exhausted. Suddenly into the idler's lotus-eating Paradise came a rushing sound. A sharp swerve of the horse was followed by an exasperating crackle, and, lo! the beloved fishing-rod was broken,—yes, broken, and that delicate, quivering, responsive, tapering end lay trailing in the dust which whirled in eddies around a flying vehicle.

Flint saw flashing past him a racing sulky drawn by a half-tamed colt, and driven by a girl—if indeed it was a girl and not, as he was at first inclined to think, a boy in petticoats.

The young woman took the situation jauntily. She reined in the colt, adjusted her jockey-cap, and pulled her dog-skin gauntlets further over her sleeves.

"I beg your pardon," she called out as Flint's wagon overtook her. "I'm awfully sorry to have broken your rod; but I saw that we had room to pass, and I didn't

see the pole hanging out. It never occurred to me," she added with a dimpling smile, "that any one would be fishing on the Nepaug road."

Flint had labored hard to subdue the outburst of profanity which was the first impulse of the [Pg 14] natural man, and had almost achieved a passing civility, but the smile and the jest put his good resolutions to flight. The milk of human kindness curdled within him.

"You could hardly," he answered, raising his hat, "have been more surprised than I was to see a horse-race."

A trace of resentment lingered in his tone. The mirth died out of the girl's eyes. She returned his bow quietly, leaned forward and touched the colt with the tassel of her whip. The creature reared and plunged.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Flint, preparing to jump out and go to her assistance.

"Let her alone!" said Marsden, with unmoved calmness, shifting the tobacco from one side of his mouth to the other. "That girl don't need no guardeen. She's been a-drivin' raound here all summer, and I reckon she knows more about managin' that there colt'n you do. It's my colt, and I wouldn't let her drive it ef she didn't."

"I hope to thunder you won't again, at least while I'm about, unless you intend to pay for damage to life and property," Flint answered testily.

By this time colt and driver had been whirled away in a cloud, Elijah-like.

"Nice kind of a girl that!" said Flint to [Pg 15] himself

with savage, solitaire sarcasm. He felt that he had appeared like a fool; and it must be a generous soul which can forgive one who has been both cause and witness of such humiliation. To conquer his irritation, Flint proceeded to take his injured rod to pieces, and repack it gloomily in its bag of green felt. When he looked up again, all petty annoyances faded out of his mind, for there ahead of him, behind the little patch of pines, lay the great cool, cobalt stretch of ocean, unfathomably deep, unutterably blue.

The young man felt a vague awe and exaltation tugging at his heart. But the only outward expression they gained was a throwing back of the head, and a deep indrawing of the breath, followed by the quite uninspired exclamation, "Holloa, there's the ocean!"

"Why shouldn't it be there?" inquired the practical Marsden. "You didn't think it had got up and moved inland after you left, did you?"

"Well, I didn't know," Flint answered carelessly. "I've seen it come in a good two hundred feet while I was here, and I couldn't tell how far it might have been carried, allowing for its swelling emotions over my departure. But I'm glad to see it at the old stand still; and there's the pond too, and the cross-roads and the [Pg 16] Nepaug Inn. I declare, Marsden, it is like its owner,—grows better looking as it gets old and gray."

Marsden's face assumed that grim New England smile which gives notice that a compliment has been received and its contents noted, but that the recipient does not commit himself to undue satisfaction therein.

"Yes," he responded, "the old inn weathers the

winters down here pretty middlin' well; but it's gettin' kind o' broken down, and its doors creak in a storm like bones that's got the rheumatiz. I wish I could afford to give it a coat o' paint."

"Ah!" said Flint, with a shrug, "I hope, for my part, you never can! I can see it now as it would be if you had your way—spick and span in odious, glaring freshness, insulting the gray old ocean. The only respectable buildings in America are those which the owner is too poor to improve."

Marsden turned sulky. He did not more than half understand Flint's remarks; but he had a dim impression that he was being lectured, and he did not enjoy it; few of us do.

Flint, however, was wholly unconscious of having given offence. It would have been difficult to make him understand what there was objectionable in his remark, and indeed the [Pg 17] offence lay more in the tone than in the words. Flint's sympathies were imperfect, and he had no gift for discerning the sensitiveness which lay outside his sphere of vision. To all that came within that rather limited range, he was kind and considerate; beyond, he saw nothing and therefore felt nothing.

Yet he himself was keenly sensitive, especially to anything approaching ridicule. He had not yet forgiven his parents, for instance, for naming him Jonathan Edwards. He was perpetually alive to the absurdity of the contrast.

"What if the great Jonathan *was* an ancestor! Why flaunt one's degeneracy in the face of the public?" As soon as he arrived at years of discretion, he had proceeded to drop the Jonathan from his name; but

it was continually cropping up in unexpected places to annoy him. The very trunk strapped onto the back of the carryall, that sole-leather trunk which had travelled with him ever since he started off as a freshman for the university, was marked, in odiously prominent letters, "Jonathan Edwards Flint."

It provoked him now as he reflected that that female Jehu must have seen it as she drove by. Perhaps that accounted for the suspicion of a smile on her face. He didn't care a fig what she thought, and he longed to tell her so.

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The most tedious road has an ending, and the Nepaug highway was no exception, except that instead of a dignified and impressive ending, it only narrowed to a grass-grown track, and finally pulled up in the backyard of the Nepaug Inn. The inn had stood in this same spot since the days of Washington, and there was a tradition that he had spent a night beneath its roof, though it puzzled even legend-mongers to invent an errand which could have taken him there, unless he was seized with a sudden desire for salt-water bathing, and even then it must have been of a peculiar kind, for the inn stood far back from the ocean, at the head of a salt-water pond, shadeless and low-banked, a mere inlet of the sea.

This pond, however, was the great attraction of Nepaug to Flint, for in one of its coves lay an ungainly boat of which he was the happy owner. She was a bargain, and, like most bargains, had proved a dear purchase. True, the hull had cost only five dollars and the sails ten; but she yawed so badly that a new rudder had become a necessity, and that article, being imported, cost almost more than hull

and sails together. When all was done, however, and a new coat of paint applied, Flint vowed she was worth any sixty-dollar boat on the pond. Once afloat in "The Aquidneck" (for so Flint had [Pg 19] christened her, finding her a veritable "isle of peace" to his tired nerves) he seemed to become a boy again. The Jonathan in him got the upper hand. All the super-subtleties of self-analysis which in other conditions paralyzed his will, and congealed his manner, gave place here to the genial glow of careless happiness.

It was his fate to be dominated alternately through life by the differing strains in his blood: one, flowing through the veins of the old Puritans, chilled by the creed of Calvin; the other, of a more expansive strain perpetually mocking the strenuousness of its companion mood. Flint's friends were wont to say, "Flint will do something some day." His enemies, or rather his indifferents, scoffingly asked, "What *has* Flint ever done anyway?" Flint himself would have answered, "Nothing, my friends, less than nothing; but more than you, because he is aware that he has done nothing."

The morning after Flint's arrival at Nepaug broke clear and cloudless, yet he was in no haste to be up and actively enjoying it. Instead, he lay a-bed, taking an indolent satisfaction in the thought that no bustling duty beckoned him, and amusing himself by a leisurely survey of the various corners of his bed-room.

It was scarcely eight feet in height, and the heavy, whitewashed beams made it look still [Pg 20] lower. In the narrow space between the ceiling and wainscot, the wall was covered with an old-fashioned

paper, florid of design, and musty of odor. On the mantel-shelf stood two brass candle-sticks with snuffer and extinguisher. As Flint stared idly at them, wondering what varied scenes their candles had shone upon, his eyes were drawn above them to a picture which, once having seen, he wondered that he could ever have overlooked so long. It was a portrait of great beauty. He propped himself on his elbows to study it more closely.

"It looks like a Copley," he said to himself, "or perhaps a Gilbert Stuart. How the devil could such a picture get here, and how could I have failed to see it last year? I must have it—of course I must! It is absurd that it should be wasted here! I wonder if Marsden knows anything of its value?"

Here Flint fell back upon his pillow and found, to his disgust, that his metaphysical conscience was already at work on the problem of the equity of a bargain in which the seller is ignorant of facts known to the buyer, and whether the buyer is in honor bound not to take advantage of his professional training.

The picture which had given rise to this long and complicated train of thought was the portrait of a young woman in Quaker dress, her [Pg 21] hair rolled back above a low and subtle brow, her lace kerchief demurely folded over a white neck. Her head was bent a little to one side, and rested upon her hand. At her breast sparkled a ruby,—a spot of rich, luminous flame.

"That is odd," thought Flint. "I fancied Quakers never wore jewels—conscientiously opposed to them, and all that sort of thing. Perhaps this damsel was a renegade from the faith, or perhaps this was some heirloom,—a protest against the colorless limitations

of the creed. Queer thing the human soul. Can't be formulated, not even to ourselves. Sometimes I've seen people show more of their real selves to utter strangers at odd moments than their nearest and dearest get at in a life-time."

This disjointed philosophy beguiled so much time, that Flint was late to breakfast. His fellow-boarders, a pedler and a fisherman, had gone about their business, and he sat down alone at the oilcloth-covered table, and twirled the pewter caster while he waited for his egg to be boiled. It was one of his beliefs that a merciful Heaven had granted eggs and oranges to earth for the benefit of fastidious travellers who could wreak their appetites in comparative security, especially if they did their own cracking and peeling. At length the breakfast [Pg 22] appeared, and with it the innkeeper, who sat down opposite Flint.

He had many weighty questions to put.

Should oakum or putty be used in the seams of "The Aquidneck"?

Should he pack the dinner-basket with beef or ham sandwiches?

Would Flint take lines for fishing, or a net for crabbing?

When all these were settled, Flint's thoughts drifted back to the portrait in the bed-room overhead. He began his questioning somewhat warily. "I suppose you've lived in this house for some time?"

"Wall, ever since I wuz born."

"And your father before you?"

"Yes, and my gran'father before him, and hisn fust."

"Ah, I see—an old homestead; and that portrait in my room is the wife of 'hisn'?"

"Not exactly—we never had no womenfolks in our family ez looked like that—stronger built is ourn, with more backbone, and none of that lackadaisical look raound the eyes."

"Pre-cisely," answered Flint. "And how does it happen that this lackadaisical-eyed portrait has hung so long without getting packed off to the garret?"

"Wall, you see," began Marsden, slowly and [Pg 23] with evident relish, "thet's quite a story about thet theer."

"Yes?" said Flint, with a rising inflection which invited further confidence.

"Yes, indeed," answered Marsden, expanding still further and stroking his chin-whisker as he proceeded. "You see 't wuz this way—Captain Wagstaff—he wuz the portrait's uncle—wall, he wuz in command of a fleet that lay in the harbor up yonder, in the Revolutionary War. When he wuz ashore, he spent most of his time to this haouse; and when his sister down to Philadelphy died, leavin' this daughter and no one to take care on her, he brought her on here to live with him. He'd been brought up a Quaker,—'Friend,' he called it,—though he did fight for his country, and right enough, sez I. Wall, this girl,—Ruth, her name wuz,—she came here and stopped awhile; and then there wuz a fight off the shore between the Captain's ship and a British cruiser. The cruiser wuz run down and sunk; but one of the officers they picked up waounded and brought

ashore, to this house, and Miss Ruth she set to work takin' care on him.

"Wall, what with cossettin' of him, and all sorts of philanderin', she got kinder soft on him, and one day, fust any one knowed, she'd jest run off with him."

"And what did the Captain say to that?" [Pg 24] asked Flint, more interested than he was wont to be in Marsden's narratives.

"The Captain? Oh, they say he took on about it like thunder, and swore he'd never forgive her. But Ruth, she sent him her marriage lines, and wrote him what a good husband she'd got; and after the war wuz over, she kep' a-beggin' the Captain to come over and live with them. He wouldn't go; and I don't know ez I blame him any. Europe is so fur off, and such a wicked place—seems onsafer ez you get old. New England's the best place in the world to die in, and so he thought.

"Howsumever, she kep' a-sendin' him money and things; and one day ther came this here box—I've often heard my gran'mother tell how she looked on when 't wuz opened, and this picter turned out. Gran'ma wuz only a little thing, and she didn't know what to make of it all; for the Cap'n, he cried like a baby when he seen it. He had it taken up right away to his room (thet's whar you're a-sleepin') and hung over the mantel jest whar he could see it from his bed. Thar it stayed ez long ez he stayed on airth, and when he lay a-dyin',—He died, you know, in that very bed you're a-sleepin' in—only o' course the mattress is new—the old one wuz a feather-bed. My gran'mother wuz with him at the end, and she said he stretched out his arms to the pictur, [Pg 25] same ez ef 't ed been his niece herself; and he sort o' cried

out, 'God bless you, Ruth! I wish I'd 'a' understood you better!' Wuzn't that a queer thing for him to say when he wuz a-dyin'?"

"Poor Ruth!" murmured Flint, with that placid, mild melancholy born of a sad story heard under comfortable circumstances. His fancy travelled back to the damsel in her Quaker dress, and he fell to wondering if the garb had been donned, with innocent hypocrisy, to please her old uncle, or if she always wore it in her faraway new home.

When he had got so far in his musings, his host recalled him to the present by continuing, "I dunno ez we've a very good claim to the pictur; but there ain't no heirs turned up, so ez the Cap'n wuz a little behind in his board bills, we sort o' kep' it."

Flint sat drumming with his fingers on the table, while his host still maundered on after the fashion of old age, which has so few topics that it cannot drop them with the light touch-and-go of youth.

Flint had already firmly determined that he would be the possessor of that portrait; but he was too shrewd to make any further advances now.

Instead, he turned again to the subject of "The Aquidneck," and, rising, made his way to the porch, where he almost walked over a speckled [Pg 26] hen so nearly a match for the floor that his near-sighted eyes failed to perceive her, paying as little heed to her clucking and fluttering as he bestowed upon the smiles of a girl who stood in the doorway and moved, with conspicuous civility as he passed. He stalked around to the corner of the porch where stood his long boots, for which he exchanged his low ties of russet leather, and, picking up fishing-tackle

and crabbing nets, started off at a brisk pace for the shore of the pond, leaving Marsden to follow with the pail of dinner.

When all these were stowed away in the locker of "The Aquidneck," together with a straw-covered flask and a volume of Omar Khayyam, Flint bade a cheerful good-bye to Marsden, who stood rolling up his shirt-sleeves, and giving copious advice. The amateur skipper cast off from the little dock, lowered the centreboard, and stretched himself lazily in the stern, with one hand on the tiller. Peace was in his heart, and a pipe in his mouth—what could man ask more of the gods?

The white sails of "The Aquidneck" fluttered in the light breeze as if tremulous with the ecstasy of motion. The sea, beyond the low grass-covered sand-bar which enclosed the pond, lay bright and smooth to southward, its surface dotted with craft of various sizes. Here skimmed [Pg 27] a white-winged schooner; there panted and puffed a tug absurdly inadequate to its tow of low-lying coal-barges. Far on the horizon, a swelling island raised its bulk, purple as Capri, against the golden haze.

Flint might have been a better sailor had he not been so good a swimmer; but, having no fear of the consequences of a sudden bath, he took all risks, sailed into the very apple of the eye of the wind, and habitually fastened his sheet,—a practice strongly reprehended by old Marsden.

"There's a new boat on the pond," said Flint to himself, as a cat-rigged craft, white-hulled with a band of olive, shot out from behind a point of rock. "Her lines are rather good. A good sailor aboard too, I should say, for she runs free and yet steady. I'd like

to try a race with the chap some day; maybe it would be hardly fair if he's a new comer, for I know the pond like—Damn it! what's that?"

That was a sunken rock which Flint, in his self-satisfied musings, had failed to keep a lookout for. It had struck "The Aquidneck" full (or *vice versa*, which amounts to the same thing); and here was a pretty pickle. Navigation is like flirtation: all goes smoothly till the shock comes, and then everything capsizes, with no chance for explanation.

"The Aquidneck" began to fill, and then to [Pg 28] sink so rapidly that Flint, not caring to risk entanglement in the sheets, thought it prudent to jump overboard, and struck out lustily for the shore. Fortunately for Flint, the shore was near and the water shallow. Unfortunately, the shore was at the end further from the inn, his clothes were soaking, and his tobacco and whiskey flask in the locker, already under water in the midst of mud and eel-grass.

Determined to make the best of a bad situation, Flint swam ashore, calmly disposed his coat and knickerbockers over the bayberry bushes, and seated himself, in his dripping under-garments, to dry in the sun to consider his next move.

"Certainly things couldn't be much nastier," he grumbled. "Yes, they could too," he added, as he heard a female voice calling from beyond the screen of bayberry bushes.

"Boat ahoy! What's the matter?"

Flint's first impulse was to hide; but fearing the voice and its owner might come ashore to investigate the extent of the calamity, he hastily donned his outer

clothing and emerged, like a dripping seal, from his retreat. "All right!" he called out.

"All wrong! I should say," the voice replied; and in an instant he knew it for the voice which had called to him from the sulky on the previous afternoon.

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"That girl is a hoodoo!" he muttered.

"Can I do anything for you?" inquired the voice, with that super-solemnity which results from the effort to conceal amusement,—a solemnity doubly insulting to its object, implying at once his absurdity and his vanity.

"Thank you!" answered Flint, stiffly; "if you will be kind enough to send some one over to give me a lift, I will be greatly obliged."

"Why not get in with us? Luff her in, Jim!" With this the girl and her companion, a boy of twelve years old, bare of leg and freckled of face, brought the boat around, and Flint climbed aboard with rather a bad grace.

To tell the truth, he was in a fit of the sulks. I admit that the sulks are not heroic; but Homer permitted them to Achilles, and why should I conceal the fact, unpleasing though it be, about my lesser hero.

Doubtless his ancestor, Jonathan Edwards, would have felt a like discomposure, had his pulpit given way under him in the presence of his congregation; and even that other fiery orator, Patrick The Great, might have lost his balance had his new peach-colored coat split up the back, when he was hurling death and destruction upon tyrants and pleading for

liberty or death. To be ridiculous with equanimity is the crowning achievement of philosophy.

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The boy addressed as "Jim" stared at Flint with open-mouthed enjoyment.

"You didn't fetch where you meant to, did you?"

"Hush, Jim!"

"Why, Fred, what am I saying wrong now? You're always hushing me up. I didn't mean to guy him, but he did look so jolly glum."

Seeing that intervention was vain in this quarter, his sister essayed a change of topic, and, womanlike, rushed on to the one she had most steadfastly promised herself to avoid.

"Were you fishing when the accident happened?" She stopped and colored nervously.

"No," observed Flint, dryly. (His remarks were the only dry things about him.) "My fishing-rod happened to be broken. It is of no consequence however," he hastened to add, seeing her blush deepen painfully. "The fish about here are not gamey enough to make fishing an exciting sport. Do you find it so?"

"I never fish."

"Ah, I am surprised."

"I hate to see the poor things suffer—"

"You are too tender-hearted?"

"Say rather too weak-nerved—I should not care if

every fish in the sea died a violent death after prolonged suffering, provided I was not obliged to watch the process."

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Flint smiled.

"But don't you know these cold-blooded creatures can't be made to suffer? I dare say the keenest enjoyment a fish ever feels is when his nervous system is gently stimulated by a hook in his mouth."

"Perhaps—I don't know—I tell you it is no question of sympathy. It is simply physical repulsion; and then I loathe the soft slipperiness of the bait."

"That's so," put in the boy at the tiller. "Fred groans every time I put a worm on the hook, and squeals when the fish flop round in the bottom of the boat, especially if they come anywhere near her skirts."

"Fred," repeated Flint to himself, "I might have known she would have a boy's name—" Aloud, he said: "I suppose, Master Jim, you have found all the best fishing-grounds in the pond."

Jim softened visibly at this tribute to his skill.

"Well, I know one good one over at Brightman's, and I'll show it to you to-morrow, if you like."

His sister shot a warning glance from under her level eyebrows.

"Don't make plans too far ahead, Jim. Sufficient unto the day, you remember—and unless this gentleman gets dry and warm soon, I am [Pg 32] afraid he will spend some days to come under the doctor's care. Haven't you some brandy or whiskey?" she asked,

turning more fully toward Flint, and noticing for the first time that his lips were blue and his teeth chattering in spite of his efforts at unconcerned conversation.

"Yes," he answered; "a flask full of excellent old whiskey—over there," and he pointed disconsolately to the line of green water where the tell-tale fluttered above the wrecks of "The Aquidneck."

The young lady knit her brows in puzzled thought, "What is in our locker, Jim?"

"Bread and butter, cocoanut balls and ginger-ale."

"Get out the ginger-ale."

"But it is your luncheon," deprecated Flint.

"No, it isn't—it is your medicine. Try it."

Flint pressed the iron spring, and poured down the spluttering liquid, striving to conceal his wry face.

"Bully, ain't it?" exclaimed Jim, not without a tinge of regret for lost joys in his tone.

"Excellent!" returned Flint, perjuring himself like a gentleman.

"It is better than nothing," Miss Fred answered judicially. "I will send Jim up to the inn with some brandy; Marsden's stuff is rank poison. I had some once this summer when [Pg 33] I was ill, and straightway sent off to town for a private supply. If you feel able to exercise, I should advise you to let us put you off at this point, and make a run across country to Marsden's."

"I don't know how to thank you," Flint murmured as

Jimmy pulled the row-boat up, and the young man prepared to climb in after him.

"There is no occasion for thanks. But if you insist on a debit and credit account, please charge it off against the ruin of your fishing-rod."

"I am humiliated."

"You?"

"Yes; I must have been a model of incivility."

"No; it was I who was in fault, rushing about the country like a jockey riding down everything in sight."

"Who except a fool would have had a fishing-rod trailing half-way across the road?"

"Look here," grumbled Jim, "I can't hold this dory bumping against the side of the boat forever—"

"Don't be impertinent, Jim. Besides apologies never last long. It is only explanations which take time—"

Flint jumped from the gunwale of the sail-boat into the dory, and took the oars. As he headed for shore, he turned his eyes once more to the sail-boat, and the glimpse that he had of [Pg 34] its skipper he carried for long after—the vision of her standing there in the stern, against the stretch of blue water, her soft handkerchief of some red stuff knotted about her throat above the gray jacket, her felt hat thrust up in front above the waves of her hair, and her eyes smiling with frank mirthfulness.

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CHAPTER III

OLD FRIENDS

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"It's an ower-come sooth
For age and youth,
And it brooks wi' nae denial,
That the oldest friends
Are the dearest friends,
And the new are just on trial."

Flint was glad enough on reaching the inn to creep into bed. In spite of his cross-country run he was chilled through. Little shivers ran down his back, and his hands and feet seemed separated by spaces of numbness from the warmth of his body. The brandy arrived, and he swallowed some eagerly; but it had little effect on his chilly apathy. The dinner-bell clanged below. Flint heard it, but he paid no heed to the summons. He had forgotten what it was to desire food. A blur before his eyes, and an iron band about his head, occupied his attention to the exclusion of the outside world.

By three o'clock the headache-fiend had entered into full possession, had perched itself in the centre of consciousness, and seemed to [Pg 36] Flint's excited nerves to be working its octopus claws in and out among the folds of his brain.

Waves of pain vibrated outward to his ears and eyes. He watched the shade against the blindless window

flap to and fro. Each streak of light admitted, struck the sufferer like a blow. He got up, went to the washbasin and sopped a towel, which he bound about his head and lay down again—no relief. He could endure it no longer. He dropped his boots one after the other on the floor, till at length Marsden heard the signal of distress, came lumbering up the stairs, and thumped upon his door.

Flint bade him come in and state in the fewest possible words whether there was any doctor within reach.

"There was."

"How long would it take to fetch him?"

"About half an hour."

"Let it be done."

Again Flint sank into a sort of stupor, from which he was awakened by a knock, and the entrance of a nervous, little wiry gentleman whose clothes of rusty black had the effect of having been purchased in a fit of absence of mind.

The sufferer roused himself as the physician came in.

"The doctor?"

[Pg 37]

"Yes."

"My name is Flint, and I sent for you to give me a dose of morphine."

"My name, sir, is Cricket, and I'm damned if I do any such thing."

"Why did they send for you then?"

"They sent for me to see what I thought you needed —not to take your orders for a drug. I am not an apothecary."

"More's the pity!" returned Flint, flouncing across to the inner side of the bed, and turning his back unceremoniously upon his visitor.

Dr. Cricket received this demonstration with unconcern. He took out his thermometer and shook it against his wrist. Then resting one knee on the bed he thrust the thermometer into his recalcitrant patient's mouth, saying: "Don't crunch on it, unless you want your mouth full of glass, and your belly full of mercury. Now for the pulse. Ah! too fast—I expected as much."

He took out the thermometer and held it to the light. "Over one hundred—see here, young man, it's well you sent for me when you did."

"I wish I hadn't."

"So do I, from a professional point of view. Nothing so good for doctors' business as delay in sending for us. As it is, I fear I can't conscientiously [Pg 38] make more than two calls, or keep you in bed after to-morrow."

"But what are you going to do for this accursed pain in the head?"

"Oh, that's of no consequence—only a symptom. It's the fever that worries me."

"Oh, it is—is it? Well, it is the pain that worries me, and if you don't do something about it, I'll fire your old bottles out of the window."

"Very good. Then I will send back to Mrs. White's for more bottles and a straight-jacket to boot—"

"So you live at Mrs. White's, do you?"

"No, sir, I do not *live* anywhere in summer—I board."

The doctor chuckled over his little joke as genially as if it had never seen the light before; but humor does not appeal to a man with a headache, and antique humor least of all.

"That's where Miss Fred and that freckled-faced brother of hers stay—isn't it?" Flint continued.

"Ah, do you know the Anstices?"

"Not I—that is, I never saw the young woman till yesterday; but to the best of my belief she is not human at all, only an evil genius of the region who goes about with incantations which cause fishing-rods to break at the end, and boats to run onto rocks."

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"So—ho! You were the skipper of 'The Aquidneck,' were you? Well, well! no wonder you're laid up with a chill. We nearly burst our blood-vessels, laughing over Miss Fred's account of you, rising up like a ghost out of the eel-grass, and the topmast of your boat sticking up out of the water like a dead man's finger."

Dr. Cricket's little black eyes twinkled with enjoyment as he recalled the scene. The misguided man fancied he was helping to take his patient's thoughts off himself, and, having measured out his powders and potions, he took his departure, leaving Flint inwardly raging.

To be made the butt of a boarding-house table! Really it was too much; and this girl, of whom he had begun to think rather well—this girl doubtless mimicked his disconsolate tones and his chattering teeth, and made all manner of fun of his sorry plight.

Folk with a headache see life quite out of focus; and at the moment it really would have been a comfort to Flint to know that this mocking maid had been drowned, or struck by lightning, or in any fashion disabled from repeating the story of his discomfiture. He writhed and twisted, and at last fell asleep, still alternately vowing never to forgive, and never to give her another thought.

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In the morning when he woke, free from pain and, except for a certain languor, quite himself again, he wondered at his childishness of the night before, though in spite of reason a certain sub-conscious resentment lingered still.

At seven o'clock Matilda Marsden knocked at his door and gave warning that the breakfast-hour drew near.

"I say," he called in response, "will you please send some one with a pitcher of hot water? I'll have my breakfast in bed."

Flint knew perfectly well that she would bring the water herself; but it was necessary to keep up the fiction of intermediate agency in deference to her position.

From October until June she was "Miss Marsden," in a shop of a small New England town; and when from June to October she condescended to become plain

"Tilly," and to lend her assistance to her parents at the Nepaug Inn, she made it distinctly understood that she did so without prejudice to her social claims.

She waited at the table to be sure; but she shaded her manner with nice precision to meet the condition of the guest she served. To the timid pedler, she was encouraging; to the encroaching commercial traveller, she was haughty, and to Flint gently and insinuatingly sympathetic.

Flint, on his part, treated her with the deference [Pg 41] which he accorded to all women; but it never occurred to him to consider her as an individual at all. To him she was simply an agency for procuring food and towels; and when she lingered on the stairs, or at the doorway, making little efforts at conversation, he cut her ruthlessly short.

The result of this mingling of courtesy and neglect was of course that the girl fell promptly and deeply in love with the young man, cut out from the current magazines every picture which bore the slightest resemblance to his features, and went about sighing sighs and dreaming dreams, in a fashion at once pathetic and ridiculous. Flint, meanwhile, always obtuse on the side of sympathy, went his way wholly oblivious of her state of mind. How should he know that his rolls were hotter and his coffee stronger than those of his fellow-boarders, or that to him alone was accorded the friendly advice as to the comparative merits of "Injun pudd'n" and huckleberry pie, which constituted the staple of desserts at the inn?

This morning, as usual, he was wholly unconscious of the effort to beautify the tray set down outside his door. It meant nothing to him, that the pitcher holding the hot water was of red and yellow

majolica, that the coarse napkin was embroidered with a wreath of impossible [Pg 42] roses, and the coffee-cup bore the legend "Think of me" in gilt lettering. In fact the only thing which attracted his attention at all was a pile of letters on the tray. He glanced hastily over the envelopes, swallowed his breakfast, and returned to closer inspection of the correspondence. The first letter which he opened was written by the editor of an English "Quarterly," informing him that his recent critique on Balzac had found favor in high places, and that the "Quarterly" would like to engage a series.

Flint tried not to seem, even to himself, as pleased as he felt.

The next note was of a different tone, a grieved rejoinder from a young author whose book had been reviewed by Flint with more light than sweetness. Less stoical to reproaches than to compliment, Flint kicked vigorously at the bedclothes, as though they had been the offending note-writer.

"Great Heavens!" he growled. "Does the man think his budding genius must be fed on sugar-plums? What I said about him and his book was either true or false; and here he spends his whole sheet prating about 'sensitive feelings,' as if they had anything to do with the matter."

Oh, imperfect sympathies! How large a part you play in the unhappiness of the world!

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The third envelope on the tray was yellow, and contained a large, careless scrawl on a half-sheet of business paper; but it seemed to afford Flint unalloyed delight.

"Brady coming to-day!" he almost shouted aloud. "That is what I call jolly. I would like to see forty Dr. Crickets keep me in bed."

Brady and Flint had been college friends in the old days, at Harvard, and after that for years had drifted apart. Flint betaking himself to a German university, and Brady to a business career in Bison, a flourishing town of the great Northwest, wherein he too had flourished mightily, and whence he sent imploring messages to Flint, begging him not to waste his life in the effete civilization of New York, but to come out and get a view of real folks in the fresh new world of the West.

To these messages Flint had replied with more candor than courtesy, that the only fault he had to find with New York was its lack of civilization, that he was saving every nickel in hopes of getting away from it to eastward, and that if he were condemned to spend his life in Bison, or any other prairie town, he would make short work of matters with a derringer.

This slight difference of opinion had not at all interfered with the attachment of the two; and few things would have roused Flint to such enthusiasm [Pg 44] as this expectation of a fortnight—a leisurely, gossiping, garrulous, quarrelsome fortnight—with his old friend. The prospect of the visit was a better tonic than any contained in the little doctor's black-box. Indeed it drove all thoughts of doctors and their medicines so completely out of his head that he was quite surprised when, having dressed and descended to the ground-floor, he saw Dr. Cricket standing at the foot of the stairs, wiping the perspiration off his forehead with a large silk handkerchief.

The Doctor looked fiercely at him from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Is this Mr. Flint?" he asked, as if unable to believe the testimony of his eyes.

"It is," Flint answered with unconcern.

"Why did you get up?"

"Because I formed the habit in my youth."

"Didn't I tell you to lie in bed till I came?"

"I don't remember."

The Doctor quivered with rage.

"I am an old man, sir," he said, "and I've walked a mile in the heat of this devilish sun, and all for a patient who is determined to kill himself, and such a fool that it doesn't matter much whether he does or not."

Flint smiled.

"Every man, you know, must be either a fool or a physician when he reaches maturity. Some [Pg 45] may be both. However, since you were kind enough to come to my assistance last night, I cannot be induced to quarrel with you this morning, and you ought to be the last man to find fault with me for feeling the benefit of your medicine sooner than you expected."

Dr. Cricket was as easy to be placated as to be stirred to anger; and when Flint urged him to come into the stuffy little office and partake of a lemonade with the addition of a stronger fluid from a bottle in Flint's room, he forgot his wrath or drowned it in the

cooling drink, and at length parted in kindliness, only bidding his patient wear cabbage-leaves in his hat, and be sure to take wraps in case of a change in the weather, not forgetting to put on his "gums" if he walked on the wet beach.

When he had gone, Flint found the Doctor's gold-bowed spectacles in a chair. "Brady and I will walk up with them this evening," he said to himself. "Perhaps I was not as civil to the old gentleman as I might have been."

When Marsden learned that Flint was planning an expedition to South East, he suggested that he would "take it kindly" if Flint could make it convenient to bring down a few packages of groceries, as some of the store supplies had run out, and the relays were not expected until the next day.

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Flint reproached himself for weakness in complying, and growled still further when he saw the length of the list which Marsden handed to him as he took his seat in the carryall.

"What a cursed fool I am," he muttered as he drove off, "to hire this man's beast for the privilege of doing his errands!"

The three-o'clock train puffed into the station at South East nearly an hour behind time. The period of waiting in the intense mid-day heat had not improved Flint's temper. For all his hearty greeting to Brady, he could not shake off a sense of irritation, intensified by the fact that he had no one on whom to wreak it.

Brady's trunk was strapped onto the carryall, the

various bottles, jugs, and packages which Flint, with such unusual urbanity, had consented to bring down to the Beach for Marsden, were stowed away under the seat, and nothing remained but the mail. To get this Flint drew up at the post-office. The postmaster was a grouty old store-keeper who, through political influence, retained his position in spite of the efforts of the town's-folk to oust him. This afternoon a line of wagons stood at the door, and a line of men stood at the little window within. Seeing his own name in the list of those for whom there were letters, Flint waited for the window to open, and took his place in the line. [Pg 47] When he reached the window, he asked for his letter.

"No letter for you," growled the postmaster.

Flint stepped out of line and consulted the list. There was no mistake. Again he presented himself before the window.

"What cher want?"

"My letter."

"Ain't no letter, I told cher."

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to look at the list."

The postman, in the worst of humors, went to a drawer of his desk, and, after much hunting about and turning over of parcels, he found a letter which he threw out at Flint without a remark. Flint took it also in silence, turned away and resumed his place at the end of the line. Again he returned to his old post before the little window. This time the postman grew purple with rage.

"Get out o' this you! What cher want now?"

"I simply wish," answered Flint, in his low, clear, gentlemanly voice, "to tell you that you have behaved like an insolent blackguard, and deserve to be removed from office."

Flint's words were the signal for a storm of applause from the loiterers, and he walked out a hero. He was in a more amiable frame of mind [Pg 48] when he climbed into the carryall. The old horse, feeling his head turned homeward, needed less urging than usual, and the young men lolled back, talking busily of old times and new.

Brady was a typical business-man of the West,—cheerful, practical, a bit boastful, square-shouldered, clear-eyed and ruddy-faced, confident of himself, proud of his surroundings, sure that there were no problems of earth or Heaven with which America in general, and Philip Brady in particular, were not fitted to cope.

Before he had uttered a dozen sentences, Flint began to realize how far apart they had drifted in the ten years since they had met. He experienced a vaguely hopeless sense of complexity in the presence of his friend's bustling frankness. He felt almost a hypocrite, and yet it seemed to him that any attempt at self-revelation would be useless, because the relative value, the *chiaro-oscuro* of life, was so different to each. He took refuge, as we all do under such circumstances, in objectivity—asked heartily for the health of each member of Brady's family, listened with polite interest to the statistics of the growth of Bison, and then began to wonder what he should talk about next. As he cast his eye downward, a very practical subject suggested itself, for he saw with dismay that the cork was [Pg 49] out of the molasses

jug, from which the sticky fluid had already oozed forth, and was rapidly spreading itself over the floor of the carryall.

"This is what comes of being obliging. Just look at this mess! What in time are we going to do about it, Brady?"

Brady, being a man of action, wasted no energy in discussion. He jumped to the ground, pulled out first his overcoat and gripsack, fortunately unharmed, then the paper parcels of oatmeal and hominy, sticky and dripping. Swiftly corking the jug, he lifted it out of the carryall, together with the oilcloth strip, and deftly stood both against a fence by the roadside. Flint watched him with admiration. He felt himself supremely helpless in the presence of the direful calamity. How was he ever to get these bundles into condition to be put back into the wagon? How cleanse the oilcloth and the fatal jug?

No house was in sight.

Flint stood gloomily gazing down at his boots covered with the oozy brown fluid. "Jupiter aid us!" he exclaimed; and as if in answer to his call, "a daughter of the gods, divinely tall," rose on their sight, coming towards them from over the ridge of the hill. She came on swiftly, yet without hurry. She walked (a process little understood by the feminine half of the world, hampered as they are by their stays and ten [Pg 50] penny heels). This woman neither hobbled, nor waddled, nor tripped. With the leg swinging out from the hip (no awkward knee-movement, yet no stride), she swept down the hill as serenely as though she were indeed a messenger sent by Jupiter to their assistance. Beside her trotted a large dog who now and again excursionized in

search of tempting adventure, but as constantly returned to rub his head lovingly against his mistress's skirt, and lick her hand, as if to assure her that, in spite of his wandering propensities, his heart remained faithful.

"The hoodoo!" muttered Flint.

"What a pretty girl!" exclaimed Brady.

The object of these widely differing criticisms moved steadily nearer. She wore a white gown. A basket was on her arm, and her wide-brimmed straw hat was pulled low over her eyes to shield them from the sun. She was close upon the scene of accident before she discerned it. Catching at the same moment a look of annoyance on Flint's face, she swerved a little, as if with intent to pass by, like the priest and the Levite, on the other side; then, reassured by Brady's look of half-comic despair, she set down her basket and paused.

"You have met with an accident, I see," she observed, as casually as though she had never before heard of any catastrophe in connection [Pg 51] with Flint. "The molasses worked, I suppose. It will, sometimes, if it is not tightly corked. It was stupid in the grocer not to warn you."

"It is kind of you," said Brady, "to lay the accusation of stupidity so far off; but, wherever it lies, the results are the same, and we are in a bad way."

"What can we find to wipe these things off with?" the good Samaritan asked, making common cause in the misfortune.

"Nothing," answered Flint, with extravagant gloom, striving as he spoke to cleanse his shoes by rubbing

them against the grass-grown bank.

The girl put her finger to her lips,—a characteristic gesture when she was puzzled. Then, unfastening her basket with sudden energy, she exclaimed: "Why won't this do? Here is some sea-moss which I was taking to an old woman who lives a little further down the road. She makes some stuff which she calls farina out of it, and grieves bitterly that she is no longer young and spry enough to gather it for herself along the shore. My basket is full of this moss, and if we could wet it in the brook down yonder, we might sponge off the things with it, and then dry them with big leaves, backed up by those newspapers which I see you have in your parcel of mail."

"What a clever notion!" Brady said, as he [Pg 52] plunged down to the brook, and came up again with the dripping moss. He and the Samaritan scrubbed merrily away, while Flint stood by with an uncomfortable sense that he was out of it all, and that no one but himself knew or cared.

When comparative cleanliness was restored, and the bundles returned to the bottom of the wagon, the girl scrambled down to the brook, and, pushing back her wide cuffs, knelt by the water, where she washed the traces of sticky substance from her long slender fingers.

"You have relieved us from a very awkward situation," said Flint, as she rose; "but your basket of moss is spoiled and your long walk rendered futile. Surely you will permit us at least to drive you home."

"Thank you, no. Mrs. Davitt will like to talk a while, and to know that I have not forgotten her and her farina. So I will bid you 'good afternoon.'"

"That is the most charming girl I ever met," observed Brady, as he stood watching her disappear around the turn of the road.

"Did you ever meet one who was not?" asked Flint.

"The way she took hold was magnificent," continued Brady, unmoved by his companion's raillery. "And then when it was all over she was so unself-conscious; and the best of all was [Pg 53] her politeness in never laughing at us, for really, you know, we must have looked rather ridiculous, standing gawking there like two escaped imbeciles."

This allusion irritated Flint, as he remembered the last two occasions, when she had borne herself less seriously. The recollection colored his first remark, after they had clambered into the carryall, and persuaded Dobbin to resume his leisurely trot.

"I am afraid myself, inconsistent as it seems, I should have liked her better if she had not taken hold in such a capable, mannish fashion. There is a certain appealing dependence which is rather becoming to a woman—to my thinking, that is—it is an old-fashioned notion, I admit."

"Well, I must say I don't think an attitude of appealing dependence would have been very serviceable to us to-day; and as an habitual state of mind, while it may be very attractive, it seems to imply having some one at hand to appealingly depend upon. Our sex must have reciprocal duties; but I don't notice that you have offered yourself as a support for any of these clinging natures."

"Nevertheless," answered Flint, "if I ever did fall in love, it would be with a woman of the clinging kind.

But don't let us get to talking [Pg 54] like a couple of sentimental schoolgirls! Here we are, anyway, at the last turn of the road, and there is Nepaug Beach. How does it strike you?"

"It reminds me," said Brady, smiling, "of the Walrus and the Carpenter:—

"'They wept like anything to see
Such quantities of sand.
If this were only cleared away
They said it would be grand.'"

"Brady, you are a sentimentalist! You sigh for brooks and willows and, for all I know, *people*."

"Flint, you are a misanthrope! You have searched out this God-forsaken stretch of sand just for the purpose of getting away from your kind. Now I have hunted you to your lair, and I propose to stay with you for a fortnight; but I am not to be dragooned into saying that I think your resort is a scene of beauty, for I don't; but that is a jolly, old, gray, tumbled-down building over there—a barn, I suppose."

"No, sir; that is the Nepaug Inn. As it has neither porters, waiters, nor electric bells, you are expected to shoulder your own luggage and march upstairs—second room to the right. Whoa, there!" he called out to the old horse a full minute after the animal had come to a dead halt in front of the inn door. The noise, how [Pg 55] ever, served its purpose in bringing Marsden to the door, and loading the old inn-keeper with imprecations for their unlucky experience with the molasses, Flint left him to struggle with the contents of the wagon, while he himself escorted Brady up the narrow, sagging stairs, and ensconced him in a room next his own,—a room whose

windows looked out like his over the purple stretch of ocean, now opalescent with reflection of the clouds.

"Where do you take your bath?" Brady asked, looking round somewhat helplessly.

"In there, you land-lubber!" answered Flint, pointing out to sea; "isn't the tub big enough?"

Brady laughed, a hearty, boyish, infectious laugh. "All right," he said, "only it seems rather odd to come East for pioneering. Did you know, by the way, that I am to be in New York this winter?"

"No!"

"Yes. Our house is just establishing a branch office there, and I am to be at the head of it."

Flint chuckled.

"Bison establishing a branch office in New York! The humor of the thing delights me."

"I don't see anything so very funny about it," answered Brady, rather testily; "but I have no stomach for a quarrel till I have had some [Pg 56] supper—unless you sup *out there*," he added with a lordly wave of his hand towards the ocean in imitation of Flint's gesture. "I hope, at any rate, our evening meal is not to be of farina. The associations might be a little too strong even for my appetite."

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CHAPTER IV

THE DAVITTS

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"The short and simple annals of the poor."

After taking leave of Flint and his companion in misfortune, Winifred quickened her pace. The lengthening shadows warned her that if she intended to return to the White House before supper was over, she had no time to lose.

"Come, Paddy!" she said, laying her hand with a light, caressing gesture on the shaggy red-brown head of the Irish setter, which had kept closer guard than ever since the meeting with the strangers in the road,—"come, Paddy! we must make a sprint for it."

The dog, glad enough to be allowed the luxury of a gallop, set off pell-mell, and Winifred followed at a gait which soon brought her, flushed and out of breath, before the unpainted house where the Davitt family made their abode. It was not characterized by great order or tidiness. Clothes-lines, hung with underwear of various shapes and sizes, decorated the side-yard, and proclaimed Mrs. Davitt's calling. A whole section [Pg 58] of the front fence had taken itself off. The gate swung aimlessly on one rusty hinge, and a brood of chickens wandered at will over the unmown grass before the house: yet the place was not wholly unattractive, for it bore evidences of human love and happiness; and, after all, these are the objects for which the most orderly and elegant mansions exist, if indeed they are so fortunate as to attain them. These are the essence of a home.

An old dory filled with geranium and nasturtium

brightened the centre of the yard. Beneath the wide spreading maples, which lent their unbought adornment to the shabby old house, hung a child's swing, and near by stood a rickety express-cart, to which an unlucky goat was tethered by a multi-colored harness made of rope, tape, and bits of calico. The driver of this equipage, a tow-headed lad of some five years old, stood with his thumb in his mouth, gazing with open-eyed amazement at the young lady who thought it worth while to walk so fast.

"Good afternoon, John!" said Winifred, when she had regained her breath. "Is your mother at home?"

The practice of answering questions is an acquired habit, and comes only after long acquaintance with society. Children left in a state of nature rarely think it necessary or even safe [Pg 59] to commit themselves so far. John Davitt only pulled his thumb out of his mouth, poked his pink toes deeper into the grass, and gave a hitch at the single suspender supporting the ragged knickerbockers which formed two-thirds of his costume.

"Oh!" continued the visitor, not in the least disconcerted by the lack of response to her advances, "you don't want to leave your goat long enough to go and ask about your mother, do you? Well, I should not like to be asked to leave my colt if I were driving. People should do their own errands, I think, and not be bothering other folks with their business. You will not be afraid of my dog if I leave him here while I go into the house, will you?"

"Whath hith name?" asked John, discovering for the first time that he had a tongue and knew its use.

"Paddy," answered the visitor.

"I uthed to have a brother Paddy. He died."

"Then you must make friends with the dog for his sake. Would you like to see how my Paddy can chase a stone?" With this Winifred picked up a large pebble, and threw it far down the road. Paddy, with a bark of animated enjoyment, made after it, with wagging tail and ears laid back against his head. John laughed [Pg 60] loud, wrinkled up his little pug nose and showed his white teeth.

"Now when he brings it back, you throw it again, and I will go in and try to find your mother; I think I see her now," she added, as she turned the angle of the house and caught a glimpse of Mrs. Davitt, seated in the wooden rocking-chair beside the kitchen-table, paring potatoes.

To the casual glance she was only a homely old Irish woman who might have been the original of "The shape which shape had none." The only semblance of waist was the line drawn by her gingham apron-string. Her form bulged where it should have been straight, and was straight where it should have curved. Her face, however, had a gentle motherliness, and still bore traces of the comeliness which had marked it a quarter of a century earlier, when, as Bridget O'Hara, she had set sail from "the owld counthry" to try her fortune in the new.

After a few months' experience of city life over here, she had drifted to South East, where she found employment in a thread factory which stood on the bank of the tiniest stream that ever, outside of England, called itself a river. Its current ran swiftly, however; its mimic falls were forced into the service

of trade; and the wheels of the thread factory whirred busily, except when [Pg 61] bad times brought wheels and bobbins to a standstill.

For three years after her arrival in South East, Bridget O'Hara stood beside her wheel, and fed her bobbin faithfully. Her blue Irish eyes were bright in those days, and her cheeks red as the roses of County Meath, where the thatched homestead of the O'Haras lifted its humble head. More than one of the men working in the factory took notice of the blue eyes and the red cheeks, and would have been glad to secure their owner for a wife; but she was not for any of them. Before she had been in the village six months, she had given her faithful heart to Michael Davitt, the young New England fisherman whose boat lay below the bridge which she crossed every morning on her way to her work in the factory. Many a time on bright spring mornings she loitered on the bridge, leaning over its wooden railing to watch Michael as he washed out his boat, and made ready for the day's sail. Sometimes the talk grew so absorbing that the factory bell sounded out its last warning call before Bridget could tear herself away, and afterward, through the long day, shut up among the whirring wheels, in the dust and heat of the big dreary room, she kept the vision of the white flapping sail, and of Michael Davitt standing by the tiller of the boat under the bridge.

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At last the fisherman asked her to marry him, and she accepted him joyously, undismayed by the diminutive proportions of their united incomes.

"Sure, Mike dear," Bridget had declared cheerfully, "what's enough for wan will be enough for two, and

you'll never feel the bit I'll be afther atin'."

This specious theory of political economy has beguiled into matrimony many a young couple who fail to take account of the important difference that what is enough for two may not be enough for three, and still less for three times three. So it fell out with the Davitts. For the first year of their married life, Bridget went on working in the factory, and kept her tiny tenement tidy, and Michael mended nets on the doorstep, and sold fish in summer, and loafed in the winter in contented assurance that life would continue to treat him well. But the next year opened less prosperously. Bridget was compelled to give up her work in the factory, and when, in the middle of a particularly rigorous winter, a baby was born to the house of Davitt, the outlook would have appeared discouraging to any one less optimistic than Bridget. But she found much cause for satisfaction in the thought that the baby had come at this particular time, when Michael could be at home to help take [Pg 63] care of the house; and above all in the reflection that the baby was a boy, "who'd not be thrubblin' any wan long, for before we know it, Mike, me jewel, he'll be lookin' afther you and me."

Part of her self-congratulation had justified itself, for the baby Leonard had grown up into one of those helpful, "handy" lads who sometimes are sent to be the salvation of impecunious households. At an incredibly early age, he began to feel the responsibilities of the family on his manly little shoulders, and as the procession of small Davitts entered the world, he took each one under his protecting care. Dennis, Ellen, Maggie, Tommy, Katie, and John had found their way into the family circle, and no one hinted that there was not place

and porridge for the last as well as the first.

As the years went on, Michael Davitt lost whatever alertness of temperament he might once have possessed. New England seems to endow some of her children with such a surplus of energy, that she is compelled to subtract a corresponding amount from the share of others. Michael Davitt was one of the others. His experiences as a fisherman had persuaded him that it was useless to put forth effort, unless he had wind and tide in his favor. Consequently, his life was spent in waiting for encouragement from the forces of nature,—encouragement which [Pg 64] never came; so that at last he gave up the struggle, and sat by the chimney-corner all winter, as contentedly as he sat on the stern of his boat all summer, ready to move if circumstances favored, but serene under all conditions. His silence was as marked as his serenity. On occasions, he could be moved to smiles, but seldom to speech. He sat quiet and unmoved amid the family hubbub, his long limbs twisted together, his arms folded above his somewhat hollow chest, and his protruding tusks of teeth firmly fastened over his nether lip, as if constraining it to silence.

Tommy might lift off the cover of the beehive, and rush into the house shrieking with wrath and terror over the result; Maggie might upset the milk, and John drag the kitten about the room by its tail,—no matter! the father of the family continued to sit unmoved as Brahma. But when Leonard entered the door, some appearance of life began to show itself in Michael. He untwisted his legs, moved a little to make room on the settle, and even went so far as to make an entering wedge of conversation with a "Well, Leon!"

Leonard Davitt was a boy to warm any father's heart,—stout and strong, hearty and frank, cheerful as the day was long, with the smile and jest of his race ready for any chance [Pg 65] comer. This light-heartedness had made him a favorite not only in his own family, but among all the youth and maidens who dwelt in the outlying farmhouses around South East; but of late an unaccountable change had come over the lad. This merry, careless happiness had deserted him. He had taken to going about with hair unbrushed, and a "dejected 'havior of his visage."

The noisy mirth of his little brothers and sisters irritated him, and their noisier quarrels exasperated him. He kept away from them as much as he could, and when he was not off in his boat, he sat on the fence under the maples as taciturn as Michael himself. The children wondered at him, and gradually began to draw away at his approach, instead of rushing toward him as of old. Maggie, who was fifteen now, and worked in the factory, suspected the cause of his trouble, and once ventured to rally him on "the girl that was so cool she'd give a man the mitten in summer;" but her pleasantry was ill-received. Leonard scowled at her, and stalked away muttering to himself.

His mother saw him from her window, and she too knew what was the trouble with her boy; but she only dropped a few tears among the potato-parings, and resolved to make griddle-cakes for supper,—as though Leonard were still [Pg 66] a child whose heart could be cheered through his stomach. As Mrs. Davitt laid down her knife to wipe her eyes, she heard the barking of a dog, and then a rapid double knock on the half-open kitchen-door.

"Come in, Miss," she said, rising and wiping her hands on her gingham apron. "Come in and take the rocker. Don't be standin' when sittin' down is chape enough, even for the poor. It's yourself hezn't forgot me, nor me bit o' farina."

"No, indeed, Mrs. Davitt, I did not forget you: but you won't get your farina after all; for I met some poor men in distress, and I handed over all the sea-moss to them."

"Poor craytyurs! Wuz they that hungry they could ate it raw?"

"Hardly," answered Winifred, smiling at her remembrance of the peculiarly well-fed looking recipients of her bounty, "they were not hungry at all; but they had come to grief with a molasses jug. The carriage and everything in it was sticky, and I don't know what they would have done to get it clean without your moss; but you shall surely have some more to-morrow, and now tell me how you are feeling."

"Is it meself? Thank ye kindly, me dear. I'm jest accordin' to the common, save where I'm worse; me legs ache me nights, and I fale [Pg 67] the washin' in me back some days; but if me moind wuz right, it's little I'd moind the thrubble in me bones."

"Why, what is wrong, Mrs. Davitt?" Winifred asked with sympathy in her voice. "The children all look well. John's cheeks are red as apples, and Katie is as round as a butter-ball."

"Oh, the childers is all right," answered Mrs. Davitt, with an air of mystery, but evidently not unwilling to be pressed further as to the source of her trouble.

"Surely it is not your husband? He looked better than usual this morning when he came around to the White House, and he had as fine a catch of fish as I have seen this summer."

"Yea, himself's all right."

"Then it must be Leonard; but I am sure he is a boy of whom any mother might be proud."

"Proud? Yea, but many's the proud heart is the sore heart."

"Tell me all about it," said her young visitor, laying her delicate hand on the red fingers which still clasped the bone-handled steel knife. Mrs. Davitt looked down for a moment in silence, playing with the bent joint of her stiff third finger, then she broke out with a fierceness in curious contrast to her usual gentle speech.

"It's that Tilly Marsden. Bad luck to her [Pg 68] for a bowld hussy! She's put the insult on Leonard."

"The insult?"

"Yea, 'tis the same as an insult for all the neighbors to take notice of, whin a gurrl ez hez been kapin' company with a man fur goin' on two years, walks by him now with her nose in the air, lek wan wuz too good to be shpakin' with the praste himself."

"Don't be too hard on Tilly, Mrs. Davitt," remonstrated Winifred, soothingly. "Perhaps she is fond of Leonard still, but does not want him to feel too sure of her. I dare say you were a little like that yourself, when you were a girl."

"Thrue fer ye, me dear!" Mrs. Davitt answered, with that delightful Irish readiness to be diverted from her

woes to a more cheerful frame of mind. "Thrue fer ye! I'd never let Michael be sayin' me heart wuz caught before ever he'd shpread the net."

"Then, depend upon it, Tilly feels the same."

"Mebbe it's the thruth you're afther findin' out; but I misthrust, and it's meself will never fergive her if she breaks the heart of the best by in the counthry."

The possibility was too much for the sorrowful mother. She threw her apron over her head, and abandoned herself once more to despair, swaying to and fro disconsolately in the black [Pg 69] wooden chair from the back of which the gilt had been half rubbed away by quarter of a century of rocking.

"Do you think it could possibly do any good for me to talk with Leonard?" Winifred ventured, quite dubious in her own mind of the wisdom of the proceeding.

"Ow, if yez would, 'twould like be the savin' o' the by. He'll not bear any of us to shpake wid him at all at all."

"Very well then, I will try to get him to talk about it. Only don't be disappointed if I do not succeed! The chances are that he will not listen to me."

"Not listen to yoursilf, is it!" cried Mrs. Davitt, once more transported to the heights of hope. "Sure, the saints in Hiven would lay down their harps to hear your swate vice. Yes, and aven to look at ye, as ye shtand there, in that white dhress, jist like what wan o' thimsilves 'ud be wearin'! How becomin' ye are to your clothes!"

Winifred smiled at the subtle flattery; but before she

could muster an appropriate acknowledgment, she caught sight of Leonard loitering at the gate.

"There is Leon now; I will ask him to walk part way home with me. It is growing dark, and you know," she added, laughing, "how timid I am!"

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Mrs. Davitt smiled in answer to the laugh, for Winifred's daring was the talk of the countryside. She dried her eyes, and peered over her spectacles at her visitor as she picked her way among the chickens, feathered and human, who thronged about the doorstep, to the spot where Leonard stood, listlessly hanging over the gate gazing idly up and down the road.

Mrs. Davitt's heart beat anxiously as she marked the girl stop to speak to him, and when at last she saw him turn and walk beside her up the road, followed suspiciously by Paddy with the basket in his mouth, she burst out into a tearful torrent of joy and thanksgiving.

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CHAPTER V

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THE OLD SHOP

"Ah! poor Real Life, which I love, can I make others share

the delight I find in thy foolish and insipid face?"

The sun was already low in the west, when Flint and Brady, having supped heartily on boiled lobster and corn bread, lighted their pipes and strolled toward the door of the tiny shop which leaned up against the inn as if for support. A bird, looking down upon it in his flight, might have mistaken it for some great mud-turtle, so close did it sprawl along the ground.

For some years it had served as a turkey-house on the farm; but as Marsden had begun to discover possibilities of profit in a shop which should both draw custom to the inn, and find customers in the chance guests of the tavern, he had turned his attention to the work of transforming the poultry-house into a village store, and had been surprised to find how well it adapted itself to its new purpose. True, the beams ran across only a few inches above Marsden's head; but that was rather an advantage than otherwise, [Pg 72] for they thus made an excellent substitute for counters, and the wares were well displayed and within easy reach. Along one beam hung a row of boots of every style and size,—from giant rubbers, reaching to the thighs, in which the Nepaug farmers went wading for seaweed fertilizer, to the clumsy baby shoes, jauntily set off with a scarlet tassel at the top, in that pathetic effort of the poor to express in their children's dress the poetry so scantily supplied in their own lives. Another beam was hung with wooden pails, and a third gleamed with the reflections of bright-new tinware.

On the shelves opposite the door lay bright hued calicoes flanked by jars of peppermint candies, some of which were rendered doubly irresistible to

youthful customers by being cut in heart-shape and decorated with sentimental mottoes chiefly in verse.

Marsden fitted his shop so well, that he seemed little more than an animated bundle of secondhand goods. His cowhide boots were the fellows of those that dangled from the fourth beam. His gayly checked flannel shirt harmonized delightfully with the carriage robes in the corner, and the soft brown-felt hat toned æsthetically with the plug tobacco in the case behind him.

When Flint and Brady looked in at the door, a girl was standing at the counter, turning over [Pg 73] the pile of calicoes. She had brought with her a pailful of blueberries which she evidently wished to barter for a remnant of the prints. She showed much disappointment when Marsden declined to trade except upon a cash basis.

"What might this be wuth?" she asked at length, pointing to a red and white calico on the second shelf. Marsden, Yankee-like, answered her question by another. "What'll ye give fur it? It's the end of the piece, and I dunno but I'd as lives you'd hev it ez anybody."

"Wall," answered the girl, cautiously, "I wouldn't give no more'n six cents a yard for it."

"Take it along," said Marsden, wrapping it, as he spoke, in coarse brown paper. As he handed it to her he said: "I *wuz* goin' to offer it to you for five cent."

The girl's face fell.

"You see," whispered Flint to Brady, "there never was a woman who could really enjoy anything unless she thought she had paid less than it was worth. It is my

own belief that Eve bought the apple from the Serpent as a bargain, and that Satan assured her that he would not have sold it to Adam at double the price."

As the maiden withdrew, a buggy rattled up to the door of the little shop. In the broad strip of light formed by the lamp opposite the door, the creaking vehicle stopped short. A [Pg 74] dumpy female in a nondescript black garment took the reins, while her male companion descended heavily, putting both feet upon the step, and cautiously lowering himself to the ground close beside the spot where Flint and Brady stood. Once assured that he had reached the ground in safety, he proceeded to take off his wrinkled duster, fold it tenderly, and lay it on the seat, from beneath which he pulled out a bulky bundle, securely tied up in bed-ticking.

Flint watched the rustic with idle curiosity, as the old man entered the store and deposited his bundle on the counter. Marsden sat on a chair with no back, nursing his knee and assuming indifference to the entrance of the new-comer.

"Be thar any market naow for *quilts*, or *be* thar?" asked the old farmer, somewhat anxiously, while untying the knots of his parcel.

"I dunno ez thar be, and I dunno *ez* thar be," Marsden answered.

Both parties seemed to understand each other perfectly. They approached as warily as two foxes. When the roll was finally spread out on the counter, the dim lamplight flickered over a patchwork quilt of the familiar log-cabin pattern, gay with colors as varied as those of Joseph's coat.

"What cher s'pose yer could give fur this?" [Pg 75] the new-comer asked with a relapse into unwary eagerness, and an irrepressible pride in this evidence of the household industry of his women folk.

"Dunno, I'm sure," said Marsden, slowly, shifting his quid of tobacco and spitting meditatively on the floor. "Shop-keepin' 's all a resk anyhow. I'll give yer seventy-five cents for it though, jest for a gamble; but nobody has much use for quilts in this weather, except to hide their heads under from the skeeters."

"Truth will out," whispered Flint. "Marsden always declares that mosquitoes are unknown at Nepaug."

The owner of the quilt shook his head dubiously.

"Couldn't you go a dollar on it?" he queried. "It took my wife a month to make it, sewin' evenin's."

"Did—did it?"

"Yaas, 'n' it's made out of pieces of the children's clothes, and some on 'em 's dead—and associations ought to caount for somethin'."

"Will it last?" questioned the cautious Marsden, twitching it this way and that, and testing the material with his thumb-nail, which he kept long and sharp apparently for the purpose of detecting flaws in dry-goods.

"Wall," assumed the other, somewhat nettled [Pg 76] by the purchaser's skepticism, "I reckon it'll last ez long ez a dollar will."

"Mebbe," said Marsden, quite impressed by the logic of this last statement. "Anyhaow I'll give you ninety cents, and that's my last figger."

The man glanced furtively over his shoulder at the female in the buggy, who sat twitching the reins impatiently, then he hitched up closer to Marsden and held out a dime.

"Take it," he whispered, "'n' give me the greenback. I promised I wouldn't let it go fur less'n a dollar, 'n' I dassent."

The two men winked at each other like brothers in the freemasonry of married life, and the knight of the duster disappeared in the gathering dusk. His departure emptied the little shop, and Flint and Brady entered and seated themselves on a couple of kegs on opposite sides of the door.

"Ef it's all the same, gentlemen," drawled Marsden. "I'd recommend you to take another seat with yore pipes, fur one of them kags is filled with ile, and the other with gun-paowder."

Brady jumped up in haste, and felt of his coat-tails as though they might even then be on fire.

Even Flint moved with greater alacrity than usual, quite concurring in the wisdom of seeking [Pg 77] another seat, especially as the new one brought him opposite the low doorway, through which he could see the sky, and watch the night drawing in over bay and cove.

On the fence-rail opposite, a flock of turkeys had composed themselves to sleep. The crickets in the corn-field were tuning their wings for their habitual evening concert. The night-moth flapped heavily against the small, square window-pane.

It was a scene bare but tranquil; and Flint was possessed by its dreary charm. The dim quiet of the

twilight suited him; and it struck him jarringly, like a false note in an orchestra, when there fell on his ear a high, shrill voice, exclaiming,—

"Pa, ma wants to know if the yeast-cakes have come."

Tilly Marsden gave a little start of surprise, as she came down the steps from the house-door, at the sight of Flint and Brady, who rose at her entrance, and removed their pipes from their mouths.

"Enter woman—exit comfort," thought Flint.

"I hope you're better, Mr. Flint," said Tilly, edging a little nearer him while her father searched among the blue boxes for the desired yeast-cakes.

"Thanks."

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"Wasn't the sun awful hot up to town?"

"Quite so."

"But you didn't get sun-struck?"

"No."

"I'm awful glad. I says to ma this morning, 'I do hope,' says I, 'Mr. Flint has taken Pa's big white umbrella lined with green. You know his head is so weak.'"

Flint felt Brady's amused glance upon him. "Thank you," he answered stiffly, "my head is quite well again. Come, Brady," he added, turning to his friend, "if you are ready, we'll get our stroll before we turn in."

"Here, Tilly," said Marsden, at the same time, "here's

the yeast-cake; but I don't see what ma wants with it, fur I gev her two this arfternoon."

Tilly blushed, and looked furtively toward the doorway where the young men stood. The girl had a kind of flimsy prettiness which suggested a cotillon favor. Her hair was fluffy, and coquettishly knotted at the back with blue ribbon. Her freshly ironed white dress set off her hourglass figure, and the fingers on which she was continually twisting the rings were white and slender. Her lips were set in a somewhat simpering smile, and her voice was soft with a view to effect. Brady watched her artless artfulness with some amusement. When they had gone [Pg 79] out, he hinted something to Flint in regard to the conquest he appeared to have made; but found him so loftily unconscious that his jest fell flat, and he dropped the subject to take up a more serious theme as they strolled along the road, and at length seated themselves where the turkeys had made their roost, on the gray rail-fence in the moonlight.

"I wonder, Flint," said Brady, "if we shall be able to take up our old association where we dropped it."

"Of course not," Flint answered, "don't imagine it for a moment!"

"I don't see why we should not."

"You don't?"

"No, I do not."

"Well, that fact alone is enough to show the gap between us. I can see it plainly enough. You have spent these last ten years in active, quick decisions, accumulating energy, push, drive—what you call

hustling; while I have been trying to see into things a little, trying to find out what is worth hustling for—whether anything is. Now do you suppose that two people with such opposite training are going to fit together like a cup and ball, as they used to do when they were chums in college, and had had no training at all?"

"I don't know," said Brady, more dubiously. [Pg 80] Then he went on, with the air of one who is not to be balked in speaking his mind, "I am not quite sure that I think your training has improved you."

"Very likely not," said Flint, imperturbably puffing away at his pipe.

"I suppose," continued Brady, "that it is very cultivating, and philosophical, and up-to-date to lie back like that, and let your soul expand, to wonder whether anything is worth while, and smile at the struggle of the dull people around you who are foolish enough to believe that something is worth while; but I'll be hanged if I like it. I would rather be the lowest of the warm-blooded animals than the highest of the cold-blooded. I beg your pardon," he added a little lamely, "I did not mean to put it quite so strong as that."

"You have made a very clear statement, my dear fellow. Don't weaken it by apologies. What you say of me is as true as gospel—truer perhaps. The only mistake you make is in ascribing to training what is really to be attributed to temperament. What is bred in the bone, you know— But never mind, I detest talking of myself. Now you have had experiences worth talking of; let us hear some of your doings out West, there!"

Long and late that night the two friends sat together. Now that the first strangeness had [Pg 81] worn off, and with it the consciousness of the divergence of the roads which they had travelled since the old days, Flint began to find his liking springing up as strong as ever, only the liking was of a different kind. It was after midnight when he came into the house, and betook himself to his own room. As he was pulling off his coat, he suddenly remembered his unopened letter. He smiled grimly, as it recalled the scene at the post-office, the glowering official, and the grinning bystanders. He was still smiling as he took the candle from the mantel-shelf and set it on the bureau, to which he drew up his one rickety chair. He sat down and scrutinized the letter again, and more closely.

The envelope was a large, square one, with the editorial address of the "Transcontinental Magazine" in the left-hand corner. The writing was in the large, loose scrawl of Brooke, the junior editor. He wrote in haste as usual. All at the office was going well, new subscriptions were coming in fast, and if Flint would keep away long enough, the success of the "Transcontinental" would be secure. The letter which he enclosed had been opened by mistake, being apparently a business communication with no other address than "To the Editor;" but finding it personal in character, he forwarded it unread, and remained as always, Flint's faithful friend, C. Brooke.

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The enclosed letter to which Brooke alluded presented a curious contrast to his own. The handwriting was firm, but delicate—distinctively feminine.

"I want to thank you," so the letter began, "not only for accepting my verses on 'A Thimble,' but also for the words of encouragement with which you accompany the acceptance. You say that you are especially glad to print the verses because they suggest a return to the type of womanhood of an earlier day, for which you retain an old-fashioned admiration. Now, I scarcely know whether my verses are very deceitful, or whether it is the realest and truest side of my nature which finds expression when I take my pen in hand.

"I wonder if a bit of autobiography would bore you. I should feel that it would most men; but I think of you as a genial, elderly gentleman with a face like Thackeray's, and with a broad human interest in all phases of life."

Flint grinned. "So much," he said to himself, "for the intuitions of woman." Yet he felt a trifle vexed at being set down as elderly, and secretly elated at the allusion to Thackeray,—as if a wide mouth, a turned-up nose, and eye-glasses carried with them fee-simple to "Henry Esmond" and the "Newcomes."

"I am twenty-two years old!" the letter went [Pg 83] on. "As a young girl I knew nothing of city life. My father owned a sheep ranch in the Northwest, and there I grew up, roaming about as freely as the sheep themselves. I learned to ride and to shoot. Until I was a woman grown, I never took a needle in my hand. Perhaps it may seem strange to you, but out of this aloofness from feminine pursuits there grew up within me a sort of reverence for the feminine ideal. I felt a vague awe, such as I imagine strikes a man at sight of a rose-lined parasol, or a thimble laid on a pile of stitchery. It is this sense of the poetry of

women's occupation which must give what little value they possess to my verses; and perhaps you will not care for any more now that you know they are no part of the real *me*, but only an ideal."

The letter was signed "Amy Bell," and the only address given, a New York post-office box.

"A pretty name," said Flint to himself, as he studied it, "a very pretty name!" Then he fell to musing on how this girl must look; and he found himself making a likeness from the picture over the mantel, only he would have the face a trifle rounder, with a dimple in either cheek, and a hint more of tenderness in that firm under-lip, whose smile savored of delicate irony. His thoughts unconsciously reverted to the reflections of the morning, as he looked at the portrait.

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"How shy we all are of self-revelation!" he murmured, as he folded the letter slowly, and slid it into his vest-pocket; "and then, when we have gone about for years hedging ourselves in with barriers of ice, suddenly some emotion thaws them, and out flow all the tides of feeling which we have been damming up so long." Flint's musings ended in a determination to answer this letter, and to answer it now while the genial mood was on him. The writer had taken pains to give little clue to her identity. Well, he would answer her from behind the same veil of impersonality. She need never know how widely she had missed her guess in her picture of him. She might keep her poor little illusions—yes, "elderly gentleman" and all. He would speak to her, as one soul might speak to another, unhampered by all the trammels of outward circumstance. It was his

to offer help, sympathy, encouragement, and he dispensed it in no stinted measure.

As he drew pen and paper towards him, there swept over him a sense of the oneness of humanity, and a vision of what the world might be, if man were tenderer, and woman held the wider vision. Such a training as hers, he wrote to Amy Bell, might give her something of both, might grant her a standpoint from which she could see clearer than most women, just because [Pg 85] she saw life in larger outlines, undimmed by detail,—a life as different from that of the average woman as the sweep of the garments of the Greek caryatides from the fussy, beruffled gowns of the nineteenth-century women. The question, the vital pressing question in her case, was how she would use this freedom. Should it slip into the hardness of the new woman, on the one hand, or, on the other, allow itself to be fettered to the dulness of every-day decorum, her opportunity would be lost; but if she could hold the delicate equilibrium where she stood,—self-poised, and yet swaying to the influences which must work on every soul for its highest development, plastic yet firm,—then he believed, firmly believed, that there might lie in her a power for which the world would be the better and the richer.

"There!" said he, as he blotted and sealed the letter. "That, I should say, is as prosy and didactic as a discourse of my venerated ancestor. I wonder if the tendency to sermonize runs in the blood. I dare say if I had the good fortune to have any religious convictions, I should dogmatize over them in the pulpit, and pound the cushions as vigorously as any itinerant evangelist. Well, well! heredity is a queer thing. We think we get away from it, but it is always

cropping up in unexpected places. Our ancestors [Pg 86] are like *atra cura*, and ride behind every man's saddle."

The clock struck three as he finished his musings. He pushed away his chair, and set back the lamp on the mantel. The light, flaring a little in the draught from the open window, lent a startling look of life to the portrait above it. Flint seemed almost to hear the voice of the dying sea-captain whispering: "God bless you, Ruth—I wish I had understood you better!"

Upon his exalted mood the morning voice of a barnyard cock broke mockingly.

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed, "what a fool I am!—and at my age, too. I am ashamed. And, by the way, we never took back Dr. Beetle's—no—Dr. Cricket's spectacles. Well-to-morrow will answer as well."

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CHAPTER VI

THE GLORIOUS FOURTH

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Extract from the Journal of Miss Susan Standish.
Nepaug, July 4, 189-.

A holiday, for some reason or other, is always longer than other days, even for people like me who live a life of ease and comparative idleness, and who can make every day a holiday by abstaining from

unnecessary and self-imposed work. It certainly is curious that this morning we rose an hour later, by way of compliment to our ancestors, who doubtless rose several hours earlier than usual on the day we celebrate, and certainly did a hard day's work.

After breakfast Mr. Anstice read the Declaration of Independence aloud, signatures and all. Then Jimmy recited part of a highly patriotic address, beginning, "Give up the Union? Never!" He worked his arm in the gestures with all the grace and agility of a pump-handle. His voice, to be sure, came out very strong on the prepositions and conjunctions, and sank to a whisper on the explosive climaxes; but [Pg 88] we all voted it a masterpiece of elocution, and his father really thought so. When these exercises were over, Dr. Cricket and I played a game of chess, in which he insisted that I should take the part of the British, while he represented the Americans.

In spite of a severe struggle with my patriotic emotions, I felt compelled to do justice to the side thus thrust upon me, and I conducted my campaign with such vigor, that it was Washington who was compelled to hand over his sword to Cornwallis, and I swept the last American pawn triumphantly off the board as the dinner-bell rang.

The afternoon rather dragged. I came to the conclusion that the secret of the length of a holiday lies in the severity of the effort to enjoy one's self. At our age the truest happiness lies in absorption in work,—a kind of active and bustling Nirvana. Having come to this conclusion, I pulled out the golf-stockings I am knitting for Ben, and fell to work, with the result that it was tea-time before I knew it.

Winifred made quite a diversion by coming down

dressed as Columbia, in a white muslin with blue sashes and a big bunch of red roses. She had made a helmet of card-board and covered it with gold paper. In one hand she held a long lance of the same shiny stuff, and in the [Pg 89] other a big flag. We all laughed and sang and shouted, and had a fine old-fashioned, emotional Fourth. It did me good.

After tea, I had a surprise in a call from Cousin John's son. In fact, the call was a surprise on both sides. This is how it came about. The day before yesterday, Dr. Cricket, who is a good creature, though self-opinionated and always differing from me, was called to see a patient over at the inn; and yesterday, making his second call, he left his gold-bowed glasses, and spent the afternoon bewailing his loss, for he fancied they had slipped out of his pocket when he sat down on the beach to rest. The patient, who is a young man (of some pretensions to gentility, I understand, although a New Yorker), discovered them in the office (otherwise bar-room) of the inn, and walked over to bring them this evening. With him was Philip Brady, whom I have not seen these ten years; but I should have known him in a moment from his likeness to Cousin John. He is a fine young man, and does credit to the family. I think Winifred will like him.

Dr. Cricket was on the porch when they came; and when he saw the glasses, he was ready to fall upon the young men's necks while they were yet a long way off. He really was quite ridiculous with his "Bless my soul!" "Very kind [Pg 90] upon my honor!" "Now Richard is himself again!" and I don't know what more, hopping about meanwhile like the cricket, who was no doubt his ancestor in pre-historic times, and pulling up chairs for men twenty

years younger than himself. I have no patience with too much vivacity in middle-aged people; when we turn fifty, dignity is all we have left, and we'd better make the most of it.

When the Doctor had thanked his visitors five times over for what was really a small matter for two able-bodied young men, he insisted on their sitting down, and turned round to me,—I hate being dragged into a situation,—"Miss Standish," said he, "I want you to know Mr. um—ah—Flint, I believe? and his friend, Mr. um—ah—What is the name, may I ask?"

"I can tell you," said I, coming forward and really looking up for the first time (for I am trying to train myself not to stare and peer as some of my age do when their sight is failing)—"I can tell you and save your visitor the trouble. His name is Philip Brady, and his father is my cousin."

Dr. Cricket looked thoroughly taken aback. This I rather enjoyed, for he is always prying into affairs and saying, "I rather suspect so and so," with his nose held out as if he got at his intuitions by the sense of smell.

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"You don't say so," was all he could get out this time; and meanwhile Philip called out, in his hearty voice, "Holloa, Cousin Susan!" and kissed me a little louder than I liked; but that is the difference between Bison and Boston. Perhaps I am hard to suit, for his companion's manner seemed to me as much too repressed as Philip's was too exuberant. He had the air of holding his mental hands behind him and warning off social intruders with a "Let us not enter upon too familiar a basis of mutual acquaintance,"

and yet he was not brought up on Beacon Street, and I was, which makes it all the worse. He is a handsome man,—that is, his features are regular, his teeth are fine, and the little tuft of white hair above the temple gives a marked air of distinction. Altogether, he has a peculiarly well-groomed effect; but his face is like a mask,—one does not get any inkling of what is going on behind it. The eye-glasses too seem to take all expression out of the eyes, and leave them mere inquisitors for discovering the sentiments revealed by those who don't wear similar shields. I notice the same thing about Dr. Cricket. I can always get the best of him in argument unless he has his spectacles on. Then I become confused, forget my point, and the Doctor comes off triumphant.

Of course, when the Doctor urged the young [Pg 92] men to stay, they sat down, and Philip began at once to ask about the people in Oldburyport, whom he remembered very well, except their names. Everything was pleasant until Jimmy Anstice came along, as he always does when not especially wanted, and began to tease about having the fire-works set off. Nothing could be allowed to go on until they were brought out. If he had been my child, he should have been soundly punished and sent to bed for whining and pulling at his father's coat-tails; but Mr. Anstice is amiable to the verge of inanity where Jimmy is concerned, and after saying, "My dear!" and "Yes, in a minute," he allowed himself to be fairly pulled out of his chair and into the house, from which he shortly emerged with Jimmy, bearing between them an oblong pine box filled with packages of every shape and size, and smelling objectionably of gunpowder.

Of course this put an end to all rational conversation.

Philip jumped up to inspect the crackers and pin-wheels. To my surprise, Mr. Flint showed no annoyance, but began to poke about among the Roman candles and rockets, as if he rather liked it. Jimmy has taken a great fancy to him, it seems. I must admit that it is in a man's favor to be liked by boys and dogs. So they drove stakes into the grass, and set up inclined planes for the rockets; and, when it grew dark [Pg 93] enough, Jimmy set off his first pin-wheel, amid a chorus of shouts of that artificially enthusiastic sort common among older people at a junior entertainment.

The shouts brought Winifred out to the porch. She had taken off her helmet, for which I was sorry, as it was very becoming. I introduced Philip, who said, with a smile, that he thought they had met before; but Winifred did not seem to remember it. Now, if Winifred has a failing, it is thinking she knows just how everything ought to be done; and after fidgeting about in her chair for a minute or two, she called out: "Why don't you set the rocket against that stone?" and down she ran to arrange it herself.

The rocket did go better in her way, but she was not satisfied even then. She must show them how to hold the Roman candles, which was very imprudent with the loose sleeves of her muslin dress. Mr. Flint called out: "Hold it out away from you! Further away!" but instead of paying any heed, she held it straight up in the air. She had forgotten herself entirely; and we were all watching the little fountain of fire sending out its red, white, and blue colored balls when, all of a sudden, I saw a line of fire creeping up Winifred's sleeve. She threw away the candle, which lay sputtering on the ground; but that line of fire on her arm seemed to grow and [Pg 94] grow, and I watched

it in helpless agitation. I suppose the thing was over in two minutes, though they seemed hours to me. The instant Flint saw the accident, he stripped off his coat, and, rushing up to Winifred, bound it tightly about her. Dr. Cricket brought out his bandages and liniments, and the arm was bound up and in a sling before the girl really knew what had happened.

She was quite bewildered, and looked about like a little child, from one to the other. Then she turned to Mr. Flint, with a smile which seemed to me not so very far from tears, and said:—

"This time, it was your turn."

"This time, it was my fault."

"Your fault?"

"Yes; it was stupid, my letting you hold it so. I knew it was dangerous."

Winifred shook her head, in a wilful little way of hers which always reminds me of a Shetland pony.

"Pardon me, but I think I should have done it whether you had let me or not. I should have had to pay pretty dearly for my venture though, if you had not been so quick, and as for the poor coat—" Here she picked it up from the floor where it had fallen. "What a pity it should have a hole right in front!—but Miss Standish [Pg 95] will make it as good as new, though. You never saw any one who can darn like Miss Standish" (which is quite true).

"Papa," she added, turning to her father, who had been utterly unnerved by the accident, and was now walking up and down with a vain pretence of calmness. "Papa, you can lend Mr. Flint a coat for to-

night, can't you?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly! what will he have—a dressing-gown or a Tuxedo?"

"Thank you," said Flint, with gravity; "but, if the etiquette of Nepaug will not be violated by a shirt-sleeve costume, I can go as I am, though indeed I do not like giving Miss Standish so much trouble, and the coat is a veteran anyway, only promoted to the Nepaug station after long service elsewhere."

"Veterans always command my respect," I answered, "and deserve at least repairs at the hands of their country."

"All very fine," said Dr. Cricket; "but I advise you to wear your coat home to-night, even if you send it back to-morrow. It is easier to mend coats than constitutions."

"And cheaper," I suggested.

"I'll tell you," Winifred broke in, seeing Dr. Cricket glowering at me. "He shall neither risk a cold by going home in this night air without his coat, nor tear the sleeves out of papa's, [Pg 96] which would surely be half-a-dozen sizes too small. He shall wear my golf cape. Go up to my closet and get it, Jimmy! —the blue one lined with red."

Jimmy, who having once been relieved of anxiety as to his sister's life, had spent his time in maligning her as the cause of stopping his fire-works exhibition, turned somewhat sulkily to obey her command; as he went he fired a parting shot: "This is what comes of girls meddling with things they don't understand."

"James!"

When Mr. Anstice says "*James*," he is not to be trifled with; and his son ventured no further remarks, only emphasized his feelings by a vicious stamp on each separate stair as he ascended. While he was prosecuting his search for the cloak, his sister sat in the big chair by the fireside, her head thrown back a little against the angle formed by the back and the side, which curves out like a great ear. I saw Philip and Mr. Flint looking at her as the firelight climbed over her dress and touched her cheek, and I wondered what they thought of her.

To me, her face is one of the most interesting I have ever seen. It evades description, and yet I feel tempted to try to describe it again and again, and to analyze its charms for myself. It is full of distinction, though the only really beautiful [Pg 97] feature in it is the brow, broad and low, from which her hair rolls back in that long, full sweep. About her lips, there is the fulness that Leonardo gave his Mona Lisa, and the lips have the same subtle curves, with a smile whose meaning is often of dubious interpretation, and tempts the eyes of her companion to return to them again and again to confirm his last impression.

As for her character, I do not yet feel sure of it, though I have known her for years. Dr. Cricket says he understands her perfectly. Pshaw!

Ben says he and she agree in everything. Poor boy! The fact is, that the girl has one of those curious natures, absolutely unmoved and unmovable at the centre, but on the surface reflecting every one and everything that comes in her way.

Many men have loved her. I don't think she has ever cared for any one. The Mona Lisa smile comes over her lips when I question her about this one or that.

"Tell me now," I said the other day, "did you never love any one?"

"Yes, and I do now."

"Excellent. At last we shall have confidences."

"And you like confidences?"

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"I do—but no diversions—who is the youth?"

"I did not say it was a youth."

"Well, it is not a dotard, I trust; but who is the man?"

"I did not say it was a man."

"But you said—"

"I said I loved somebody, and that somebody is you, dear Miss Standish. Indeed I do, and I am ready to fight a duel, if necessary, with Dr. Cricket to prove that my affection is deeper and loftier, and generally better worth having, than his."

What can one do with a girl like that, who winds up with a little mocking laugh and goes off whistling?

I wish she would not whistle. It is one of those mannish tricks of hers which give a wrong impression. Her father ought to stop it; but he is so fond of the girl, and thinks her so altogether perfect and beyond cavil, that he lets everything go. She needs to have some one stronger than herself come into her life. I wonder if he ever will.

It took Jimmy Anstice a long while to find that cloak. When he returned with it, he was still sulky.

"I don't see why I should have to go on Fred's errands, when she spoiled my fire-works."

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"Ah!" said Flint, "it was a pity about those fire-works. Suppose you bring them down to the inn to-morrow night, and we will set them off there."

Jimmy brightened up; but his sister rather resented the suggestion. "You need not be afraid to do it here," she said; "I promise not to interfere again."

Mr. Flint ought to have said something civil; but he only turned to Jimmy and proposed that they go out and gather up the rockets before the dampness spoiled the powder.

"Here, are you going without the cloak after all?"

"Oh, thank you!" answered Flint, with sufficient graciousness, as he took it from Professor Anstice's hand.

To reach the door, he passed near Winifred's chair. As he did so he bent over and spoke to her. I could not hear what he said; but I saw an angry color come into her cheeks, and she answered:—

"Yes, as you say, we seem fated to bring each other ill luck. Let us hope we shall not meet often."

I never heard Winifred make so rude a speech before. But, to my surprise, it seemed to develop an unsuspected amiability in Mr. Flint.

"That might be the worst luck of all," he [Pg 100] answered, still in that provoking half-tone of his, and, waiting no answer, he followed Jimmy out of doors. It seemed to me that Philip Brady would have liked to take advantage of the general stir to get in a word with Winifred; but I saw that the girl was really suffering with the burn on her arm, so I told him, without ceremony, that it was time he went home.

Dr. Cricket, who seems to feel personally responsible for these young men, evidently thought my behavior ungracious and inhospitable. To make amends, he

followed Philip to the door, and called out after him and Mr. Flint:—

"Oh, by the way, we're going up to Flying Point for a clam-bake some evening this week. Would you care to go too?"

"By all means, if you will be good enough to take us into the party," Philip answered heartily. If his friend said anything, it was lost in the fog which was rolling in thick from the ocean.

I never take prejudices; but I often have an instinct about people before I know them, and this instinct tells me that I am not going to like this Mr. Flint. He is so self-sufficient,—not conceited, but completely satisfied with his own judgments. When he asks any one's opinion, he does it as if it were a mere matter of curiosity how such a person might feel, not with any idea [Pg 101] of being influenced. I can stand this from a person with strong convictions; but this young man seems to have none. He actually smiled when I quoted Dr. Channing.

"Perhaps you never heard of him," I said, a little irritated by that supercilious smile of his.

"Oh, yes," he answered; "but he was at such pains to set himself up in opposition to my ancestors, that family pride compels me to resent it, though my personal prejudices may be in his favor."

I cannot abide such trifling. It seems to make it ridiculous in any one to be in earnest.

P. S.—Dr. Cricket asked me to-day if I would marry him. I told him he was an old fool; but I could not make him believe it.

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CHAPTER VII

ON THE BEACH

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"The curving land, with its cool white sand,
Lies like a sickle beside the sea."

The next morning dawned cloudless. Nature, radiant in her bountiful splendor, seemed to give herself to man, who, in response, thrilled with something of the primal impulse which stirred his pulses in the golden days before he had separated himself from the beneficent currents of the Earth Mother's vitality to shut himself up within brick walls with artificial heat, artificial light, and artificial stimulants.

On such a day, it is good to be alive. Flint felt the sunshine in his blood as he stepped out into the fresh, open air. For a while he hesitated as to the use to which he should put the morning in order to secure the utmost of its bounty. Then he bethought him of his duty in returning the blue golf cape which he reproached himself as an idiot for having taken. Brady had gone crabbing with Marsden, so Flint could not delegate the duty to him, as he had intended. [Pg 103] Accordingly, slinging the wrap over his shoulder, in the middle of the morning, he started on the path which ran along among the scrub-oak and blueberry patches, to lose itself on the curving stretch of beach which lay between the inn and Captain's Point, where stood the Whites' house

known in the region of Nepaug as "The White-House."

The Point stretched along at the mouth of the little harbor, one side thrust boldly out cliffwise into the ocean, the other sliding by soft degrees to the margin of the salt-water lagoon. On the crest of the cliff, and commanding a fine view of both sea and shore, rose the White-House, originally owned and built by a sea-captain who could not live without the sea, even when he had ceased to live on it. For years the Captain took his daily walk on the little platform railed in from the slanting roof, and scanned the horizon with his glass, taking note of every sail, till at length he walked and gazed no more, and his grave was made in the little hollow that dips behind the house. The places which had known him knew him no more, and the house was let to strangers.

The Point, however, retained his name; and the white railing around the Captain's walk gleamed in the sunlight from the crest of the cliff as bright as when he leaned upon it to sweep the face of the waters with his glass.

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Flint did the Captain the honor to bestow a passing thought on him this morning, to be vaguely sorry for him, and to reflect that it was really a fine thing to be above ground when the sun was shining like this. To be sure, life had its vexations; but they were so brief, and there was so much time in which to be dead!

Flint had not gone many paces along the beach before he saw Jimmy Anstice digging clams out on the oozy flats left bare by the receding tides, his

knickerbockers rolled well up on his legs, and a great pail set on the mud beside him.

The boy's hat was pushed far back on his head, and the sun fell full on his face. Even at this distance, the resemblance to his sister was so marked as to be almost comical. The eyes were the same. The nose, with its unmistakable upward turn, a burlesque on the short, straight one which lent piquancy to Winifred's face. The soft, subtle curve of her cheek developed in Jimmy to a hardened rotundity inevitably suggesting the desire to pinch it, which one feels toward the tomato pin-cushions on exhibition at church fairs.

Nevertheless, despite freckles bestowed by nature, and grime artificially acquired, Jimmy Anstice was a well-looking lad, and added a distinct note of human interest to the barren [Pg 105] flats, as he stood, spade in hand, staring at Flint.

"Come out here!" he called.

"No, thank you," answered Flint. "Not with my boots on. What are you about? Clamming, I suppose."

"Oh, no—fishing!" answered Jimmy, with fine sarcasm. "Come and help me pull in the mackerel, can't you?" Then he turned his back and began his digging once more. At the same moment Flint caught a glimpse of a red hat against a seaweed covered rock. Obeying an impulse which was rather a surprise to himself, he directed his course toward it. He found, as he surmised, that it belonged to Winifred Anstice, who sat reading, comfortably ensconced with her back against the low sandbank, and her feet stretched out in front of her. She looked up at Flint's approach, but made no change in her

attitude as he came and stood over her. He found it a little harder than he had expected to make a conversational beginning. After a second's hesitation he asked:

"How is the wrist?"

"Better, thanks! but still in close confinement," Winifred answered, throwing back her shawl and revealing the bandaged arm.

"You had a narrow escape."

"Very."

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"I hope you have not felt the need of the cape you were kind enough to lend me. I was just on my way to carry it home."

"And, having found the owner, you need not pursue your journey any further."

Flint felt inwardly chagrined. This, then, was her interpretation of his stopping to speak to her,—that he might be rid of his trouble.

"Thank you," he said stiffly; "but unless you need it, I prefer to take it back to the house."

"Very well," said his companion, "as you please." Then, moved evidently by a prick of conscience, "Perhaps you will rest awhile before climbing the hill."

As she spoke, she moved a little that he might share the shadow of the bank.

"Don't move on my account," Flint said.

"Oh," answered Winifred, smiling, "I owe you a decent civility, since you saved my life last night."

"Don't mention it. Actions should be judged by what they cost, not what they come to; and mine cost nothing but the hole in my coat, which I don't doubt is already better than repaired under Miss Standish's skilful handiwork, so pray dismiss the subject from your thoughts. There are few, I fancy, who find it so hard as you to accept anything at the hand of another. It vexes you not to be the one always to give aid [Pg 107] and comfort. If I knew you better, I might venture to hint that it smacks of spiritual pride."

"You generalize widely after an acquaintance of four days."

"One sees character more clearly sometimes by the flashlight of a first meeting, than when the perception is blurred by more frequent opportunities."

Again the smile, inscrutable and mocking; the eyes looked into his with a gay defiance.

"Perhaps you will be good enough to give me the benefit of these first impressions of my character. They are as comprehensive, no doubt, as those of the British traveller in America. Tell on, as the children say."

"Pardon me, I have said too much already, under the circumstances. Praise would be impertinence, and criticism insolence."

"You shall have absolution in advance. Begin then!" she added, with a little nod of command. "What is the most striking trait of my character on first

acquaintance?"

"Well, if you will have it, I should say it was a restlessness which you probably call energy; but it is a different thing. Energy is absorbed in the object which it seeks to attain. Restlessness is absorbed in the attaining."

"Hm! what next?"

"Next? Next, comes a quality almost invariably [Pg 108] allied to such restlessness as yours,—ambition. You may have all sorts of fine theories about equality and that kind of thing; but you want power—power over the lives with which you come in contact—power for good of course; but it must be yours and wielded by you. It is not enough that things should get along somehow. They must go right in your way."

Winifred laughed.

"Ah! you say that because I wanted to show you how to set off a rocket last night."

"I should say you showed us quite satisfactorily how *not* to set off a rocket last night."

"Don't let us revert to that episode, about which we shall probably not agree. But go on. Let me hear more of your impressions. They are quite diverting."

"No more. I dare not presume further upon my advance absolution. Rather let me ask you to return candor for candor, and give me your impressions of me and my character, or lack of it."

"I have formed none."

"Is that quite true?"

"No," said Winifred, looking up, "it is not true at all. I formed impressions within the first ten minutes after I had seen you, only I called them, more modestly, prejudices."

"Prejudices? They were unfavorable then. Good! Let us have them!" and Flint settled [Pg 109] himself more comfortably, bracing his head against his clasped hands; and, leaning back against the bank of sand, he sat watching the little tufts of coarse grass springing up close beside him. Still Winifred was silent. At last Flint began himself:—

"You thought me rude and churlish, I suppose?"

"I certainly did not think you were Bayard and Sidney rolled together; but I admit you had some provocation," she answered lightly, "at least in our first meeting. When I demolished your new fishing-rod, I think you might have accepted my apologies more gracefully; and I think you need not have been so particularly uncivil when Jimmy and I tried to come to your assistance on the pond. I have not yet recovered from the reproof conveyed on that occasion by your manner, which plainly indicated that, in your opinion, it would have been more tactful for us to sail by, and ignore your disaster, or treat it as an episode which did not call for explanation or remark. I should have felt duly humiliated, no doubt; but I have become hardened to rebuffs, since I have been at Nepaug, for I meet with many, as I go about like a beggar from door to door in South East."

"Distributing tracts?" Flint asked, with eyebrows raised a little.

[Pg 110]

"No."

"Collecting statistics, perhaps?"

"Not at all; my errand is neither philanthropic nor scientific."

"Private and personal, that is, and not to be farther pursued by impertinent inquiry?"

"Oh, I have no objection to telling you, since you are not a native. I am searching for my great-great-grandmother."

Flint looked at his companion uneasily. She smiled.

"No, I have not lost my senses. Such as they are, I have them all. I do not expect to find this ancestress of mine in the flesh, nor sitting in any one of the splint rockers behind the checkered window-panes of the old South East houses. It is only her portrait for which I am searching as for hid treasure."

"Ah!"

"Yes, her portrait. I feel certain it is hidden away somewhere in South East."

"How very odd!"

"Odd? Not at all, as you will say when you come to hear the story of the original. But perhaps it would bore you to listen?"

"Go on; I am all attention."

"Well, to begin with, my great-great-grandmother was a very pretty girl."

"I can believe it."

Winifred looked quickly round, but her companion's eyes were fixed upon the horizon with an abstracted gaze which lent an air of impersonality to his words. So she began again:

"Yes, she was a young Quakeress, born, I believe, in Philadelphia; but her father and mother died, and she came to South East, to live with her uncle, when she was about eighteen. The story of her girlhood is rather vague; but somehow she fell in love with an English officer, and made a runaway match which turned out better than such affairs usually do; for his relatives received her favorably, and she made her home with them at Temple Court in Yorkshire—doesn't that sound like a book? Well, her uncle died, and she never came back to this country; but her grandson came in the early part of the century, and, following the traditions of his race, fell in love with an American girl. They were married and settled in Massachusetts. But once, when they were visiting at the old home, my grandmother saw a portrait of her husband's grandmother hanging in the great hall at Temple Court. She was fascinated by its beauty; and when she heard the story of the runaway bride, who was an American like herself, she determined to have a copy of the portrait, and talked of engaging one of the London artists to make it for her. An old servant [Pg 112] told my grandfather that he remembered seeing another, painted at the same time and sent over to this uncle in America. The man was sure that the address of the uncle was South East. Many a time I have heard my grandmother tell the story, which so fired my youthful fancy that I dreamed of it for years, and at last I persuaded papa to come down here this summer, and let me hunt for the picture. But I am tiring you, I am afraid."

Flint pulled his hat lower over his eyes.

"Pray go on; I am immensely interested."

"Thank you. Well, the desire for the recovery of the portrait is no longer a sentiment with me,—it is a passion. My daily occupation now is driving about and asking for a drink of water, or inquiring about early vegetables, chickens, goslings,—anything which will afford a plausible excuse for penetrating into the dark halls or stuffy fore-rooms. Of course I rule out the modern houses. I have even tried the tavern here at the beach; but the only decorations of the walls were 'Wide Awake' and 'Fast Asleep,' and other chromos of the same pronounced and distressing variety."

Flint took off his eye-glasses, and began to wipe them tenderly with his delicate handkerchief.

"Perhaps," he began, when he was interrupted [Pg 113] by a wild whoop just above. It was from Jimmy Anstice, who shared the delusion, common to his age and sex, that nothing is so amusing as a sudden and unexpected noise.

"Oh, Jimmy!" his sister exclaimed.

"Oh, Jimmy!" mocked the boy. "I am glad to find that you are alive. I've been watching you two these ten minutes, and you've sat as still as if Mrs. Jarley hadn't wound you up yet."

"She hasn't," said Winifred, somewhat inconsequently. "Have you finished digging your clams? What time is it?"

"I've dug all the clams I'm going to; don't intend to get all the food for the boarding-house," answered

Jimmy, somewhat sulkily, leaving Flint to answer the last question.

"It is ten minutes after twelve," he said, looking at his watch.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Winifred, "I had no idea it was so late. I promised Dr. Cricket to play chess with him at twelve."

She rose as she spoke, and stretched out her hand for the golf cape; but Flint kept it quietly, and started on by her side.

"Are you going all the way to the house?" Jimmy asked.

"If your sister permits."

"Oh, then, you might as well take the other handle of this basket."

[Pg 114]

"Jimmy!" exclaimed Winifred, "I'm ashamed of you."

"Well, you needn't be. You'd better be ashamed of yourself, saying one thing to a fellow's face, and another behind his back. Sitting there for an hour talking with Mr. Flint, as if he were your best friend, when only last night you said—"

"Jim, how near the shore should you say that sloop lay?" Flint inquired in even tones.

"'T ain't a sloop at all; it's a schooner," returned Jim, contemptuously.

"Why, to be sure, so it is. How stupid in me! I suppose all my nautical learning went down in 'The Aquidneck.' By the way, Mr. Brady and I are talking

of going up to the wreck soon to try what can be got out of her by diving. Wouldn't you like to go along?"

"Wouldn't I!" responded Jimmy, *con brio*. "Don't you forget it!"

His sister gave a dubious glance over the boy's head at Flint; but he only smiled in return. This smile so transformed his face that the girl beside him fell secretly to wondering whether her instinct of character-reading, upon which she prided herself, had not played her false in the case of this man, and whether she might not be called upon for a complete reversal of judgment,—so apt we are to mistake the momentary mood for the index of character.

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They walked on in silence along the margin of the bank, Flint with the cape thrown over one arm, while he and Jimmy carried the basket, heavy with clams, between them. The blue water shoaled into emerald at their feet; a single white gull soared and swooped above their heads. The long sunburned grasses swayed in the summer wind, and the clouds floated tranquilly over all.

How tiny the three human figures seemed in the wide setting of earth, sea, and sky!

As they passed the bluff on the other side of the cove from Captain's Hill, Jimmy suddenly dropped his side of the basket of clams. "Hi!" he exclaimed. "Why can't we go up into the light-house, now Mr. Flint is with us?"

"Not to-day," answered his sister, repressively. "Mr. Flint may have other engagements, and then, you know, Dr. Cricket is waiting for his game of chess."

"As for me," said Flint, "I was never more at leisure; and as for your appointment with the Doctor, I advise you to adopt my motto: 'Better never than late.'"

Winifred hesitated.

"Oh, come on!" persisted her small brother. "Don't be a chump, Fred. You never used to be."

"Lead on," answered his sister; "rather than be considered anything so ignominious, I would [Pg 116] scale more alarming heights than those of the light-house, though I confess its winding staircase is not without its perils."

The path to the light-house led through a patch of bayberry bushes. Winifred stooped, as she passed, and gathered a handful, which she crushed in both hands, taking in a deep breath of their spicy aroma.

"Are they so good?" Flint asked, smiling at her childish enjoyment.

"Try and see!" she answered, holding them out to him in the cup of her joined hands.

Flint bent his face over them for an instant. Then Winifred suddenly dropped her hands and shook the fragrant leaves to the four winds. Flint smiled again, for her gesture said as plainly as words: "Here I am being friendly with this man, to whom I intended to be as frigid as an iceberg."

Flint responded as if she had spoken.

"Do you never forgive?" he asked.

"No," answered Winifred, impetuously. "I never forgive; but I have a horrid facility for forgetting."

"Cherish it!" exclaimed her companion. "It is the foundation of many of the Christian graces."

As they drew nearer the light-house, they felt the salt sea-wind strong in their faces. The [Pg 117] bluff was so gale-swept that the trees, few, small, and scrubby, had caught a slant to westward, and the scanty vegetation clung timidly to the ground, like some tiny state whose existence depends upon its humility. From the edge of the bluff rose the light-house,—a round stone building, dazzling in its coat of whitewash. Far up in the air its plate-glass windows gleamed in the morning sun.

The keeper was standing in the open door, and cheerfully consented to show the visitors over the premises. Loneliness is a great promoter of hospitality.

As they peeped into the tiny kitchen, with its shining brasses and its white deal floor, Winifred exclaimed at the exquisite neatness of the housekeeping.

"It is a man's, you see," Flint commented with pride. "No doubt we shall drive you from the domestic field yet."

"I should think the position of light-house-keeper would suit you excellently," Winifred replied, oblivious of the slant at her sex. "Your desire for solitude would surely find its full satisfaction here."

"There might be much worse occupations certainly," Flint began; but he saw that Winifred's attention had been diverted by the keeper, who had already begun to mount the stairs, talking, [Pg 118] as he moved, with a fluency which denoted a long restrained flow of sociability. Winifred was glad to be saved the

trouble of replying, for the unceasing climbing put her out of breath, and she felt that she might have been dizzy, but for the railing under her left hand.

At last they arrived in the little room with its giant reflectors of silvered copper, and its great lamp set on a circular table. Outside, ran a narrow balcony with iron railing. Winifred stepped out onto the ledge, clinging nervously to Jimmy, who professed a great desire to sit on the railing. The wind here was so strong that it gave one a feeling that the building was swaying, though it stood firm as a cliff of granite.

Flint leaned over the railing. "See!" he said, "there is a great white gull which has beaten itself to death against the light, and fallen there, close to that fringy line of mottled seaweed on the beach."

"Don't!" exclaimed Winifred, turning pale, and leaning further back against the light-house wall.

Flint saw in an instant that she was feeling dizzy, but thought it best for her to ignore the fact.

"Come," he said, "we must be going down now, unless Dr. Cricket is to lose his game entirely. You go first, Jim! I will come next."

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Jimmy started down, whooping as he went, for the pleasure of hearing his voice echo and re-echo from the bare walls.

Flint glanced somewhat anxiously at Winifred. He saw her put her foot upon the first stair and then draw back. At the same instant he caught the cause of her terror. Her bandaged wrist prevented her

grasping the balustrade, or getting any better support than the smooth wall to which to cling.

"Put your hand on my shoulder, and count the steps aloud as you go." He spoke like one who does not question obedience; and, somewhat to her own surprise, Winifred found herself meekly doing as she was bid.

The last part of his advice was even better than the first, for it occupied her mind, and also gave her the encouragement of feeling that at each step she had lessened the distance between her and *terra firma* by one.

Flint felt the hand upon his shoulder tremble like a leaf; but he never turned his head, only moved steadily onward and downward, with a regularity and solidity which soon told upon Winifred's nervous dizziness.

When she reached the ground, and stood once more in the sunlight of the open doorway, she looked at him with a little tremulous smile. "A hundred and seventeen!" she exclaimed. "I [Pg 120] am sure I shall never forget how many steps there are leading to the Bug Light."

"What a fool you are, Fred!" Jimmy remarked, with family frankness.

"I am," admitted Winifred. "No one knows it better than I, except, perhaps, Mr. Flint."

"I know nothing of the kind," her companion answered with unwonted cordiality. "Any one may be subject to a fit of dizziness, and to be minus an arm under such circumstances makes the situation really uncomfortable. We must try it again some day,

to give you an opportunity to prove to yourself that it was only an affair of the moment."

"Dear me!" thought Winifred to herself, "why can't he always be nice like that! He seems to be a queer kind of stratified rock; you never know what you are going to strike next."

Aloud, she said, "I fancy, Jim, it must be past the White-House dinner hour, and papa has grown worried and sent out scouts to look for you and me. See, here is Ben Bradford!"

Looking down the road, Flint saw approaching them a tall, long-legged youth whom he dimly remembered among the group on the porch of the White-House the night before. His hair was parted in the middle, and thickly pomaded to restrain its natural inclination towards curling. His ears were large, and set on at right angles to [Pg 121] his face. His nose was Roman, and its prominence had rendered it peculiarly sensitive to sunburn. His manners were too frank to be polished. As he joined them now, he succeeded in making it evident at once that Flint's further presence was entirely superfluous. This juvenile candor would have had no effect, had not Winifred supplemented it by saying:—

"Mr. Bradford will take charge of me and my cape, Mr. Flint; I really cannot consent to trouble you further."

Her manner was equivalent to a dismissal. Flint handed over the cape, as she bade him, to young Bradford's eager grasp, bowed, and turned his steps homeward. As he strolled along, he felt a curiously sudden change of mood, from the elation of the morning to a depression half physical, half mental.

"I wonder," he said to himself, "if this is not another phase of my inheritance from Dr. Jonathan. I remember the old gentleman used to complain that his constitution was an unhappy one from birth, attended with 'flaccid solids, sizy and scarce fluids, and a low tide of spirits.' The description amused me in my youth; but I begin to have an uncomfortably sympathetic sense of his state of mind and body. I wonder, by the way, what *he* would have done about that portrait. I never heard that he or any other [Pg 122] Puritan gave away his property to any extent; and this portrait I regard as virtually mine. To be sure, I have not paid for it; but I had fully determined to purchase it, and—Yes, to all intents and purposes, it belongs to me. Now, to be expected to give it up, just because I happen to hear of some one else who wants it too, is asking a little too much. If I had avoided the girl, as I intended, I should never have heard of her search for her beloved great-grandmother. No, my mind is made up; I shall keep that picture—of course I shall. I am glad I put it into the closet before Brady came.

[Pg 123]

CHAPTER VIII

THE MARY ANN

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"Our deeds are like children that are born to us: they live

and act apart from one's own will."

The weather of the morning, with its golden clearness, was too beautiful to last. By noon the gold had paled. The high wind which had prevailed earlier in the day subsided; but the swelling waves, which broke with thud after thud upon the shelving beach, gave evidence of a gale still whirling somewhere off the coast. The clear-cut lines of the distant cliffs faded to dim, quiet masses. Far out on the horizon rose a line of phantom hills,—a line which, as night drew in, moved slowly shoreward, rising as it came, shutting out sail after sail, point after point, till at last it met the land and shut out the sea itself. There is something weird and uncanny about the approach of a fog, stealing thus unperceived out of the heart of sunshine and blue weather. It has in it a hint of death.

Flint felt the weight of it. His mind was shut in upon its own resources, and did not find them [Pg 124] altogether satisfactory. Brady added little to the gayety of nations. He came in from his day on the water sunburned, tired, and as nearly cross as it lay in his genial disposition to be. He swallowed his supper, and made haste to stow himself away in bed, leaving Flint to choose between a conversation with Marsden and the self-communion which was his least congenial occupation.

For an hour or so, he loitered in the little shop, listening idly to the yarns which Marsden rolled as sweet morsels under his tongue: of the whale which the fishermen had caught off the beach, a sea-monster of untold length, breadth, and thickness, which had been sold for a thousand dollars; of the marvellous experiences of his father, as captain of a

trading-vessel in the "East Injies;" and finally of the fire-ship which he himself had seen hanging between sea and sky, out yonder between the island and the mainland.

"You say you saw it yourself?" Flint asked, partly from listless curiosity, and partly with an eye to the society of psychical research.

"True as yo' 're a settin' thar. 'Twas one night nigh onto fifteen years ago,—good deal such a night as this heer. The old cow wuz sick that night, and as I wuz out to the barn, puttin' hot cloths on her till past midnight. Ez I wuz comin' into the house, I looked out, and [Pg 125] there, jest where the mist was breakin' away, hung a ship, lookin' like a light under a cloud."

"Did you call any one?" queried Flint.

"Call any one? Lord! I was too scared to move hand or foot; I jest stood gapin' at her till she faded clean out o' sight."

"Mirage, I suppose," Flint murmured to himself, "unless the old fellow is lying out and out, which is not likely." Then, aloud, as he rose, stretching himself lazily, "If you ever see the fire-ship again, while I am here, let me know. I have always wanted to see a wreck, and a phantom wreck is better than none."

"Don't go to talkin' too much about it," said Marsden, mysteriously. "They say it brings bad luck."

"Apparently it brings bad luck for anybody but you to do the talking. Well, I think I will leave you before I am tempted to a loquaciousness which might bring down a curse on the house of Marsden."

Smiling to himself over the old man's superstition, Flint climbed the stairs to his own room, as softly as possible, lest Brady's wrath at being waked descend upon him. Having closed his door cautiously, he sat down by the open window, enjoying the soothing dampness of the fog as it came rolling in laden with the pungent fragrance of the salt marshes.

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He sat a long while in the darkness. Even the Bug Light, which shone on ordinary nights from the tip end of Bluff Point, this evening formed only a paler shade in the universal grayness.

His thoughts turned to the scene of the morning. He remembered the wide-stretching purple of the sea, the yellow shell-strewn sand, the patch of coarse grass on the bank against which Winifred Anstice leaned. He remembered to have noted how perfectly her dun-colored dress had harmonized with the environment, so much so, that, but for the patch of red in her hat, he might have passed her as a part of the inanimate nature of the beach. He remembered, too, the touch of her hand on his shoulder there in the light-house, and the sound of her voice as she counted the steps, "One—two—three—four." Then he fell to thinking more closely than he had yet done of the girl herself,—that curious blending of subtlety and simplicity, of reserve and frankness; he had never seen anything quite like it. What a queer coincidence that she should be a descendant of this Ruth, in the room behind him! Now she spoke of it, there was a suggestion of resemblance, faint, but haunting. This must have been the secret of his desire to study her face again, and yet again, that day on the pond, to determine the source of the sense [Pg 127] of familiarity which even their first

meeting had given him.

How charming her frankness about the portrait had been! Ah, there the recollection ceased to be altogether agreeable! He twisted a little in his chair, and screwed the end of his moustache into his mouth, as he recalled his own lack of response when the portrait was mentioned. Had he been deceitful? No, certainly not that, for he had conveyed no false impression by word or gesture. Disingenuous? Perhaps, but after all he was in nowise pledged to equal frankness, because his companion chose to be confidential. Suppose, though, Winifred Anstice should come to the inn; should hear from old Marsden of the portrait; should learn that it was hanging in his room, and he had made no sign!

The train of thought was perplexing, and not altogether pleasing. Flint was not sorry to have it interrupted by a call upon his attention in the appearance of two figures below, looming dim and ghostlike in the fog. Just beneath his window, they paused in their walk, and their voices came up to him first indistinctly, then with more and more clearness. The tones Flint recognized at once as belonging to Tilly Marsden and to Leonard Davitt, the young fisherman whose scarlet shirt was often to be seen on the clamming [Pg 128] grounds, and whose rich baritone voice came ringing over the pond as he sat in his boat hauling in his nets.

To-night, it was subdued, and at first scarcely rose above a murmur; at length Flint caught the words:—

"I shall never ask you again."

"I hope to goodness you won't!" answered the shriller tones of the innkeeper's daughter.

"That isn't a very nice way to speak, Tilly."

"Well, it's *my* way, and my name isn't 'Tilly;' it is Matilda Marsden, and very polite folks call me 'Miss.'"

"Some day you'll find out that it isn't the politest folks that's the trustiest, or sticks to you the faithfullest. Don't you remember two years ago, Tilly, when I was going to the Banks, how you kissed me good-bye, and how you promised—"

"Never mind what I promised. I was only a child anyway."

"Well, you didn't think so then, and neither did I. Mebbe, the time will come when you'll think you acted wiser then, than you're a-doin' now."

"Oh, you needn't take the trouble to warn me, Mr. Leonard, about my being foolish to give you up. You're not the only man in the world."

"Oh, yes," responded Leonard, nettled at last, [Pg 129] "I knew very well that was the trouble; and I know who the other man is; and all I can say is—"

"Hush," cried Tilly, with a little turning of her head, and quickly laying her hand on Leonard's arm. "Don't you say another word, Leonard Davitt, if you ever want me to speak to you again."

At this, Flint's conscience got the better of him, and he rose and closed the window noisily enough to startle the speakers below, as he perceived with some amusement.

"What a little minx that girl is!" he said to himself as he turned to light the lamps. "I have half a mind to devote myself to convincing Leonard that she would

make his life miserable if she married him, and that he is worth ten of her; but I don't suppose he could be made to believe either. Men are such fools when they are in love! By Jove! that portrait is like Miss Anstice!"

This last ejaculation escaped him as he held the lamp above the mantel where all his books were piled in heterogeneous confusion. One by one he scanned their covers, with the half intention of the idler who reads for pure diversion, and at length he drew out a volume of Dumas. He set his lamp—a large one with double burners—on the table by the window; [Pg 130] and tilting his chair on the back legs, resting his shoulders against the wall, he plunged into the mysteries of "The Forty-Five."

In a few minutes he was absorbed, as only Dumas has power to absorb his readers. The man of action in that great romancer exercised a sort of hypnotic power over Flint. The robust virility passed into the sinew of his soul. The romance possessed him utterly, and left him without even the power to criticise. It was he himself who stood in Queen Catherine's box, and watched the spouting of Salcide's blood, as he was drawn by the horses in the arena beneath. He sat secreted beside Chicot in the great arm-chair in the King's bed-room. He took part in the serenade beneath the balcony of the mysterious lady in the Rue des Augustines. He joined the hunting of the wolf in Navarre; and finally he had plunged into the fight between the French and Flemings, with such intensity of reality that it scarcely surprised him to hear the booming of a gun.

"It is those rascally Flemings!" he thought for a moment. "Up and at them, Joyeuse!" Then suddenly

he rubbed his head like one striving to recall wandering wits. His chair came down with a crash. He took out his watch. It marked three. Again the gun! He threw up the window. The fog was breaking [Pg 131] fast, and lights were visible too far out for the the land, too near for a vessel at sea; unless, Great Heavens! it was, it must be, a ship grounded off the Point. For an instant, the thought of Marsden's fire-ship flashed across his mind; but his head was too clear to be fooled in such fashion.

Banging on Brady's door, he shouted:

"A wreck off the Point! I'm going down to the shore!"

"Hold on! Wait for me, can't you?" called Brady, still half asleep.

"No; there's no time to lose. I may be of use. Come on as fast as you can!"

As Flint rushed downstairs, he met Marsden coming out of his room, lantern in hand. The old man's face was ashen gray, and his fingers fumbled at the buttons of his coat.

"Did you hear it?" he said in a trembling, shaken voice. "It's the gun of a ship in distress. Many's the time I've laid awake a-listenin' for it when the wind was wild and the sea lashin' up over the rocks; and now it's come on a night as ca'm as a prayer-meetin'. I told you no good would come of our talk this evenin'."

"Is there any life-saving station near?" Flint asked, as they stumbled along the road in the dark.

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"No, not near as you might say. Ten miles away is as

bad as a hundred."

Once out of doors, they started on a run down the road which led to the shore. The booming of the gun grew louder in their ears; and dimly through the mist they caught sight of a vessel lying keeled over on her side well in shore. Flint was conscious of a not wholly unpleasing excitement as he watched her. As yet his mind had found no room for thoughts of individual suffering. It was a wreck, and he had always wished to see a wreck.

The thoughts passing through his mind did not delay his footsteps, and he made such good speed that, half way to the shore, he had left Marsden far behind, and struggled on alone through the last few rods of heavy sand.

When he reached the beach, several people were gathered there already: Ben Bradford and Dr. Cricket, with that dishevelled air which always marks a midnight alarm; Michael and Leonard Davitt, who slept in their fisherman's hut by the pond, in order to get an early morning start, and were therefore first at the scene of excitement.

Michael felt all the importance of his position as first witness, and with unusual loquacity was giving an account of the catastrophe to the group around.

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"I can't nohow account for it," he said; "that captain must be an escaped idjit to go on a lee-shore a night like this."

"Had the fog lifted when she struck?" queried Marsden.

"Well, it was jest a-waverin', breakin' up like, and then shuttin' down agin. The idjit must er thought he was off the Bug Light, where the water's deep right up close in; but why should he a-thought so?—that's the question."

"Well, it is a question that can wait, I should think," said Brady, who had come up panting from his run. "The most important question is, what are you going to do about it? There's not much danger, I suppose, as long as the night is as calm as this; though there's such a ground swell on it looks as if there must have been a big storm at sea. See how she pounds on the reef out there! She is likely to go to pieces before many hours, I should say, and if a wind springs up, as it's pretty sure to do with morning, it would be an ugly lookout."

"Is there a life-boat anywhere?" asked Flint.

"Yes," said Leonard, somewhat scornfully, "in the pond." (He pronounced it pawnd.)

"They must have boats on the ship," said Marsden; "seems to me I see 'em launchin' one now." At this the men on shore huddled [Pg 134] closer together, as though four could see farther than one.

Yes, there was no doubt of it. The misty dawn showed forms standing on the slanting deck of the ship, and a boat hoisted, held out, and then dropped into the waves, which were already rising with the rising wind.

"They'd best make haste," muttered Michael, uneasily; "if the sea gets up, they'll go down."

It seemed an age to the little waiting group before the boat put off from the ship. The wind had begun

to blow in cold and strong. Flint buttoned his coat tight to his chin, and still he shivered. On the little boat came, now dipping almost out of sight in the hollow of the big green waves, now rising like a cork upon their crest.

"Hurrah!" cried Brady, "they're almost in."

"Hm!" said Michael, "not yet, by a long sight! The danger comes when they git into the breakers."

Flint was enough of a sailor to know that the fisherman spoke truth. A little later, he saw the white, combing foam break over the boat. He drew his breath quicker, and caught his under-lip between his teeth.

"There's four men in her," said Marsden, making a telescope of his closed hands.

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"Five," said Leonard,—"five, and one of 'em is a woman!"

Flint unbuttoned his coat and threw it off.

"What are you about?" asked Brady. "You'll get your death of cold."

Flint made no answer, but, stooping, unfastened his boots, and kicked them off. Rapidly as he undressed, he was too slow; for, as the boat reached the tenth breaker, a great wave struck her a little on the side, and over she went, spilling out her contents as heedlessly as though they had been iron or lead in place of flesh and blood. In an instant, Flint was in the surf, and striking out for the spot where he had seen a woman's shawl.

"Curse it!" cried Leonard, "why can't I swim, and me a sailor!"

"I'd orter a-learned yer, Leon, and thet's a fact. Look at him! He's got her. He's a pullin' of her in. Make a line, men! Make a line! Quick as thunder, and the last man grab 'em when they come within reach!"

In answer to Michael's words, the men hastily formed in line, and moved out till Brady stood chest-deep in water. It was a wise precaution, for Flint, though a good swimmer, found his task too hard for him. He felt like a man in a nightmare with a weight of lead upon his chest; and arms that must move, and could not move, and yet must again.

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Dimly, a sense of possible escape for himself came over him. Why should two drown in place of one? He had but to let go this weight and strike out. Why not?

Why not indeed? This man held to no altruistic creed. His doctrines, had he expounded them quite coolly, would have claimed that self-preservation was the first law of Nature, and that Nature was the best guide. But now, with no time for reason, by the flashlight of instinct, intuition, inheritance,—call it what you will,—he found himself absolutely physically unable to let his load slip. With this stranger he would live or die, most likely die!

With the last thought, he felt a numbness creep over him. The limbs refused to obey the will. The will itself was paralyzed. Blank darkness fell around; the end had come.

He awoke to consciousness with a painful gasp, to

find himself stretched out on the sand, and to hear Dr. Cricket's voice sounding far away, saying: "He'll be all right soon. Keep on working his arms, Ben! Here comes Marsden with the brandy and warm blankets." Then followed a vague sensation of swallowing fire, and a blissful warmth creeping along his veins as though Nature had taken him to her heart once more.

Languidly, he unclosed his eyes. What did it all mean: the waves roaring close at hand; the [Pg 137] driftwood fire burning hard by; the circle of anxious faces? Through his dim senses ran the lines long familiar, never till now fully realized:

"The tall masts flickered as they lay afloat
The crowds, the temples wavered, and the shore."

What made everything wobble about like that? Was he dying? What had brought him here, anyhow? Then, with a rush, it all came back. Raising himself on one elbow, he looked about inquiringly. "Where is she?" he asked, and fell back exhausted by the effort of speech.

"Here and safe," answered a woman's voice which he recognized as that of Winifred Anstice. "The captain and crew are saved too."

"Could they all swim?" Flint questioned feebly.

"Hold your tongue!" cried Dr. Cricket, with more good sense than good manners. "Your business now is to save your strength. Leave questions for later in the day. If that coffee is done, Ben, pass it round. We will all have a pull at it."

The commonplace of the daily routine is a blessed relief after the overstrained excitement of a great

catastrophe. We eat and drink, and life seems real once more. Even Dr. Cricket was drawn for a moment from his patient's side to the circle gathered about Ben Bradford, who [Pg 138] stood with the steaming coffee-pot in one hand, and a tin dipper in the other. Nectar and ambrosia, served from jewelled plate, could not have offered more temptation to the appetite of the weary group. Flint, lying a little apart, was conscious that Leonard Davitt was standing beside him, staring down into his face. As the young fisherman turned away, Flint heard him say, below his breath: "Damn him!"

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CHAPTER IX

NORA COSTELLO

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"We pass through life separated from many people
as by a wall of glass.

We see them, we are conscious of their presence;
but we never touch."

The evening following the wreck of "The Mary Ann" found the friends in council, who included most of the summer population of Nepaug, gathered around the White-House hearth, on which blazed a hospitable fire, doubly cheering in its radiant contrast to the gathering darkness without. The wind, which had risen to half a gale, rattled at the window panes and roared down the chimney. The

sound of the booming surf, as the great waves hurled themselves against the dunes, made itself heard, even through the heavy pine doors and shutters. The foam, which yesterday curved in lines of delicate spray below the headland, was now lashed into a lather of white terror. Above it through the twilight rose, dim and ghostlike, the masts of the wrecked vessel.

The dreariness outside lent an added charm to the snug and cheerful cosiness within the [Pg 140] little parlor, the inmates of which drew closer than usual, as they talked in somewhat subdued voices.

Jimmy Anstice lay on his back upon the hearth-rug, his head pillowed upon Paddy, and his knees braced one on top of the other. Ben Bradford sat on a chair tipped back against the wall, with his thumbs thrust through the armholes of his corduroy vest. Winifred lounged upon the haircloth sofa with one foot surreptitiously tucked under her. Every one's attitude suggested a degree of comfort rare in society. A wonderful sense of intimacy is imparted by perils undergone together, or profound experiences shared. They seem to sweep away, as with a whirlwind breath, that thick veil of convention and commonplace which shroud many acquaintances from beginning to end. At these times the real nature has shown itself, as it does only in the great crises of life; and, once revealed, it can never wholly conceal itself again.

At the White-House that evening, the wreck was discussed over and over from every point of view. Each person wished to describe the moment when he awoke to the apprehension of the calamity,—what he said and did, thought and planned. Such

conversations lead one to believe that the chief pleasure of the resurrection [Pg 141] will lie in the comparison of post-mortem experiences on first awakening.

Dr. Cricket said that when he first heard the booming of guns, half-asleep as he was, he dreamed that the statue of William Penn was falling off the dome of the Philadelphia city hall.

Miss Standisth said that she was broad awake; but had happened not to catch any sound till she heard the commotion of people moving about downstairs. This she took to mean that breakfast-time had arrived, and that this was destined to be another dark day like the freak of nature famous in the colonial annals.

"I heard Fred call out—" Jimmy Anstice began; but his sister interrupted, "Please, Jimmy, leave me out. You know Papa forbade you to talk about me in company."

"My dear," remonstrated her father, mildly, "don't speak so abruptly to your little brother."

Thus, in one shape and another, every one said his say.

Flint alone, of the entire group, was silent, almost surly. He submitted without comment to being ensconced in the great chintz-covered chair. He even swallowed, under protest, the various pills and potions which Dr. Cricket presented to him at intervals; but the most adroit questioning on the part of Miss Standish failed to elicit any information as to his sensations [Pg 142] or emotions, past or present. Brady, who understood his friend better than all the

rest, strove to shelter him by talking longer and laughing louder than usual; but this Miss Standish resented as much as Flint's silence, and set it down to flippancy. Her ethical training impelled her to strive to improve the occasion to these young people. She shook her gray curls, and cleared her throat several times before her conversational opening arrived.

"I hope, Mr. Flint," she said at last, "that you feel as strongly as that poor girl upstairs, the mercy of the divine Providence which brought you to the rescue at that critical moment, and enabled you to save a life."

Something in Miss Standish's tone irritated Flint.

"If, for 'divine Providence,' you will substitute 'lucky accident,' I will agree to it as heartily as either you or she. If you persist in dragging in Providence, I must really beg leave to inquire where Providence was when the ship struck."

The silence which reigned in the room was like the space cleared for a sparring-match. The old combative instinct of the primitive man arises in the most civilized, and makes him delight in a fight. Brady looked amused; Winifred a little apprehensive; Mr. Anstice preserved [Pg 143] a dignified neutrality; and Miss Standish fumbled with her cameo brooch, and smoothed the folds of her skirt, as if to make sure that all was in order before entering upon a possibly ruffling contest.

"I suppose—" she began; but old Marsden, who sat on the other side of the fire, and who was no respecter of persons, broke in: "I've heerd a deal about how you all felt, and what you all thought; but what I'd like to know is what really happened. The men at the

inn wont talk without their captain gives them leave; and Dr. Cricket has got him and his sister shut up in their rooms, to git over the shawk. Now perhaps the Doctor can tell us how it wuz thet thet air ship went aground on a sandy coast, in a ca'm night like the last."

"Captain Costello says it was the light in the tavern-window which he mistook for the Bug Light off the point; but how could that have been, when it was past two o'clock, and I'll answer for it that no one at Nepaug was ever found awake after nine?"

Dr. Cricket questioned with the inflection of a man who neither expects nor desires an answer. Indeed, he had only paused for breath, when Flint, from his easy chair on the other side of the fireplace, broke in: —

"So I am to blame for the whole thing."

"You!"

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"You don't say so!"

"Was the light yours?"

"What on earth were you doing at that hour?"

"Not quite so many questions at once, friends, if you please. My brain is still a little waterlogged, and my thoughts work slowly. I only remember sitting down about ten o'clock to read a novel, and the first thing that roused me was the gun, which for the moment I took for the attack of the enemy of whom I was reading. I rushed out, half expecting to find the tavern surrounded, and to have to risk my life in its defence, and instead—"

"Instead," put in Winifred Anstice, very quietly, "you risked your life to save some one else,—Nora Costello, the Captain's sister, spent the whole morning in tears, because Dr. Cricket would not let her leave her room to go and tell you how grateful she was."

"Hysterical, I suppose," said Flint.

Winifred, who had opened her lips to say something more, shut them closely again, and sat back with the air of a person determined to have no further share in the conversation.

Dr. Cricket hastened to occupy the floor. "A charming girl—upon my word, a charming girl—if she *is* a Hallelujah lassie."

"A what?" ejaculated Brady.

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"A Hallelujah lassie—Feminine of Salvation Soldier, don't you know! Why, she had one of the coal-scuttle bonnets hanging by its draggled strings round her neck when Flint pulled her in, and a number of 'The War Cry' was in the pocket of her dress, when we stripped it off."

"Oh," said Brady, with a touch of disappointment in his tone, "I took her for a different sort of a person; she looked quite the lady."

"So she is, young man," answered Dr. Cricket, with his fierce little frown. "There is no doubt of that. She told me her story this morning. I wanted her to rest; but the poor thing was so nervous I thought it would hurt her less to talk than to keep still."

Flint smiled sardonically. The Doctor's little foible of

curiosity had not escaped his observant eye.

"You would have done much better to shut her up; but what did she say?" queried Miss Standish.

Flint smiled again. But the Doctor began briskly:—

"Why, it seems that the Costellos are the children of a Scotch minister; though, from his name, I should guess that he had a drop more or less of Irish blood in his veins, and their looks show it too. They were brought up in a manse on one of those brown and bare Scotch moors. [Pg 146] The boy was to be educated for the church, like his father; but when he was seventeen, he grew restive under the strictness of his training, turned wild, and ran away. For ten years they had no word of him. The father reproached himself for having been too hard on the boy; and he never stopped loving and praying for him. On his death-bed, he charged Nora—that's the girl's name you know—to sell all the things in the manse, and start out into the world to find her brother, and never to give up the search as long as she lived."

"That is always the way," said Flint, with a shrug: "the reward of virtue is to be appointed trustee of vice—no assets—assume all the liabilities."

"Hm! wide, of the mark this time, Mr. Flint. The very day after her father's death, Nora Costello received a letter from her brother, saying that he was ashamed to come home without first securing forgiveness, and asking his sister to intercede for him, and to meet him in London with the news of his pardon."

"Exactly," resumed Flint with irritating calmness. "Prodigal son sends postal card stating that he is

prepared to receive overtures looking to a resumption of family relations. No questions asked."

"He has not seen Captain Costello, has he, [Pg 147] Dr. Cricket? or he would be more sparing of his jibes."

"Never mind, Miss Winifred, Mr. Flint is ashamed of having played the humanitarian this morning, so he is trying to atone by double cynicism this evening; but don't let him interrupt my story again, under pain of being sent back to the tavern, instead of taken care of in Mrs. White's best bed-room, under the charge of the best doctor (though I do say it) in Philadelphia.

"Well, as I was about to say, Nora Costello came up to London; and there she found her brother, a brown and bearded man in command of a schooner, 'The Mary Ann,' plying between New York and Nova Scotia. He had been looking forward joyfully to his homecoming; but when he learned of his father's death, he was all broken up, and talked about its being a judgment of God on himself."

"Rather severe on his father," grumbled Flint; but no one heeded him, and the Doctor continued:—

"Costello felt so awfully cut up, that one night he came near drowning himself; and after that his sister did not dare leave him alone, but went about everywhere with him; and one night they came upon a Salvation Army meeting, with drums and torches and things, in the [Pg 148] streets of the East End. General Booth was there; and, my soul! to hear that girl talk, you would think he was the archangel Gabriel, with the sword of the Lord in his hand."

"It was Michael who carried the sword," came from

Flint's corner, exasperating even Brady beyond endurance.

"Come, Flint, you're too bad. Hold your tongue, can't you, and let the rest of us hear the story! That girl is a trump."

"You 're right, sir," echoed the Doctor, cordially, "a trump she was, and her brother too, for that matter. General Booth preached that day, as it happened, about remnants, and argued how a man might make the most of the remnants of a life, as well as of a meal, even if the best part was gone. Well, the talk sort of heartened up Angus Costello; and, after the meeting, he and his sister went up to the General, and Nora asked to be taken into the Army. She went in as a private; and when Angus came back to Nova Scotia, Nora came with him, and was assigned to duty, first in Montreal, and then in New York. She has risen already to be an officer, and, I judge, a valuable one. She was off this month on sick-leave for her brother's ship, taking a vacation from overwork, I suspect."

"What is her work?" asked Brady, leaning forward with his square chin propped on his [Pg 149] hands, which, in their turn, were supported by his knees,—an attitude to which he was prone when self-forgetful.

"Her work? Oh, I don't know! Everything I suppose. Taking care of sick people in tenements, talking, and singing, and selling copies of the 'War Cry,' in offices and liquor-saloons."

Brady frowned. "I don't like it," he said. "She's too pretty, with those little curly rings of hair round her pale face, and with those big blue eyes. Why don't

they send some old maid on such errands?"

"Because they want to sell their papers," answered Miss Standish, dryly.

The talk around the fire had gone on so eagerly that the attention of the group was utterly absorbed; and every one started as if an apparition had appeared in their midst, when a slim figure in a dark dress, against which her face looked doubly white, glided noiselessly into the room. With eyes fixed in almost trance-like far-sightedness, she moved towards Brady, and laid her hand upon his sleeve.

"My brother," she said, "it is you have risked your life to save mine. God gave you back both. What will you be doing with your share?"

"I—I—I'm awfully sorry, don't you know!" stammered Brady, terribly embarrassed; "but it wasn't I who did it."

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"Here is the man, Miss Costello, to whom you owe your life," said the Doctor, who dearly loved a "situation," turning as he spoke, with a little flourish, to the place where Flint had stood; but that gentleman had taken advantage of the mistake to bolt into the bed-room behind him. He would have bolted into the pond, rather than submit to be thanked publicly in this fashion.

"He's gone!" exclaimed Dr. Cricket, in disappointment.

"Ah!" said Nora Costello, with a quick, sympathetic smile, "it's verra natural. He did not wish to be thanked. Perhaps he is right. After all, it is to the

good God himsel' that our thanks are owing."

She knelt on the rug, as simply as she would have taken an offered chair, and spoke to some invisible presence, as naturally as she would have spoken to any of those in the room. Brady was shocked at first, at the conversational tone. It was so realistic that he opened his eyes, half expecting to see the Someone—the Something—so evidently apparent to the girl herself.

Having once opened his eyes, he forgot to close them again. The actual so pursued him, that he ceased to seek the spiritual presence. The firelight, playing over the girl's face, threw strange lights, and shadows half unearthly. She [Pg 151] seemed a spirit, of whom no ordinary restraints of the familiar social life were to be expected.

When her prayer was finished, she rose as simply as she had knelt, though now two large tears stood on the long fringe of her eyes.

"Good-night, friends!" she said with a confiding glance around. "I think I shall be able to get the sleep now. God bless you all!"

When she was gone, the hush was unbroken for several minutes. At last Winifred spoke.

"I don't know how the rest of you feel, but somehow I have a sensation of being a lay figure in the shop-window of life, and having all of a sudden seen a real woman go by."

"Jove! what eyes she has!" said Brady, continuing thoughts of his own, rather than answering Winifred's speech.

"Really," said Ben Bradford, "it wasn't unpleasant at all."

"Unpleasant!" exclaimed his aunt. "Well, I should say not, unless heaven is unpleasant, and angels, and the Judgment Day, which I daresay it will be for you, Ben Bradford, unless you mend your ways. Good-night! I'm going up to see that the child has a hot-water bag to her feet, and a mustard plaster on her chest. The Salvation Army needs an efficient ambulance corps."

"Hm!" said Dr. Cricket, as Miss Standish [Pg 152] disappeared. "Mary may have chosen the better part; but I pity the household that's all Marys. Give me a Martha in mine every time!

"That reminds me," he added briskly, "that I must look after my patient, and not let him pitch himself into that bed, which has not been aired for a week; and nobody in this house knows the difference between damp sheets and dry ones. Do you know, Mr. Brady," he continued, as he rose from his chair with a little rheumatic hitch, "I have taken a great shine to that queer friend of yours. I don't know how it is, but I suspect it is because he is such a contrast to most folks. It's a comfort to meet a man who keeps his best foot back."

"Oh, Flint is a brick!" said Brady, with enthusiasm. "I have known him to do the nicest things. There was a fellow once in college—he was rather pushing socially, and nobody liked him—but he was 'a dig,'" and he got sick from studying too much. None of the rest of us ever fell ill of that trouble; but he did, and he was so poor he didn't want to let any one know about it, for fear he would be obliged to send for a doctor. It was found out though; and one day a

doctor and nurse turned up at the fellow's room,—said they'd been asked not to say who sent them; but they stayed and pulled him through. He never knew who his benefactor [Pg 153] was; but I did, and you may judge of my surprise, when the fellow got about, to see Flint cut him on the street.

"'What in thunder did you do that for?' I asked, for I was dumfounded to see him do it.

"'Because the fellow is a cad, and would be taking all sorts of advantages. Better ignore the acquaintance at the start.'

"'Then why did you do what you did for him?'

"'I don't know, I'm sure!' Flint answered.

"That's just the sort of fellow Flint is. He may seem crusty, but in any emergency he is a man to tie to."

"If life were a series of emergencies," said Winifred, reflectively, "Mr. Flint would be invaluable; but in every-day existence, one does not quite know what to do with him."

"I can put up with a great deal," said Ben Bradford, "from a chap like that, who shows real sand and pluck when a crisis comes. I mean to tell Mr. Flint to-morrow that I think he's a daisy, and go down on my marrow bones for the things I have thought and said about him before."

"I wouldn't, if I were you, Ben," observed Winifred, with an amused smile; "for I doubt if Mr. Flint has ever had the dimmest idea that you have not been thinking well of him all along."

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CHAPTER X

FLYING POINT

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"We'll maybe return to Lochaber no more."

Far up the pond, at no great distance from the spot where "The Aquidneck" had met her untimely and ignominious end, Flying Point thrust out its tongue of land into the rippling water, which stole in and out between its tiny coves so gently that scarcely a murmur could be heard, except when a northeaster lashed the pond into a mimic sea; and then the teapot tempest was so outdone by the giant waves outside the bar, that it passed unnoticed, like the fury of a child beside the rage of a grown man.

The Point took its name from the flights of ducks which passed over it in vast numbers in the spring and autumn, their dark, irregular squadrons black against the intense blue of sea and sky. Its low bluff of gleaming sand was crowned by a grove of tall pines, through which purled a tiny brook perpetually prattling to the sea of its little inland life. Below the bank, stretched out a rod or more of level beach [Pg 155] where fires might be lighted and cloths spread by those who wished to return to the gypsy habits of their forebears and sit down as Nature's guests, to simple fare of their own cooking and serving.

A midsummer pilgrimage to Flying Point was a regular feature of the season with the dwellers at the

White-House; and it was a point of honor for the old-timers to declare that last year's expedition was in every way more successful than that of the present season. Newcomers endured this superiority in silence, consoled by the prospect of enjoying the same triumph themselves next summer.

Several times the date of this year's expedition had been set, and as often changed. The last date had been fixed for the eighth of July; but the excitement of the wreck, and the reaction of lassitude which followed that catastrophe, put to flight, for a time, all thoughts of amusement, and a fortnight elapsed without an apparent ripple on the calm of existence at Nepaug.

On the second day after the wreck, Angus Costello and his sister took their departure for New York,—he to collect the insurance on the ill-fated "Mary Ann," she to report again for duty in the Army. With the going of the Costellos, quiet settled down once more; but the dwellers on the Point found themselves impatient [Pg 156] of the very repose for which they had sought Nepaug. Rest had turned to inanimation, quiet to dulness, peace to stagnation.

Flint, usually unaffected by environment, found himself incapable of any intellectual or physical exertion. He could not work. He could not even loaf alone. Brady was an indifferent companion, subject to fits of absence of mind,—more unsocial than absence of body.

There was only one resource left; the young men betook themselves to the White-House. Life there could not be wholly dull, while a perpetual sparring match was going on between Miss Standish and Dr. Cricket, while Professor Anstice smoked his pipe

serenely on the corner of the piazza, and Ben Bradford openly adored Winifred, heedless of outside observation or amusement.

Ben himself was an endless source of entertainment to Flint, so vividly did his demeanor recall the rapidly receding days of his own youth, when he too had felt the constraint which is born of the assurance that all the world is fixing its gaze upon us and our actions.

Ben never dreamed that he could be taken humorously. He regarded himself with a deep seriousness, and planned innocent little hypocrisies with a view to their effect on the public. He was anxious to be supposed to handle a large [Pg 157] correspondence, and took pains to sort his mail in public, fingering a number of letters in his leather case with a reflective air, as if he were considering what replies they demanded, although their worn envelopes revealed them to the most casual observation as at least a fortnight old.

He had the sensitiveness of youth, and spent much useless effort in the endeavor to discover what people meant by their words and deeds; when, nine times out of ten, they meant nothing at all, but were only striving to fill up the gaps of life with idle observations or diversions. He himself was fond of side remarks, intended to be satirical, but falling rather flat, if dragged out into the prosaic light of general conversation, as sometimes happened when Miss Standish caught a word or two and exclaimed aloud: "What was that, Ben? Won't you give us all the benefit of that last observation?"

Ben loved his aunt; but he did not like her.

She interfered sadly with his pose as a man of the world, by relating anecdotes of his infancy, and stating the precise number of years which had elapsed since the occurrence.

On the occasion of one of the daily visits of Flint and Brady, they were made aware of unmistakable signs of a domestic unpleasantness. They were no sooner seated, than Ben picked up [Pg 158] again the grievance which their arrival had compelled him to drop.

"You have told that story four times already this summer, Aunt Susan," he remarked truculently; "and I don't think it is of great interest to the public at any time to know that I took a bite out of each one of the Thanksgiving pies when I was five years old."

"I have *not* told it before, and you were *six* when it happened, which was fourteen years ago next November," Miss Standish answered.

Winifred Anstice, foreseeing a battle, made haste to the rescue. She called out from her hammock:—

"When are we going to Flying Point? I think we all need change of air for our—ahem!—nerves."

Woe to the person who undertakes to divert the lightning from meeting thunder-clouds; unless he be well insulated, he is sure to fall victim to his own well meant efforts.

"Winifred, my dear," sniffed Miss Standish, "you may remember that it was only this morning when *I* asked when we were going to Flying Point that you answered, 'Never, I hope—I detest picnics.'"

"Did I?" laughed Winifred; "well, it's true, and I

cannot deny it."

"I must agree with you there," said Ben. "A [Pg 159] picnic is an occasion when all the food is picked and all the china nicked."

"A picnic," said Winifred, "is a place where you can accumulate an indigestion without incurring an obligation. In this, it is an advance upon a tea-party."

"Picnicking with people you know is a bore, Picnicking with people you don't know is a feat of endurance," echoed Flint.

"Professionally, I am in favor of them," threw in Dr. Cricket. "I often feel like saying, with the old Roman, 'This day's work shall breed prescriptions.'"

"Oh, come now!" said Brady, "you're all trying to be clever. This is only talk. I think a picnic is great fun, especially a tea-picnic, where you boil coffee, and light a camp-fire, and perch about on the rocks over the water. You would appreciate that last privilege, if you lived out on the prairies, where there is no water, and the rocks are all imported."

"Bully for you!" shouted Jimmy Anstice, who had been sitting by with his hands clasped over the knees of his stockings to conceal the holes from his sister's observant eye, but none the less eagerly following the conversation. "You're a peach; and why can't we go to-night?"

"That boy is all right," said Brady, smiling. [Pg 160] "He knows enough to take the current when it serves. Off with you, Jim, while the tide is out, and dig your basket of clams! Come on, Flint, and we will join them at the Point! How will you go, and when?"

"I think we'd better go up in the Whites' sail-boat. There'll be room for one of you," said Miss Standish, looking meaningly at her nephew, for she had not yet forgiven Flint's indifference.

"That's good," Flint said cheerfully. "You take Brady. He's better ballast; and I'll row up in my dory."

"A good excuse for coming late and leaving early," said Winifred, mockingly.

Flint bowed and smiled imperturbably, without troubling himself to offer a contradiction.

Miss Standish swept past him with her Plymouth Rock manner. "I will go and look after the supper," she remarked, and added, as she reached the door, "however much people may sniff, there's nobody, so far as I know, who is superior to food."

Nepaug picnic suppers had been reduced to scientific principles under Miss Standish's rule. There was a picnic coffee-pot and a picnic-dipper, a set of wooden plates and a pile of Japanese paper napkins. All these went into one basket, together with cups and glasses and knives [Pg 161] and forks. Another, still more capacious, held the sandwiches and biscuit, the cake and coffee, the pepper and salt, beside the jar of orange marmalade, and the pies surreptitiously borrowed from the pantry, where they were reposing upon the larder shelf, tranquilly awaiting the morrow's dessert. Everything was neatly stowed away,—no crowding, no crumbling. Miss Standish was willing to take any amount of trouble; all she asked was to be appreciated.

Flint certainly did not appreciate her. Her particularity he found "fussiness," her energy

annoyed him, and her well-meant interest in others appeared to him insufferable busy-bodyism. More than once that afternoon he remembered her with a sense of irritation. "A confounded old maid," he called her to himself as he pushed off his dory from the beach below the inn.

But no matter how irritable the frame of mind in which he started, he could not help being soothed by the tranquillity of the scene around him as he went on. The west was one sheet of orange. The brilliancy of the sunset had faded to a tenderer tone. The spikes of the pointed firs on the mainland stood dark against it. Over in the east, the moon was rising, pale and spectral, with all her ribs showing like a skeleton leaf. Jupiter shone out more clearly as the darkness [Pg 162] deepened and the shadows fell more heavily along the strip of shore.

"The gray sea and the long black land;
And the yellow half-moon, large and low,"

Flint quoted to himself. "What is it that comes next? Something about

"'A mile of warm sea-scented beach.'

Must have been curiously like this. Where is Flying Point anyhow? Oh, yes; there's the camp-fire."

"Here comes Flint," cried Brady, as he heard the grating of the prow of the dory on the gravel.

"I should think it was time," grumbled Miss Standish, who had been making great sacrifices to keep the coffee hot. For some inscrutable reason, all the people with whom Flint came in contact felt impelled to do their best for him, let their opinion of him be what it would.

"Well, we thought you must be lost!" called Brady from the height of the rocks. "We have all had supper; but we have kept some for you."

"Thanks," answered Flint, from below, "I am sorry you had the trouble, for I took mine at the tavern before I started."

This was more than the descendant of Miles [Pg 163] Standish could bear. With a bang, she emptied the coffee-pot and knocked out the grounds, as her ancestor had shaken the arrows out of the snake-skin to replace them with bullets. Henceforth, she was implacable; and yet Flint never dreamed that he had given offence. Imperfect sympathies again!

Winifred Anstice, whose misfortune it was to be peculiarly sensitive to disturbances in the atmosphere, jumped up from under the pine where she had been sitting with Brady. "Come," she said, "let's all sit down around the fire. I want Leonard to recite for us. Will you, Leon?"

Flattered, yet embarrassed, the young fisherman rose from his occupation of tying up the baskets, and drew nearer. As he stood in front of the fire, Flint looked at him with a thrill of æsthetic admiration. His red shirt, open at the throat, showed a splendid chest and a neck on which his head was firmly and strongly poised. His hair, curling tightly, revealed the well-shaped outline of the skull, and the profile was classic in its regularity. "And that little fool doesn't know enough to fall in love with him!" thought Flint.

"What'll you have, Miss Fred?" asked Leonard.

"Whatever you like."

"Wal, then, ef you'd jes ez lief, I'll say [Pg 164]

'Marmion.' I was learned it at school." Throwing off his cap and striking a dramatic pose, he began:—

"The Douglas round him drew his cloak."

It is marvellous, the power of strong feeling to communicate itself through all barriers. True emotion is the X-ray which can penetrate all matter, —yes, and all spirit too.

The hackneyed words burned again with the freshness of their primal enthusiasm. Again Douglas spurned, and Marmion flung him back scorn for scorn. It was not acting. Leonard Davitt could never have thrown fire into a rôle which did not appeal to him; but this lived. He put his soul into it, and he drew out the soul from his audience.

"I must go now," he said, when he had finished, having ducked his head shyly in response to the applause, and picked up his cap. "I'm goin' off at sunrise."

"Where are you going, Leon?" queried Winifred Anstice, coming up to him where he stood not far off from the spot where Flint, in dead shadow, leaned against the trunk of a giant pine.

"Goin' off bars-fishin' for a week with the men from the Pint," Leonard answered, and then added in a lower tone, "you won't forget your promise, Miss Fred."

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"No, I will not forget; but you must try not to cherish hard feeling."

"Oh, I don't say it's his fault. Mebbe it's hers."

"Perhaps it's nobody's, and perhaps there's no harm done after all,—at any rate, none that can't be undone."

"Yes, there is," Leonard answered gloomily. "The past can't never come back, and things won't never be the same."

"Oh, cheer up!" Winifred answered more hopefully. "Your going away is the best thing under the circumstances, and I'll do what I can for you; but I wish it were anything else."

"Thank you, marm, and good-bye!" With another shy duck, Leonard let himself down over the rocks and sculled out into the strip of rippling moonlight which stretched across the bay.

The moonlight fell also upon Winifred Anstice's face as she stood looking after him, and showed a pathetic little quiver about the mouth. An instant later, she dashed the back of her hand across her eyes, and exclaimed, half aloud, "It's too bad; I've no patience with him."

"What a clear night it is!" said Flint, stepping out from the shadows.

Winifred started a little. "I thought you were sitting by the fire," she said rather abruptly.

"Indeed," Flint answered. It was one of [Pg 166] his peculiarities never to be drawn on to the explanations to which most people are driven by the mere necessity of saying something. After all, he had as good a right to the place where he was as Miss Anstice herself. Miss Anstice perhaps was thinking the same thought, for she made no response, only stood twisting and untwisting a bit of lawn

handkerchief which bade fair to be worn out before it reached home. At length, with the air of one nerving herself to a difficult task, she turned about and faced Flint. Lifting her clear gray eyes full to his, she began hesitatingly:—

"Mr. Flint."

"Yes, Miss Anstice."

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Assuredly."

"No, not an 'assuredly' favor, but a real favor."

"If I can."

"Will you do it blindly?"

"No, I will do it with my eyes open."

"You cannot."

"Try me!"

The girl shifted her eyes from his face to the path of moon beams in which Leonard's boat floated far off like a dark speck against the ripples of light. When she went on, it was in a lower tone, with a note in her voice which Flint had never heard there before, —the note of appeal.

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"I am going to ask you a very strange thing," she said; "I would not ask it if I could see any other way."

"Surely, Miss Anstice, you cannot doubt my willingness to oblige you in any way. You have only to command me."

"But it is not to oblige me. It is—oh, dear! I can't explain, but I want you to go away."

Flint rose instantly.

"No, no, not away from this spot, but from Nepaug. That's it," she went on insistently; "I want you to leave Nepaug."

Flint stared at her for a moment, as if in doubt whether to question her sanity or her seriousness. The latter he could not doubt, as he looked at her eager attitude, her hands tightly interlaced, her head bent a little forward, and a spot of deep red sharply outlined on either cheek. Suddenly the meaning of her conversation with Leonard flashed across his mind; but it brought only further puzzlement. He motioned Winifred to sit down upon the great tree which lay its length on the earth, overthrown by the last storm, and with stones and upturned dirt still clinging to its branching roots.

"Are you sure," he said gravely, as he took a seat beside her,—"are you sure that you are doing right to keep me in the dark?"

"I think so; I hope so."

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"Of course I know you would not ask such a thing if there were not something serious back of it all; and since it so nearly concerns me, it seems to me I have a right to know it."

Dead silence reigned for some minutes. Then Winifred said, speaking low and hurriedly:

"Yes, you are right; I ought to tell you,—I know I ought; but it is so hard. Why isn't it Mr. Brady! He

would understand."

"Perhaps if you would explain," Flint began with unusual patience.

"Well, then, it is about Tilly Marsden, who has been engaged these two years to Leonard Davitt; and now she refuses to marry him, and he thinks it is because she is in love with someone else. *Surely* you understand *now*."

"No, upon my soul, I don't. You can't mean that the little shop-girl—the maid-of-all-work at the inn—is—thinks she is in love with—"

"With you; exactly."

"But I have hardly spoken to her."

The silence which followed implied that the situation was none the less likely on that account. The implication tinged Flint's manner with irritation.

"I suppose I am very dull; but I confess I don't understand these people."

"Have you ever tried to understand them?" returned Winifred, with a sudden outburst of [Pg 169] the indignation which had long been gathering in her heart against the man before her.

"Haven't you always thought of them only as they ministered to your comfort, like the other farm animals? Is it really anything to you that this narrow-minded girl has conceived a very silly, but none the less unhappy, sentiment for you?"

"I—" began Flint, but the flood would have its way.

"Oh, yes, it annoys you, I dare say. You feel your

dignity a little touched by it; but does it move your pity, your chivalry? If it does—Oh, go away!"

Flint would have given much to feel a fever heat of anger, to flame out against the audacity of the girl with an indignation overtopping her own; but he only felt himself growing more cold and rigid. He told himself that she had misunderstood him hopelessly, utterly. There was a certain aggrieved satisfaction in the thought. He had risen, and stood leaning against a tree. Winifred wondered at her own courage, as she saw him standing there stiff and haughty.

"I shall go, of course," he said at length. "My absence seems to be the only sure method of producing universal content. But let me ask you one question before I go. Do you consider me to blame in this unlucky business?"

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Winifred parried the question by another.

"Why should I tell you, when you don't care in the least what I think?"

"If I did not, I should not ask you, and I think I have a right to demand an answer."

"I can hardly answer you fairly. Is ice to blame for being ice and not sun? We cannot say. We only know that we are chilled. I always have the feeling that with those you consider your equals, you might be genial and responsive; but the joys and sorrows of the great world of uninteresting, commonplace people about you have no power to touch your sympathies. Of course, in a way, it is not your fault that you never noticed Tilly Marsden's manner—"

"I am not a cad who goes about investigating the sentiments of—of women like that. But you have your impressions of my character fully formed, and I shall not be guilty of the folly of trying to change them. To-morrow, I shall relieve Nepaug of my objectionable presence, and, I hope, you will cease to fear me as a disturbing element when I am far away at my office-desk."

"You are going back to New York?" echoed Winifred, uncertainly, realizing all of a sudden what it was that she was sending him away from, and to what she was consigning him.

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"Yes, of course," Flint answered a little impatiently.

"I am sorry," the girl began lamely. It was just dawning upon her that it was not so easy to control the destinies of other people, as she had fancied.

"Oh, that is all right!" her companion responded more cheerfully; "New York in summer is not half so bad as you people who never stay there probably imagine."

"I don't know," said Winifred; "to me it seems dreadful to be shut up inside brick walls, or walking on hot paving-stones, when one might be sitting under green trees, or by rolling waves, breathing in the fresh country air. But I suppose I feel so because while I was growing up I never lived in a large city."

"Indeed! How was that? I should think your father's profession would have kept him in the city."

"Oh, it does now, of course; but for years after my mother's death he was so broken down that he could

not bear to mix with people at all, and he chose to bury himself out on a Western ranch, and there I grew up with no more training than the little Indian girls who used to come to the house with beads and things to sell. It was a queer life for a girl; but it was great sport."

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Winifred had almost forgotten her companion for the moment in her thoughts of the past; but as he rubbed his hand across his forehead in the effort to recall something, she mistook the gesture for a sign of weariness, and reproached herself for her egotistical garrulity.

"I do wish," she said hastily, "that there were some way out of this unlucky matter,—some way which would not send you back so unseasonably."

"Never mind that," Flint answered; "my vacation was almost at an end, anyway. I am really needed now at the office of the 'Trans-Continental.'"

"The 'Trans-Continental'?" echoed Winifred. "Do you work on that magazine?"

"Yes, I do a little writing for it occasionally."

"Then perhaps you know the editor—the chief editor, I mean."

"Yes, he is a friend of mine."

"I envy you the privilege of calling such a man your friend. Oh, you may smile if you choose, but perhaps, after all, you do not know him as well as I do. I have never seen him, I don't even know his name, and yet I have a clear picture of him in my mind. And he has been so kind—so good to me. His

letters have helped me more than he will ever know." [Pg 173] Here a sudden thought seemed to strike the girl, and she lifted beseeching eyes to his face.

"You won't try to make him dislike me, will you? I know you never did like me. I saw it the first time we met, when I was driving that wretched colt, and we ran over your fishing-rod, and then, the next day on the pond, and ever since, things have steadily kept going wrong between us. So, of course, it would be quite natural for you to talk about it all to him; and then he would never like me any more, and I do want him to."

For an instant Flint felt a mad desire to keep up the illusion; but he himself was too much shaken to have played his part if he would.

"Miss Anstice," he said, "*I* am the editor of the 'Trans-Continental.'"

Without another word, he swung himself down by the pine-bough to the gravelly beach, and, pushing off the dory, slipped out over the same moonlit course which Leonard had travelled. Winifred watched him till his boat had rounded the Point; then she turned back to the camp-fire in a daze. Do what she would, she could not shake off the spell of those last words: "*I* am the editor of the 'Trans-Continental.'"

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CHAPTER XI

THE POINT OF VIEW

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Extract from the Journal of Miss Susan Standish.
Nepaug, August First.

[*From which it will appear that contemporary journals are not always trustworthy*.]

This August weather is really unbearable. Nobody but flies can be happy in it, and they are part of the general misery. I sleep with a handkerchief over my face to keep off the pests; but I invariably wake to find one perching on every unprotected spot, and the others buzzing about my ears, and making such a noise that I can't sleep a wink after five o'clock.

It is a very long time between five o'clock and breakfast. It would be a sufficient incentive to a blameless life, to know beforehand that you were to be condemned to think over your past for three mortal hours every morning.

This is what I do; and though I suppose I have been as respectable as most people, I find cold shivers running down my back when I remember some things, and the blushes of a girl of [Pg 175] sixteen mounting to my wrinkled forehead, when I think of others. On the whole, the silly things are the worst. I think at the Judgment Day I would rather answer up to my sins than my sillinesses—especially if my relatives were waiting round. The only way I can turn my thoughts out of the uncomfortable reminiscent channel which they make for themselves at five o'clock in the morning, is to think as hard as I can about somebody else. Lately, I don't find this so

difficult; for our household here at Nepaug includes some interesting people, and, moreover, some very queer things have happened lately, I thank Heaven, I have none of Dr. Cricket's curiosity; but I should be ashamed if I were so indifferent to those about me as not to take an interest in their concerns. This interest has led me of late to ponder on recent events, and speculate as to their causes.

When I asked some very simple and natural questions of Winifred Anstice, she snapped at me like a snapping-turtle; but I did not discontinue my investigation on that account. On the contrary, I resolved to be all the more watchful; and when it comes to putting two and two together, there are few who have a more mathematical mind than Susan Standish.

On Friday evening, we had a picnic supper at Eagle Rock.

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Mr. Flint (superior as usual) preferred to go in the only society which interests him, and therefore set off *alone* in his dory. His absence did not have any visibly depressing effect on the party in the sail-boat. Winifred was at her very best; and Philip Brady seemed to appreciate her. If I were a matchmaker, I should have tried to throw them together, for they do seem just cut out for each other; in spite of all my efforts to give them opportunities of making each other's acquaintance on intimate terms, they never appeared to take advantage of them. But on Friday it was different. In the first place, anything more warm-blooded than an oyster must have fallen in love with Winifred at first sight on that evening. She wore a white flannel yachting-dress, and a red-felt

hat cocked up on one side, and as she stood against the sail in the sunset, she was—Well, I'm too old to be silly; but really that girl is something worth looking at when she is nice. To-day, she looked like a frump, and talked like a fury.

The wind on Friday died out soon after we started; and at one time I was afraid Mr. Flint would have the satisfaction of getting to the Point before us; but, providentially, it sprang up again and, indeed, I need not have worried, for it seemed he was afraid of being bored, and did not start till six o'clock. Brady says he was [Pg 177] always like that, even in college; that when they were invited anywhere, Flint would always put off the start, and would say, "Your coming away depends on your hostess; but your going depends upon yourself."

"If it had been *my* house," said I, "his *staying* away would have depended on his hostess. I have no patience with a rude man."

"Flint rude?" said Philip.

"Most decidedly rude, I should say."

"Oh, but he is not rude. He is only indifferent."

"Indifference is rudeness."

"Then I'm afraid, Miss Standish," broke in Winifred, "we must all be rude to most of the world. That is, unless we belong to the Salvation Army, like Nora Costello, and take an interest in everybody or rather every soul."

"Very remarkable girl, that Nora Costello," said Philip. "I don't quite know what it was that made her so interesting."

"*I* know," answered Winifred, with a little laugh; "it was her looks."

"Or her manner," suggested Philip.

"Oh, her manner without her looks would not have carried at all. Manners are only thunder. It is looks that strike."

"You should know," Philip said quite low. Just at this moment Jimmy Anstice, with that [Pg 178] exasperatingly inopportune way of his, called out:—

"Look, Fred! Did you see that fish jump? Gracious! He must have gone up two feet! What makes a fish jump? Papa, Papa, do you hear me? What makes a fish jump?"

"I don't know, my dear; I suppose to get food, or because he wants air."

"Then why doesn't he jump oftener?"

It has always been one of Professor Anstice's pet theories that a child's mental development is promoted by the stimulation of intellectual curiosity. As a result, Jimmy has been encouraged to ask questions to an extent which the world at large finds somewhat tiresome. For my part, I think one of the most useful accomplishments connected with the tongue is the art of holding it; and I believe in its early acquirement by the young.

After Jimmy's curiosity in regard to the habits of fish had expended itself, there was no more *tête-à-tête*. Everybody was shouting this way and that; and then the boat brought up at the rocks, and those of us who could jump, jumped out, and those who couldn't, clambered out; and Jimmy Anstice flopped

into the water above his knees, as usual, and had to sit by the fire getting dry, when he should have been running errands and making himself useful. Small [Pg 179] boys, being neither ornamental nor interesting, should be either useful or absent.

Winifred and Brady started off after driftwood. I invited Ben to help me with the coffee; but he said, "Presently," and made off after the other two. Really, that boy may come to something if he selects his profession with care. He can't see when he's not wanted, which may make him a success in the ministry.

Well, at last, we got our two fires started, and the tablecloth spread; and the coffee tasted so good I just hoped Mr. Flint would come to have some, because he made some disagreeable remarks in the morning on the subject of picnics. Some people are never satisfied unless they can spoil the enjoyment of others.

While we were eating, everybody was jolly and all went well, except that Philip would tell stories,—Western stories about "commercial gents" and "drummer hotels" and such things. He tells a story very well; but he also tells it very long. With the tact upon which I justly pride myself, I tried to shut him up or draw him off; but each time Winifred would bring him right back, with "What was it you were just going to tell, Mr. Brady?" or "As you were saying when Miss Standish began," I was a good deal annoyed, for I couldn't quite make out whether she was really interested, or whether she was [Pg 180] making fun of us both. Now I have a very keen sense of humor; but I don't like a joke at my expense. At last Philip offered to give us a comic poem from the

"Bison Spike;" but *that* I *couldn't* stand; and I pretended that the coffee was boiling over, and Winifred jumped up to attend to it. Philip, of course, went to her assistance, and afterward, as he stood before the fire with Winifred beside him, I could not help thinking what a fine looking couple they would make. His golf suit brought out the fine proportions of his stalwart figure. The firelight played over his firm chin, his broad, square forehead, and his frank, kind eyes. He would make a good husband for any girl; and a judicious wife could soon break him of his habit of telling stories.

I dare say they would have had an interesting talk, if Ben Bradford had not come up with his hands full of stone chips, which he calls arrowheads. That ridiculous boy walks the furrows of old Marsden's potato-fields for hours together, with the sun blistering the back of his neck, quite contented if he brings home a dirty bit of stone, which his imagination fits out with points and grooves. At Flying Point, he had apparently reaped a rich harvest of these treasures. His companions inspected them with civil but languid curiosity. While they were [Pg 181] turning them this way and that, and striving hard to be convinced that the bulkiest had undoubtedly been employed by the Indians as a pestle for corn-grinding, we heard the grating of a boat on the beach. Of course it was Mr. Flint.

Ben called out to him to hurry up and have some coffee before it was cold; to which he coolly answered that he had had supper before he started; and there I had put off ours half an hour for him, and then kept the coffee boiling another half hour! I would have liked to shake him.

Winifred saw that I was justly indignant; and though she can be as peppery as anybody over her own quarrels, she is always bent on smoothing down other people; so she called out:—

"Well, fortunately, Mr. Flint, you are not too late for 'the feast of reason and the flow of soul;' and I am sure you did not get that all alone there at the inn." I wondered if he appreciated that rather neat little stab. Winifred does those things well, with a demure manner which leaves people in doubt whether her remarks are vicious or simply blundering. "Come, Leon," she added, turning to young Davitt, "you know you promised to recite something for us."

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Leonard stood up like a boy at school, and recited the speech from "Marmion" where he and Douglas give it to each other like Dr. Cricket and a homœopathic physician. Then he bobbed his head, just like a schoolboy again, and said he must go. Winifred followed him, and spoke to him, almost in a whisper. What they were talking about I could not catch; but I heard her say, "I will do it for you, Leon; but I wish to goodness it were anything else." Then Leonard answered, just as if she had given him some great thing: "Oh, thank you, thank you!" and then he disappeared. At the same moment Mr. Flint took his place by her side.

Instead of joining us all, and making a jolly party, what does he do but stand in the shadow of the three big pines talking to Winifred in that insultingly low voice which seems to imply that people are listening. I did, however, catch one or two things. I distinctly heard Winifred say: "Oh, do go away!" and I heard him say: "I hope you will cease to fear me when—"

There I lost it again; but what could it mean? Winifred *fear* him!—fear *him*! She, who never feared the face of clay! There is only one explanation, and yet that is too wildly improbable!

I never saw any one more unlikely to inspire an affection. Flint by name and Flint by nature,—cold and hard as rock itself; and for a girl like [Pg 183] Winifred! It never could be!—and yet, I confess, I don't know what to think.

After they had talked together for some time, he swung himself down the bank, pushed off the dory, and we saw him pulling rapidly into the middle of the bay.

"Well, if that doesn't beat the Dutch!" said Dr. Cricket.

"Hi, there!" cried Ben; and Brady, standing up, waved his hat, and hallooed through his hand with a volume of voice that could be heard all the way to Nepaug. But though Flint hallooed in return, he never changed his course, nor slackened his speed.

When Winifred came back to us, a color like flame burned in her cheeks, and her eyes were bright with unshed tears. No one but me noticed it. Every one fell upon her with questions.

"What's the matter?"

"Why did he leave so suddenly?"

"Why did he come at all?"

"What did he have to say for himself?"

"Was this rude, or only indifferent?"

"Don't bury me under such an avalanche of inquiry," said Winifred, with a little artificial laugh. "There really is nothing very mysterious about Mr. Flint's departure. He is not a flying Dutchman. I don't think he wanted to come at all; but he was afraid we might think [Pg 184] something had happened if he failed to appear. Ben, the fire needs another log. Mr. Brady, did you bring your banjo, as you promised?"

This was a master-stroke,—divert and conquer,—presto, Ben was off after wood, and Philip tuning up for alleged "melodies;" but I was not so easily put off the track.

"It took him some time to make his excuses," I said to her aside. She looked up quickly.

"You are too shrewd to be put off like the others, Miss Standish; but don't say anything more,—I'm so awfully tired."

The poor girl did look used up, and I knew she was longing to get home, so I coughed violently, and asked Dr. Cricket for my shawl.

"You are taking cold," said he.

"Oh, don't mention it," I answered.

"But I will mention it," persisted the dear old goose. "You mustn't stay out in this damp air."

"Don't let me break up the party."

"The party is all ready to break up, and it's time it did."

"Oh, yes," added Winifred in a tone of relief. "Do let us be going."

So that was the end of our Flying Point expedition. I might have forgotten the episode in the shadow of the three pines, or at any rate have come to the conclusion that I had failed to [Pg 185] catch the true meaning of the words I heard; but for the sequel.

The next morning Mr. Flint appeared on the porch as usual, but instead of the cap and flannel shirt, the knickerbockers and canvas shoes which formed his familiar Nepaug costume, he was attired in ordinary citizen's dress. I must admit that the straw hat, linen collar, and close-fitting blue suit were decidedly becoming; and, bitter as I felt against him on Winifred's account (she came down to breakfast confessing that she had not slept a wink), I was forced to admit that Mr. Flint was a gentleman,—even a gentleman with a certain distinction.

"Yes," he answered to the chorus of questions which met him, "I am going back to town to-day. Yes, as you say, Mr. Anstice, quite unexpected; but business men can't expect the vacations that fall to the lot of college professors. Dr. Cricket, I believe you said you were going on to New York to-night. I shall be glad if you will drop in and have breakfast with me to-morrow morning at 'The Chancellor.' That will give me the latest budget of news from Nepaug. Have you any commissions, Miss Standish? What, none? I assure you, my eye for matching silks is quite trustworthy. Now you, Jim, have more confidence in me,—what can I send you from town?"

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"A fishing-rod."

Flint and Winifred Anstice turned and looked at each other. What it meant, I don't know; but I saw her

color up to her hair. The others had turned away for a moment to watch a schooner which had just come in sight round the Point. Flint went up close to Winifred and said: "And you—what will you have?"

"Your pardon."

"That you cannot have, for you don't need it. Will you take my thanks instead?"

"You are too generous."

"With thanks?—that is easy. They are 'the exchequer of the poor.'"

"I trust, Mr. Flint," said Professor Anstice, who, having withdrawn his attention from the schooner, could now bring it to bear nearer home,—"I trust we may not altogether lose sight of you after these pleasant days together, I shall be glad—"

"Papa!"

"Yes, my dear, I know you should be included. My daughter and I will be glad to see you at our house on Stuyvesant Square." With this he pulled out a card, but, discovering in time that it contained the address of his typewriter, he returned it to his pocket and substituted his own.

"I thank you," said Flint, with more of human [Pg 187] heartiness in his voice than I had ever heard before, —"I thank you, and I shall not fail to avail myself of the privilege. Here comes the carryall! Good-bye!"

A moment later he was gone. Dr. Cricket goes by the night boat this evening, and Philip Brady leaves on Monday. How dull we shall be!

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CHAPTER XII

"PIPPA PASSES"

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The train for New York came along duly, and Flint clambered into it as quickly as the impediment of his luggage permitted. He stowed away his belongings in the car-rack,—his bag, umbrella, and the overcoat which seemed a sarcasm upon the torrid heat of the car. A flat, square package which formed part of his luggage he treated with more respectful courtesy, giving it the window-seat, and watching with care lest it slip from the position in which he had propped it.

When the engine ceased to puff, and the bell to ring, when the wheels began to revolve and the landscape to move slowly out of sight, Flint leaned out of the window for one more glance at the dull little cluster of houses, beautiful only for what it connoted; then he drew in his head, and settled himself against the cushions of wool plush to which railroad companies treat their passengers in August.

He was not in an enviable frame of mind. He felt like a fool who had been masquerading [Pg 189] as a martyr. He had given up two weeks of vacation, of rest and comfort and health-giving breezes fresh from the uncontaminable ocean, to go back to the noisy pavements, the clanging car-bells, the noisome odors of the city,—and all for what? Simply because a jealous fisherman and a hysterically sympathetic young woman chose to foist it upon him as his duty.

Duty? Why was it his duty? What was duty after all? Did it not include doing to yourself as others would have you do unto them? Decidedly, he had been a fool. As for Tilly Marsden—here a vague and—shall I confess it?—not wholly uncomplacent pang smote him, as he remembered her red eyes, and the trembling of her hand as she set the doughnuts before him this morning. There was one who would for a day or two, at least, genuinely regret his departure. Let that be set off against the aggressive benevolence of Miss Standish's parting, indicating, as it did, unalloyed satisfaction.

From Miss Standish, his thoughts wandered to the other inmates of the White-House. Ben Bradford at this hour would be lounging over the golf field, driver in hand, making himself believe that he was taking exercise. Dr. Cricket, no doubt, was playing chess with Miss Standish (beating her, he hoped); and Winifred Anstice—what was she doing? Leaning back, perhaps, in [Pg 190] the hammock, as he had seen her so often lately, with one arm thrown over her head, pillowed against the mass of cardinal cushions. Was she feeling a little remorseful, and bestowing a regretful thought upon the man whom she was driving away from all the coolness and comfort which she was experiencing? If he could be sure of that, he could forgive her; but, as likely as not, she was driving cheerfully about the country behind Marsden's colt, smiling, perhaps, as she recalled the series of misadventures which had marked her acquaintance with the supercilious stranger whose civility she and her colt had put to rout.

Flint's morbid musings had taken more time than he realized, for at this point, to his surprise, the

conductor thrust his head in at the door shouting, *New* London, as if the passengers were likely to mistake it for the older city on the other Thames. Here a boy came aboard the train with a basket laden with oranges, scalloped gingerbread, and papers of popcorn labelled, "Take some home."

The misguided youth tried to insinuate a package into Flint's lap, but was met with an abrupt demand to remove it with haste. His successor, bearing a load of New York afternoon papers, fared better. Flint selected an "Evening Post," and, leaning back in his corner, strove [Pg 191] to find oblivion from the wriggling of the small child in front, and the wailing of the infant in the rear of the car.

Hotter and hotter, the blistering sun beat upon the station; and, as though the misery were not already great enough, an engine, panting apparently with the heat, must needs draw up close beside Flint's window.

In vain did he try to concentrate his attention upon the Condition of the Finances, the Great Strike in Pittsburg, or the Latest Dynamite Plot in Russia. Between him and the printed page rose the vision of cool, translucent waves crawling up the long reach of damp sand to break at last upon the little shelf of slippery stones. Could it be that only yesterday he was tumbling about in that surf, and to-day *here*? He thought vaguely what a good moral the contrast would have pointed to the sixteenthly of one of his great ancestor's sermons; then he fell to wondering if the old gentleman's theology would have stood the strain of an experience like this. Fancy even this carful doomed to an eternal August journey! Ah, the car is moving again! Thank Heaven for that!

Purgatory after Hell approaches Paradise.

On and on the train jogs, over flat marshes, past white-spired churches, and factory chimneys belching forth their quota of heat and smoke. [Pg 192] The twin rocks, which guard New Haven, loom in view at last; and Flint feels that he is drawing towards home. If it were not for the square, flat package, he would get out and stretch his legs by a walk on the platform. As it is, he picks up the package tenderly, and transports it to the smoking-car. The air here, although filled with smoke, seems more bearable. The leather seats, too, are more tolerable, as his hand falls on them, and, best of all, he can light his pipe here. With the first puff dawns a serenity with which neither faith nor philosophy had been able to endue the journey hitherto.

After all, what are two weeks?—a mere trifle; and he can make it up by a run down to the Virginia Springs in October. This will give a good quiet time too, for the foreign "Review" critiques. The libraries are empty at this time of year, and he can study in peace. Of course there will be a pile of letters waiting for him.

With that reflection, came, irresistibly, the thought of Winifred Anstice, and their curious, mutually deceptive correspondence. In the swiftly thronging events of the last twenty-four hours, he had scarcely had time to let his mind dwell upon that strange clearing up between them last night. He smiled, unconsciously, as he remembered the look of utter bewilderment in those great eyes of hers.

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"Candy, sir, peanuts, oranges, and gingerbread!

Popcorn in papers! Take some home?" With this the train-boy, quite oblivious that this was the same person who had met his advances so cavalierly in the other car, again held out an olive branch, this time a cornucopia marked "Ridley, best broken candy."

To his own surprise, Flint felt himself fingering in his pocket for a dime, and heard himself say, "That's all right, I don't want the stuff. Take it in to that little chap in a striped suit, in the next car,—dirty little beggar, wriggled like an eel all day. This will probably make him wriggle all night. Never mind, serves him right."

The boy grinned.

A passenger in the next seat turned round.

"It is pleasant," he said with a smile, "to see such kindness of heart survive on a day like this."

"Sir," answered Flint, "don't mistake me for a philanthropist. I make a small, but honest livelihood at a different calling."

The man's smile died out in a little disappointment; and he turned again to his paper. Imperfect sympathies! Flint took up his paper also, and read until the sudden shutting off of light warned him that the train had entered the tunnel. Through the checkered darkness, he made his way back; his flat, square package [Pg 194] under his arm, to the other car, where all was in the confusion of preparation for arrival. The pale little mother of the wriggling boy looked up, as he entered.

"Thank you, sir," she began; "it was very kind in you —"

"Not at all, madam; the boy would have been much better without it," Flint answered. The art of being thanked gracefully is a difficult one, and Flint had never acquired it.

The train came to a standstill with a jerk which, but for Flint's hand put out to steady her, would have thrown the pale little woman to the floor. He stopped at the car-steps, lifted her and her bundles, her boy and her bird-cage, to the platform, then, touching his hat hurriedly, as if in nervous fear of being thanked again, he made off at full speed to the outlet, where his ears were greeted with the familiar sounds of—

"Cab, sir? Cab? Cab? Have a cab?" which sounded like the chorus of a Chinese opera. "No, I won't have a cab, unless you intend to treat me to a free ride," Flint remarked, ironically, to the nearest applicant, and then swung himself aboard the yellow car at the corner.

As it made its way downtown, he was struck with the strangeness which the city had assumed, after so short an absence. It did not look like New York at all; and he could not remember [Pg 195] noticing before how large a part of the population lived on the street. It reminded him of Naples. He was forced to admit, too, that it had a certain charm of its own,—a charm which deepened as he reached "The Chancellor," the bachelor apartment-house which did duty for a home to a score of unmarried men. He was met by the janitor with a cordiality born of the remembrance of many past gratuities. Yes, his telegram ("wire," the man in uniform called it) had been received, and his rooms were in order. He pulled out his latch-key and turned it in the lock. The door opened on an interior pleasantly familiar, yet

piquantly removed from the dulness of every-day acquaintance. The matting was agreeable to his foot. The green bronze Narcissus in the corner beckoned invitingly; above all, the porcelain tub in the bath-room beyond, with its unlimited supply of water, and sybaritic variety of towels, appealed to him irresistibly. Into it he plunged with all despatch, and emerged more cheerful, as well as less begrimed.

An hour later, clad in fresh linen, white vest, and thin summer suit, he sallied forth in search of dinner. He felt that he had earned a good one, and did not intend to scrimp himself. After a moment's deliberation, he turned into Fifth Avenue, and, at Twenty-sixth Street, made his way through the open door of Delmonico's. [Pg 196] He saw with pleasure that his favorite table (the second from the corner on the street, not too conspicuous, and yet commanding the avenue) was vacant. He slipped into the chair which the waiter drew out for him, and took up the bill of fare. With the sight of the menu, he felt his flickering appetite revive; but it was still capricious, and would not brook the thought of meat. Little-Neck clams, of course. They seemed to convey a delicate intimation to the waiting stomach of favors to come. Soup? No, too hot for soup. Frogs' legs à la McVickar? Yes, he would have those, though he did not exactly know what "à la McVickar" indicated, and felt that he should lose caste with the waiter by inquiring. When that functionary recommended a bite of broiled tenderloin, prepared with Madeira sauce, and the addition of fresh mushrooms and a small sweetbread, he allowed himself to be persuaded. An English snipe, with chicory salad and some cheese, with coffee, completed his order. Oh, and a pint of Rudesheimer with it!

The waiter departed; and Flint, not hungry enough to be impatient, settled back in his chair with the damp evening paper unopened beside him. The sigh he gave was one of satisfaction, rather than regret. His gastronomic taste was to some extent feminine. He cared as much [Pg 197] for the service as for the thing served, and found a carnal gratification in the shining glass and the table linen, smoothed to the verge of slipperiness. Really, he wondered how he could have endured the Nepaug Inn so long.

A hand laid upon his shoulder caused him to turn his head quickly.

"Halloa, Graham! You here?"

"Yes, we sail on the 'Etruria' to-morrow,—only in town over night. Beastly hot, isn't it? My wife is here. Come over, won't you, and let me present you?"

Now Mr. Jonas Harrington Graham, though one of the most fashionable, was by no means the best beloved of Flint's acquaintance; and it was with an inward conviction of perjury that he murmured, "Most happy, I'm sure," and made his way to the table by the centre window which the Grahams had selected. The lady already seated there was sleek and well appointed. Flint noticed that the people at the other tables did her the honor to prolong their casual glance to an instant's critical inspection. The women studied her costume of black with white lace as if wondering whether the confection of a Parisian artist might not be successfully duplicated by a domestic dressmaker (as it never can, ladies). The men's gaze generalized more, but had in it a hint of approbation which Flint found offensive. [Pg 198] He did not relish the idea of making one of a restaurant party which challenged observation; but he perceived at once that

it was unavoidable. Mrs. Graham was very gracious, and insisted, with much emphasis, that he should take his dinner with them.

"You *must* come and dine with us at our table. You look *so* lonely over there," she remarked. "I have some sympathy with bachelors. My husband was one once."

"Yes," answered Flint; "I knew him in those pre-madamite days."

This allusion was too occult for Mrs. Graham. She smiled the smile of assent without apprehension, and asked if Flint had been at Bar Harbor this summer. He should have been; it was *so* pleasant. The young man felt a wild desire to set forth the rival charms of Nepaug, and urge her to try it next season. The thought of her and her husband settled at the inn made him smile as he saw her lift a roll in her delicately ringed fingers, and smooth back the lace of her cuffs. What would happen, he wondered, if she were seated before a Nepaug dinner, with a Nepaug tablecloth and napkin?

"I have not been so far afield as Mount Desert," he answered, with an irrepressible smile at his own thoughts. "I stayed in town till July, and then I went to Nepaug. Perhaps [Pg 199] you never heard of that delightful summer resort?"

"Nepaug? Nepaug?" repeated Mrs. Graham, with as near an approach to reflection as she ever permitted herself. "Why, that's where Winifred Anstice was going! Do you know Winifred Anstice?"

"Do *you* know her?" Flint questioned in his turn, in some surprise.

"Oh, dear, yes; we met her one summer when we were travelling in the West. We were visiting on the same ranch. Mr. Graham quite lost his head over her; didn't you, dear?"

"Well, I was a little touched. She showed up uncommonly well out there,—rode a broncho, and beat all the men firing a pistol."

"Yes," his wife added, "and then so clever—so *frightfully* clever. Why, I've seen her *reading* before breakfast, and not a novel either. You and she must have enjoyed each other; for Mr. Graham tells me you are—"

"Frightfully clever, too? Don't believe any such slander, I beg of you, Mrs. Graham! It is not fair to blast a man's reputation like that at the very outset. What chance would there be for me in society, if such a rumor got abroad?"

"Well," responded Mrs. Graham, "there's a great deal of truth in what you say. It's very nice of course to be lively and good company, [Pg 200] and all that; but when it comes to right down cleverness, and particularly bookish cleverness, it does stand in a man's way socially. At the smartest houses, they don't want to be talked down, and still less to be written up afterward. I don't feel so myself. I just *dote* on literary people; but then I am called positively blue."

"What was there to do at Nepaug?" asked Mr. Graham, who had not followed the intricacies of his wife's remarks. "Any good shooting?"

"I'm afraid not, unless you rode a cow and shot at a goat," Flint answered, and was rather relieved to

have the conversation drift away on to the comparative merits, as hunting-grounds, of the different sections of the country. The subject was not specially exciting to Flint; but it was at least impersonal, and he felt an unaccountable aversion to hearing any further discussion of Winifred Anstice.

The diners had advanced to the meat course,—Graham having complimented Flint so far as to duplicate his order, with the addition of an ice for Mrs. Graham and Pommery Sec for the party,—when a noise was heard further up the avenue. The sound drew nearer, and the notes of a brass band tooted a lively tune which re-echoed from the walls of the Brunswick, and drew a crowd from the benches of the square. [Pg 201] Several people in the restaurant left their places, and came to the window to investigate the commotion. Flint himself rose, napkin in hand, and stood under the blaze of the lights, looking out.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham, raising her lorgnon as the procession came in sight, "it's that horrid Salvation Army!"

"Bless me! so it is," assented her husband, adjusting his eye-glass. "Pretty girl, though, that—in the front row with the tambourine."

Flint's eyes followed his companion's, and saw Nora Costello walking a few paces in advance of her comrades, the electric light from the northern edge of the square falling on her pale face and rings of dark, curling hair.

The tambourines jangled discordantly; the brass instruments were out of tune; the rag-tag crowd surged about, some jeering, some cheering,—

everything in the environment was repellent, but in the midst shone that pale face like a star.

Attracted by the brilliant lights within, or perhaps impelled by that curious psychic law which arrests the attention of one closely watched, the girl turned her head as she passed their corner, and her eyes met those of Flint; she smiled gravely, and he bowed.

Graham saw the interchange of glances, and looked at the man beside him, with the raised [Pg 202] eyebrows of amused comprehension. Flint could have shot him.

"I don't see," said Mrs. Graham, returning to her venison, "why they let those creatures go about like that, making everybody uncomfortable. They are very annoying."

"Yes, very. So were the early Christians," murmured Flint, as he helped himself to the mushrooms.

"I never studied church history," said Mrs. Graham, a little repressively. She felt that the conversation was bordering on blasphemy, and sought to turn it into safer channels. She begged Flint, whom, she looked upon, in spite of his denials, as alarmingly cultivated, to recommend a course of reading for the steamer, so that she might be "up" on the associations of the English lakes.

"You know," she said, "I just *adore* Wordsworth. I think 'Lucy Grey' and 'Peter Bell' are too sweet for anything, and the 'Picnic'—no, I mean the 'Excursion' is my favorite of them all. So light and cheerful; I'm glad the dear man did take a day off once in a while."

Flint gravely promised a Life of Wordsworth, to be

sent to the "Etruria" to-morrow, and then, bidding his companions adieu, he passed out into the night.

His mood, as he strolled up the avenue, was [Pg 203] far from complacent. He felt a contempt for himself, as the sport of every passing impression. It was not enough, it seemed, that he should have cut short a summer vacation, and come hurrying back to the city at Winifred Anstice's behest. He must vibrate to every whim about him. He had found, with inward disgust, that he was raising his elbow to shake hands with the Grahams, instead of holding his hand at the customary, self-respecting angle; and that he might be still further convicted of weak mindedness, he had a sense of being in some inexplicable fashion dominated by the vision of Nora Costello and her comrades. Not that he experienced any sudden drawing to the Salvation Army; he felt, to the core, its crudeness, its limitations, its social dangers. His reason assured him that its methods threatened socialism and anarchy. He could have demolished all General Booth's pet theories by an appeal to the simplest logical processes, but that it seemed absurd to apply logic to so crude a scheme. "Nevertheless," said conscience, "these people are striving, however blunderingly, to better the condition of the forlorn, the wicked, and the wretched. What are *you* doing about it?" He had almost framed a defence, when it suddenly occurred to him that he was under no accusations, except from his own soul, and such thoughts [Pg 204] and impulses as had arisen at sight of Nora Costello, moving in the world outside the social wall behind which he had intrenched himself.

"I suppose," he said to himself, with a shrug, "if I were living in the Massachusetts of a hundred years ago, I should be considered in a hopeful way to

conversion. Now, we have learned just how far we may indulge an emotion, without allowing it to eventuate in action."

Yet the passing of Nora Costello, like the passing of Pippa in the poem, had left its light, ineffaceable touch on at least one life that night.

[Pg 205]

CHAPTER XIII

A SOLDIER

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"'T was August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green;
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.

"I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
'Ill and o'erworked, how fare you in this scene?'
'Bravely!' he said; 'for I of late have been
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the *living bread*.'"

Nora Costello was even more moved than Flint by their chance meeting, if meeting it could be called, under the white light of the lamps of Madison Square. On leaving Nepaug, she had resolutely shut out of her mental horizon the acquaintances that she had made in her few days there. She felt instinctively that any further continuance of the associations would be fraught with embarrassing complications, if not actual perils. These people belonged to a world to which she was as dead as though she had taken the black veil in a convent.

As the daughter of the manse, in her young girlhood

she had come in contact with people [Pg 206] of refinement and some wealth; people of keen perceptions if somewhat pronounced limitations; and she realized that in enlisting in the Salvation Army, she had not only shocked their prejudices beyond repair, but had wrenched herself out of their sympathies in a degree which could not have been exceeded by an actual crime on her part.

Time had in some measure healed the sensitiveness which had been sorely wounded by the withdrawal and disapproval of these early friends; but she seemed to feel all reflected and renewed in her brief acquaintance with the strangers at Nepaug, especially in her intercourse with Miss Standish. There is a curious resemblance, which lies deeper than outward circumstances, between New England and Scotland. The same outward environment of frugal poverty, the same inward experience of intense religious exaltation, continued from generation to generation, produced in early New England a type closely allied to the Scotch Covenanters, and many resemblances still linger among their descendants, widely as they may be removed from the primitive conditions which formed their ancestors.

Miss Standish's manner was marked by all the old Covenanters' directness, and in spite of her prepossession in Nora Costello's favor, showed clearly that she looked upon her as an extremist, if not a fanatic.

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"What took you into that Salvation Army?" she had asked, as she sat by Nora's bedside in the upper front chamber of the White-House.

"A divine call, I hope," Nora had answered.

"Couldn't you have done just as much good in some of the churches?"

"Very likely, but there's many will be doing that work, and there's no over-crowding among us highway-and-hedgers."

Nora remembered a curious little look on Miss Standish's face, as if she thought the answer savored of sarcasm. This expression had led her on to further explanation:—

"I know just how folk will be feeling about the Army. I know how I felt myself before I signed the Articles of War,—as if it was much like joining a circus-troop, going about so with a brass band."

"Well, isn't it?" asked Miss Standish, bluntly.

Nora colored, but answered amiably: "No, it does not look so to me now,—whiles there's things in the Army work for which I've no liking myself, the noise and a'; but such things are not for you and me. We can get our spiritual aid and comfort somewhere else; but these are like a snare spread for the souls we are hunting, and when you see the rough men come round us like those in the London streets, it's fair [Pg 208] wonderfu' how they be taken wi' the drums and torches."

"Humph!" sniffed Miss Standish, "it is as easy to gather converts with a drum as to collect flies round a lump of sugar,—men will always come buzzing about where there is any excitement. The question is, Have you got the fly-paper to make 'em stick?"

At Nepaug Nora had smiled at Miss Standish's blunt

questions; but here, in the depression of spirits caused by overwork and the deadened atmosphere, the words came back to her with overwhelming force. When she rose on the morning after seeing Flint standing in the window at Delmonico's, she found more than one importunate question arising in her mind. Was it worth while after all—the sacrifice she was making, the work, the worry, and above all the contact with so much that offended her taste and judgment?

Were not those people behind the curtains, with their purple and fine linen, more nearly right than she? They at least found and gave pleasure for the moment—while she—? Then there swept over her the recollection of the drunkard who had shouted loudest in the hallelujah chorus and reeled home drunk after the meeting, of the penitent girl whom she had seen one night dissolved in tears, the next out [Pg 209] on the streets again at her old calling, —"Yes," she admitted sadly, "Miss Standish is right. It is one thing to catch them, but another to keep them." If it had been only the sinners, she would not have minded so much, but there were some things about her fellow-officers— Here she stopped, for her loyalty would not allow her to go on, even in thought. This mood of depression was not an uncommon thing in Nora Costello's life, but she sought the antidote in prayer and work.

After her morning devotions, she spent an hour in setting her room to rights; watering the plants on the window-sill, feeding the bird in the cage, and then, after a breakfast of the most frugal sort, she started on her way to her post. Although it was not yet eight o'clock when she emerged from the door of the tenement-house where she lodged, a haze of heat

hung over the city like a pall, the sun was already beating with a sickening glare upon the sidewalk, which still showed signs of having been made a sleeping place by those who found their crowded quarters within too suffocating for endurance. On the doorstep, worn with the feet of the frequent passers, sat a weary woman, nursing her baby. Nora's heart sank as she noticed the deathly pallor of the little thing. She stopped, bent over, and listened to its breathing. Then she lifted [Pg 210] the eyelid streaked with blue, and looked into the fast dimming eye.

"That bairn needs a doctor," she said to the mother. "Come with me; there is a dispensary on the next block."

Rising stupidly, with her infant in her arms, the woman in dull obedience followed her down the sun-baked block to the door marked:

"DISPENSARY.

PATIENTS TREATED FREE FROM TEN TO TWELVE O'CLOCK."

Nora looked at the sign in discouragement; instinct told her that two hours of delay would be fatal. The child was evidently nearing a state of collapse. Turning about entirely baffled, Nora's eyes fell upon an elderly man coming down the street at a brisk trot, a travelling bag in one hand and a large white umbrella in the other. He was evidently a gentleman, —which was strange, for gentlemen did not often appear in Bayard Street. What was stranger still, he looked up at the numbers of the houses as if he were seeking a friend, and, strangest of all, at the sight of herself he took off his hat, and her astonished gaze rested upon Dr. Cricket.

"Well, well, Captain," the little Doctor cried, peering at her with his near-sighted frown. "I [Pg 211] *am* in luck. I came down on the night boat, and hurried over here right away; but we were so late I was afraid you might have got off to headquarters to report for duty. I promised Miss Standish when I left Nepaug that I would surely see you on my way through New York. She felt so worried about your coming back so soon to this town, which is like a bake-oven,—or would be if it smelled better."

All this the good Doctor poured forth so rapidly that Nora could not get in a word edgewise. When at length she found space to utter a reply, she cried out, "Oh, Doctor, never mind me, but take pity on this bairn! It's in an awfu' way."

"Pooh, Pooh, nothing of the sort!" answered the Doctor, with professional cheerfulness, before he had fairly glanced at the child. Then aside to Nora: "We must get into the dispensary somehow. Water, hot and cold, are what the child needs. It is near a convulsion."

At this juncture, as eight o'clock was striking, the dispensary clerk arrived, key in hand, and, seeing the emergency, put all the resources of the building at the disposal of Dr. Cricket, who soon brought a better color to the little face, and handing the child, rolled in a blanket, to the mother, bade her keep it cool. The woman looked blankly at the rising wave of heat outside; [Pg 212] Dr. Cricket too looked out, and felt the shadow of her hopelessness fall on himself. "Here," he said suddenly, pressing a bill into her hand, "take that; get your baby dressed and onto the Coney Island boat as quick as you can."

The woman took the bill and crumpled it in her

fingers; but she turned away without uttering either thanks or protest.

"You must na mind the ongraciousness o' the puir mither," Nora said, as they turned away. "She is too fashed and clear worn out to have any sense o' gratitude left." In her excitement the girl dropped into a nearer approach to dialect than marked her ordinary speech.

"My dear young lady," said the Doctor, "do you suppose I hold you responsible for the manners of Bayard Street? You won't be here to be held responsible for anything long if this heat lasts. I wish to the devil (excuse me!) I could get you out of the hole. We need just such a person as you at our Sanatorium in Germantown. What do you say to coming to try it for two months at least?"

The offer chimed in so with her morning thoughts that it seemed to Nora a direct temptation of the devil, and she thrust it away almost angrily.

"Never be speaking o' such a thing! Do [Pg 213] you think I would desert now when the war is raging?"

"I don't know anything about your Salvation Army jargon," answered the Doctor, with equal brusqueness; "if it's the war with sin you're talking about, you needn't be afraid of lack of fighting wherever you go—I'll wager Philadelphia can furnish as lively service as New York."

Nora laughed, showing her white teeth in genuine amusement.

"Well, I'm fearing you're richt, Doctor, and you must na fancy I dinna recognise your kindness in wanting to get me out of 'this hole;' but I'm called to work

right here, and I must 'stay by the stuff,' like the men in the Bible."

"Then my taking the trouble to come here without any breakfast goes for nothing," said the Doctor, a little crossly. He liked his own way, and he liked to help people, and this girl was balking him in both desires.

"Good for nothing!" cried Nora. "You must na say so. You dare na say so, when God put it into your hands to save a life! Dinna ye remember the story of Abdallah, and how the golden leaf of his clover, the most precious leaf he found on earth, was the life which it was given to him to save?"

Nora stopped in her words, as in her walk, for they had reached the corner where her division [Pg 214] headquarters stood. Dr. Cricket made no answer to her little sermon—only put out his hands in response to hers, and gave her a grip like a freemason's. "Maybe you're right after all," he said, "and I like your pluck, right or wrong. Only remember, if you want help, or think better of my offer, just drop a line to Dr. Alonzo Cricket at the Sanatorium."

When the good-byes were said, Nora stood a moment watching the Doctor's little figure moving jerkily down the street under its white umbrella. "I believe he was sent," she said to herself. "I must try to be to some other puir soul what he has been to me this day."

At her desk at headquarters Nora found a memorandum of four letters to be written,—three to men in the prison at Sing-Sing. These she despatched speedily, with the aid of a typewriter; but the fourth she wrote with her own hand, for it was in answer to

one from an orphan girl who was coming to New York in search of work, and who desired to be put in the way of finding a safe boarding-place. Nora's heart was touched by a peculiar sympathy at the thought of the girl's loneliness, so closely allied to her own, and she wanted her to feel that it was a friend, and not merely an officer of the Army, who responded to her appeal, and held out the right hand of fellowship.

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It was eleven o'clock when the letters were written, and Nora ran downstairs to vary her industry by cutting out baby-clothes in the workroom. Just as she was taking the shears in hand, however, news was brought in of an accident to a factory-girl who had crushed her foot in the machinery, and had been brought home to her lodgings in the house on the next corner.

To this house Nora went, and found the girl alone, and weeping more from loneliness than suffering. The doctor had left, promising to come again, and to send an ambulance later in the day, to take the sufferer to the hospital. Nora knocked gently at the chamber door.

"Come in!" a voice from within answered wearily.

The visitor, standing in the doorway, was impressed by the dreariness of disorder which reigned inside. Such a room would have been impossible to Nora herself while hands and knees and a scrubbing-brush were left to her. In one sweeping glance she took in the hastily dumped clothing on the floor, the bureau heaped with mussy finery, the fly-specked window-pane, and soiled bed-spread.

"Who are you?" asked the girl, raising her head from the pillow. "Oh, one of those Salvation Army women," she added, as she caught sight of the dark bonnet.

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"Yes," answered Nora, "I heard of your accident and that you were all alone. I have come to try to help you."

"You can't. Nobody can help me. I wish I was dead." With this the girl buried her face in the pillow and resumed her half-hysterical weeping.

Nora wisely wasted no words in trying to prove her ability to help, but began quietly to hang up the clothes, to slip the soiled lace and brass chains from the top of the bureau into the drawer, to close the blinds, and fold a towel over a basin on the chair within reach of the sufferer.

"There," she said, "maybe if you could wash you'd feel a bit more comfortable, and I'll run round to my lodgings—they're not far off—and back in no time."

When she reappeared, it was with a snowy white dimity spread taken from her own bed, a pitcher of ice-water, and a large palm-leaf fan. When the bed was re-made, the self-appointed nurse seated herself by the bedside of the sick girl, promising to stay until the coming of the ambulance, and settling down to listen to all the details of the accident, which seemed to give the victim a grewsome satisfaction in rehearsing.

When the ambulance arrived, and the patient departed, the nurse began to realize that it was [Pg 217] three o'clock, and that she had had no food

since seven. As the Bible-reading was at four, she had time only for a hastily swallowed cup of tea, and a slice of bread and butter, with a bit of cold meat, before the reading, after which she went home, bathed, rested, and supped, before presenting herself again at headquarters for the night duty, which called her to patrol the streets with a companion officer (a dull, rather coarse woman, who "exhorted" and sang through her nose) until after midnight.

Then she went home and to bed, inwardly thanking Heaven for her happy day. She felt, as she would have said, that she had been "awfu' favored."

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CHAPTER XIV

TWO SOUL-SIDES

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"Thanks to God, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides—one to face the world with,
One to show a woman when he loves her."

A man's character is like the body of a child,—it grows unequally and in sections. Certain qualities in Flint had lain throughout these thirty-three years wholly undeveloped and unaffected by the culture of other characteristics. In his case the dormancy of the sympathetic side of his nature was no doubt largely due to the absence of those close family ties which call out in most of us our first sense of the kinship of

the race.

Flint had no recollection of either father or mother, and he was an only child. On his mother's death, he was sent to the home of an uncle and aunt in Syracuse. They received him without enthusiasm, and only because it was inevitable that the child should be cared for, and there was no one else to undertake the task. Flint sometimes recalled, with a feeling [Pg 219] of bitterness against Fate, those early years of repression, when silence and self-obliteration were the only merits or attractions asked for in the orphan boy.

Those formative years might have proved a much drearier period but for the circumstance that his uncle's house was provided with a library, made up of books of all grades and qualities. To these volumes young Jonathan was at liberty to help himself without let or hindrance, provided he handled them with care.

Mr. Mullett Flint was a collector of books, but not a reader. Elzevirs and Aldines and first editions bound by Rivière pleased him as so much pottery might have pleased him, and he took great pride in relating how the value of his purchases had increased on his hands. His guidance in the paths of literature would not have been of great benefit to his nephew had he been disposed to offer it; but, in fact, he wasted little thought either on the contents of books or on his nephew's mental progress. His tastes, interests, and ambitions lay wholly in the business world, in the making of money, and the handling of mercantile affairs of magnitude. Had Jonathan, as he grew older, shown more sharpness and sagacity, some bond of sympathy, if not attachment, might have

formed itself between [Pg 220] the two. As it was, they drifted farther and farther apart. The uncle looked with a shrug of his shoulders at the boy curled up in one of the library arm-chairs on a Saturday morning, poring over a volume of the Waverley Novels, when he himself was briskly making ready to betake himself to business.

"I wish that boy had any enterprise. I'd rather see him breaking windows or shooting cats out the back door than dawdling like that," he said once to his wife.

"Yes," answered that worthy lady,—"and he wears out the furniture so!"

Mrs. Mullett Flint was one of those heavy, apathetic women who seem to have a special attraction for brisk, energetic men of Mr. Flint's type. If he ever made the discovery that apathy and amiability are not identical, he never revealed his disappointment to the world,—perhaps for the same reason that he kept silence over the failure of other investments, lest the rumor should injure his reputation for shrewdness as a business-man.

From the beginning Mrs. Mullett Flint had taken one of her apathetic dislikes to the little Jonathan. He was no kindred of hers, and she thought it rather hard at her time of life to have her housekeeping put about by a boy whose feet were always muddy and who had a [Pg 221] reprehensible habit of tucking them under him when he sat down, as he did with utter lack of discrimination in the matter of relative values in furniture. Her manner toward the child was not intentionally unkind, but it was wholly devoid of the tenderness which is as necessary to the growth of a child as air and sunshine to a plant. She always

called him by his full name, which sounded strangely prim and formal applied to the little kilted figure with its thatch of black hair. He recalled distinctly once going up to the long pier-glass between the two windows and stroking his own hair as he had seen a mother across the street do for her boy at the window opposite, and then saying softly, in imitation of supposed maternal tones, "Johnny! Dear little Johnny!"

Such moods of sentiment were exceedingly rare in Flint's earliest infancy, and grew rarer as he advanced in life. At twelve he was sent to boarding-school, and thence to college, with scarcely an interval of home life. In college he formed several friendships; but in each he was and felt himself the superior, whereby he lost the inestimable privilege of looking up.

There had been a decided difference of opinion between Mr. Mullett Flint and his nephew in regard to the choice of a college. Mr. Flint strongly urged that the family traditions should [Pg 222] be preserved, and that Jonathan should pursue his education under the shadow of old Nassau, "where giant Edwards stamped his iron heel." The nephew was as strongly prejudiced against Princeton as the uncle in its favor. He declared that the educative effect of living for four years within sight of his venerated ancestor's grave in President's Row was more than offset by other considerations, and that if the influence of the departed still lingered about the college halls he was as likely to fall under the spell of Aaron Burr as under that of Jonathan Edwards. With all the headstrong will of youth he determined to go to Harvard, and carried his point, though not without a degree of friction, which alienated him still

farther from his uncle.

It was, therefore, with immense surprise that, on Mr. Flint's death, which occurred in Jonathan's junior year at college, the young man learned that his uncle had left him his library and a substantial share of his fortune. The terms of the will were not flattering. "To my nephew, Jonathan Edwards Flint," so it ran, "I leave this amount, realizing that the money left him by his father is inadequate for his support, and that he will never have the energy to make a living for himself."

The widow wrote a conventional note of combined self-condolence and congratulation for [Pg 223] Jonathan over his inheritance. Between the lines Flint quite easily read that her latent aversion to him was augmented by her husband's bequest.

"I have decided," she wrote, "to go at once to London, where I shall probably reside for some years. I shall therefore strip my house of furniture preparatory to renting. I will pack up the books which now belong to you, and await your instructions as to the address to which you would like them forwarded. Should we not meet again—and I presume you will agree with me that it is hardly worth while to interrupt your studies at Cambridge for a trip to New York before the steamer sails—pray accept my best wishes for your future happiness and prosperous career."

With this cool leave-taking Flint's association with his aunt had come to an end. The books, which were his earliest friends, followed him about from place to place, until at length they had found a home on the walls of his study in "The Chancellor."

The work of his first solitary evening after his return

from Nepaug was to pull off the sheets and newspapers with which the caretaker of his room had vainly striven to protect them against the all-pervading dust of summer. He sat in his easy-chair, running over the titles with the endeared eye of long familiarity.

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There stood a set of Edwards's treatises, in eight ponderous volumes; their leaves yellow with age, and cut only here and there at irregular intervals. "Freedom of the Will" and "The Nature of Virtue" jostled "Original Sin;" and "The History of Redemption" leaned up against "God's Last End in the Creation of the World."

On the same shelf, as if with sarcastic attempt to mark the logical sequence, Flint had placed a black-clad row of John Stuart Mill's essays, while Hume and Hobbes looked out above and below. It amused Flint, as he sat there alone, to fancy these polemical gentlemen issuing from their bindings and sitting down together around his evening lamp, to talk things over. "Probably," he mused, with that idle pensiveness which is the lazy man's apology to himself for not thinking, "the thing which would surprise them most would be to see how much they held in common. If they could get rid of the cant of theology and the jargon of metaphysics, they would find that they were not so far apart after all. But I don't know that that would gratify them so much,—certainly not the old parson, for he belonged to the Church Militant if ever any one did, and dearly loved to belabor his enemies with the spiritual weapons too heavy for any but him to handle. Well, it *was* a temptation to let something fly, be it Bible or brickbat, at the [Pg 225] head of the average dullard.

How was it that some people did not find the average man dull? There was Winifred Anstice, for instance,—she seemed to find something interesting in every one she met. Perhaps because she did not try to approach them on the intellectual side at all, but took them into her sympathies and soothed their troubles, as he remembered that mother across the way from his uncle's house soothing the little son and wiping away his tears."

Perhaps, after all, she was right and he was wrong. It was almost the first time in Flint's life that he had ever definitely formulated a confession that his attitude towards life in general was not what it might be. Once formulated, it began to grow upon him curiously. He found himself reviewing whole courses of conduct, and testing them by new rules and standards.

At first these rules and standards were cold and rigid abstractions; but gradually they took on a faint echo of personality, and he found himself speculating on what Winifred Anstice would have done or said, on occasions when he felt himself to have been harsh and hard. This haunting influence was intensified by the presence of the portrait which he had brought away from Nepaug; the picture of the gray-robed Quakeress, with the soft dark eyes, and the white lace, and the point of flame at her breast.

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He had lost all appreciation of its artistic qualities. The mottled softness of the curtained background against the folds of the woollen stuff gave him no pleasure now,—at least, he never thought of it. His whole attention was absorbed in that faint hint of resemblance to Winifred Anstice which lay chiefly in

the full eyelids and the subtle, shadowy, evanescent smile which said at once so much and so little.

He could not tell how it fell out, but at last the time came when he admitted the source of its charm. He recalled the time sharply long after, and how he had risen hastily, and paced the floor with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. That it should come to this—he, Jonathan Flint, a man whose gray hairs—here he stepped before the mirror and studied the tuft of prematurely white locks upon his forehead—whose gray hairs ought to have brought with them wisdom, or at least common sense,—that he should fall to sitting for hours in front of a picture like any schoolboy of eighteen! Really, it was too absurd!

He would send off the portrait to the cleaner to-morrow, and then when it was properly framed, it should be sent to Miss Anstice with his compliments, and so an end of the whole matter. He would never see it again.

Nor the original?

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This query was so insistent that it seemed to come from outside his consciousness, and to demand an answer. He stopped short in his walk as it struck him. Then, alone as he was, he colored to the temples, and gave a little gasp. Like an overwhelming tidal wave there swept over him the realization that his will was mastered by a power above it, mightier than itself; that his seeing Winifred Anstice again was hardly a question of volition any longer, any more than breathing was a matter of will—that he *must* see her—that the chief question of his future was whether she cared to see him.

This train of thought did not tend to anything very cheerful. One after another he recalled their interviews, on the road, in the boat, on the beach, and again at Flying Point. Her manner on each of these occasions had been sufficiently pronounced to leave him in no doubt of her opinion; and at the last two meetings her words had been even more explicit. She had called him a man of ice. She had taxed him with the narrow limits of his sympathies. "Well," said Reason, "did you not give her cause for all she said and more? Weren't you an odious, crabbed, supercilious cad?"

Flint took a savage satisfaction in admitting every accusation which he could bring against himself, in recalling the light irony with which [Pg 228] Winifred Anstice had witnessed his blunders, and the direct, downright anger with which she had dealt out her judgments there at the Point. Only one drop of comfort could Flint extract from the memory of that interview, and he smiled cynically as he remembered the warmth which marked her description of her friend, the editor of the "Trans-Continental." When the surprises of the sudden enlightenment and the emotion of the moment had passed away, which feeling, he asked himself, would remain in her mind, —the liking for the ideal or the disliking of the experienced? For both there was not room, yet each was intense. It was a curious psychological problem. At a further remove it would have afforded him a keen intellectual pleasure to speculate upon the probable working of a woman's heart under such conditions. As it was, he found himself incapable either of solving the problem or of letting it alone. His mind dwelt upon it continuously. He was almost inclined, like Eugene Aram, to tell his story disguised to strangers, and listen to their idle speculations.

Brady was a comfort at this time. He was so responsive in his sympathies and so obtuse in his perceptions. It was possible to talk all round a subject to him with no fear that his imagination would travel a step farther than it was led. It needed no urging, either, for he [Pg 229] appeared to have a sentiment of his own for Nepaug and all its associations, and drew towards it as naturally as a moth to a flame or a woman to a mirror.

Indeed, Brady often dwelt spontaneously upon the various episodes of the days at the beach,—the fireworks, the shipwreck, the evening at Flying Point. He was a capital mimic, and loved to imitate Dr. Cricket striding up and down the room, with his hands clasping his elbows behind his back and his chin-whiskers thrust out before as a herald of his approach. Then casting aside all the scruples which should have been raised within him by ties of blood, he would give a burlesque of Miss Standish peering out from beneath her little gray curls at the world, and rapping out her opinion of those around her in good set terms.

After her came Mr. Anstice, looking busily in every corner for the book he had in his hand. This the mimic followed by a representation of Ben Bradford, with hand propped on knee and chin on hand, glooming from his corner upon Winifred Anstice, when she ventured to address some one else.

"I cannot do Miss Anstice," Brady confessed one evening. It was October then, and the two friends were sitting together in Flint's room. "She has too much humor. The more humor [Pg 230] there is in an original poem, for instance, the harder it is to parody, and so with people. The grand, gloomy, and

peculiar are easy enough, let them be ever so august; but the light, delicately ironical manner is a difficult thing to exaggerate."

"Yes," assented Flint, "the heaviness of touch necessary to caricature spoils the effect."

"Precisely," said Brady, "and it is as difficult to take off her looks as her manner. Her expression is too changeable to leave any characteristic fixed in the mind. The fact is, Miss Anstice is almost a beauty at times."

"You think so?" responded Flint, with half-closed eyes.

"Yes, I do really—in a way—not like that Madonna-type of Nora Costello."

"No, certainly not like her."

"But still she has a style of her own."

"Oh, yes, quite so—as you say, she has a style of her own."

"You are very cool on the subject; but you should have heard a man at the club go on about her, when he heard that we had spent our vacation at Nepaug."

"I should scarcely think," said Flint, opening and closing his match-box with a quick, nervous movement, "that you would have allowed her name to come up at the club."

"Oh, hang it, Flint, that is going pretty far! [Pg 231] I don't know that Miss Anstice's name is too sacred to be mentioned in general society; and as for the club, —why, if it is not made up of gentlemen, what did you put me up for?"

It was seldom that Brady got off so much of a speech, and he felt a little elated by seeing his friend without an answer for the moment.

"Besides," he continued, "nothing was said, except about what a stunning girl she was. 'Handsomer than ever,' Livingston said, 'since she came home.'"

"So the Anstices are at home?"

"Yes, and Cousin Susan is coming down next week to visit them. She wrote me to be sure to call."

"I shall try to go before Miss Standish arrives."

Brady laughed.

"You and Cousin Susan never did hit it off very well."

"Excuse me, I think she hit me off very well; the fact is, the *femme sole* after fifty becomes either pious or pugnacious. Miss Standish is both."

"You are prejudiced, as usual, and malicious, too, under the guise of impartiality. Miss Standish is a benevolent woman, with an irresistible bent towards doing people good even against their will."

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Flint groaned assent. "Alas, yes," he muttered.

"She is a fine woman," continued Brady, "and a fine-looking one too, as Dr. Cricket will testify, for on my soul I think the old duffer wants to marry her."

"I wish he would, and rid the world of an officious old maid."

"'Old maid' is an opprobrious term. Miss Standist is a well-preserved single woman."

"Hold there, Brady! She is really not sugary enough for a preserve; I should say rather well canned. But never mind, I can forgive her some acidity toward myself, in consideration of her sweetness to Nora Costello. She has really been good to that girl."

"Who could help it!" exclaimed Brady, unguardedly. Then he cleared his throat with a nervous little cough, and began again with would-be unconcern: "By the way, I don't know whether I told you, that the day after you left Nepaug, Jimmy Anstice picked up a gold brooch on the beach, just where you came ashore after the wreck. It was a homely, old-fashioned thing, with a gold-stone centre big enough for a tombstone; but Jim brought it to me with all the pride of a discoverer. I turned it over, and on the back I saw engraved in the gold, 'To Nora from her Mother, on her birthday, November [Pg 233] tenth,' Of course I knew in an instant that it belonged to Nora Costello. Then it came to me how the girl spent most of the day while she was at Nepaug wandering up and down on the beach. Of course she was looking for her brooch; but she was afraid, if she said anything, it would look like accusing somebody; and besides, very likely with her queer ideas she felt that she ought not to have kept any piece of jewelry, even if it was her mother's."

"You seem to have studied her feelings rather closely."

"Why, of course, when one meets a pretty girl like that—and really you know she is the prettiest I ever saw—"

"How long is it since you said the same of Miss Anstice?"

"Ah! that was before I met Nora Costello. 'Time's noblest offspring is his last.' But if you will keep still and listen, instead of interrupting all the time, you will hear something about the little plot which Miss Anstice and Cousin Susan and I have laid among us."

"Well—"

"I should say it was well. Just you wait and see. Cousin Susan is to write to Nora."

"Nora?" commented Flint, with raised eyebrows.

"Yes, Nora," repeated Brady, somewhat defiantly. [Pg 234] "If I said Captain Costello you would not know whether I was talking of her or her brother."

"Oh, yes, I should," said Flint, "for you never talk of him at all; but never mind that—go on with your revelations of this deep conspiracy."

"You don't deserve to hear; but as it gives me pleasure to tell you, I will. Cousin Susan writes to the Costellos to come to the Anstices' house on the evening of November tenth. They arrive. We are there already. Tableau—old Nepaug minus Dr. Cricket and Ben Bradford—and a bouquet for Mistress Nora, with her brooch hanging from it in a little bag which Miss Standish was manufacturing when I came away. Now isn't that a scheme?"

"The tenth of November," responded Flint, as though the latter part of the sentence had escaped him —"and am I to be invited?"

"Why, of course!" exclaimed Brady, impatiently. "Weren't you the one to save her life? Worse luck to you for having the honor fall to your share!"

"Then," said Flint, with that curious obliviousness of

the important parts of his companion's remarks, —"then in common civility I ought to call there beforehand."

"Ah! Flint, I'm glad to see you waking up to some decent sense of social observances."

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"What time is it?" asked his friend, absently, oblivious of the watch in his pocket.

"Quarter before eight," Brady answered.

"Then out of my room with you, for I have just time to dress and get down there. If one must do these things, the sooner they are out of the way the better."

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CHAPTER XV

A BIRTHDAY

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An Extract from the Journal of Miss Susan Standish, New York, November 12.

It is nearly two weeks since I left Oldburyport, and in spite of the Anstices' hospitality I have been homesick ever since. When we reach middle age nothing suits us so well as village life. The small events occupy and divert our minds without wearying them with the bewildering whirl of the city. The interest of our neighbors in us and our

affairs, which is annoying in youth, becomes more grateful as life goes on, and we discover how little real thoughtfulness and interest in others the world contains. As for the narrowing influences of village life, I don't see that people in Oldburyport are any more provincial or prejudiced than they are in New York,—not so much so, I really think, for they are forced by the very smallness of their circle to find their interests in the affairs of the great world, and the lack of social excitements gives them so much more time for reading. [Pg 237] To be sure, when people are unhappy there is less to divert their minds, and when they are irritable they feel more at liberty to vent their tempers, because they know folks cannot get away from them so easily. I confess I was not sorry to take leave of Cousin John, though I did feel sorry for him, as he sat there all alone with his gouty foot up on the chair in front of the Franklin stove in the sitting-room. He is not satisfied with Philip, and seems to hold me responsible. He would like to have Phil come home to live and be cashier of the bank.

Cousin John thinks the world revolves round the Oldbury bank; and I suppose it is natural he should, seeing how long he has been president, and what a fine reputation it has the country round.

Of course Philip does not see it in the same light, and it seems he made some ill-advised speech,—said he would rather turn sexton and bury other people than be buried alive himself in a hole like that, which was not a nice thing for him to say to his father,—but that was no reason why Cousin John should swear at him, and tell him he was sick of his capitalist airs, and he for one should not be surprised if he came some day to beg for aid from the bank he thought

too insignificant to be worthy of his attention.

Philip was furious. "Bankrupt I may be [Pg 238] some day," he answered, "but I promise you I will go to the poorhouse before ever I ask help of you and your infernal bank."

This was the state of mind in which they parted, when Philip had come home for his first visit in years. I could have shaken them both for their obstinacy and lack of common sense; but it is always so when men live alone. They need a woman about the house to accustom them to being contradicted. Now if Philip married a girl like Winifred, she would soon straighten things out. I can see now how Cousin John would dote on her and pretend not to care very much, and scold sometimes when he had the gout; but all the while be her slave and spend his life trying to give her pleasure. That is what ought to happen, so of course it won't. Instead, Philip will go and marry some uncomfortable sort of person with a mission. Oh, dear! what if it should be—? There, I will not allow my mind to turn in *that* direction. I have a sort of superstition that thinking too much about any unfortunate thing helps to bring it about. I think it must be this city life which makes me feel so blue and discouraged. The fact is, I do not like New York. In the first place, because it is not Boston; and in the second place, because it *is* New York. There is too much of everything here—too much [Pg 239] money, too much show, too many lamps, and sofa-pillows, and courses at dinner. Then everybody seems to be everlastingly at work getting ready to live. Here is Winifred, for instance, tearing up and down for hours after upholsterers and paper-hangers, toiling about from shop to shop, and from Broadway to Sixth Avenue, matching samples and trying

æsthetic effects which no one but herself cares anything for when they are accomplished. And by the end of the day she is so tired that she falls asleep when I read aloud to her in the evening.

"Why do you fuss so about everything?" I asked her the other day. "We don't fuss in Boston."

"That accounts," she answered,—which was not very civil, I thought. She has certainly grown very queer this fall. She told me this morning that she thought the Unitarians were as bigoted as anybody. Now she never would have said a thing like that this summer when she was living in the open air. It's my opinion that two things are telling upon her,—furnace heat and the influence of that Mr. Flint—especially the last. Why, it just seems to me as if she were trying to make herself over into the kind of woman he would be likely to like. She has dropped her old hoidenish ways and goes about as prim as a Puritan. She says she [Pg 240] is always like that in the city, and that her Nepaug ways are only a reaction; but I don't believe it. He comes here a great deal, that is certain; and I don't think it is very gentlemanly, after her begging him, as I heard her with my own ears, to go away. But he is too selfish to care what any one wants but himself. For some reason or other it suits his plans just now to try to please Winifred.

The first night I was here Winifred was telling him about Maria Polonati, the little Italian girl who sells flowers at the corner of the Square, and how she had made friends with her, and learned all about her "padre" and her "madre" and the playmates she had left behind her in the "bella Napoli." Winifred knows how to tell a thing so it seems to stand right out like the old Dutch women in the pictures, and I could see

that Mr. Flint was taking it all in, for all he said so little; and so he was, for the next time he came he walked right up to Winifred's chair and dropped a great bunch of violets into her lap.

"The little girl at the corner sent you these," he said; and Winifred smiled as if it were the most natural thing in the world for that cross-grained egotist to do a thing like that. He did it rather gracefully, I admit; but a Boston man would have done it just as well, if he had only thought of it.

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Of late Mr. Flint has taken to dropping in once or twice a week of an evening to play whist,—he and Winifred against her father and me. Now I like to beat as well as any one; but I do like some show of organized resistance, and this young man's playing is what I call impertinently poor, as if he did not think it worth while to try. Winifred seems just as well satisfied to be beaten as to beat, and the Professor takes a guileless and childlike satisfaction in his triumph which is quite pitiable. I take pains to let Mr. Flint see that I at least am not taken in; but he only smiles in that exasperatingly non-committal way of his, as if it mattered little enough to him what I thought one way or the other. After the game is over he gets a chance for a few minutes' talk with Winifred while I am hunting up my knitting and her father his pipe, and it is my belief that it's just those few minutes that he looks forward to all the evening, while he is ignoring his partner's trump-signal and leading from his weak suit.

Winifred has caught a very annoying trick of turning to him on all occasions, as if waiting to know what he thought before making up her mind. Altogether I

don't like the look of things at all.

Of course there was no getting out of inviting Mr. Flint to the little birthday party which we [Pg 242] were planning for Nora Costello. To tell the truth, nobody but me seemed to want to get out of it. Professor Anstice says he is the most agreeable man that comes to the house, and when I confided to him that I was afraid Winifred would fall in love with him, he answered: "She might do worse. She might do much worse." That was all the consolation I got in that quarter, and with Winifred herself it was as bad. I thought it might do good to recall some of her early impressions, which seem to have changed so mightily of late.

"Don't you remember," I said, "how you called him a refrigerator?"

"Did I?" she said with a little laugh. "Well, he was rather frigid in those days."

"Yes, and you said how disagreeable his manners were, and how thoughtless he was of every one but himself."

At this Winifred colored up as if they hadn't been her own very words. "If I said it," she answered with a little toss of her head, "or if anybody else said it, it was a stupid slander, which grows stupider every time it is repeated."

I was a little nettled myself at her answering me like that. "You didn't think so," I said, "when you begged him to go away from Nepaug."

At this Winifred jumped straight up from her [Pg 243] chair, running her hand through her hair in a way she has when she is excited—"Did you hear that?

Then you must have been listening," she cried out, as if she were accusing me of chicken-stealing.

"If you think that of me, Winifred, the sooner my trunk is packed the better," I answered, as stiff as the Captain's monument on Duxbury Hill.

In an instant Winifred was on her knees by my side, and had thrown her arms around my neck.

"No, no, dear Miss Standish, I do not think it, and I ought not to have said it. It only made me feel so badly to think of any one's having overheard my secret, which after all was not my own."

Now here was my chance to find out the very thing which had been bothering my old head all these weeks. I had only to pretend to know and I should hear it all, for Winifred was in one of her rare confidential moods. But that inconvenient New England conscience of mine not only would not let me pretend, but it pricked me a little with Winifred's accusation of having listened. Perhaps if my ears had not been strained just a trifle, I should not have caught as much as I did of the conversation at Flying Point. Anyway, I felt bound to confess now.

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"I did not hear anything but just your asking him to go away, and his answering rather reluctantly that he did not want to, but he would."

"Then," said Winifred, "you are bound to take my word for the meaning of the snatch of talk you heard, and I tell you that he acted like a gentleman and a very honorable gentleman; moreover, that from that good hour I began to be ashamed of my rash estimate of him (I always do jump in overhead

in my judgments) and am only waiting for a chance to tell him so frankly, and to ask him to forget all my rude speeches."

After this there was no more to be said. I only pray to be kept from arguing. The habit of making comments has brought me into more trouble than all my other vices put together. Well, this time grace was given me to hold my tongue. When I saw a note addressed in Winifred's hand to "J. Edwards Flint, Esq.," I did not even observe that it would have been as well to let her father write it, nor did I say what I think,—that I hate to see a man chop off his first name with a capital and write his middle name in full. It always looks like an alias. The man who does it is either trying to attract attention or trying to get rid of it.

Everything else about the birthday scheme ran [Pg 245] as smooth as a ribbon from Jordan & Marsh's. I begged leave to make the cake, and it came out of the oven done to a turn, white as snow inside and a golden brown on the crust. Nora Costello and her brother came at eight o'clock just as they had promised, with unfashionable promptness. They looked somewhat surprised to see the house so lighted up, and Nora gave a timid little glance at Winifred's rose-colored waist (a woman doesn't forget how clothes look just because she joins the Salvation Army); but she herself was a picture in spite of her dress—perhaps because of it, for the close-fitting blue gown, with its plain band at the neck and sleeves, set off her fine features and the noble carriage of her head. The chief decoration of her dress was a scarlet ribbon coming diagonally from the shoulder to the belt, marked "Jesus is My Helper." I did wish she had not felt called to make a

guy of herself with that thing; but she seemed so unconscious of it herself that I should have forgotten it too if Mr. Flint had not been coming; but I hate to see a scoffer like him get hold of anything ridiculous in religion. Now we Unitarians stand midway between scepticism and superstition. I wonder everybody can't see it as we do.

I am bound to say, however, that Mr. Flint behaved exceedingly well. A thorough acquaintance [Pg 246] with the world seems to give pleasanter manners sometimes than a religious nature. Anyway, he came forward and greeted her very handsomely. He handed her a little volume of Thomas à Kempis, "For those leisure hours which you never have," he said. The girl looked mightily pleased but a little bewildered, and still more so when Philip Brady followed with a great bunch of the reddest of red roses (trust men for always picking out red flowers—I don't believe they know there is any other color). Tied by a satin ribbon to the flowers was the little blue bag which I made at Nepaug, and inside it lay the lost brooch. I never saw any such delight as shone on Nora Costello's face when she drew out the pin. She looked from one to another of us, then at the pin in her hand, which she turned about and about, crying over it softly. At length she brushed away her tears and smiled a real child's smile of pure pleasure. "Look, Angus!" she exclaimed, holding out her treasure to her brother, "the lost is found. Do you mind the day Mither gave it me, and how she bade me have a care, for that I was a heedless lass and like to lose it?"

"Ay, I mind it," answered her brother, a flush of gratified pride and affection mounting to his high cheekbones. "How can we thank these kind folks?"

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"How indeed!" echoed Nora. "Oh, how good it is to have it back!" she exclaimed, fondling the brooch as though it had life and could feel. "But where did you find it, and why—Ah! I see," she added, as she turned it in her hand—"you dear, good folks—and here it was only this morning I thought the Lord had clean forgot 't was my birthday."

I wish I could recall on paper the little foreign accent of the Scotch girl which seemed to add so much to the charm of her simple speech. Her big drooping eyes were wet with tears, and the little homesick note in her voice made an irresistible appeal to the hearts of those who heard it,—at least it did to mine, and I sneaked away behind the lid of the grand piano, which was open, to get out my pocket handkerchief, for I did not choose to make a spectacle of myself, and I don't know how to cry prettily, like Nora Costello. My nose gets red, and my eyes look as if I were addicted to the use of intoxicating liquors.

When I emerged from behind the screen of the piano, I saw Philip Brady standing over Nora Costello, and looking down at her in a way that made my heart jump. She is a sweet girl, and a good girl, and a beautiful girl; but really this wouldn't do at all. Fancy Cousin John's son going round with a drum, keeping [Pg 248] company with a tambourine. Shades of Dr. Charming forbid! Now why couldn't it have been Mr. Flint? That would have been poetic justice. Conversion of an atheist—marriage on the platform in presence of the Army. She is too good for him; but still I would have given my blessing—but here everything is snarled up and getting worse all the time.

The surprises of the evening were not over yet, for the most remarkable remains to tell. While we were all sitting at table (Winifred did look startlingly handsome under the pink candle-shades) the bell rang, and a messenger boy appeared.

Could he not leave the package? Professor Anstice asked, when he had signed the ticket the boy took out of his hat, where for some inscrutable reason New York messengers carry everything.

No, he was ordered to give it to Miss Anstice herself.

"Very well," said Winifred, "bring it in by all means. Perhaps some one has mixed things a little, and fancies that it is *my* birthday that we are celebrating."

So in came the package, and with it a great bunch of violets, and a card which said, "The little girl at the corner sends you these."

I saw Winifred's hands tremble as she untied [Pg 249] the ends of the package. The wrappings fell off and she saw a picture.

"What—who is it?" Winifred asked, turning from one to another of us with bewilderment in her eyes.

"A relative of yours, I believe," Mr. Flint answered quietly. "Her name is Ruth. She formed the habit of eloping in her youth, and had not the heart to refuse my entreaties to run away with me when I left Nepaug."

Then in an instant it flashed across Winifred and all of us that this was the portrait for which she had been searching all summer (any one might have recognized it, for the resemblance to Winifred about

the eyes and mouth is unmistakable), and she knew of course that Mr. Flint had been the one to find it. Her way of taking the affair was very characteristic. There was no tearful tremulous gratitude like Nora Costello's, but a great overflow of pride and gladness. Rising, with her just filled wine glass in her hand, and her head thrown back a little as if in a pride which had a shade of defiance in it, she called out, "A health!—a health! Here's to my great-great-grandmother, the runaway bride, and to the generous man who restored her to the bosom of her family!"

Every one looked bewildered, but all laughed and drank the toast (I noticed that the Costellos [Pg 250] drank theirs in water), and then began to ask questions as fast as they could talk. The health broke up the feast, and every one crowded about the portrait. As Winifred and Mr. Flint stood close behind me, I overheard, this time without intention, upon my honor, an exchange of remarks between them.

"You have shown yourself very generous, Mr. Flint," Winifred remarked. "You will not surely be so *un*generous as not to let us make some little return for your gift. I am not ignorant that such a portrait has a value besides that of sentiment."

"You touch me there on a sore point, Miss Anstice," Mr. Flint answered. "I am afraid the person to whom you are really indebted is old Marsden, for I knew if I offered him anything like the real value of the picture, he would hold it for the price of a Raphael. So I made him set his own price, which the sly old dog thought a staggering one, and which I found so absurdly low that I shall feel bound to remember him

handsomely at Christmas."

"You are jesting," Winifred answered, speaking lower; "but I am in earnest. Can we not persuade you to let us pay for this picture? For the pleasure you have given us we never could repay you."

"If it is a question of payment," said Mr. [Pg 251] Flint, sinking his voice still lower, "I am so deep in your debt that it would bankrupt me to straighten our accounts. If it is a question of generosity, and I should come to you some day and ask—"

"Did you say it was a Copley?"

This question from Philip broke in upon Mr. Flint's aside. He answered with some asperity, "No, it was painted in England before Copley's time. It is unsigned, but the artist, I should say, was first-rate."

After this response Mr. Flint turned his head in an instant; but the charm was snapped. Winifred had slipped away, and the company was breaking up. How the man would hate me if he knew that it was I who set Brady on to ask that question!

Winifred is tired to-day, and took her breakfast in bed. I wonder—Pshaw, what good does it do to wonder?

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CHAPTER XVI

YES OR NO

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"A man's homage may be delightful until he asks straight for love, by which a woman renders homage."

The Anstices' house stood on the sunny side of Stuyvesant Square. It belonged to the type common in the lower part of the city fifty years ago,—a type borrowed from Beacon Street, as Miss Standish was fond of pointing out, and never improved upon for comfort. Its red-brick front swelled outward, not in the awkward proportions of the modern bay-window, which suggests some uncomfortable protuberance; but with a gracious sweep from the front door to the limits of the next property. In front ran a balcony with a finely wrought iron balustrade, over which clambered a wistaria vine hung with purple clusters in the spring, and green with foliage throughout the summer.

The front door was framed by glass side-lights set in delicate oval mouldings, and above, the colonial fan-light lined with silk fluted in a rising-sun pattern, gave additional cheerfulness to the hall within.

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This hall was of generous proportions, and suggestive of land sold by the foot rather than by the inch. At the back a white staircase railed with mahogany wound its way to the second story, and at the right a broad silver-knobbed mahogany door opened invitingly into the drawing-room.

The charm of the Anstice drawing-room lay in its being no drawing-room at all, but just a living-room, reflecting the taste and habits of the people who occupied it. Jim's parrot usurped the window, where

he chattered in the sun all day, and flew about at his will, much to the injury of the curtains. Between the windows and the white casing of the mahogany door, stood an old desk strewn with papers in some confusion; for Professor Anstice was fond of bringing his writing from the study on the upper floor to Winifred's domain. The piano occupied the opposite side of the room, the coffin-like gloom of its polished rosewood enlivened by a tall vase brilliant now with the chrysanthemums which autumn had brought. A shaded lamp glowed on a table loaded with books and drawn cosily to the side of a deep couch, and on the other side of the fire, which shot out little hisses of heat on this chilly afternoon, stood the tea-table, with its delicate old-fashioned silver, its transparent china cups, and the plates [Pg 254] of hot toasted muffins and ethereally thin bread-and-butter sandwiches which McGregor brought in punctually at five every day.

The old butler was the one extravagance of the Anstice ménage, and as Winifred said, she saved his wages out of the china that he didn't break,—which was one way of looking at it,—and then, McGregor was so much more than a butler! He was housekeeper and parent's assistant and family counsellor all in one. He advised Professor Anstice as to the weight of overcoat called for by the temperature outside. He reminded Jimmy of his mittens and rubbers, and his respectful but significant glances informed Winifred of the exact estimation in which he held her guests.

Flint was a special favorite, and the bow he accorded him was equivalent to a benediction.

"Yes, sir," he said this afternoon, "Miss Anstice is in

the parlor. I am just taking in the tea." Having relieved the visitor of his hat and coat, he ushered him in with the air of a protector, and then, after drawing the curtains and lighting the alcohol lamp under the silver kettle, he withdrew noiselessly and deferentially.

"What a treasure that man is!" said Flint, looking after him as he disappeared. "He is better than forty coats of arms as a guarantee of respectability, and the welcome which he extends [Pg 255] to callers is a perpetual testimonial to the hospitality of the household."

"Ah," Winifred answered, smiling, "you say that because you belong to the most favored nations. You might not think him so genial if you saw the frigidity with which he receives some of our guests."

"Then I suppose I have only to be thankful that McGregor has not yet caught a hint of my real character, as set forth last summer so vividly by his mistress, and I think I have one more friend in the household; what do you say to that, Paddy?"

The dog had risen from his comfortable doze in front of the fire, and stood stretching himself, with two shaggy paws thrust out in front. When he heard his name called he wagged his tail and came up to Flint's chair, by which he squatted, laying his tawny head cosily across the visitor's lap.

"Come here, Paddy; don't make yourself a nuisance!"

The dog listened calmly to his mistress's invitation, wagged his tail again, and winked his sleepy eyes, but made no motion to obey.

Flint patted the dog's head.

"This is too bad!" Winifred exclaimed, in assumed indignation. "Jimmy has already learned to oppose my opinions by quotations [Pg 256] from what Mr. Flint thinks and says; but I will not have Paddy taught to defy my authority."

"Go, Paddy!" said Flint, moving his chair further back. "Your mistress regards me as a dangerous character, and considers it her solemn duty to remove every one in her charge from the risk of the injurious effects of my society."

In spite of Flint's jesting tone there was a hint of bitterness in his voice. The dog, in some surprise at the sudden withdrawal of his head-rest, stood up, looking from one to the other, apparently in doubt as to the rival claims. At length old habits of allegiance asserted themselves, and he seated himself in the angle between the tea-table and his mistress's chair.

Winifred's mood suddenly seemed to have changed from gay to grave. She sat for a moment or two in silence, her hand softly playing with Paddy's long ear, and her head bent ever so little to one side.

"Mr. Flint," she said at last, somewhat abruptly, "I want to tell you a little story; but first let me make your tea. Do you take lemon?"

"Yes, if you please."

"And sugar?"

"One lump—no, thanks—no more."

"Try this brown-bread sandwich. Now, lean [Pg 257] back in your chair and listen. Once there was a girl —"

"No!"

"Yes, there was, and she was a very stupid girl, and all the stupider that she thought herself rather clever. She fancied that she was very acute in reading character, and she trusted a great deal to instinct, and first impressions, and all that sort of rubbish by which women excuse themselves from taking the trouble to use their reason. Well, once upon a time, this girl met a man whom she did not like. Her vanity was touched, in the first place, because he disapproved of her and showed his disapproval."

"What a cad he must have been!" Flint put in.

"Now you are no better than the girl I am telling you about—going off like that on insufficient evidence. The girl made up her mind at once that the man must be at fault, since he failed to appreciate her,—all our estimates are based on vanity, you see in the last analysis,—so she proceeded to fit him out with a character to match her ideal of him. He was to be selfish and cold, and regardless of everybody but himself, and supercilious and domineering, and endowed with all the other agreeable qualities which go with those engaging epithets. This answered very well for a while, and I am bound [Pg 258] to admit that at first you—I mean he—seemed to play the part which she had assigned to him very satisfactorily; but presently little things began to come to her knowledge which refused to fit into the picture she had made of him. He had a friend who let slip stories of inconsistently kind things he had done for a man whom he had known in college, pooh-poohing them all the time as folly."

"Rubbish!"

"Exactly what the girl said. They didn't go with the character of the kind of man that she had made up

her mind this was to be, so she would not believe them, and kept repeating every disagreeable thing she had ever heard him say as an antidote against any change of impression. But stupid as she was, she was not quite dishonest, even with herself, and when gradually her eyes were opened to the wrong which she had done him in her own mind, she longed for an opportunity to make him some amends; but all the opportunities came to him, and the coals of fire were heaped on her head till she began to feel them quite too hot for comfort. So at last she resolved, on the first occasion when she saw him alone, to ask his pardon very humbly for all her misdoings and misthinkings. Now, if she did, what do you think the man would say?"

Flint had set down his tea untasted, and sat [Pg 259] staring steadily into the fire, yet no detail of Winifred's dress or attitude escaped him. He noted the glint of the firelight playing on the buckle of her little slipper; he watched it climb over the sheen of the gray-silk dress, higher, higher, till it reached the bare throat, and flushed the already flushed cheek to a deeper carnation. He felt the appeal in the girl's attitude as she leaned ever so little towards him. He caught the tremulous note in her voice. His own was less steady than its wont as he answered:—

"How do you know that the girl was not right in her first estimate? For my part, I think a man who presumed to show the disapproval you speak of, and to say disagreeable things on slight acquaintance, fully justified her opinion of him; and if he seemed to change later, I should think it probable that something in her had shamed him out of his coldness and his selfishness. As for the superciliousness, I should be inclined to set down the appearance of

that to the charge of an unconquerable shyness masquerading in the guise of self-assertion,—I have known men like that,—but the other qualities I believe were there. I suspect it was a reversal of the old story of Pygmalion and Galatea, as if he were slowly turning from stone to flesh, yet still held back by the old chill of stony habit,—an imprisonment which could only be broken by [Pg 260] a word from her. Is there any chance that you will ever speak it—Winifred?"

"Oh, no—no!" the girl answered brokenly. "Don't say anything more!"

"I love you," Flint continued, as if the statement were necessary to his vindication.

"Oh, but why do you tell me?"

"Because I choose to have you know,—because I must tell it. I love you. I love you." He repeated the words with a persistence not to be put aside. Winifred was inwardly furious with herself for her own stupidity in giving him such an opening; but then, as she told herself, who could have foreseen it, with this man of all men! The shock of the surprise took her breath away, and robbed her of her usual self-command. She still strove to take the situation lightly, to treat it picturesquely, like a love-scene on a Watteau fan.

"Here is another proof of your generosity," she said, with a half tremulous, wholly adorable little smile. "I asked for pardon and you offer love."

Flint would not be put off so. "Ah, but I ask for so much more than I offer," he said.

"And—if I cannot give it?"

"Why, then," he answered steadily, "I shall still carry with me through life something you cannot take away if you would,—the ideal [Pg 261] which these weeks have held up before me. If it is not for your best happiness to marry me, loving you as I do, I would not have you do it. The matter is in your hands—a simple 'Yes' or 'No' is all I ask."

"But life is too complicated to be settled by a word like that. It could not be 'Yes'—but what if it is 'No'?"

She paused a moment, and then, hurried on by a tidal wave of feeling, she burst out: "Oh, I don't suppose you can understand it; but much as I like you,—and I do like you now,—I feel as though if I promised to marry you, I might absolutely hate you."

"Oh, yes," Flint answered quietly, "I can quite understand it; I think I should feel in the same way if I were not perfectly sure I loved a person."

Winifred felt herself touched by his quick response and perfect comprehension of her state of mind; but her feeling was too intense, too direct and too importunate, to be stayed in its utterance.

"I cannot marry you. I never could promise. I am sure of it. Forgive me!"

Flint rose and stood by the mantel, toying absently with a bronze model of the Praxiteles Faun which rested on its shelf.

"It is all right," he said, "and I shall always [Pg 262] thank you for it all, and say God bless you, whatever happens; only for a while I must go away and make my life over a bit in the light of all this."

"Why must you go away?"

"Because—" Here Flint paused, and began to walk the floor impatiently. "Oh, if you can ask that, I could not make you understand. It is useless to go on talking."

"No," said Winifred, now with fuller command of herself, "it is not useless; it is necessary. We must make each other understand. If we cannot do it now, how much less afterward! It always seems to me as if it were selfish folly in men and women to act as if their love were the only reality in the world, so that they forget everything that they owe to other people. Yes," she added, gathering strength as she went on, "I think it would be selfish in you to consider only yourself, or even yourself and me, in this matter, and I think it would be foolish if—if you really care for me, as you say you do, to throw away all my interest and regard and sympathy just because I do not consent to marry you. If you would only put that idea out of your head, I think I could be of some service to you. I know you could be of great service to me."

As Winifred uttered these words she sat looking [Pg 263] up at him with wide-open, childlike eyes, a hint of pathetic appeal in her voice.

Flint paused a moment, as one who counted the cost of his words. Then he said slowly: "It shall be as you wish; but on your own head lie the risks. When a man has once said, 'I love you,' the woman to whom he says it sees it in his eyes and hears it in his voice forever after. I tell you," he went on, setting down the faun hard on the mantel, "love is like the spirit which the Arabian fisherman let out of the shell. It can never be shut up again—never—never—never!"

Winifred stirred a little, but did not lift her eyes.

"You shall try this precious scheme of friendship," Flint continued hotly. "It is not a new experiment. It is well worn, and so far in the world's history it has not proved a great success; but try it if you will, only you shall make me one return. I shall never ask you again for your love. It is not a plaything to be teased for in such childish fashion. You tell me you will not give it to me. Well and good. But if ever—" here he paused and shut his eyes for an instant, as if upon some inward vision,—"if ever you should come to feel differently, I demand it as my right that you shall tell me so honestly. You know me too well to think I could ever change."

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"I accept the risk," Winifred answered steadily. "You shall never regret this concession, and by-and-by, when we both grow old, you will look back and see that such a friendship is the best thing that could befall you and me."

The girl spoke with quick decision of manner. It was characteristic of her not to question for a moment the wisdom of her decision, the infallibility of her own judgment, or her power to regulate the life and destiny of those around her.

Flint smiled, as one smiles at the eager illusions of a child. He was going to speak further; but the ringing of the door-bell warned him that the interview was at an end.

"So be it!" he said, coming over to the side of the fireplace where Winifred stood,—for she too had risen. "Since it is not to be good-bye, then, I will bid you good-night."

He took the hand which she extended, and raised its

slender finger-tips to his lips. "That is for friendship," he murmured; then turning it, he laid a swift kiss upon the delicate pink palm,—"and that is for love," he whispered, and was gone.

On his way out he passed Miss Standish, who had just come in from a concert. She gave a little nod of scant civility, suggestive of disapproval, [Pg 265] and instead of turning in at the parlor door, made her way directly to her room.

As the hall door closed after Flint, Winifred Anstice felt as if some door had closed also in her life. She sat for some time in her low chair, leaning forward, with her hands clasped about her knees, and her pretty brows knit, gazing into the embers. At length, with a little vexed shake of the head, she rose, and paced the long room; but the whirl and rush of thought were too importunate for her present mood, and she paused in her walk at last, and betook herself to the table, with its litter of new books and magazines. She picked up the "Fortnightly Review," and opened mechanically where a silver book-mark pointed to an article on "Balzac and his Followers" marked with emphatic notes of assent or protest. It was another reminder. She impatiently shut the covers sharply together and returned to her vigils before the fire.

There is no woman living who is not somewhat shaken by a proposal of marriage. It is a peremptory challenge, which forces her, for the moment at least, to consider a certain man not as one of a class,—as a member of the conventional, calling, smiling, chaffing circle,—but as an individual, passing suddenly from all this surface trifling to a life and death reality—saying as Jonathan Flint had said this

night: "Give me [Pg 266] all or nothing. I will have no half loaves. Let us have an end of pretences and evasions. For once at least you shall listen, and be told the truth flowing at lava heat out of a man's heart." It was by no means a new experience to Winifred Anstice. As a younger girl, although no coquette, she had found a certain charm of romance in finding herself the heroine of a love-affair in real life; but as she grew older she felt more and more shrinking from such sentimental crises, and a more and more genuine regret as she saw the candid comradeship of one friendship after another sacrificed to the absorbing egotism of passion.

One by one she had let these lovers slip out of her life, and acknowledged to herself that it was better so; but when it came to Jonathan Flint, she had found herself impelled to the impetuous protest for which she already half blamed herself in her heart. But in self-exculpation she argued with the embers, which seemed to wink at her from the hearth, that there were more considerations than one in the matter; that as she had told Mr. Flint, modern life was too complex to be compressed into a "Yes" or "No."

As she was pondering, her eyes fell upon the portrait, —Ruth's portrait, hanging there over the mantel.

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"I wish you were here, Grandmamma," Winifred exclaimed, looking up at it, "to help me clear up the muddle in my mind! I have a kind of feeling that *you* would understand."

The girl's sentimental musings were rudely interrupted by a race between Jimmy and Paddy,

who came rushing through the room, regardless of tea-tables or rugs.

"Jump for it, Paddy!" cried Jim, snatching a piece of cake from the tray, and holding it high in air.

"Don't, Jimmy! You will upset the table."

"Come on then, Paddy, we'll jump in the hall, where there is no girl to be nervous—I hate nervous people."

"Whose cane is that, McGregor?" he asked, as he saw an unfamiliar walking-stick on the hall table.

"It belongs to Mr. Flint—he must have forgot it," the butler answered.

"I say, Fred, has Mr. Flint been here?" Jimmy called out from the baluster, over which he was leaning at imminent risk to life and limb.

"He has," Winifred answered repressively.

"Did he say anything about seats for the football game on Thanksgiving Day?"

"He did not."

"Then I think I'd better sit right down and [Pg 268] write to him, for he told me not to let him forget about it, and all the best seats will be taken if he does not attend to it soon."

"Papa," appealed Winifred to her father, who had come in and was taking off his coat in the hall, "you won't let Jimmy write to Mr. Flint, will you?"

"I *will* write," said the voice from the stairs, "and I'll tell him how cross you are. I did once, and he only laughed."

"Jimmy!"

"Yes, I did. It was that day when you would not let me go fishing with him. I told him you were quite nice sometimes, but you could be horrid to people when they did things that didn't suit you, and he said that was just the way you struck him."

"Papa!" cried Winifred, now thoroughly out of temper, "will you forbid Jimmy to talk me over with strangers? It is really too much, the way that boy's tongue runs on."

"You understand him, don't you?" the Professor asked mildly, looking over his gold-bowed spectacles.

"Yes, but other people don't."

"Are they so much less clear-sighted than you?" With this gentle sarcasm her father slowly mounted the stairs, leaving Jimmy making faces of triumph through the open door.

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It is often a curious experience in the contrasts of life for a girl to see herself from the family point of view, after catching the rose-colored reflections which the admiration of an outsider throws upon her character.

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CHAPTER XVII

A LITTLE DINNER

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"Wreathe the bowl with flowers of soul."

The suppressed excitement of the afternoon lent an added flush and sparkle to Winifred's face as she entered the study where her father and Miss Standish were playing chess together after the family dinner. Self-absorbed as she was at the moment, she found leisure to be struck with the picture of the two sitting there; her father's head, with its austere profile outlined against the green curtain, which cast softened reflections over his white hair, and Miss Standish, crisp and dainty as a sprig of dried lavender, her gray curls quivering with the excitement, and her white hands hovering anxiously over rooks and pawns.

Miss Standish looked up as Winifred came in, radiant in her new evening gown, for she was to dine with the Hartington Grahams, who had recently returned from England and opened their town house for the season.

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"I thought it was to be a *little* dinner," said Miss Standish, looking with some disapproval at the bare shoulders rising above the billowy ruffles of rose-colored chiffon.

"It is—'just a small affair,' Mrs. Graham wrote me. Besides, it is too early in the season for anything formal. In fact, she would hardly ask her most fashionable friends at this time of year. But she must get round somehow," Winifred finished with a little laugh.

"In Boston," said Miss Standish, "you would be

overdoing it to wear that kind of a gown to such an affair, but here people seem to have no sense of gradation. They take literally Longfellow's advice to the young poet seeking success: 'Do your best every time.'"

"I don't see," said Winifred, "why the advice is not just as good for dress as for poetry,—except that gowns wear out and poems don't. Is the carriage there, McGregor, and Maria ready? Well, good-night, Papa; look out for your queen, and don't let Miss Standish checkmate you with any of her Boston tricks!"

"I think," Jimmy called out after her from the corner of the big sofa, where he lay curled up like a dormouse, "if you would do your best on *my* dress, instead of making me wear this old suit, it would strike a better average in the family."

As McGregor closed the carriage door, Winifred [Pg 272] was conscious of a certain satisfaction that she was not to spend the evening at home with the family. Her restlessness craved a vent, and she wanted to postpone **all** opportunity for reflection.

There was something about the Grahams which always appealed to the girl. Their environment suited her æsthetically. For themselves,—why, one could not have everything—and then they were never alone.

The carriage stopped before Mrs. Graham's house, and the door opened almost before she had mounted the steps.

As she passed along the hall, a wave of fragrance from lavishly disposed flowers floated out to her

through the drawn portières, and she caught a glimpse of the softened light of many lamps-shaded to the eye but festive to the fancy. "Decidedly," thought Winifred, "it is agreeable to be rich, and next to being rich one's self, the best thing is to associate with rich people. Money is such a smoother of rough ways! and then the vast opportunities of being nice to other people that come of a purse at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathize." She smiled to herself at her bold adaptation of the poet's sentiments, and mounted the stairs with a quickened step, reflecting suddenly that she had not marked the time accurately and might be late. Her [Pg 273] glance in at the door of the dressing-room reassured her. At least she was not the last, for in front of the mirror stood a portly, bediamonded dame, gazing intently into the glass and putting the last touches to her toilet with stolid equanimity.

"Want to come here?" she asked, pausing in her elaboration of her water-waves, and nodding affably to Winifred.

"No, I thank you," Winifred answered, seating herself in the low easy-chair, while the maid pulled off her velvet overshoes.

"Chilly to-night, isn't it?" the lady continued pleasantly, desirous of putting the new-comer at her ease.

Winifred acquiesced in the views of the weather expressed, and a hint of the chilliness seemed to have crept into the interior. Her agreeable anticipations of the evening were vaguely dampened, and she could not quite forgive the innocent cause. "Why will women with red necks wear light blue and diamonds!" she wondered, "and what can reconcile

her to looking in the glass?"

With a little shake of the head to make sure that her hairpins were firmly anchored, and a futile effort to smooth the rebellious curls at her neck, Winifred glided past the lady in front of the mirror, who seemed no nearer the completion [Pg 274] of her toilet than when she had entered. At the door of the rear room stood a short, bald-headed man with a patient expression on his face, as of one who had spent a large share of his life waiting for his wife. He glanced with some surprise at the swift reappearance of the girl whom he had watched as she came up the stairs so short a time before.

"That girl beats the ticker," he said to himself as she passed him; "she'll make some man happy if she keeps it up."

The clock was striking eight as Winifred entered the drawing-room. "It is quite a feat to be on time in this city of long distances," said her hostess.

"How delightful to be appreciated!" responded Winifred, with a brilliant smile. "I was just pluming myself on being so prompt, but I see the others are still more so." Here she swept a rapid glance over a seated group at the other end of the room.

"I suppose it is hardly more prompt to be too early than too late, so you are still entitled to the palm."

The voice which came from close beside her drew the blood to her cheek; but as the words went on, her nervous tremor subdued itself, for the tone said to her as clearly as words, "Everything is to be ignored. We are on the [Pg 275] social stage, and must play our parts. You may trust me."

Winifred felt a wave of relief sweep over her. She thanked the speaker with her eyes. To her hostess she said lightly, "Mr. Flint is as much of a purist as ever—no; don't leave us together. He and I have been quarrelling over the tea-cups this afternoon. I will let you take up the defence, while I go over to speak to your sister, Miss Wabash, in the corner—and isn't that Captain Blathwayt with her?"

"Yes, he crossed with us on the 'Lucania'; remembered meeting you in Cheyenne or some other outlandish Western town—thinks you the most charming American he ever met."

"How clever of you!" said Winifred over her shoulder, as she moved away. "Reflected flattery is the most alluring kind."

As Mrs. Graham turned to greet two newcomers, Flint was left alone, with no hindrance to the occupation of watching Winifred Anstice. She stood with her back toward him and her head slightly turned, so that his eye took in the delicate line of cheek and chin, broken by the shadows of a dimple, the curve of the neck, and the soft little curls that nestled at the base of the hair. A woman is always much handsomer or much plainer than usual in evening dress.

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As Flint looked at Winifred, he felt an absurd jealousy of the monocled Englishman who presumed to show his admiration so plainly. His reflections were ended for the time being by the voice of his hostess saying, "Will you take my sister in to dinner?" As he moved across the room, Winifred and Captain Blathwayt passed out together, just ahead of Miss

Wabash and himself. He scarcely knew whether to feel regret or relief to find that the width of the table was to be between him and Winifred. It certainly had the advantage of shutting off all necessity for the conversation *farcie* of the conventional dinner, which he felt would be an impossibility between him and her to-night.

With Miss Wabash the *vol-au-vent* of talk seemed the most natural thing; and Flint dashed at once into a jesting, somewhat daring tone, which she took quite in good part, and when her attention was claimed by the bald-headed broker on the other side, his neighbor on the left, a double-chinned dowager, with a pearl necklace half hidden in the creases of her neck and a diamond aigrette in her hair, proved no less garrulous if somewhat less sprightly.

She had much to tell of the loss of her diamonds by a burglary last week, and of their recovery through the agency of detectives whose charges were exorbitant. She acquainted Flint [Pg 277] with every detail of the conduct of the family and the servants, the police and the detectives. As she went on, people began to listen, and the talk around the table, which had lagged a little, started up more briskly than before.

"I have noticed," said Winifred to Captain Blathwayt, "that there are two subjects which will make even dull people lively,—burglaries and mind-cure."

"Aw, I don't know much about burglaries,—never had one in the family; but I think a lot about mind-cure and all that sort of thing."

"Confirmation of my theory!" said Winifred, with an impertinence which felt safe in banking on the lack of perception in the person whose dignity was

assailed.

"Do you believe in the mind-cure?" asked Miss Wabash, who had caught the phrase across the table.

"It depends on the mind," Flint answered.

"Oh, no, it doesn't; not at all. That's the first principle of the science. You only need to resign yourself and let the influence flow over you."

"Does it make any difference whose influence it is?"

"Oh, I suppose so. It must be trained influence, and it seems to work better when it is paid for."

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"Most things do," observed Flint.

"My cousin says—"

Flint never knew exactly what Miss Wabash's cousin did say, for at that point in the conversation his attention was irresistibly attracted by the talk of his opposite neighbors.

"Now there's a lot in it, I'm sure," the man of the monocle was saying, bending toward Winifred with what Flint considered objectionable propinquity, —"telepathy, don't you know, and—and all that sort of thing. I had no idea I was to meet you to-night, but as I was standing on the doorstep I remembered how you looked at that dinner out in Cheyenne, and a remark you made to me—do you recollect?"

"The dinner, perfectly; the remark, not at all."

"Well, I sha'n't repeat it, for it was deucedly severe on the English. Really, you know, we're not half bad; but you don't care for your cousins over the water, I

am afraid. Do you?"

"I think the cousins over the water are much like those on this side,—the relationship is simply an opportunity for intimate acquaintance. Some Englishmen are the most charming of their sex; others are—well, quite the reverse."

"To which do *I* belong?" asked the Captain, turning toward her more openly and leaving [Pg 279] his terrapin untasted, which meant much with Blathwayt.

"Can you doubt?" Winifred responded with a radiant but wholly non-committal smile. Self-possessed as she was outwardly, however, she felt Flint's eyes upon her, and experienced a sense of annoyance at the attitude of both men.

Her host on the other side came to her relief at the moment.

"Blathwayt," he said, leaning over, "you must try this wine. It is some my wine-merchant in Paris sent over ten years ago,—a special vintage,—and don't let the terrapin go by, for there's nothing else worth while before the canvas-backs. I'll let you into the secret too, Miss Anstice," he added with an expression closely approaching a wink.

"Thanks," said Winifred, rather wearily, "I am not an epicure."

"Oh, but you can be trained to be!" Graham answered encouragingly. "It is mainly a question of practice, though I must say that I was born with the taste,—inherited from my father, I believe; and I've heard him tell how once when I was five years old I scolded the butler for sending up the Burgundy iced."

"How precocious!" murmured Winifred.

"Well, of course, that was unusual; but if children were taken young and had half the [Pg 280] attention paid to their palates that folks give to their eyes and ears, with their fool drawing-teachers and music-masters in the attempt to enable them to bore somebody with their twopenny accomplishments, we should soon have a race of gourmets; and gourmets make cooks. No chef can do his best without appreciation. For the matter of that, a cook must be born,—he must have the feeling for his business. Now there was a fellow in England—My dear," he called out to his wife at the other end of the table, "was it Windermere or Grassmere where we had those excellent breaded trout?"

"I forget," Mrs. Graham answered; "but I know it was the one where Wordsworth lived. Which was that, Mr. Flint?"

"Now don't interrupt us," Miss Wabash said in her loud, unshaded tones; "Mr. Flint has just consented to let me tell his fortune by his hand."

Flint looked rather foolish. He was in that awkward position where it seemed equally fatuous to assent or decline; but deciding on the former course, he held out his hand, saying, "Spare my character as far as you conscientiously can, Miss Wabash, and remember in extenuation of my shortcomings that I did not have the advantage of being brought up in Chicago."

All tête-à-tête conversation now ceased, and [Pg 281] the attention of the company was riveted upon Flint and his neighbor. Winifred felt herself growing intensely nervous. She had no fear of Miss Wabash's

extraordinary power of divination, but she had still less confidence in the delicacy of her perceptions, and she dreaded some remark which would embarrass her through Flint's embarrassment.

In her present high-strung condition, her apprehension made her a little faint for a moment. The centrepiece of orchids and roses seemed a vague mass of rather oppressive color and perfume. The women's faces and necks looked like reddish blobs with flashes of light where the jewels came. The broad white expanse of the men's shirt fronts alone retained a certain steadiness. Hastily she grasped her glass of champagne and drained it dry. It was the first wine she had tasted that night, and it braced her nerves at once. Fortunately no one observed her paleness, for everybody's attention was fixed upon Miss Wabash as she bent over Flint's open palm.

"A surprising hand!" that young lady was saying; "really in some ways quite the most interesting I ever came across. I must report it to Chiro. The fingers very pointed—that ought to indicate idealism, but the knots on the joints imply practical critical sense. It looks as [Pg 282] though the mind were always grasping at some ideal and were held back by the critical faculty."

"Don't blink your points, Mamie!" called out the host, facetiously. At this allusion to sporting reminiscences, all the men laughed, but the women rather resented the interruption, as a frivolous treatment of a serious subject.

"You have learned your profession thoroughly," said Flint, coloring a little in spite of himself. "I shall begin to be afraid of you in earnest, if you are so discerning."

"Oh, I have only begun!" answered Miss Wabash, kindled by success to greater vivacity. "That thumb shows marked firmness (see, I can scarcely bend it back at all); perhaps, if I knew you better, I should say obstinacy."

Every one laughed.

"The fingers," she went on, "show more sensitiveness; and the mounds—oh, those mean a great deal! Mars is firm and prominent—what you undertake you will carry through, if it kills you and everybody else."

"What a fellow to buy on margin!" said the broker.

"He doesn't seem to have succeeded in getting married for all his perseverance," laughed Mr. Graham.

Winifred, in spite of her emotion, found time to reflect on the vulgarity of the phrase, and [Pg 283] shivered a little. Flint colored, though he held his hand quite steady.

"Perhaps he'll buy her sixty," chuckled the broker, pleased with his technical wit.

"He'd better hurry up," said Miss Wabash, "for his life-line is short. He's had experiences though. May I tell them, Mr. Flint?"

"I give you permission."

"Well, then, you were in love once a long time ago, but there were reasons why you couldn't marry, and so you gave up the affair and have never really cared for any one since; but two or three women have been desperately in love with you."

"Mademoiselle, respect the seal of the confessional!"

said Flint, smiling, but drawing away his hand with a quick instinctive motion which did not escape Winifred.

"Ho! ho!" called out Graham, "perhaps there is more in palmistry than I thought. Go on, Mamie, and give us the history of the Salvation Army episode and the Hallelujah lassie!"

Flint cursed inwardly, cursed everything and almost everybody, himself most of all. What was he here for? What if Graham *was* the chief stockholder in the "Trans-Continental," he was a coarse-grained sensualist, with whom no gentleman should associate. (This estimate by no means did Graham justice, but Flint was not in a [Pg 284] judicial mood.) Then this crack-brained girl with her foolish fake of a theory—and he had been idiot enough to fall into this trap, and now Winifred would think he had boasted of Nora Costello as a conquest, perhaps bragged about saving her life. Oh, the whole thing was past endurance! Meanwhile everything around moved on mechanically. He heard his host say impatiently, "My dear, if you keep that épigramme of lamb waiting much longer, we'd better give up dining and take to holding hands all round."

At this there was a general taking up of forks and a subdued buzz of conversation. It was rather a relief when the candle-shade took fire and Flint had an excuse for rising to seize it before the butler could reach it.

The dinner ended at last, though it seemed as if it never would. As he held aside the velvet curtains for the ladies to pass, Flint strove to catch Winifred's eyes, to judge, if he might, what impression Graham's remark had made; but Blathwayt held her

in talk till the threshold was reached, and the curtain dropped behind her without a glance in Flint's direction.

She held her head a little higher than usual as she moved beside Mrs. Graham into the music-room. A wave of contempt was sweeping over her, as she reviewed the dinner, its gilding, its [Pg 285] gluttony, and its unspeakable dulness, and she felt that she had sold her birthright of self-respect for a mess of pottage.

Miss Wabash sat down at the piano and sang "Oh, Promise Me," and one or two other gems from DeKoven's latest opera, and then the ladies adjourned once more to the library.

The Grahams' library was a large square room, diversified by two shallow bay-windows such as only a corner house permits. It was ceiled and finished in heavy Flemish oak, and the walls above the low bookcases were hung with tapestry. Easy-chairs and softly upholstered divans filled every nook and corner. It was really, Winifred decided, an ideal library,—or would have been if there had been any books behind the silk curtains hung over the shelves.

As they entered the room Miss Wabash drew Winifred to a seat near herself on the sofa.

"Green mint or Chartreuse?" the hostess asked, as the little ice-filled glasses were set on the low table by her side.

Winifred declined the cordials, but sat sipping the coffee out of the tiny Dresden cup, while she listened to the wearisome platitudes of Mrs. Graham and her guests. From time to time her eye was caught by the

flashing of the jewelled pendulum of the clock on the mantel, in the drawing-room across the hall, and her mind [Pg 286] dwelt ironically on some lines she had read somewhere:—

"Ah! who with clear account remarks
The ebbing of Time's glass,
When all his sands are diamond sparks
That dazzle as they pass!"

She smiled a derisive little smile, all to herself, as she thought how small a power lay in jewelled pendulums to make a brilliant evening, and she felt a certain thrill of pride at the thought that her associations lay in a world removed from all this smothering materialism. The lavish sumptuousness which till now had appealed to her rather strongly, seemed suddenly tainted with vulgarity, and her thoughts wandered half unconsciously to the bare little room where she had gone to see Nora Costello. The name brought a slight quickening of her pulses, and she wanted time to think over things alone.

As the men came in from the dining-room Miss Anstice's carriage was announced, and she rose to bid her hostess good-night.

"Must you run away so early, my dear?"

"Thank you, yes; I promised Papa to come home early. He likes to see me before he goes to bed, and to hear an account of my evening."

"You will be at home at five to-morrow, and I may bring Captain Blathwayt?"

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"Any friend of yours, of course," murmured Winifred,

in a tone which could hardly have proved encouraging to the vanity or incipient sentiment of the guardsman.

"If you will permit me," said Flint to Graham as Winifred came down the stairs, "I will put Miss Anstice into her carriage, and then come back for that last cigar."

Never in his life had Flint so raved against his own lack of readiness as now, when he felt the passing moments slipping by, and could find no words to set himself right in the eyes of the woman he loved,—the woman whose little gloved hand rested on his arm. Judge then of his feeling when, smiling up into his eyes with perfect friendliness, Winifred said under her breath, "Why do we go there—you and I? They really aren't our kind at all."

The remark carried with it full assurance that no words uttered by Hartington Graham had power to shake for an instant her faith in the man whom she had called her friend; but beyond that her confident use of the word *our*, as if their interests and associations were the same, thrilled him with a sort of intoxication.

"Oh, thank you!" was all that he could find to say to express his complicated state of mind.

"I do not deserve any thanks at all," Winifred answered. "I ought to be well scolded for [Pg 288] speaking slightingly of people whom I have just been visiting. I do not often do such ill-mannered things, and I should not have said it to any one but you."

Again Flint thrilled at the unconscious flattery.

"Will you come in to-morrow afternoon?" she asked,

as he shut the carriage door.

"To meet Captain Blathwayt? No, thank you."

"The day after then."

"So be it—till then, farewell!"

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CHAPTER XVIII

A MAIDEN'S VOW

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"A maiden's vow, old Calham spoke,
Is lightly made and lightly broke."

As the cab rattled down the avenue, Winifred sank back against the cushions. She sat in the corner in a sort of daze, marking the glimmer of the electric lights, which seemed so many milestones in her life, as she passed them one after another. After all, it is experience which marks time, and in this day Winifred Anstice had tasted more of life than in many a year before. Crashing into her world of calm commonplace had fallen the dynamite bomb of an overwhelming emotion. Her present, with all its preoccupying trifles, lay in wrecks about her. For the future—it was too tumultuous to be faced.

She was like a person who has been walking in the darkness along a familiar road, and suddenly feels himself plunging over an unsuspected precipice. She

was conscious of nothing but a gasping sense of dizziness—all control of herself and her life seemed passing out of her hands [Pg 290] into those of another, and she scarcely knew whether to be glad or sorry. Was it only this afternoon that she had looked upon a marriage with Jonathan Flint as impossible? If she had thought so a few hours ago, why not now? Nothing had occurred since. No transcendent change had come over him or her—why should it all look so different to her now? Perhaps, she told herself, this mood too would pass like its precursor. She dared not feel sure of anything—she who had swung round the whole compass of feeling like a weather-vane before a thunder-storm.

These introspective reflections brought back irresistibly the feelings with which she had read Flint's letter, little dreaming that it was his,—the letter so full of wise and friendly counsel. She remembered how, as she read, she had been filled with a yearning desire to rise to the ideal her unknown counsellor had set before her, and filled too with a longing that Fate might send it in her way, to be something to him, to return in some measure the spiritual aid and comfort which she had received at his hands.

"Well," she told herself gloomily, "the opportunity had come, and this was how she had used it—not only by denying his petition,—that, of course, was inevitable, feeling as she did,—but by accusing him of selfishness, by insisting [Pg 291] that he should accept her terms of friendship. *Friendship*, bah!—how stale and flat it sounded! Could she not have devised some newer way of wounding an honorable man who had offered her his heart?"

It seemed to her excited consciousness that she must appear to him a vain and empty coquette, eager to retain a homage for which she intended no return. When once he awoke to that view, his love would die out, for he was not a man to continue devotion where he had lost respect; and so it was all over, or as good as over, between her and him.

The cab lurched sharply across the tracks at Twenty-Third Street, jostling Winifred's flowers and fan out of her lap. The maid stooped to pick them up. As she returned them she caught a glimpse of the set look in the face of her mistress.

"Are you feelin' bad?" she asked.

"No, no, I am quite well, Maria, only a little tired—are we near home?"

"Yes'm, we've passed Gramercy Park, and there's the steeples of St. George's that you see from your windows."

"Yes, yes, I see. Here we are close at home. You may go to bed, Maria, after you have lighted the lamp in my room. I shall not need you to-night."

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"Well, well," thought the maid, "something's the matter sure. I never knew no one more fussy about the unhooking of her gown. She can't do much herself, but she does know how things ought to be done, and that's what I calls a real lady."

"Winifred, my dear, is that you?" Professor Anstice called, as the rustle of his daughter's dress caught his ear on the stair.

"Oh, Papa, are you awake still?"

"*Still!* Why it is not so very late!" said her father, as Winifred entered the study and threw herself into the deep upholstered chair beside the fire, which was just graying into ashes in the grate.

Her father was sitting in his cane-seated study-chair with a conglomeration of volumes piled about the table. His face, perhaps from the reflection of the green-shaded student-lamp, looked pale and worn. His shoulders, too, seemed to Winifred's abnormally quickened perception to have caught a new stoop. The fact forced itself upon her consciousness with a sudden, swift pang, that her father was growing old. She had never thought of age in connection with him before. To her he had been simply and sufficiently "my father," without thought of other relations or conditions; but now it rushed upon her with a wave of insistent remorse, that his life [Pg 293] was slipping by, while she was doing so little for his happiness. A rather bare and dreary life it seemed to her now, as she contemplated its monotony; for Winifred had no appreciation of "the still air of delightful studies." Her world was peopled with live, active figures, always pushing forward, seeking, striving, loving. And her father had loved once. Yes, that too struck her now, almost with a shock of surprise. He, too, had asked for some one's love as ardently, perhaps, as Jonathan Flint for hers. More than that, he had won the love he sought. Won it and lost it again. Could it ever come to that for her? The thought smote her with an intolerable sharpness.

Mr. Anstice was a strange man to be the parent and guardian of such a girl as Winifred. The world for him was bounded by the walls of his study. Even his teaching seemed an interruption to the real business of his life, and he turned his back upon his class-

room with a sensation of relief.

He was not a popular professor among the body of the students; but the unfailing courtesy of his manner, and the solidity of his scholarship, won the respect of the many, and the esteem and warm admiration of the few.

His bearing, in spite of the scholar's stoop, was marked by a certain distinction, and the lines of [Pg 294] his worn face curiously suggested the fresh curves which marked his daughter's brow and cheek. The beauty of youth is an ivorytype; the beauty of age is an etching, bitten out by the burin and acid of thought, experience, and sorrow.

The prevailing mood with James Anstice was one of gentle weariness. He felt that his life was ended, and that the years were going on in a sort of monotonous anti-climax. Yet, in spite of this undertone of depression, his manner was responsive, genial, even gay at times, and he lived much in the reflected light of Winifred's youth and energy.

If it caused him some surprise that any one should want anything as much as Winifred wanted everything for which she cared at all, he treated her enthusiasms with amused toleration, and made as much effort to secure for her the successive desires of her heart as though they had assumed the same importance in his own mind as in hers.

To-night he forced himself away from his own train of thought with an effort, to throw himself into Winifred's evening experiences. He watched her for some time as she sat in silence, with head bent forward and gloved hands clasped about her knee.

"Well, little girl," he said at last, "you [Pg 295] seem to have fallen into a brown study. Was the dinner so dull?"

"No, Papa, not dull exactly; rather brilliant in some ways."

"I understand—brilliant materially, dull spiritually, like the mantles those fellows wore in the Inferno—gilt on the outside, and lead within. 'Oh, everlastingly fatiguing mantle!' I am gladder than ever that I stayed at home."

"I am glad too, for I think you would have been bored, and when you are bored you make no concealment of the fact."

"Of course not,—why should I? If I seemed to be having a good time, I should be compelled to go through it again. No, society is organized for people under twenty-five. They really enjoy it. For the rest of the world it is a sham."

Winifred smiled absently.

"Who was there?" Professor Anstice asked at length, pushing away his books as if bidding them a reluctant good-night.

"Oh, no one whom you know, I think, except Mr. Flint."

"Flint? Does he go to such things?"

"Yes, and appears to find them sufficiently entertaining, though I fancy he must be decidedly over twenty-five. By the way," she added, with an elaborately careless aside, "what do you think of Mr. Flint, on the whole?"

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"I think, for a clever man, he plays the worst game of whist I ever saw."

"Yes, yes," admitted Winifred, with light mockery in her tone; "but what do you think of him in lesser matters,—general character, for instance?"

The Professor looked at his daughter with a little quizzical sadness in his faded gray eyes. He began to perceive the drift of her banter.

"It would be difficult to state exactly what I think of him when you put it so broadly as that," he answered. "Flint's character is complex. He has in him the making of a fine man; but the question is, will it ever be made? He seems to me abnormally lacking in personal ambition,—does not seem to care whether he is heard of or not,—has a sort of contempt for the little neighborhood notorieties which give most men pleasure. It is as if he were taking a bird's-eye view of himself, and every one else, and they all looked so small that the trifling variations in prominence did not matter."

Winifred looked at her father in silent surprise. She had no idea that he had made such a study of the younger man. He paused for a moment; but meeting his daughter's absorbed gaze, he continued: "The thing which gives me most hope of Flint is his genuine devotion to truth. Positive or negative truth —it is all [Pg 297] the same to him. Now, many a man is loyal to his convictions; but very few are loyal to their doubts. He will 'come into port greatly or sail with God the seas.' Fine line that, isn't it? The sound is quite majestic if you say it over aloud—'Come into port—'"

"But, Papa," interrupted Winifred a little impatiently, "you were talking of Mr. Flint."

"To be sure, so we were,—at least I was; but I should like to hear a little of your opinion of him. A woman's estimate of a man is always worth having, though not always worth heeding. You see too much in high lights and deep shadows, not enough by clear daylight; still, I should like to know how Flint strikes you. I remember at first you found him absolutely disagreeable."

"Yes, Papa."

"But of late you have seemed to change your mind, or at least to feel less prejudice against him."

"Yes, Papa."

A silence fell between them after this. At length Winifred rose and turned down the lights. Then she drew a low stool to the side of her father's chair, and sitting down by his knee began to rub her hand gently up and down over the broadcloth.

"Papa," she said after a while, "I haven't been very nice to you; have I?"

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"Nonsense, child,—what put such an idea into your head? As if I had had any happiness in all these years since—since your mother died—except through my children!"

"Oh, yes, I know you have found your happiness in taking care of us, but I have found my happiness in being taken care of; and I have enjoyed having my own way and doing the things I liked, and now I would give—oh, so much!—if I had been different."

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Professor Anstice, anxiously fumbling about Winifred's wrist in the vain effort to find her pulse. "Are you ill? You have not had a hemorrhage or anything, have you?"

"Don't worry about me, dear! I shall live to plague you for many a year yet. I'm as well as can be, except for the mind ache." Here she gave a nervous little laugh. The Professor looked down at her, sitting there on the stool, her head drooping to the side as he remembered to have seen it years ago when she was a little chidden child. The waving hair hid her face from his sight,—all but the delicate oval of the cheek and the curve of the full, rounded chin.

"Winifred," he said gently, "I think you have something to tell me."

"Yes, I have, only I don't know how to begin."

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"Is it, perhaps, about Mr. Flint?"

"Yes, about Mr. Flint," Winifred admitted.

"He has been asking you to marry him?"

"Yes, asking me to marry him," Winifred repeated, still like a child reciting her catechism.

"And you promised."

"No, I did not," Winifred answered with sudden energy; "I told him I never could, would, or should marry him,—that I would go on being friends with him as long as he liked, but on condition that he gave up the other idea entirely."

Professor Anstice reached out his thin white scholarly fingers and stroked the rebellious waves of

his daughter's hair.

"Winifred," he said, "you are always acting on impulse. You never take time to consider anything, but jump and plunge like a broncho. Now let us talk this matter over calmly: I am afraid you have made a mistake—a serious mistake, my dear, though it may not be too late to remedy it."

"There is nothing to remedy," said Winifred, with a tremulous attempt at cheerfulness; "he asked me and I said 'No,' and he said he should never ask me again, and I said I hoped he wouldn't, or something like that, and so the matter ended; and I am always going to live with you and be good to you,—and you won't be sorry for that, will you?"

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"I should be very sorry if it came about so. Listen, Winifred. Because you see me a delver in dusty old books, you think perhaps that I don't know what love is; but I tell you as I grow older it comes to fill a larger and larger part of the horizon, to seem perhaps the only reality. I don't mean just the love of a man for a woman, but the great throbbing bond of human affection and sympathy; and of all the kinds of affection, there is none that has the strength and toughness that belong to the love of husband and wife. I wish you to marry, Winifred,—I have always wished it,—only let it be to a true man, my dear,—let it be to a true man!"

"Father, he *is* a true man," said Winifred, speaking low and with a timidity wholly new to her.

"I think so,—I earnestly believe it. He seems to me to have more ability, more strength, and more tenderness than he has shown yet. Some wrong ideas

have twisted themselves persistently among the very fibres of his life and warped it; but it is not yet too late to tear them away."

"Some one else may do it," said Winifred, in exaggerated discouragement, "I let the opportunity slip by. He will never ask me again, and as for me—do you think I will ever go to any man with the offer of my love? Not if my heart broke for him!"

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"He said he would never ask you again?"

"Yes, Papa; he said it twice."

"Well, if he said it twice fifty times, it was a lie, or would have been if he had not believed it himself at the time. Never fear but you will have a chance to tell him that you have changed your mind, and without any wound to your pride either."

"Oh, Papa!" cried Winifred, rising and throwing her arms about his neck, "you are such a comfort!"

The old clock on the landing of the stairway struck one.

"There, it is morning already," said her father. "Off to bed with you, else I shall have no one to pour out my cup of coffee to-morrow." As he spoke, he gently unclasped her arms from about his neck, but she would not go quite yet.

"If—if—all this should ever come about, are you quite sure you would be willing to have me leave you?"

"Quite sure, my dear. It is the natural thing, and what is natural must be right. Now, good-night."

Winifred wiped away the tears which had been hanging on the fringe of her eyelashes, and after a parting hug gathered up her wraps and swept away to her room. Her father watched her tenderly till the last trace of her gown had vanished [Pg 302] up the stairs; then he closed the door softly, took a miniature from its case in the drawer, laid it on the table, and bowed his head on both arms above it.

"'Father and Mother both.' Yes, that was what I promised, and that is what I must be so far as I can, and may God help me!" he murmured.

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CHAPTER XIX

A SLUM POST

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"Sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

Despair fells; suspense tortures. The forty odd hours which lay between the ending of the Grahams' dinner and the promised interview with Winifred Anstice stretched out into an eternity to the impatience of Flint. By turns he tried occupation and diversion; yet his ear caught every tick of the clock, which seemed to his exaggerated fancy to have retarded its movement. He found it so impossible to work at his office that he packed up his papers and started for home.

"What! going so early?" called Brooke from his desk.

"Yes, a man cannot do any work here with this everlasting steam-drill outside."

"You are growing too sensitive for this world, Flint. We shall have to build you a padded room, like Carlyle's, on top of the building."

Flint vouchsafed no answer. He posted out and up Broadway as if he were in mad haste. Then suddenly recollecting that his chief purpose [Pg 304] was to kill time, he moderated his stramming gait to a stroll. At a jeweller's on Union Square he paused, and turned in, ostensibly to order some cards; but passing out he stopped surreptitiously before the case of jewels. The rubies interested him most. How well they would look against a certain gray-silk gown! Should he ever dare— He caught a meaning smile on the face of the clerk, and bolted out of the door.

He paused again at a fashionable florist's shop tucked deftly in among the theatres of central Broadway. The men at the counter were busily engaged over curiously incongruous tasks,—one binding up a cross of lilies, another a wreath for a baby's coffin, and a third preparing a beribboned basket, gay with chrysanthemums, for a dinner-table. Heedless, like us all, of every one's experiences but his own, Flint stood by, waiting impatiently for the clerk who was putting the last lily in the cross. From the great heaps of roses which stood about he selected an overflowing boxful of the longest-stemmed and most fragrant. The clerk smiled as he watched his recklessness. "I've seen 'em like that," he said to himself, "and two or three years after they'll come in and ask for carnations, and say it doesn't matter if they *were* brought in yesterday."

Unconscious of the florist's cynical reflections,

[Pg 305] Flint tossed him his card, and emerged once more to add one to the moving mass of humanity on the street. At Madison Square he dropped in at the club and looked over the latest numbers of "Life" and "Punch."

Still time hung heavy on his hands. He looked at his watch; it was just five o'clock,—exactly the time when that objectionable Blathwayt was to call in Stuyvesant Square. Still two hours before dinner.

He left the club, crossed over to Broadway, and jumped onto the platform of the moving cable-car at imminent peril to life and limb. He rode on in a sort of daze, till he was roused by a sudden jerk and the conductor's call of: "Central Park—all out here!" Moving with the moving stream of passengers, he stepped out of the car, and refusing a green transfer ticket he crossed the street and entered the park at the Seventh Avenue gate, where the path makes a sudden dip from the level of the street. The sun was near its setting, and the chilly wind had swept the walks clear of tricycles and baby carriages. The gray-coated guardian of the peace blinked at him from his sentry box. Otherwise he had the park to himself, and found an intense pleasure in the solitude, the keen air, and the sharp outlines of the dreary autumn branches against the gorgeous sky.

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The west had that peculiar brilliancy which the dwellers on Manhattan would recognize as characteristic of their island in November, if there were not so few who ever get a peep at the sky except perpendicularly at noonday, as they emerge from rows of brownstone houses or overshadowing buildings of fabulous height. Flint was in no mood to

sentimentalize over sunsets. The intensely human interests before him drove Nature far away, as a cold abstraction akin to death; yet half unconsciously the scene imprinted itself upon his senses, and long afterward he recalled distinctly the pale grayish-blue of the zenith shading into the rare, cold tint of green, and that again barred over with light gossamer clouds, beneath which lay the glowing bands of orange, red, and violet.

As the sun dropped, the temperature followed it. The wind whistled more keenly through the bare branches. Flint turned up the collar of his overcoat, thrust his hands into his pockets, and quickened his pace.

The relief of rapid motion told upon his overstrained condition. By the time he had rounded the lakes he was calmer. The ascent of the steep, rock-hewn steps of the ramble rested his nerves as much as it taxed his wind, and as he came stramming down the mall, his mind was sufficiently detached from its own hopes [Pg 307] and fears to be able to realize that the overhanging elms recalled agreeably the long walk at Oxford, and that the Cathedral spires were fine in the gathering dusk, as one emerged from the Fifth Avenue entrance. The return to the world of men stimulated him, and the long undulating waves of electric lights seemed to beckon to him hopefully as he went on.

The afternoon was gone. That was one comfort, he said, as he reached his own room. It would take half-an-hour to dress for dinner, and that meal might be prolonged to cover another hour; but the evening still stretched onward, seeming interminable to his restless fancy. It was a relief when Brady came in

and suggested that they drop in at a meeting of the Salvation Army to be held at a slum post in a region of the city known as Berry Hill.

"Will I go?" he said, echoing the question of his friend, who stood looking out of the window with an appearance of indifference, which deceived no one. "Yes, I will; but I want you to understand that I don't go as you do, out of pure emotional piety, but only to see and hear Nora Costello."

"Well, she is worth it, isn't she?" Brady responded.

"Worth a trip down-town? Without doubt; but that is not the question that is lying down [Pg 308] in the depths of the locality you are pleased to call your heart. Come, now," he added, walking across to the window and throwing his arm over Brady's shoulder with one of his rare exhibitions of affection,—"come; make a clean breast of it, and let us talk the thing out from A to Z. *Imprimis*, you are in love with Nora Costello."

Brady started and moved away a trifle, but made no effort at denial till after a minute, when he said rather weakly, "What makes you think so?"

"*Think* so! Why, man, I must be deaf, dumb, and blind not to *know* it. Do you suppose I believed that a man at your time of life, brought up as you have been, had suddenly gone daft on this Salvation Army business?"

"It's a 'business', as you call it, that does more good than all the churches put together," answered Brady, hotly.

"Hear him!" echoed Flint, mockingly.

"Hear this son of New England actually declaring that there may be a way to heaven which does not lie between church-pews or start from a pulpit!"

"Flint, you are a scoffer."

"What do I scoff at?"

"Religion."

"Pardon me, but I do not."

"Well, theology, anyway."

"Ah, that is a different matter."

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"You call yourself an agnostic."

"No, I don't. 'Agnostic' is too long and too pretentious a word. I prefer to translate it and call myself a know-nothing."

"Don't you believe in God and a future life—and—and all that sort of thing?" Brady ended rather disjointedly.

"Don't you believe Mars is inhabited? and that the lines on its surface are canals for irrigation?"

"I don't know," answered Brady, whose mental processes were simple.

"Neither do I," said Flint; "and what is more, neither does any man, any more than he knows about God and a future life; and so why should we go to making up creeds and breaking the heads of people who don't agree with us when we are all just guessers, and probably all of us wrong?"

"Then you would take away faith out of the world?"

"Not I,—at least not unless I could see something to take its place, which at present I don't; and as for these poor devils who are consoling themselves for their hard lot in this world by the expectation of a soft thing in the next, I would not be such a brute as to shake their confidence if I could, and I don't blame them much if in addition to their heaven they set up a hell where, in imagination at least, they can put the folks [Pg 310] who have been having a too good time here while they were grunting and sweating under their weary load."

"Then I wonder you have not more sympathy with an organization like the Salvation Army, which is doing its best to lighten the burden of the grunters and sweaters."

"Ah," answered Flint, "I had forgotten the Salvation Army,—it seems so small a branch of a big subject. I am glad you brought me back. But let us go a little further back still, for you know it was not the Army at all that we started to discuss, but only one of its officers, with a slender little figure and a pale face and a big pair of rather mournful dark eyes."

"Oh!" said Brady, taken somewhat off his guard, "but you should see her when she is pleased! They light up just as if a torch had been kindled in them."

"Oh, they do, do they?" said Flint, with genial raillery; "well, you see I never saw her so pleased as that."

"Why, don't you remember on her birthday, when I gave her back the locket?"

"I remember the occasion; but I had precious little chance to see how her eyes looked, for you stood so close to her that nobody else could catch a glimpse. I did see something, though."

"What?"

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"I saw *you*, and any one more palpably sentimental I never did see."

"Well, what of it? It isn't a crime, I suppose—"

"That depends," Flint answered dryly.

Brady shook off his hand. "What do you mean by

that?" he asked angrily.

"I mean," said Flint, folding his arms and looking at his friend steadily, "that you have come to the cross-roads. You cannot go on as you are. You must either give up hanging about Nora Costello, or you must make up your mind to marry her."

"And why not, pray, if I could induce her to accept me?"

"Great Heavens!" cried Flint; "has it gone so far as that?"

"Yes, it has," answered Brady, as defiantly as though Flint had represented his whole family circle; "and if she will marry me I shall be a proud and happy man."

"And your relatives,—the Bradfords and Standishes and all?"

"Plymouth Rock may fall on them for all I care," exclaimed Brady.

"And how about the tambourines and torches?"

Brady colored a little, but he stood his ground manfully.

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"I shall never presume to dictate," he answered. "I will go my way and she shall go hers; and if I can lend a helping hand to any of the poor wretches she is trying to save, I shall do it, if I have to take off my kid gloves and get down into the gutter, as many a better man has done before me."

"Well," answered Flint, "if that is the way you take it I have nothing more to say. But if you don't object I

would like to be present when you announce the engagement to Miss Standish."

"Miss Standish be hanged!" cried Brady. "It is a question of Miss Costello, I tell you. My only anxiety lies right there. If you had ever been in love you would know how it feels."

"I can imagine," Flint answered, taking up his pipe and looking scrutinizingly into the bowl; "I have read about it in books. But come! if we are going to the rally we must be about it. It is nearly eight by my watch. How long is the confounded thing—excuse me—I mean the gospel gathering?"

"If you are going to make fun of it, Flint, you would better stay at home," said Brady, stiffly.

"No, no, forgive me, Brady! I meant nothing of the kind; it is my accursed habit of joking [Pg 313] when I am in earnest, and being so solemn when I try to be funny that I am never in harmony with the occasion. Go on; I will close the door. I ought not to go, for I half expect Brooke of the Magazine. No matter; I will leave word for him."

As they passed the janitor, Flint said, "I shall be back by ten. If any one comes to see me you have the key of my rooms, and let any visitor come in and wait."

"All right, sir!"

"And see that the fire is kept up."

"Yes, sir."

Flint shivered as he passed out of the warm, heavily carpeted halls into the chilly night of late November.

"To-morrow will be Thanksgiving, won't it?" Brady

observed.

"Yes, and judging by the number of turkeys on this avenue there will be no family without one. I heard last year of a poor widow who had *six* sent her by different charitable institutions. That is what I call a pressure of subsistence on population."

Something in Flint's manner jarred upon his companion. It seemed like a determined opposition to any undue influence of sentiment or emotion. Brady could not have defined the attitude of his friend's mind; but he felt it, and [Pg 314] resented it to the extent of keeping silence after they had taken their seats in the car of the elevated road.

There were few other passengers, and the car smelled of lamp-oil. All surrounding influences tended to depress Brady's ordinarily buoyant spirits, and he wished he had stayed at home, or at any rate had left Flint behind. Meanwhile his companion, apparently wholly oblivious of the frigidity of his companion's manner, sat with his hat pulled over his eyes, and his face as undecipherable as the riddle of the Sphinx.

As the cars stopped at a station half-way between the up-town residences and the downtown offices, in the slum belt of the city, Brady buttoned up his overcoat and rose, saying shortly, "We get out here."

"He has been here more than once," was Flint's inward comment; but he made no reply, only followed in Brady's footsteps down the iron stairs, and under the shadow of the elevated track for a block or two, when Brady made a sharp wheel to eastward.

"Is this our street?" asked Flint, speaking for the first time.

"Yes, this is our street. Turn to the right—there where you see the red lantern hanging out from the second story."

"Ah, you know the neighborhood well, I see. [Pg 315] Lead on, and I will follow. How dark it is down here!"

"Yes, electric lights are reserved for the quarters where you rich people live."

"*You* rich people!" Flint smiled to himself. "Pretty soon," he thought, "Brady will be classing me among the greedy capitalists who are battening on the sorrows of the poor." He was almost conscious of a feeling of guilt as he recalled the fresh, pure air of the park and contrasted it with this atmosphere. The name of Berry Hill seemed curiously inappropriate for the level streets lined with tumble-down tenements; and its suggestion of the long-ago days when vine-clad uplands swelled between the narrowing rivers, and little children steeped their fingers in nothing more harmful than the blood of berries, lent an added pathos to the gloom of the contrasting present.

The slum post was a forlorn wooden building which had quite forgotten, if it had ever owned, a coat of paint. The windows of the lower story were guarded by a wire netting, behind which reposed the treasures of the poor under the temporary guardianship of the pawnbroker. On one side lay bits of finery, tawdry rings of plate and silver set with sham diamonds and pearls, which if the product of nature, would have bankrupted a Rothschild. In

among them were [Pg 316] infants' rattles and spoons marked for life with the impress of baby teeth. Behind the smaller articles hung a row of musical instruments, fifes and fiddles sadly silent, and hinting of moody, mirth-robbed homes. Behind these again, by the dim light within, Flint caught a glimpse of miscellaneous piles of household articles wrung from the reluctant owners who had already parted with vanity and mirth, and now must banish comfort too.

The door on one side of the window stood open, and a rather dim light within showed a bare hall-way with a worn shabby staircase leading to the room above. Flint and Brady toiled up two flights. "The path to heaven is not to be made too easy, is it?" said Flint, pausing to take breath.

"No; did you expect elevators?" his friend asked with some asperity.

Flint's good humor was not to be shaken, however.

"To heaven? Why, yes. Angels' wings I've always understood were to be at our service. Here it seems not."

At the door Brady stopped to drop a quarter into the basket labelled "Silver contribution," held by a buxom and not unpleasing young woman in the Army uniform.

"They understand the first principles of the [Pg 317] church, I see," Flint whispered. "They have dropped the communion, but they keep the contribution-box."

Brady did not attend to him. As the two men entered, several turned to look at them. Clearly they were not of the class expected. Brady, however, nodded to one or two, and he and his friend sat down on a bench

near the door, in the corner of the hall. Flint wished it were in order to keep his hat on to shield his eyes from the unshaded gas, which struck him full in the face. But he resigned himself to that, as well as to the heat and the odor, and charged it off to the account of a new experience.

The interior was bare and cheerless, colorless save for the torn red shades above the high dormer windows, and the crudely painted mottoes over the platform and around the wall. "*Berry Hill for God!*" sprawled along one side, flanked by "*Remember Your Mother's Prayers!*" and in front the sinner's trembling gaze was met by the depressing suggestion, "*What if you Was to Die To-night?*"

The ceiling was low, and the air already over-heated and over-breathed. Flint was an epicure in the matter of air. He looked longingly at the door, which offered the only method of escape. But he had come for the evening, and he made up his mind to endure to the end.

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A Hindoo was speaking as they came in, shaking his white turban with much vehemence, and waving his small delicate hands in the air as he told of "The General's" work in India, and how he had been drawn by the gospel (which he pronounced go-spell) to give up his rank in the Brahmin caste, to wander over the world as an evangel.

"Queer," muttered Flint, "that every converted Hindoo was a Brahmin. Booth seems to have had great luck with the aristocracy."

For a few moments the strangeness of the Hindoo's speech amused Flint; then he grew bored, and finally

irritated. He took out his watch, looked at it conspicuously, then closed it with an audible click. If there is a depressing sound on earth it is the click of a watch to the ear of an orator. The speaker felt it, and looked round deprecatingly, reflecting perhaps that however superior in morals, Occidentals have something to learn of the Orientals in manners.

When the high-caste Hindoo sat down, there was much clapping of hands and shaking of tambourines, and then to the tune of Daisy Bell rose a chorus of,—

"Sinner, Sinner, give me your answer, do!"

Flint felt a convulsive twitching at the corner of his mouth, but he had sworn to himself that he [Pg 319] would betray no levity. Brady looked so uncomfortable that his friend pitied him. There is much which disturbs us, chiefly through the sensibility of others. At the end of the singing, a man rose to tell of what the Army had done for him in rescuing him from the gutter; but his legs were so unsteady and his speech so frequently interrupted by hiccoughs that an audible titter ran around the room, and there was great propriety in the song following his remarks.

"If at first you don't succeed,
Try, try again."

The room grew hotter, the lights more trying, the bench harder. The humor of the situation began to die out in Flint's mind, and gave way to a wave of repulsion and of pity for his friend who was about to condemn himself to these associations for life. His mind, which had wandered from the scene around him, was recalled by the sound of a voice, so different from the preceeding ones that it fell like

angelic tones upon a world far beneath.

"My friends," said the voice, which was of course Nora Costello's, "you have listened this night to stories of sin and suffering, of struggle, of victory, and sometimes of defeat."

"Like the tipsy gent's," a man called out with a coarse laugh.

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"Yes, like his. Would you jeer and gibe if you saw a man sinking in the waves time after time in spite o' rafts and life-preservers thrown out to him from the ship?"

A shamed silence showed that the question had struck; but the speaker was not satisfied with silence. She went on driving the shaft home. "Would you laugh if you saw a man trying to climb out of a burning building and beaten back time after time by the flames?"

(Cries of "No, no.")

"Then why should you laugh over a poor wretch who is struggling with worse flames and in danger of being dragged down to more terrible fires of endless punishment?"

"Fire! Fire!" cried some one in the hall. For a moment Flint took this to be like the "No, no" of a moment before,—only a running comment on the speaker's words,—but at the same instant his eye caught the curling of a thin blue line of smoke in the corner, and he remembered the furniture and flimsy flummery stored on the lower floor. He measured the distance to the door. There was no one between him

and it. He would have little difficulty in escaping if he started on the instant—*but these others!*

"The place will go up like a rocket," he said to Brady, "but a panic is worse. Hold the door with me!"

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"Take me, meester; I'm stronger nor him!" said a broad-shouldered coal-heaver, who had overheard their whisper.

With this the three men made a bolt for the door, and formed in line in front of it, with their stout walking-sticks in hand.

"Keep your seats. We will knock down the first man who moves. There's no danger!" Flint shouted. For an instant the crowd wavered. It would have taken only one more impulse to turn it into a mob. Nora Costello saw the danger, and seizing her tambourine she began on a ringing Army chorus. The audience fell in with such energy that it drowned the rattle of the fire engines.

"Don't be alarmed," said a fireman, sticking his head in at the door, "the fire is out, and the danger over. Five minutes more, though," he added in an undertone to Flint, "would have done the business, and then, I reckon, we might have spent a week looking for bodies in the ashes."

"Come, Brady, let us go; I want some fresh air," said Flint, when the excitement had subsided and another convert had begun his sing-song confession and adjuration.

"Go, then," answered his friend; "I shall wait to the end. I am going to walk home with Miss Costello.

Yes," he went on, in response to his [Pg 322] friend's questioning glance, "it's to-night or never."

"Then I won't wait," said Flint; "only come in to-morrow and tell me how you fared."

It was with a feeling of exultation that Flint found himself again on the street. "How grewsome it would have been," he thought, "to be carried off in a job lot like that! I can imagine nothing worse, except perhaps to be killed in a crush at a bargain-counter."

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CHAPTER XX

THE UNFORESEEN

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"C'est toujours l'imprévu qui arrive."

The ruling thought in Flint's mind as he emerged from the crowded room and made his way down the shaky stairs to the outer door, was of the physical delight of inhaling fresh air. He drew in two or three deep, lung-filling breaths, then he opened his coat and shook it to the air as he had seen doctors do after coming out of a sick-room.

"Decidedly," he said to himself, "slumming is not my vocation. If I were drafted into the Salvation Army, I should plead to be permitted to join the open-air brigade. My sympathy with the poor in general, and drunkards in particular, is in inverse proportion to

the nearness. Poor Brady! I wonder how he will endure being unequally yoked together with a believer. Suppose Nora Costello refuses him. No, he is safe enough, if it is being safe to have her return his love. I saw her look up as we came in, and though she never glanced in our direction again till the cry [Pg 324] of 'Fire!' came, I saw her look of appeal then, and his response. Oh, there is no doubt about her accepting him; but the question is, not how does she feel now, but how will she feel a year or two years from now? As I grow older, I grow more conservative on these things. There is such an amount of wear and tear in the ordinary strain of married life that I hate to see cruel and unusual ones added. If Winifred Anstice should ever or could ever — There, I will not allow myself even to think about it, for it would be so much harder to give it up afterward if I am compelled to, and, after all, what chance is there that a girl like Winifred would be willing to spend her whole life with a man whose nature and character are so different from hers!"

Flint had been walking rapidly, and his musings had so filled his mind that he saw with surprise that he had reached the corner where the Sixth Avenue elevated and surface cars curve together for their straight-away race to the Park at the end of the course. He was conscious of a certain added rush of spirits at finding himself once more on the edge of a familiar world,—a world where the sin was at least conventionalized and the misery went about well dressed. Already the scene at the slum post had taken on in his mind a distance which enabled him to regard it humorously, and he amused himself in rehearsing [Pg 325] the scene as he would set it forth to Brooke when he reached "The Chancellor."

As he turned a corner, he noticed just in front of him in the side street leading toward Fifth Avenue a young woman carrying a paper parcel, and looking up a little nervously at one number after another. She wore a Canada seal jacket, and a wide felt hat topped with nodding plumes which made a large effect for the investment. Over the jacket hung a gilt chain holding a coin purse, the latest fad of the fashionable world.

As Flint's footsteps quickened behind her, she turned her head a little timorously. At last she stopped, and as he caught up with her she began, "Could you tell me—" Then she stopped short.

"Miss Marsden!" exclaimed Flint, in amazement. "What in the world brings you here?"

"To see New York," the girl began a little flippantly, but ended more tremulously, "and to see you."

"But where are you staying?"

"Nowhere—that is, I came down on the train this afternoon, and I thought I'd go to a hotel, and then I meant to write you a note to-morrow and ask you to come and see me; but a lady I met on the cars, she was real kind, and she said she guessed I'd find it cost more 'n I reckoned on to go to a hotel, and so she gave [Pg 326] me this address where a friend of hers lived. She said she was a perfect lady, and would take good care of me. Not that I need anybody to do that!"

This last with that curious mixture of innocence, ignorance, and sophistication, incredible outside America, where the self-dependent girl so early becomes sufficient for herself and too much for every

one else.

Flint took the address from her hand, and studied it for a minute. "That will not do at all," he said quietly, as he threw the bit of paper into the gutter. Then he took out his watch. "Half-past nine. You have just time to catch the night train for South East."

The girl's face fell. "I'm not going to South East," she said sullenly. "I wrote Pa that I was going off for Thanksgiving, with a friend from Boxbury."

"Then why not go back to Boxbury? That's still an easier trip, and I can let you have the money."

Flint's tone, which was always low, had dropped still deeper; but the earnestness of his manner made itself felt, and a casual passer-by, catching the word "money," slowed up his walk, and turned his head for an instant's inspection of the couple. Flint raged inwardly at the vulgarity of the situation thus thrust upon him. [Pg 327] To his companion, however, the glance of the passer-by conveyed nothing more than a recognition of her good looks, to which she was not averse. She stood still a moment, rubbing her ringed and ungloved hand back and forward over the sanded iron imitation brownstone fence by which she had paused. Then, as Flint, feeling the conspicuousness of their stationary attitude, made a movement to walk on, she broke out with a note of genuine feeling,—

"It's no question of money. I came away because I couldn't stand it any longer. I wanted so to see you and to tell you what a lot I cared about you, and I thought perhaps—"

"Don't go on!" said Flint, a trifle sternly. "You are a

silly little fool; but you ought to know better than to say things like that to a man who never did and never could care anything for you."

"Then you despise me and my love!" said Tilly, with passion half real, half premeditated for effect. She had rehearsed this scene many times in her own mind.

"Despise you? Not I," Flint answered; "and as for your love, a real, genuine affection is about the last thing in the world to be despised. Whether it is returned or not, it does not matter; and besides," here Flint paused a minute and then went on, "in that I have much sympathy [Pg 328] with you, for I too love some one who has refused to marry me."

It was with a sense of inward surprise that Flint heard himself revealing the secrets of his inmost heart to this tawdry young girl; but Brady's words were ringing in his ears: "I think I would try to help save a soul, if I had to take off my kid gloves or even go down in the gutter to do it."

Tilly Marsden had not enough nobleness of nature to take in the spirit of his confidence. To her his words implied some hope for herself.

"Perhaps," she said brokenly, "if you couldn't get her you might take me." As she looked up at him pleadingly, with real tears standing on her long eyelashes and the flush of a genuine emotion on her cheeks, Flint was conscious that she was very, very pretty.

Her prettiness would not at any time have held any temptation for him. The inherited austerity of his blood and a fastidiousness of temperament beyond

the appeal of this chromo beauty would have prevented it in any case, but just now he was under the spell of an exaltation which lifted him above even the possibility of such danger. He had stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and looked into the eyes of spiritual love. Its light still shone above and around him, and shed its influence over the whole [Pg 329] world. All dark thoughts, all basilar instincts shrank back abashed before that white light. The old monogamous instinct of the Anglo-Saxon race, which has kept it sound at the core in spite of a thousand vices, held this man as true to the woman whom he wished to marry as if she were indeed his wife.

Tempted he was not, but most wofully disturbed in mind he certainly was. Having destroyed the dubious address, he felt himself to have assumed in a measure a responsibility for this foolish girl's future, her immediate future at least. His mind traversed rapidly all the possible courses open to him. He must take her somewhere. Hotels and boarding-houses were alike impossible. He thought of Nora Costello; but he could not bring himself to ask her to share the narrow limits of her one room with this be-furbelowed young person, and then it would involve so many awkward explanations. There was only one person who would understand. By a process of exclusion, his thoughts were driven more and more insistently toward seeking aid from Winifred Anstice.

He felt to the full the delicacy and difficulty, not to say the absurdity, of his position, in seeking to place the woman who loved him under the protection of the woman he loved, but it was the only course which seemed even possible.

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"Come," he said suddenly to Tilly, with an authority which the girl's will was powerless to resist. "Since you will not go home, you must be cared for here. I will take you to a friend of mine, and you must do as she tells you."

"And what if I won't go?" said the girl, with a feeble effort at self-assertion.

"Then I will leave you here. Only never hold me responsible for the ruin that lies before you clear as Hell."

The girl quailed before the energy of his words.

"Cab, sir?" called the driver of a hansom the lights of which had twinkled from a judicious distance for some time past.

Flint raised his finger in acquiescence, and the hansom rattled up to the curbstone. Flint handed Tilly Marsden into it with his habitual deference, gave a street and number to the driver, and, jumping in himself, slammed to the half doors with a clang which echoed along the silent street. The driver cracked his whip over the horse's head as if he were about to drive him at a desperate pace; but the animal, familiar with the noisy demonstration and recognizing it as intended for the encouragement of the passengers within the vehicle and not conveying any special warning to himself, set off at his customary jog-trot.

A man who had been standing in the shadow [Pg 331] of a house moved out and stood a moment under the quivering nimbus of the electric light. His brow darkened as he looked after the retreating cab.

"Curse him!" he muttered.

Flint and his companion drove on unwitting of the vengeance-breeding wrath behind them. For a time they kept silence, each absorbed in his own thoughts. Flint was unpleasantly conscious that the girl was crying behind her veil, but realizing that he had no consolation to offer, he wisely let her alone, and before many minutes the novelty of her surroundings began to tell upon Tilly's grief.

"Whose house is that?" she asked in a broken voice, as they passed a brilliantly lighted hotel. She had read so much of the palaces of the millionnaires that a fourteen-story private dwelling did not strike her as at all unexpected.

"She will recover," Flint murmured cynically to himself. His mind was working rapidly now. Like many contemplative men, once roused to definite action he was capable of great energy and direct executive ability. He planned every detail of the coming interview, met every emergency, was prepared for every event.

As the cab drew up before the Anstice door, he noted with relief that the lights above were bright and those on the parlor floor subdued. [Pg 332] "No company, thank Heaven! and the family upstairs," was his comment. What he most dreaded now was Winifred's being out. He wondered if in that event he should have courage to ask for Miss Standish, and had almost persuaded himself that he would, when McGregor, to the comfort of his soul, admitted that Miss Anstice was at home and without visitors. Flint felt a little cut by McGregor's glance of suspicion at his companion. It seemed to connote the opinion of the world, and to make his position more difficult than ever. He determined, however, to carry things

with a high hand.

"Show this young woman into the dining-room, McGregor, and close the doors. Then take this card to Miss Anstice, and ask if I may see her for a moment on important business."

The old butler stumbled upstairs, murmuring, "Well, it's a queer business, and I can't make it out; but he's the right sort, he is."

As Flint waited in the drawing-room, he was dimly conscious of the perfume from the roses in the jar on the piano, conscious too that he was standing on the very spot where he had kissed Winifred's hand yesterday. Was it really only yesterday? It seemed an age ago.

The spell was broken by the sound of a light step on the stair, and the appearance of Winifred herself in the doorway,—Winifred in her gown [Pg 333] of soft gray silk, with a bunch of his roses at her belt,—Winifred as he had never seen her before, with the gladness of unrestrained welcome in her eyes, with shy words of love almost trembling on her lips.

Flint started forward, then thought of the girl behind the closed door, and hesitated. Surely they could postpone happiness for a time to bind up the bruises of that foolish wayfarer who was none the less to be pitied that her wounds were self-inflicted.

Winifred's quick perception took in at once the agitation of his face and manner.

"You are in trouble!" she said, coming close to him with swift sympathy.

"Yes, in trouble and in perplexity. I have come to you

for help."

"I am glad you have come to me," the girl said simply, and stood with uplifted eyes waiting for him to go on.

"Don't look at me like that," Flint cried out; "when you do I can think of nothing but you, and to-night we must both think about some one else."

"Who is it? What is it? Tell me from the beginning."

Flint was profoundly moved by the instant putting aside of all thoughts of self in the desire to be of service.

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"How dared I ask her to marry me?" he thought. Aloud he said: "Listen, Winifred, and know that I am trying to tell you the white truth without reserve or evasion. I come to you because you are the only person who will need no explanation of the past, to unravel the evil of the present. I went with Brady this evening to a meeting of the Salvation Army at a slum post down on Berry Hill, where Nora Costello was to speak—"

"Oh, why didn't you let me go too?"

"You shall go if you like sometime; but I am glad you were not there to-night, for there was a fire, and something near a panic—"

Winifred turned white and moved nearer to him.

"Don't be alarmed!" he said; "nothing happened. The fire was soon put out, and people settled back in their seats. But I grew restless, and concluded not to wait for Brady; so I started to walk up alone—"

"Alone?" echoed Winifred, "through that quarter! Why, Nora says it is as bad as Whitechapel."

"Perhaps," said Flint, with a nervous laugh; "but my walk was entirely uneventful till I reached our own highly respectable part of the city. As I was turning into Fifth Avenue, out of one of the side streets above Washington [Pg 335] Square, I saw a girl looking up at the houses. As I came along she stopped to speak to me, and to my amazement I found it was Tilly Marsden."

"*Tilly Marsden?*"

"Yes, she had come down to spend Thanksgiving here in the city. She had been expecting, it seems, to go to a hotel; but a woman on the train gave her the address of some friend, and she was looking up this unknown landlady when I came along."

"Little fool!" said Winifred, with finely feminine exasperation.

"She is—beyond a doubt she is; but still—"

"But still," said Winifred, with a vanishing smile, "you naturally have more sympathy with her folly than I have." (At this moment Winifred had forgotten the charge of lack of sympathy which she had brought against the man before her three months ago.) "The question is, of course, what is to be done with her?"

Flint felt an immense sense of relief at Winifred's practical words, which seemed to remove the situation from the element of tragedy to rather sordid commonplace.

"That's it exactly," he said helplessly. "I thought of taking her to Nora Costello."

"That would not do at all," said Winifred, [Pg 336] positively. "I am disappointed in you. If you had trusted to my proffer of friendship yesterday, you would have brought her to me."

"I—I did," hesitated Flint; "she is in the rear room there. But the more I think of it, the more I feel as if I could not have her here near you. She is—"

"You need not tell me what Tilly Marsden is," Winifred interrupted. "I know her of old. She is silly and pert, and cheaply sensational; but she is not vicious, and if she were, our duty would be the same. You may leave her with Miss Standish and me. We will take care of her, and try to make something of her."

"I suppose I ought to say 'Good-by' to her?"

"By no means. Go, and leave her to me."

"Have you no word for me at parting?"

"No, not now,—all that can wait."

"Good-night, then, since you will let me say nothing more."

Winifred answered with a farewell glance, full of confidence and of love. Then the door closed after Flint, and Winifred threw open the folding-doors into the dining-room.

"How do you do, Miss Marsden?" she said, taking Tilly's hand.

The girl looked at her, stupidly bewildered.

"You do not recognize me, I see, but I [Pg 337] remember you from seeing you with Leonard Davitt

down at Nepaug."

Tilly blushed painfully, but Winifred took no notice of her embarrassment.

"Mr. Flint said you were belated in your trip to the city, so he brought you to us for the night," Winifred continued, as if it were the most natural episode in the world.

"And did he tell you—"

"He told me nothing else. He was in a hurry, I suppose."

"Then he is gone?"

"Yes, he is gone, and I am glad, because it is time you went to bed after you have had such a tiresome journey. Come upstairs. I am going to give you the little room next Miss Standish's. You remember her perhaps—she was at Nepaug too. To-morrow we will talk over anything you wish to tell me. Come!"

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CHAPTER XXI

GOD'S PUPPETS

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"God's puppets best and worst are we,
There is no last or first."

The breakfast-hour in the Anstice household was

regularly irregular. A movable fast, Professor Anstice called it. On the morning of Thanksgiving Day the hand of the old Dutch clock pointed to nine when Winifred Anstice entered the dining-room.

A freshly lighted fire blazed on the hearth. The lamp beneath the silver urn blazed on the table. Toasted muffins and delicate dishes of honey and marmalade stood upon the buffet.

"Will you wait for Mr. Anstice?" McGregor asked as she entered.

"No, McGregor, I am like time and tide, and wait for no man or woman either; but you need not hurry, for I will look over my mail while the eggs are boiling,—just four minutes, remember. I don't want them bullets, nor yet those odious slimy trickling things which seem only held together by the shell."

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McGregor smiled,—a smile it had cost him twenty years of service in the best families to acquire,—a smile which expressed respectful appreciation of the facetiousness intended without any personal share in it. He never allowed himself to be more amused than a butler should be.

Winifred Anstice dropped into the chair which he held for her, and took up, one by one, the letters which lay on the silver tray by her side. They proved a strange medley, as the morning mail of a New York woman always is,—a dozen "At Home" cards, Receptions, Teas, "days" in December, all put aside after a passing glance for future sorting; an appeal for aid, by a widow who had done washing for the family twenty years ago, and was sure for the sake of old times Miss Anstice would lend her a small sum,

to tide over the cruel winter when her son could get no work; a note from Mrs. De Lancey Jones, stating that a few excellent seats for a performance to be given for the benefit of the "Manhattan Appendicitis Hospital" could be had from her; there was a great rush for the tickets, but she wanted if possible to keep a few for her friends, and would Miss Anstice kindly let her know at once if she desired any?

Miss Anstice smiled a sceptical smile, which [Pg 340] deepened into a laugh when she picked up the next note, which stated that Mrs. Brown-Livingston was also holding back a number of the same much-sought tickets for her friends, but would part with a few to Miss Anstice if informed at once.

"What frauds these mortals be!" exclaimed Winifred, laying both requests aside to amuse her father later.

At the next envelope she colored hotly, for she recognized the handwriting instantly. Indeed it was an easily recognizable superscription and of very distinct individuality,—a back-hand which at first glance gave the impression that it must be held up to the mirror to be read, but on closer scrutiny looked plainer than the upright round hand of the copy-books. It did not need the "F" upon the seal to tell Winifred Anstice from whom it came. She opened it, as she opened all sealed documents, with a hairpin, though two paper-cutters of silver and ivory lay at her hand on the tray.

The note was brief. It was dated "University Club, Midnight," and had no beginning, as if the writer could think of none befitting his feeling.

"I am distracted," it began abruptly, "with the contest of fears and hopes, regret and satisfaction. If I seem

to have unloaded upon you a burden of responsibility which was justly [Pg 341] mine, I beg you to believe that I did it only because I could see no other way, and even then I meant only to ask you to share it. In place of this, with characteristic generosity you insisted upon assuming the whole. This must not be. Pray name some hour when I may come to you, and let it be to-morrow. You don't know how far off that seems."

Only that, and then the signature. It was a strange note from a lover; but to Winifred Anstice it was full of the assurance that the man to whom she had given her heart (for she admitted it to herself now) was of a nature large enough to put himself and his own feelings aside and to believe that she too was capable of the larger vision, the renunciation of present happiness for pressing duty. The highest plane upon which those who love can meet is this of united work and united self-sacrifice.

Winifred's eyes glistened as she read, and when she had finished, she slipped the note into her pocket for a second reading. As she did so, Miss Standish entered.

"I declare, Winifred, you get more morning mail than a Congressman."

"Yes," said Winifred, "and my constituents make larger demands."

"It seems to me," said Miss Standish, "that you engage in too many projects. You do not [Pg 342] give yourself time to attend to your own needs at all."

"Oh, never fear for that!" answered Winifred. "One's own needs pound at the door; the needs of others

only tap. How did you sleep last night?"

"Finely. I was so tired after that picture exhibition that I could hardly keep my eyes open. I was glad enough to creep off to bed by nine o'clock; but do you know I had a confused dream of voices in the room next mine,—the little one with the green and white hangings. I thought I heard your voice, and then a stranger's, and I seemed to catch the word 'Nepaug.' Isn't it curious how dreams come without any reason whatever?"

"H'm! Sometimes it is, as you say, very curious; but in this particular instance there was nothing very miraculous about it, since you did hear voices and you very likely caught the word 'Nepaug,' for it was certainly mentioned."

"How's that?" questioned Miss Standish, sharply. She did not relish the idea of having missed any unusual happenings.

Winifred was a little vexed by the note of curiosity in her voice, and she answered without undue haste, "Yes, it was I and Tilly Marsden; you remember her, perhaps,—the daughter of the inn-keeper."

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There were two things most exasperating to Miss Standish,—one to be supposed to know what she did not and thereby to be cheated of acquiring the information, the other to be suspected of not knowing what she remembered perfectly.

"Not know Tilly Marsden! Well, you must think I am losing my faculties. I wish you would not waste your time in telling things I know as well as you do; but what I would like to hear is how she came to be in

this house."

"Mr. Flint brought her," answered Winifred, with unkind brevity.

"Ah!" commented Miss Standish, with an upward inflection, "and did he explain how it happened that she was under his protection?"

"I did not insult him by inquiring," flashed Winifred, "and I will not have him insulted in my presence."

Miss Standish looked at the girl over her glasses, as if she suspected her of having lost her wits. We are all of us surprised by a response which seems to us vehement beyond the proximate cause of the present occasion; we fail to allow for the slow-gathering irritation, the unseen sources of excitement which collect in the caverns of the mind like fire-damp ready to explode at the naked flame of one flickering candle. Winifred had the grace to be instantly ashamed [Pg 344] of her impulsive irritability. She had already set before herself the standard of self-control which she saw and reverenced in Flint.

"Excuse me," she said. "I was awake almost all night, and am tired and nervous. Mr. Flint met Tilly Marsden by accident in the street. She did not know where to go, and so he brought her here. My father approved," she added a little haughtily.

"But why did she appeal to Mr. Flint?" pursued Miss Standish, who clung to her inquiries like a burr.

"Because she was in love with him," blurted out Winifred, irritated beyond the power of silence. "Can't you see! *This* was why I asked him to leave Nepaug last summer."

"Tilly Marsden in love with Mr. Flint!" echoed Miss Standish, amazed beyond the desire to appear to have suspected it all along. "I can't understand it."

"I can," said Winifred; "I can understand it perfectly. Poor girl! I am heartily sorry for her."

"Well, you needn't be," responded Miss Standish, with an asperity born of impatience at her own lack of astuteness. "For my part, I have no doubt she has enjoyed the situation thoroughly from beginning to end. No, don't talk to me. I know those hysterical people. [Pg 345] All they care about is making a sensation and being the centre of attention. It is my opinion that she has made fools of you and Mr. Flint too. As for her being in love with him, nonsense! She would have fallen in love with a wax figure at the Eden Musée, if it wore better clothes than she was accustomed to. It tickles her vanity to fancy herself in love with a gentleman. It is the next best thing to having him in love with her."

"Don't you think you're a little hard on her?" asked Winifred, whose feelings were unusually expansive this morning.

"I think you are entirely too soft about her," Miss Standish answered. "It is sickly sentimentalism like yours which is filling the hospitals with hysterical patients. Let 'em alone and they'll come round fast enough."

"How do you account for my sickly sentimentalism when I have no heart, as you told me the other day?" commented Winifred demurely, with downcast eyes.

"Most natural thing in the world," said Miss Standish, rising to an argument like an old war-horse to the

sound of a trumpet. "Tenderheartedness is touched by the sufferings of others. Sentimentality is touched by your feeling for them, which is the most enjoyable form of sadness."

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At this point McGregor, who with admirable discretion had retreated to the pantry, reappeared, served Miss Standish with coffee and eggs, and again vanished, closing the door behind him.

"Really," cried Winifred, half laughing, half vexed, "you're as bad as Mr. Flint, with your fine-spun differences."

"There, Winifred, you've said enough. Whatever the provocation, you could not have hit back harder,—to say I am like Mr. Flint."

"It *was* rather more than the truth warrants," answered Winifred, with a little spot of color flaming up in her cheeks like a danger-signal.

"I hope so," Miss Standish continued, oblivious of the red flag. "I must say, Winifred, I think you let him come here too much."

"You don't like him?"

"No, I confess I don't."

"Then you needn't like me, either, for *I* like him so much that I am going to marry him."

Miss Standish laid down her egg-spoon, and sat staring at Winifred.

"Well!" she exclaimed at length, "this does beat all."

Winifred opened her lips to reply, when her attention

was called to the maid who came hurrying into the room with her cheesecloth duster in one hand and a folded piece of paper in the other.

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"The young woman, mum, as you said I was to call at nine,—well, she isn't in her room, and the bed doesn't look as if it had been slept in at all, and I found this on the bureau."

Winifred caught at the paper and read it breathlessly. It was addressed to herself.

"Good-by," it said, "and thank you for taking me in. I suppose I ought to be very grateful. I came here because I could not help it, and I am going away without taking a meal, or sleeping in your bed. I don't like being taken on charity. If it had not been for you, Mr. Flint might have cared for me, same as the hero did in 'The Unequal Marriage.' I saw last night it was you he was talking about when he said there was somebody he wanted to marry who wouldn't have him. My heart is broken; but I mean to have *some* enjoyment, which I couldn't, if I stayed here with you and that poky Miss Standish. I think it was real mean of Mr. Flint to bring me here anyhow."

Yours truly,
"MATILDA MARSDEN."

She tossed the letter across the table to Miss Standish, and touched the bell under her foot.

"McGregor," she said, as the man appeared, "did you hear any one go out of the house this morning?"

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"I thought I did, Miss Winifred, about six o'clock, before light,—that is, I was justly sure I heard the front door shut; but when I got there it was all right, except the outer door was unlocked, and that often happens when your father is at the Club. He do forget now and then."

"Three hours' start!" said Winifred to herself, then aloud: "McGregor, go at once to 'The Chancellor' and leave word for Mr. Flint to come here. Wait—I will send a note. Oh dear! why didn't I foresee this possibility?"

"Come!" said Miss Standish, who, even in her excitement, could swallow the last of her cup of hot coffee,—"come, let us go upstairs and see if the foolish girl has not left some clew!"

As Winifred and Miss Standish passed out at the parlor door, Master Jimmy entered from the hall, sleek and smiling in his holiday attire. "Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "What started Miss Standish off like that? Our stairs make the old lady puff when she takes 'em on the slow, and at this rate Fred will have to carry her half-way. Something's up, that's evident. Never mind, I'm not in it. McGregor," he called, "bring on those griddle-cakes; I smell 'em cooking. Quick now, while there's no one here to count how many I eat! Hurrah for Thanksgiving!"

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McGregor failed to appear at Master Jimmy's call, and when Maria came, she said he had been sent out on an errand.

"What's up?" asked Jimmy, between mouthfuls.

"Oh, nothing—nothing—I wonder will they have the

police?"

"Cops!" cried Jimmy, waking up for the first time to a genuine interest in the family excitement. "Has any one gone off with the spoons? It would be just my luck to have had a burglar in the house last night and me never got a pop at him with my air-gun loaded and close by the bed."

"It's no burglar," said the maid, with mystery in her tones.

"Not McGregor drunk!" shouted Jimmy, with a scream of delight. "That would be too good a joke."

"McGregor drunk, indeed!" sniffed Maria, indignantly. "If every one as came to this house was as good as McGregor, it would be a fine thing; but when it comes to takin' in all sorts and making a Harbor of Refuge out of a respectable home—I'm not surprised *whatever* may happen."

"Oh, hold your tongue, Maria. Don't be a fool! Get me some more cakes, while I go up and ask Fred what's the matter. It won't take *her* half an hour to get it out, I'll bet."

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With this cheerful observation Jimmy vanished, and Maria disappeared down the kitchen stairs, declaring that that boy was "a perfect gintleman."

When Flint entered the Anstices' drawing-room a little later, Winifred was standing by the window, and though she turned away quickly, it was evident that she had been watching for him.

The thought thrilled him.

"What shall we do? Oh, what shall we do?" she broke out, as he came up to her.

He took her hands; they were burning hot.

"First of all, I will tell you what *not* to do," Flint answered. "You are not to work yourself into a fever of distress over this unfortunate business. The responsibility is not yours but mine, and the burden of anxiety is to be mine and not yours."

"Oh, never mind me! What about Tilly Marsden? It is dreadful to think of her wandering about this great city entirely alone—and she such a simpleton. Of course, it's hopeless to try to find her. Papa says so."

"Not so hopeless as you think," said Flint, with a trifle more assurance than he felt in his inmost heart. "New York stands for two things to a girl like her,—the shops and the theatres,—her ideas of the 'amusement' she speaks of in the note you sent me would be limited to one of [Pg 351] these. Now, as this is a holiday, none of the shops would be open, and that limits it to the theatres. I shall have detectives at the door of every theatre this afternoon."

"How clever you are," murmured Winifred, "how clever and how sympathetic! You have such feeling for everybody in trouble."

This was too much for even Flint's sense of humor, which had suffered somewhat, as every one's does, from the process of falling in love. His lips twitched.

"Then I am not more obtuse than any one you ever saw, when the sufferings of others are involved?"

"Don't, pray, don't bring up the things I said that

night!" cried Winifred, blushing rosy red.

"This is no time for jesting, dear, I know," Flint answered, coming close to her as she stood against the filmy lace curtain. "No time either for jesting or hoping; only your words did give me a gleam of encouragement to think that perhaps a girl who changed her mind so much in a few weeks might have wavered a little in a few days. Is it possible—Winifred, before I go away, as I must at once—could you find it in your heart to say 'I love you'?"

Winifred made him no answer, at least in words; but she came close to him, and laid both [Pg 352] hands on his arm with a touching gesture of trustful affection.

So absorbed were they in one another that they did not notice how near they stood to the window, or that the curtain was too diaphanous quite to conceal them from view. Suddenly into their world of ecstatic oblivion came a crash, a sound of falling glass, a dull thud against the wall opposite to the window.

"Great Heavens!" cried Flint, looking anxiously at Winifred. "What was that? Are you sure you're not hurt, my darling?"

Even as he spoke, another report was heard outside, and, throwing open the curtains, they saw a man on the other side of the street stagger and fall. Flint rushed to the door, down the steps and across the sidewalk. A crowd had already collected.

"He is dead,—stone dead," said one, kneeling with his hand over his heart.

"Queer, isn't it—on Thanksgiving Day too?" said

another.

"Who is he?—a countryman by his looks," said a third. "Fine-looking chap, too, with that crop of curly hair and these broad shoulders."

"Faith!" murmured an old woman, "it's some mother's heart 'ull bleed this day." And pulling out her beads, she knelt on the sidewalk to say a prayer over the parting soul.

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The prostrate form lying along the pavement had a certain tragic dignity, almost majesty, in its attitude. One arm was pressed to the heart, the other thrown out in a gesture of abandonment to despair. The revolver, which had dropped from the nerveless hand, lay still smoking beside the still figure. From a wound in the left temple under the dark curls the blood trickled in a red stream. Death was in his look. The lips were turning blue, and the eyes glazing rapidly.

Flint came close to the dying man, and then shrank back with an involuntary start of horror. "Leonard Davitt!" he murmured below his breath. In an instant the whole situation was clear to him. By one of those flashlights which the mind sometimes sheds on a scene before it, making the hidden places clear and turning darkness to daylight, he grasped the truth. He knew that by some unlucky chance Leonard had come to New York, had seen him and Tilly Marsden in conversation, had seen them come here together, had fancied that he was wronged. Then this morning again he must have seen him with Winifred at the window,—Winifred mistaken for the girl he loved,—and then jealousy quite mastered the brooding brain,

and the end was *this*.

As Flint stood over the boy's body, a great [Pg 354] weight of sadness fell upon him. He felt like one of the figures in a Greek tragedy, innocent in intent, but drawn into a fatal entanglement of evil, and made an instrument of woe to others as innocent as himself. The blue sky above in its azure clearness seemed a type of the indifference of Heaven, the chill of the pavement a symbol of the coldness of earth. These thoughts, chasing each other through his brain with lightning rapidity, still left it clear for action.

"Stand away there, and give the man air!" he cried, clearing a little space. "Go for a doctor, somebody,—quick!"

"Oh, can it be Leonard Davitt!" whispered Winifred under her breath, as pale and trembling with emotion she drew near the edge of the crowd. "Poor boy! What shall we say to his mother?"

"Hush!" Flint answered. "May we carry him into the house?"

"Of course—of course. Oh, do hurry with the doctor. Perhaps he is not dead, after all."

With that ready adaptiveness which in Americans so often supplies the place of training, four of the men stepped forward, and lifting the body gently bore it up the steps and through the open door into the drawing-room, and laid it on the lounge just under the bullet-hole in the wall.

A doctor bustled in, box in hand. He made [Pg 355] no effort to open his case, however. One look was sufficient.

"Death must have been instantaneous," he said. "What a queer thing,—a suicide on Thanksgiving Day!"

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CHAPTER XXII

THE END

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Extract from the Journal of Miss Susan Standish, Oldburyport, December 1.

It is good to be at home again. I said it over to myself many a time yesterday, as I was helping Mary to take the covers off the family portraits, and sitting in front of the old andirons with the firelight dancing in their great brass balls. I felt it when I sat down at my mahogany table and laid my fingers on the ebony handle of the old silver coffee-pot. Things come to have a distinct individuality, almost a personality, and we unconsciously impute to them a response to our feeling for them. It seemed to me that the old claw-foot sofa was as glad to get me back as the cat herself, and the door swung wide with a squeak of welcome. My desk too stood open with friendly invitation, and on it lay a couple of letters. The first was from Ben Bradford. It was so long since I had heard from the boy that I opened his letter first. I wrote him last month, sending him some news and more good [Pg 357] advice. I counselled him to stop thinking about Winifred Anstice or any other girl,

and throw himself into his studies, to make a record which should do credit to the Bradford name. He replies that the advice is excellent; only one drawback,—it cannot be done. He has tried throwing himself into his studies, but they closed over him without a trace. Talk about records,—he will be glad enough if he gets through his examinations without a dead flunk. As for not thinking about Winifred, he says I have not helped him to the desired end by what I wrote about Mr. Flint and his attentions. Of course, Ben says, he could not expect that Winifred would wait for him. In these days no man could hope to marry until he was white-headed like that Flint; but as for himself he never did or should see any woman whom he could love except Winifred Anstice.

To try to throw off his depression and discouragement, he had gone around last evening to call on Fanny Winthrop, who was studying at Radcliffe this year and staying on Mount Vernon Street. She sent her love to her "dear Miss Standish," and if I had any message to send in return he would be happy to carry it, as he and she were to act in "The Loan of a Lover," and he was likely to see a good deal of her in the course of the next week or two.

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This letter has relieved my mind greatly. It is evident that Ben's heart is built like a modern ship, in compartments, so that though one bulkhead suffers wreck, the vessel may still come safe to a matrimonial haven.

Fanny Winthrop is a plain little girl with a round face and the traditional student spectacles; but a merry pair of dimples twinkling with a fund of

cheery humor, and then—a Winthrop! That will please his mother, I am sure. But I am no matchmaker. I never think of such things unless they are forced upon me, as they have been lately.

The other letter on my desk was from Philip Brady. I had missed his call that last evening in New York. He writes, as if it were a surprising piece of information, that he is going to marry Nora Costello, provided she can gain the consent of her superior officers, and he delegates to me the pleasant duty of breaking the news to his family circle. "This," he says, "will be easy for you who have known Nora, and who were the first to discover her charm and the solid merit which goes so much deeper than charm."

Here is a pretty state of things!

What am I to do? I can see Cousin John's face when he hears the words "Salvation Army." He has always scoffed and scolded and sworn [Pg 359] at the mere mention of the business, and his opinions are very "sot," as the Oldbury farmers say. He is, in fact, the only obstinate member of our family; but I will let him know that he cannot talk down Susan Standish. I mean to go right over to his house after dinner and have it out with him. I shall tell him that Nora Costello is a daughter-in-law to be proud of (as she is), and that I dare say, if he wishes it, she will leave the Salvation Army (which she never will); that, at any rate, he must send for the girl to come on to visit him; that if he does not, *I* shall; and that I heartily approve the match.

I call myself a truthful woman, and the proof of it is that when I do start out to tell a lie, it is a good honest one, not a deft little evasion such as runs trippingly from the tongue of practised deceivers.

I suppose the news of Philip's engagement will be spread all over town before night. I feel now as though I should not object to a little of that indifference to the affairs of one's neighbors which I found so depressing when I was in New York. Not that I am any less loyal to Oldburyport; if anything, I have grown more loyal than ever.

I love the deep snow and the trees bare as they are, and the square down the road a piece, and the post-office, and the trolley cars. Our [Pg 360] cars go fast, but not too fast,—just fast enough, and they have no dead man's curve. Folks in Oldburyport die a natural death. They are not killed by the cable or run over by bicycles, or, what is quite as bad, hurried and worried to death by the rush of life, as people are in New York. I declare I felt as if I had lived an age in the month I was there; but then, why shouldn't I, with so much happening and such exciting and distressing things too! It seems as if everything went crooked. Now, if my advice had been taken in the beginning—but nobody ever will take advice except in Oldburyport.

It makes me wrathy to think of Winifred Anstice marrying that Mr. Flint, who is so dangerously irreligious, and Philip Brady marrying Nora Costello, who is so injudiciously religious, and then poor Leonard Davitt throwing away his life for that pert, forward, foolish Tilly Marsden, who has gone back to her shop-counter, pleased, for all I know, with all the excitement she raised! If corporal punishment in early youth were strictly adhered to, there would be fewer Tilly Marsdens in the world. In Oldburyport, I am happy to say, we believe in corporal punishment.

Poor Leonard! I have not got over his death yet. It

was all so sad and so unnecessary. [Pg 361] But I am not sure that he is not better off as he is than he would have been married to that girl. His mother took to her bed when she heard the news, and the doctor thinks she will not live long. So Tilly Marsden will have that death on her conscience, too, or would if she had a conscience to have it on.

There might very easily have been a third, for they said the first bullet which Leonard fired must have come within an inch of Jonathan Flint's head. I should have supposed such an escape must have softened even him. I thought it was a good time to impress the lesson, so I pointed to the bullet buried in the wall.

"Mr. Flint," said I, "can you look at that and not believe in Providence?"

Instead of being convinced, as I thought he would, he only pointed to Leonard's body lying under it and said nothing.

I hate these people who are given to expressive silences. It takes one at a disadvantage. Silence is the only argument to which there is no answer. At the time I could not think of anything to say to him, though, since I got home, I've thought of ever so many. It is easier to think, I find, in Oldburyport.

Except for the last terrible days I had a beautiful time in the city, and as I look over my diary I am quite overwhelmed to see how many things [Pg 362] Winifred did for me. She is a dear girl! I have promised to embroider all the table linen for her wedding outfit. I console myself by reflecting that Mr. Flint is a descendant of Jonathan Edwards, and if she wants me to like him, I suppose I must try,

though I may confess right here to my diary that for years I have been wanting her to marry Philip Brady. She ought to have done it, but we are all fools where matrimony is concerned.

P. S. I have promised to marry Dr. Cricket.
THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FLINT: HIS FAULTS, HIS FRIENDSHIPS AND HIS FORTUNES ***

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