The 'PIPING TIMES'

Jeffery Farnol

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THE ‘PIPING TIMES’

A
Sentimental Romance
of
Those days when there was
less Heroism
but
more of everything else
than
in these death-filled, deathless years
of
Grace, Grief and Glory

BY
JEFFERY FARNOL

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To

DUDLEY SEYMOUR-NICHOLS

'OUR SMILING PHILOSOPHER'

THIS ROMANCE

IS

DEDICATED

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THE ‘PIPING TIMES’

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCES THE SON AND HIS SIRE

IT was in those halcyon days before the invention of the infernal internal combustion engine and consequently before war had darkened the skies or scarred the earth; when masculine collars were high, wages correspondingly low, and silk hats went bobbing Citywards with umbrella and newspaper to the routine of train and office; when Woman, called The Fair or Weaker Sex, not content with the charming amplitude bestowed by nature, wore monstrosities called ‘bustles’, and laced in their tender sides to a twelve-or-fourteen-inch waist; when Parliament, for lack of more important affairs, rampaged over Home Rule . . . In such carefree time upon an early June morning, to be precise,—at exactly four and a half minutes past nine o’clock, Justin Hereward Wade-Orrington, known by express command to his familiars as ‘Tom’, indited the following, extremely fateful letter:

> “Respected and dear (up to a point) Sir,
>
> “That you are my father and progenitor is a misfortune beyond my powers to repair. However, since early boyhood I have done my best to put up with you, and, to my own astonishment, have succeeded passably well until to-day, this June 2nd, 18——. For this morning, by letter, upon the hitherto uncomplaining back of the patient camel (myself) you laid the ultimate straw in the form of Helena Marchioness of Dorincourt. Wherefore now the filial soul rebels at last, your only son and heir (again myself, alas) makes his exit from these hoary ancestral walls of cloistered and silken ease to front Destiny unaided and alone. In thus taking leave of Abbey-Merivale and yourself, I would humbly submit that, esteeming you as a Public Character and Society Ornament, I deplore you as a parent, in which capacity I must regard you as a very Positive Mistake.
>
> “With which, sir, pray know me for
>
> “your abused, disabused, perfectly assured son
>
> “Justin Hereward Wade-Orrington,
>
> “TOM.”

Having perused this missive heedfully, and added a comma here and there, Justin (known henceforth as Tom) folded, enveloped, superscribed it, and went to be rid of it.

Across a wide and lofty hall against whose aged walls ancient weapons gleamed, with knightly figures ranked below in burnished, glittering splendour; along a broad,

arched passage, arras-hung and deep-carpeted, and so to a certain door. Here Tom paused, for this was the door of his father's study, *sanctum sanctorum*, which from earliest boyhood had inspired trepidation and awed discomfort. So Tom paused, then opening this door, found himself looking into the deep-set, quizzical eyes of one whose sombre though well-cut garments moulded a lithely powerful form as he rose from the great desk where he had been writing.

"Oh," said Tom, hesitating on the threshold, "how do? You are Mr. Timkins, of course, the Governor's man of affairs and so on—what?"

"His private secretary, my lord. Were you looking for the Earl?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, no. I rather thought he was away."

"He returned late last night, my lord."

"Did he though, b'George! Then I suppose he'll be hovering in the vicinity,—knocking about in the immediate neighbourhood?"

"In the library, my lord. Shall I inform him you desire to see him?"

"Thanks—no! Oh no, rather not! What I mean to say is, absolutely no! The August Sire and myself are not exactly at one just at present, we don't see precisely eye to eye, and so forth. Therefore, calling to mind the jolly old maxim 'least said' and what not, I have performed with the pen—this letter, which pray be good enough to deliver to His High Nobility in—say half an hour."

"Certainly, my lord. You are home for good, I believe?"

"Yes. But this great place, garrisoned with hosts of servants and what-nots, most of 'em strange faces, is scarcely a nest of cosy, heart-warming domesticity, too dashed ancestral and so forth, loads too much of what doesn't matter and nothing of what does, if you know what I mean?"

"My lord, of course I do."

"Oh?" enquired Tom, struck by the speaker's change of tone and look. "Do you? I wonder!"

"Shall I tell your lordship?"

"If you can."

"You have never had—a home, my lord."

"Ex—actly!" quoth Tom, fervently. "By Jingo, that's the fact! Timkins, you become such an understanding sort of bloke I wish we'd known each other better. For though I've seen you about, off and on, since I was a somewhat scaly urchin, we've never got together, you were always such a bird of passage, hither and yon,—here to-day and gone to-morrow."

"Yes, my lord. I have always been much occupied——"

"Like my Right Honourable, Lordly Sire!" said Tom, almost bitterly. "While I

grew up the best I might, into what I am. Oh well——"

"Quite well!" murmured his hearer. "You won the Inter-University Boxing Championship."

"Just about,—though I took a bit of a hammering," sighed Tom, feeling ear and nose reminiscently. "I have at least acquired a pretty straight left, and in my right a perfectly good punch—when it lands. Well, now, I'll be toddling, leaving this epistle to be handed to The Lordly One in half an hour—no, we'd better make it three-quarters."

"Is your lordship going out?"

"Somewhat. A stroll or spin on my newest bicycle,—sixty-two inch, ball instead of roller bearings, nine-inch cranks, and marvellous sprung saddle—all built to my own designs."

"I wish you an enjoyable ride."

"Thanks, and ta-ta!"

So saying, away strode Tom, back across echoing hall, up vast, wide stairway and so to his own many-windowed room, here to prepare for the road.

Thus presently, Justin, Viscount Merivale, stood equipped, and in the then prevailing mode; that is to say he wore a cap peaked fore and aft, with ear-flaps tied in a bow across the crown, a belted Norfolk jacket, knickerbockers, stockings, highland gaiters of box-cloth, and brown, sharp-toed shoes.

Thus attired, he descended the great stairway with a certain nimble stealth—only to see his father in the act of reading his letter.

Gawain Wade-Orrington, Earl of Abbey-Merivale, contrived to look all that Imagination could possibly expect,—tall, of commanding presence and immaculately correct from satin four-in-hand cravat to gleaming patent-leathers; a morning coat (cutaway) fitted his slenderness with scarcely a wrinkle, his 'inexpressibles' of chastely minute shepherd's plaid, cut fashionably narrow, gave restrained expression to 'limbs' sufficiently muscular, while his leanly-handsome face, monocled and moustached, was of a placid, plain serenity that betrayed no expression whatever.

"Oh now confound it!" murmured Tom.

The Earl glanced at his son beneath slightly-cocked eyebrow and, beckoning with slim finger, led him into the library, a stately chamber as austere and correct as himself.

"Merivale," said he, in voice pleasantly modulated, "you may close the door and be seated."

"Why, sir, as a matter of fact I'd rather not, if you know what I mean. I had hoped to avoid all or any explanations and what not."

"Nor is there the least need, my dear Merivale; your letter is sufficiently eloquent, quite remarkably so. I would merely ask a few questions excusable under the circumstances, I dare to think. As, for instance—just how do you propose to—ah—'front Destiny unaided and alone'?"

"As best I may, sir."

"Then you will probably starve."

"Rather that, sir, than remain a pampered do-nothing, a dutiful slave and what not, subservient to a father's arrogant will."

"An admirable sentiment, Merivale, quite heroic! Consequently I am happy to accord you my permission to starve yourself into a do-something, if possible. For indeed you have never achieved anything hitherto, either scholastically or in the field of sport. How do you explain this?"

"I don't, sir, except perhaps by the handicap of a father whose achievements in both—overwhelm me."

The Earl's slender brows twitched, he made a slight, though deprecating, gesture with one slender hand.

"A quite unworthy excuse!" he murmured.

"Oh quite, sir!" Tom agreed. "But I could think of none better."

"Which argues a singular barrenness of invention, Merivale."

"Sir, it grieves me to admit to such gifted parent that I am not clever."

"Nor do your looks favour you, Merivale."

"Alas, no, sir! But if anyone is to blame for my tow-coloured hair and eyelashes and too craggy person, it is my begetter, surely. However, my twenty-odd years have made me quite familiar with my too-evident paucity of charm—which must naturally strike you very forcibly since you have noticed me so seldom, being my father, that we are scarcely acquainted."

"Which, my dear Merivale, sounds quite preposterous, and yet has a measure of truth. For indeed, what with your schools, college and university and my own very many duties, we certainly know less of each other than our relationship presupposes, though, even as a child, you manifested no least filial affection towards me—your father."

"Perhaps, sir, because I had no mother to teach——" Tom checked, and opened his pale lashes wider than usual—for the Earl, placid no longer, was afoot, had crossed to the nearest window and was leaning there to gaze out at the sunny prospect of wide, richly-timbered park, though Tom noticed that his hands were clenched as in some painful spasm; yet when he spoke, his voice sounded much as usual:

"Now as regards your effusion—this!" and he flicked the open letter in his fingers, "I gather from it that your chief reason for such—not altogether respectful screed, is my desire for your engagement to the Lady Helena."

"Sir, she is the final and ultimate straw."

"A young lady you have never seen!"

"And shall never desire to, sir."

"Though I have informed you she is a beauty and an heiress."

Here, smiling impishly at his father's stately back and nerving himself to the occasion, Tom exclaimed in shocked, reproachful accents:

"Oh, dad!"

The Earl spun round to gaze upon his son in such absolute astonishment that his eyeglass fell to dangle on its broad ribbon all unheeded, while Tom, leaning back in his chair, shook his grave head, murmuring:

"Oh, father, father! Would you afflict this poor heiress, this innocent, golden beauty with such poor thing as your own son, this sorry offspring of yours who lacks both intelligence and looks?"

The Earl's reaction was sudden as unexpected, for back he came, and, seated at book-strewn table, handsome head on white hand, surveyed his son with new vision.

"Justin," said he, in tone altered as his look, "now upon my soul you begin to interest me!"

"Sir," answered Tom, "upon my life, you become almost fatherly!"

The Earl's dark-featured gravity was brightened by a dawning smile.

"Son," said he, gently, "talk now to your father as a son should."

"Why then, father, permit me, first, to destroy that . . . rather unfilial letter."

"Oh dear no, Justin, this I shall keep to temper my natural pride, an antidote to vanity. Now, my son, tell me precisely what is your grievance?"

"Sir, in a word—myself."

"Quite so, Justin, and yet—how so?"

"It is I that am the mistake!"

"In what way precisely, my son?"

"In every way! Ah, sir, I am not the son for such father! I'm nothing I should be, and everything I shouldn't. I'm wrongly cast for the part you and Nature would have me play. Instead of lord and future earl I should be a tarry sailor, a common fo'c'sle jack, or fisherman sailing my own smack. Instead of crowded drawing-rooms, state functions and a seat in the Lords, give me freedom of the seas and open air. . . ."

"Certainly!" said the Earl, "you shall have the yacht, she is in commission, take her, Justin, and sail her where you will."

"Thanks frightfully, sir, but—no! She is a floating palace, and aboard her I should be your son, with everyone at my beck and call, from good old Captain Felton down. No, your grand *Thespis* shall never do. Look at these hands, sir, shaped and knotted like a navvy's or a sailorman's—what they want isn't kid-gloved idleness, but hard work! Look at my body, so different to your own, not an elegant line anywhere! What it needs, instead of dainty linen and so forth, is to rough it in homespun or corduroy. Indeed, sir, now that you are troubling at last to talk and listen to me like a father, I do confess, and humbly, that though I have none of your aristocratic graces of person, quickness of wit or powerful mentality, I'm strong as a horse, and with a gift for making things—hammer, chisel and what not, I'm a fairly efficient carpenter. Then, of course, I know horses, and can manage 'em, I can sail a boat with anyone—and build it, too, and prefer rough sea-fishing to all your fine, niminy-piminy dry and wet fly business. In a word, sir, I am Demos, absolutely—yes, one of the lower order."

"So!" murmured the Earl. "A jack tar, a carpenter, a fisherman and a groom! Your aspirations are certainly not high. Indeed, Justin, the more I see and hear of you, the greater is my wonder that you can be son of mine. . . . And yet, God help me, you are my heir, and must someday take my place!"

"But not for a very long time, I hope, sir. You are an extremely young father, and amazingly well preserved . . . you can't be more than forty-ish."

"I am fifty-two, Justin."

"And young for your age even so, sir. While I look every day and year of my twenty-two, and, being of such ripe age, am perfectly determined."

"On what, pray?"

"Some active career, sir, no matter how rough. Instead of rolling on here in the lap of luxury, or kicking awkward heels in London Society as the lordly son of famous sire, I am determined to be just what I am,—an ordinary cove."

The Earl winced slightly.

"'Cove'?" he enquired.

"Meaning chap, sir, or bloke,—a fellow who must live by his own labour."

"If it is employment you desire, Justin, there are many posts I can find for—my son."

"Thanks, father, but he means to find one for himself."

The Earl's monocle was glistening beneath smooth, black eyebrow again, and with its resumption he became his usual, coldly remote self.

"Merivale," said he, in his most austere manner, "you have, so far, proved to be my complete disappointment. Your past achievements are nil——"

"I box a bit, sir, and——"

Glittering monocle and upraised hand silenced Tom, and his father continued, gently:

"Your attainments are negligible, and your tastes distressingly low."

"Humbly suggest—democratic, sir."

"And may I also suggest that you refrain from interrupting. I repeat, Justin, your natural tendencies, despite birth, breeding and education, appear so inexplicably primitive that I can only regard you as a 'throw-back,' through a long and proud lineage, to some rude, primordial ancestor."

"Exactly!" exclaimed Tom, heartily. "By George, sir, you've hit it, as usual! I cast back, through eons of time, nobility, blue-blood and what not, to some jolly old woad-smeared ancestor with a stone axe, a paleolithic person pigging it in a cave or grubbing for pignuts, perfectly content and happy as a lark. Yes, sir, you are right, as ever, I'm a primordial primitive, and what's bred in the bone, comes out in the flesh!"

"And youth," added his father, a little grimly, "being blind as a puppy, is usually supremely selfish! As to yourself,—do you start out on your primitive career soon?"

"To-day, sir."

"Am I permitted to know how and where?"

"Chance shall decide this, sir."

"Might I then venture to suggest Cornwall?"

"Certainly, sir. But why Cornwall?"

"For one reason because it is quite pleasantly remote from the 'mistake' that is your father, and for another, because I happen to own a small, miserable property there,—a desolate place close by the sea and not far from a fishing village called Merrion. The house is a ruin, I believe, and left quite solitary because it was, or is, reputed to be haunted."

"This," said Tom, squaring his broad shoulders, "this sounds the very place for me, sir! A haunted ruin . . . and by the sea, by Jove!"

"You could, at least, fish and carpenter, and rough it to your heart's content."

"Admirable!" exclaimed Tom.

"Horrible!" sighed his father.

"How may I find this place, sir?"

"Make for Falmouth or Truro, the property lies in the country between . . . it is called . . . Trevore."

"And the place is quite derelict, sir?"

"Yes," answered the Earl, speaking with an odd slowness, "the place . . . is a . . . desolation . . . dead and . . . done with."

"Good!" nodded Tom. "Someday it shall live again, and blossom like the rose."

"No," said the Earl, his dark gaze down-bent, "that is impossible . . . never again. Life is . . . too short."

"Why, then," said Tom, rising, "the sooner I begin the better."

"Ah," murmured his father, glancing up at him with flash of monocle, "you will go to this . . . desolation . . . Trevore?"

"Not only go there, sir, but stay there, live there, and have a go at repair work . . . if you don't mind my pulling the old place about a bit?"

"Oh no. Shall you depart immediately?"

"That was the idea, sir."

"By the midnight express from London?"

"No, sir, being in no least hurry, I shall ride my bicycle . . . or walk—yes, that will be properest. I'll turn tramp and trudge afoot . . . by the Great West Road, the old Pilgrim Way to Glastonbury."

"The . . . Pilgrim Road, Justin, yes . . . I knew it very well . . . once. You have sufficient money, I presume?"

"More than enough, sir, thanks."

"Why, then, since you choose to go—off with you, Justin . . . But . . . when you are tired of fooling about, come back to shoulder life's responsibilities like a man . . . and to your duty as—my son."

Then, looking in each other's eyes like father and son, they shook hands like strangers, and away strode Justin (called Tom) leaving the Earl gazing at the closed door with eyes now very wistful.

CHAPTER II

CHIEFLY CONCERNING ALE

THREE miles of hot and dusty road brought a perspiring and dusty Tom within sight of a small, neat tavern standing back from the road in the pleasant shade of trees. Now being footsore, weary and direly a-thirst, Tom viewed this tavern with eyes of yearning; and thinking upon richly nutty ale foaming creamily on cool rim of pewter pot, Tom moistened avid lips, but, being Tom, halted instantly and sat down on grassy bank in the full sunglare to gaze upon this place of refreshment and to let imagination riot in thought of the joys to be,—ale, crusty loaf, luscious butter and ripe cheese, that their later consumption might prove the more delicious.

Ale! First a sip. Then a swallow. Then—a long and glorious gulping draught!

Tom leapt afoot, made three or four long racing strides, checked his fevered impulse sternly and sauntered leisurely, swinging his cane jauntily but with gaze fixed yearningly upon the wide lattice of this alluring tavern which, like the hospitable door, stood wide open to the sunny air . . . And lo! as he drew near, out from this latticed casement came a shining pewter tankard crowned with bubbled foam . . . Tom dropped his cane to clasp this precious thing, much as if it had been some sacred vessel . . . He gazed at it in a mute rapture . . . he raised it to his lips with motion slow and reverent . . . he sipped, he swallowed, he gulped, drinking gloriously.

And as he did so a hoarse though cheery voice spake blessing:

"Good 'ealth, Master Tom! Drink 'earty, my lord! I spies y'ludship in the offing, and acted according and prompt, sir, prompt!"

"Bob!" sighed the drinker from beneath the inverted and now empty tankard. "Oh, my hearty, the Navy is always prompt and ready! The Navy, God bless it, never fails! Bob, old mess-mate, bring me another, and one for yourself . . . out here in the open air."

"Ay, ay, my lord!"

And now, having rid himself of heavy knapsack, Tom, reclining in this bowery shade on roomy settle beside the door, gazed up dreamily at the signboard above him the which proclaimed this for inn of the "Jolly Sailor," with a lively portrait of the tar in question, very round of eye and black of whisker, in the act of performing an intricate step of the hompipe, hat askew, arms folded and balanced gracefully on the extreme point of one toe.

Tom was still intent upon this vivid work of art when forth to him came the landlord, Robert Perks, ex-boatswain R.N., who, from truck to keelson,—from square, good-natured face to trim feet, was precisely such jovial, hardy mariner, save for tarry pigtail, as those who manned and fought Old England's battlefleets in Nelson's glorious days.

Having deposited with due care two brimming beakers (foaming, of course) upon the stout, oaken table, Bosun Bob 'made a leg,' smiled and took the hand his visitor extended.

"Lord! my lord," he exclaimed, shaking it heartily, "if I ain't that glad to see you alongside again I'm a square-'eaded Dutchman! You'm a looking prime, sir—prime though dusty, my lord . . . Master Tom, my best respex and many on 'em."

"Bob, here's wishing all the hair off your head!" murmured Tom. And so they drank to each other. "Now, sit down, Bob, and let's hear all the news,—first how's your Nancy, Mrs. Perks?"

"Handsome as ever, sir, all trim, taut and shipshape alow and aloft. She's bore away this morning for to see our Eliza's noo babby."

"What another, Bob?"

"Ay, this un'll make four, being two gells and two boys, tight little craft, and all along of and by reason of—you, my lord!"

Tom very nearly dropped his ale.

"Eh? what? Me, Bob?"

"Your very own self, Master Tom!"

"Oh, but I say, you know! What I mean to say is——"

The Bosun chuckled and clapped brawny thigh.

"Lord, sir, it do seem only yesterday as our Eliza fell into the old 'ammer pond and you goes in and pulls her out. And both on ye no taller than my knee! You was a bold little swimmer even then."

"Yes, I could always swim."

"Ar, like any little fish, my lord,—if not, d'ye see, there'd ha' been the end to our Eliza and consequently—instead o' four grandchildren—never a single one! So that's why you're responsible for 'em,—as your right noble father never forgets."

"My father! How d'you mean, Bob?"

"Why, I means their birthdays, sir,—a golden sovereign every year, and five apiece, wi' toys, at Christmas, the Earl never forgets! Ha, a right noble lord is your dad, Master Tom."

"So he—actually remembers their birthdays, Bob,—amazing!"

"Ay, and wonderful, sir, con-sidering as he's such a busy sort of Earl, blow fair or foul at 'ome and abroad. And a mighty good landlord, what's more."

"No, is he, Bob?"

"Well, ain't he, sir? Take a look at any of his villages! Listen to wot 'is tenants says of him, ay—even the farmers as is never content and never finds good in nothing, 'specially weather and landlords! And, talking o' the Earl, Master Tom, he was a-drinking out o' that very same tankard now in your fist, no later than yesterday as ever was, and—enj'ying of it!"

"Swigging ale . . . a pewter pot . . . my father?"

"Bible oath, Master Tom! And out o' that very same pot! That's why my Nancy give it such a polish, look at it shine! That's why we keeps it on our mantel-shelf, keeps it for—just him! And you, o' course, Master Tom. He likes us, me and Nancy, to tell o' them days when you used to stay at Jasper's Farm yonder, and how I learned you to build and rig little ships, and sail 'em, and likewise tie flies and cast 'em trim and true. Ay, he likes us to tell o' you in them good old days."

"Does he though?" murmured Tom. "Now, tell me, Bob, does he ever mention my——"

The word 'mother' was upon Tom's lips, but remained unspoken, for at this precise moment, with prodigious clatter of hoofs and wheels, a fast-driven dogcart drew up suddenly before the tavern, and from this smart vehicle complete with liveried footman, there descended and with lithe nimbleness, one at sight of whom Tom's straw-coloured eyebrows twitched to sudden frown while Bosun Bob's cheery visage beamed in glad welcome.

"Now love me eyes!" he exclaimed, rising. "Here's Mr. Timkins! There's another right gentleman as I'm proud to have aboard, ay and as do 'preciate good ale likewise. So I'll go and draw a pint, according." And away strode the Bosun. Meanwhile, Mr. Timkins, having dismissed the dogcart, now approached with leisured stride; and Tom's frown deepened to note that he also was equipped for the road, from stout boots to cap and knapsack, yet looking sedate as usual; thus Tom's greeting was (for Tom) decidedly cold and repelling:

"So it's you again, Mr. Timkins! And why? Not for ale only?"

"No, my lord, though ale is for the moment my first consideration."

"And here 'tis, Mr. Timkins, sir!" said Bosun Bob, and out from that same lattice came yet another foaming tankard. "Good 'ealth and best respex, sir."

"Thanks, Bob, long life!" Having said which, Mr. Timkins drank thirstily, sighed deeply, glanced at Tom's gloomy visage and bowed.

"My lord," said he, dark eyes a-twinkle in solemn face, "I grieve that I must be your infliction."

"You have dogged me here by order of the August Parent, of course," said Tom, sullenly.

"Of course, my lord."

"To command my return, I suppose?"

"No, my lord. The dogging is to persist until your lordship has been dogged safely to Cornwall, there my doggish duties will end, and I shall return to less onerous and more human occupation."

"Ha!" sighed Tom. "So then you are to haunt me as the persistent agent of a too officious Parental Care, to watch over my Lordly Sire's precious heir. Oh, dammit, —to see that I come to no harm, neither run into any kind of mischief! Am I right?"

"Perfectly, my lord, though you omitted the word 'dog'."

"Well," growled Tom, "I suppose I could not beg or bribe you to dog someone else?"

Mr. Timkins merely glanced at the speaker, then, raising tankard to lip, turned

from him and drank.

Tom scowled down at sun-dappled grass, up at the dancing 'Jolly Sailor,' at the quiet, dignified man he had meant to affront, and rose, saying:

"Mr. Timkins, your rebuke is merited . . . what I mean to say is . . . I richly deserved it, I withdraw the 'dogging' and what not, and beg your pardon, sir."

Mr. Timkins glanced round, saw Tom's extended hand, clasped it and smiled. Now although neither spoke, they viewed one another with truer understanding, for Tom, at least, began vaguely to realize why this man was and had been chiefest, most confidential and trusted of the Earl's many secretaries.

"Ahoy, Bosun!" cried Tom. "Ale, Bob, brim our tankards."

"Ay, ay, my lord," quoth Bob, instant to obey.

"Ale," quoth Tom, "has a magic in it, a charm, a spell especially for all true Englishmen, so now, up tankards all, and let us, in this noble ale, drink to ale the wine of England, the great and kindly humanizer. May its cool downflow call up a generous warmth and goodfellowship, banish care and foment true friendship."

When this toast had been duly honoured, they sat a while in friendly converse until, the sun being high and the tankards empty, Tom rose, girded on bulging knapsack, took up his light whanghee cane, shook Bosun Bob's ready hand, then, with Mr. Timkins beside him, set off to 'front his destiny.'

CHAPTER III

OF PUPPIES AND FISTS, OR THE PROGRESS OF FRIENDSHIP

SIDE by side they went, carefree Youth and sober Man, and both for some while in a musing silence; at last:

"Timkins," said Tom.

"My lord?"

"Well now, look here,—since we are to travel so many miles together and be so closely associated for heaven knows how long, we had better come to an understanding at once. And first of all, I must ask you to drop all this 'my lording' rot and what not, I must be Tom to you from now on, and no confounded Justin, Hereward and all the rest of it—just plain Tom, mind, and you shall be Tim. Tim and Tom. Agreed?"

"But, my lord——"

"There you go! Tom, man, Tom. Say Tom, Tim."

"Very well, Tom."

"Good! Now tell me, Tim, as between man and man, what precisely is the Noble Sire's idea in making you my, well—let's call it bear-leader, or should it be shadow? Just why has My Lord Austerity set you on to me, Tim?"

"By reason of his care for your present and anxiety for your future welfare, Tom."

"Highly distressing and very mortifying, Tim! For dammit,—I'm not exactly an unfledged chicken or woolly lamb, being well over age."

"Twenty-two years, six months and an odd week, Tom, to be precise."

"So you know me to a week, do you?"

"Oh yes. I remember your being born."

"Do you, by Jove?"

"Quite well, though I was not in the Earl's service then."

And now once more they walked in thoughtful silence, this buoyant youth and experienced man; but presently youth became less sprightly, his plain, usually sweet-tempered face grew dark again, and sullen with bitter thought which suddenly found expression, thus:

"When I was a mere impish, ungoverned brat, years ago, where was the kindly parental care should have guided? When I was a very lonely boy yearning for sympathy and affection and hiding it under a screen of cheek and impudence, where was my father to check and comfort me? 'Employed on greater things,' says you, affairs of state, embassies and what not. But says I, 'leaving his only son to the care of hirelings!' To-day, now that I am a man and can manage alone, he suddenly becomes aware of me, and, by proxy, smothers me with care. Ah, but it comes too late! and I scorn it!"

"May I know why?"

"Because his present too-evident concern for me, his anxiety for my welfare and so on, is utterly and absolutely selfish!"

"How so, pray?"

"Because it originates—not in a father's natural love for his son, but merely an Earl's anxiety for his heir. And this, I repeat, is merely selfish, contemptible, and revolts me. My Lordly Sire, this high-nosed arrogant, never was a real father,—and though I am born his heir, dammit—I have never felt a son's regard for him—and never shall! So now, ha—now that I am of age and my own master,—master of myself I will be, yes and you may as well know it."

Here, Tom glanced at his hearer who, inclining his head, murmured:

"I see!" Yet in his lean, grave face was so very much more that Tom demanded:

"Well, what now? Out with it,—what are you thinking about?"

"Dogs!" answered his companion, gently.

"Eh,—dogs?" repeated Tom.

"Yes, once again I am musing on dogs, very young dogs that, being so very young, are blind."

"Oh?" said Tom, eyeing the speaker askance.

"Yes. I was thinking that any son who would, from his ignorance, speak thus of his father, is no better than a very small, blind puppy that yaps unregarded."

Ten paces . . . twenty paces Tom strode before he could utter a word, and when, at last, speech came, his voice was low, hoarse and quite unlike his usual cheery, pleasant tones:

"I think . . . I mean to say . . . 'puppy' was the word, I think?"

"To be exact," answered his companion in the same gently conversational manner, "the words were,—'very small, blind puppy.' To which might be added such other words as 'cub' and 'unlicked.'"

"Sir," quoth Tom, halting, "were you only a little younger I should now proceed to thrash you."

Mr. Timkins glanced at Tom's powerful, eager fists, at Tom's passion-contorted face, smiled provokingly, shook head reprovingly and answered placidly:

"My lord, were I even a little older I could, if so minded, knock the stuffing out of your lordship."

"S-suppose you try!" said Tom, between quivering lips.

"Oh, with pleasure, since your lordship asks. Yes, under the circumstances, I feel called upon to knock your lordship down. Let us retire to the field yonder, your lordship will find it softer than the road."

So, by means of convenient stile to this field they went; and here, having doffed their knapsacks, Tom shed his Norfolk jacket also; Mr. Timkins merely buttoned his own. Then exuberant, eager youth and placid-seeming man fronted one another.

Tom feinted dexterously, led gracefully, was blocked forcefully, side-stepped nimbly, swung hard with powerful 'right,' missed by an inch, felt a jarring shock . . . felt—nothing. And presently as he gazed up vaguely into the vast, blue serenity of heaven this was obscured by a head, a down-bent face whereat, for no particular reason, Tom did his best to smile, at which valiant effort this somewhat anxious face smiled also; then a singularly powerful arm lifted Tom and a warmly kind, perfectly strange voice enquired:

"Are you all right again, Tom, old fellow?"

"As a trivet!" he answered, sitting up with an effort. "Oh yes . . . absolutely! But

I'm glad of the grass, old sportsman. . . . Yes, I'm grateful for your . . . forethought."

"To be sure I hit you rather hard."

"Sledge hammers," sighed Tom, "cannon-balls and earthquakes would be so many caresses in comparison! You caught me exactly right, so I beg to know where and how was I so exactly wrong?"

"Using 'right' instead of 'left,' Tom, which opened you wide to my cross-counter."

Tom sighed, shook his yellow head, rose unaided, and stretched out his hand.

"Tim," said he, "an honest English fist can do as much good as honest English ale —shake!"

"It can," answered Tim, as their hands gripped, "but only between true sportsmen!"

Then having shaken hands and helped each other on with their knapsacks, they turned back to the dusty highway and went on together in still better understanding and an ever-growing friendship.

CHAPTER IV

OF COLD ROAST BEEF AND AN UNANSWERED QUESTION

"TOM," said Tim, "I'll trouble you for the mustard."

"Tim," answered Tom, "behold it! And I will now trouble you for another slice of this very excellent cold beef."

"Roast beef," said Tim, busied with carving knife, "is according to song, the foundation of Old England's Constitution!"

"Pre-cisely!" quoth Tom. "The yeomen and bowmen and what not. Try some of this salad."

"Thanks, I will." Here for some while they plied knives and forks to the enjoyment of such noble fare as might only be found in England—and in those truly happy, halcyon days. Said Tom, at last:

"Referring to your fistic accomplishment, Tim, I, as you know, was thought pretty good at Cambridge, it was about the only thing I shone at, so you must be pretty well a past-master at the game."

"I was, Tom. I had to be, or starve."

"Eh . . . starve . . . you?" Tom gasped.

"Oh yes. Some day I'll tell you the story."

"Now!" Tom demanded. "Tell me now."

"Well, old fellow, I'm just a natural born fighter. The only time I ever came near being beaten was by your father, at Oxford."

"Oxford . . . my father . . . you mean . . . actually . . . that my Superb Sire could . . . use 'em?"

"Tom, your father was an all-round athlete, for besides fighting to the semi-finals, he 'stroked' Oxford to victory, as, of course, you must be aware."

"Am-azing!" exclaimed Tom. "God bless my soul! And you and the Governor were friends, and at Oxford together, Tim?"

"Yes, until financial ruin overwhelmed and killed my father—I had no mother. So then, as 'The Thunderbolt' I boxed and fought for my living, and did very well."

"'The Thunderbolt'—you!" sighed Tom. "No wonder you grassed me! But 'The Thunderbolt' vanished, and why, Tim, why?"

"Because I fell ill, fought when I shouldn't and, of course, was beaten. So there was the end of my fighting career, and I went down hill fast. I should probably have died but . . . your father . . . my old friend . . . hunted, and had me sought for until, though I had changed my name again, he found me in time, and . . . well . . . we have been together ever since. So, briefly, there's my story, Tom."

"But when you changed your name—why on earth—'Timkins'?"

"Because I happened to see it over a shop window, and thought it peculiarly suited to my circumstances—genteel poverty halting on the brink of starvation."

"Tim," said Tom, rolling a bread pellet with extreme care, "I gather the Immediate Ancestor is not such an inhuman old stick after all."

"You will know him better some day, old fellow."

"There is something," said Tom, flattening his pellet very tenderly, "something that I wish to learn now,—something that has puzzled and . . . troubled me all my life, something you can tell me—if you will." And after a moment's hesitation, Tim answered:

"I shall be glad to do so . . . if I can."

"Well then, Tim, my dear chap, having been so intimately connected with my father, you must have known . . . my mother."

"Yes, Tom."

"Then here's what so greatly puzzled and troubled my young intelligence: Other boys had mothers alive or dead,—I had neither. Other boys had pictures or photographs of their mothers. I saw none of mine. In all my father's great houses and what not in town and country, there was no painting of her, no portrait, no, not even a photograph. At first, of course, I thought she must be dead and, being dead,

buried. So, Tim, on a certain school holiday I visited our ancestral tomb, that great, ghastly mausoleum where every Wade-Orrington is buried, soon or late, and tried to find my mother's name: Janice Vivienne, somewhere in the long list of dead and gone Wade-Orringtons, but quite vainly. So then I sought enlightenment of my tutor, my old nurse, the servants—gardeners, grooms and so forth, with the same result, until at last I even ventured to enquire of my august, aloof and awful father, who was more of a stranger to his small son than any of his host of servants. Well, I questioned my noble sire . . . and Tim . . . there was an experience I shall never forget!" Tom paused to form his pellet into a ball again and began to roll it to and fro on the tablecloth as he continued:

"First he glittered at me frightfully with his monocle until I could hardly bear to look at him, then he scowled in quite dreadful manner, though not at me, for when he spoke, his voice was quite gentle. And he said this: 'Justin, because you are my son, you have, instead of a mother, a great and noble heritage, try to live worthily. Remember you are not like ordinary boys with mothers, you are my son.' Then he set an arm about me, and I was so afraid he was going to kiss me that I squirmed and shrank away. Tim, I thought he was going to strike me, but instead, he let fall his monocle, and, drawing me near, made me look at him, eye to eye. 'Justin,' said he, 'as you are a great gentleman you will now pledge me your honour never to mention'—here he paused and I thought he was going to utter my mother's name. But I was wrong again, for all he said was: 'never mention this matter again to anyone—on your word of honour,—promise me!' So of course I did. Then he patted my shoulder, quite kindly, gave me a sovereign, and bade me leave him, which I did hastily and very gladly." Here Tom flicked his bread pellet at the tall grandfather clock ticking solemnly in dim corner, and leaning back in his chair, glanced at his hearer, to see his nearly-handsome face had become stern again and troubled.

"Well, Tim," he questioned, wondering at this change, "what have you to tell me?"

"Nothing, Tom."

"Are we to be true friends, Tim?"

"Indeed I hope so."

"Then treat me as a friend worthy of all confidence, and explain to me this dark mystery concerning the mother I never knew,—remember I am her son!"

"I can never forget it, Tom." The speaker's voice now was low and troubled as his look.

"Well then, speak, man! Tell this son of hers the truth concerning her, no matter

what,—tell me!"

"Not I, Tom. Only your father can speak of this."

"And he never will!" cried Tom, rather wildly. "Always and ever this same cursed mystery, this damnable silence! I don't even know if she is living or dead! If dead—where have they hidden her poor body? If alive,—where, in God's name, is she? Why was I left such a desperately lonely urchin . . . never to feel her kiss, the gentle touch of her motherly hand? Why is my father such a solitary creature, shut up from me and everything in his cold pride,—why, Tim, why? I ask you again,—if my mother is dead, where have they buried her, if she is alive where is she? Why should she have vanished so completely all these years? Why must she hide? And if she is hiding . . . what must I think of her?"

"The best, Tom, ever and always—the best!"

Tom would have retorted, but at that instant the aged grandfather clock began to wheeze rather like a very old gentleman, and thereafter emitted a feeble chime.

"Three o'clock!" said Tim, brushing crumbs from his trim person as he rose. "We must be off if you wish to reach Horsham before dark."

"What matter?" demanded gloomy Tom.

"Oh, none whatever, except that Horsham is on our way, and the old 'King's Head' a comfortable inn."

Thus presently, their score paid, they took the road again. Tom once more a silent fellow whose unwonted irritability was nowise lessened when, in traversing busy High Street, he was saluted by divers rude urchins and errand boys with the then prevalent outcries:

"Where did ya git that 'at?"

"Does your mother know you're out?"

"Yah—git y'r 'air cut!"

"Ooh, I say, chase me Charlie!"

Wisely ignoring this annoyance, Tom merely lengthened his stride until, the town and his hooting tormentors being left behind, he relapsed to leisured amble, sighed and enquired, plaintively:

"Why must those young fiends hoot at me, do you suppose? Am I so remarkable, Tim, this phiz of mine?"

"No, I think it must be your whanghee cane and your spats, those Highland gaiters!"

"Ha!" sighed Tom, halting to glance down at the articles in question. "Now you mention 'em I suppose they are a trifle conspicuous, so—let's be rid of 'em!" And over adjacent hedge went jaunty cane, quickly followed by his long, pearl-buttoned

gaiters.

"So!" quoth he, "first thing I'll buy a proper walking-stick. And, Tim, pray remember that with these conspicuosities I shed the Orrington part of me also, and stand before you and the world as plain Tom Wade, with accent upon the 'plain'. Now, Tim, old hearty, best leg foremost, for an idea seizes me."

"What now?"

"I seem to remember that Orrington village lies somewhere hereabout."

"Two or three miles, Tom, bearing left at the next cross-roads."

"Ah yes, you know it, of course,—and The Aunts?"

"Your father's twin sisters? Well, naturally, I am sometimes at Orrington Manor on business."

"Well, Tim, I haven't been there since leaving Cambridge, so to-night we stay with The Aunts, God bless them! They were the two bright angels of my lonely boyhood. But even they would never tell me anything about my mother. However . . ."

CHAPTER V

A CHAPTER OF SISTERS AND SENTIMENT

THE Ladies Orrington, seated 'neath shady tree on smooth-shaven lawn before the stately old Manor House, busied with crochet and needlework, were quarrelling as usual. Being twins, they were naturally so devoted to one another that they could not bear to be apart, and yet, though twins, each was the other's opposite, physically and mentally. For whereas Serena, senior by exactly two and a half minutes, was blonde and plumply ripe as Venus, she was meekly gentle; while Lady Justinia, proud as Juno, was dark, angular and fierce; also, being thirty-seven years of age, they regarded each other as elderly, and bore themselves accordingly.

". . . There now,—drat you, Serena!" exclaimed her sister, with the utmost ferocity. "I say drat and confound you, you've made me prick my finger!"

"Oh, then suck it, pet!" cooed Lady Serena with tender smile.

"S-s-suck it?" hissed Justinia between large, white teeth, black brows knit above aquiline nose. "Ha—what odious suggestion! Suck it indeed!"

"Yes, darling," murmured Serena. "I believe the human saliva is extremely good for small wounds and—"

"Dis-gusting!" snapped Justinia, with stamp of large though shapely foot. "But if

you must make such horrid, coarse suggestion, be honestly coarse and say—'spit'!"

"Justinia—my love! as though I could, or would! You know I wouldn't and couldn't, and never will, horrors—no! All I said actually was——"

"Never mind what you said, only don't dare to say it again, shaming yourself and me, or——Oh, my stars—men!"

"Men, Justinia? How . . . who . . . where?"

"Over there,—there at the end of the drive . . . by the carriage gates, silly! Two men . . . strangers . . . and they approach!"

"So they do, pet, yes—but not strangers, at least—not quite. Surely one of them is Marcus . . . I mean Mr. Timkins, of course. There,—he sees us!"

"He would!" snapped Lady Justinia, between shut teeth. "And my bustle all twisted . . . quite out of place."

"Heavens!" gasped Lady Serena. "And I left mine upstairs!"

"And the best place for it, Serena! You need no bustle with your too obtrusively buxom proportions!"

"Ah, my—darling!" said Lady Serena, with dart of threatening needle. "Sometimes I almost feel inclined to scratch you, my pet."

"Hush, Serena, we shall be overheard! Compose yourself and endeavour at least to appear ladylike!" Saying this, the Lady Justinia, having contrived to push her errant bustle into its proper station or nearly so, she and her twin sister rose with all the stately grace of English gentlewomen backed by the pride of a thousand noble ancestors; but as their visitors drew near this austere dignity gave place to the glad, unaffected welcome of two warm-hearted women.

"Justin!" cried Lady Justinia, reaching him two somewhat bony though white and graceful hands, "I hardly knew you!"

"Oh, my darling, dearest boy!" cooed Serena. "So tall, so vastly grown! Come and embrace me at once!"

Tom, not the least taken aback by the fervour of this welcome, since of old he knew it sincere, clasped a long arm about each Aunt, kissed them heartily, right and left, whereafter they both saluted 'dear Mr. Timkins' with curtsies of a deep graciousness quite out of date even in those gracious days.

"Justinia," said Lady Serena, "they must drink something—instantly!"

"Certainly, Serena, and brandy of course!"

"No, no, Aunt," laughed Tom, "ale for me, if you please."

"Ale?" exclaimed Justinia, bridling. "But, my dear Justin, ale is so common and vulgar, so very low and taverny."

"Try sherry, Justin darling," Lady Serena pleaded.

"Sister—refrain!" quoth Lady Justinia, in terrible voice. "I was about to suggest port or sherry, since both are gentlemanly and——"

"Or tea?" said Lady Serena, gently though firmly. "Tea with bread and butter cut thin and rolled, cress sandwiches, buttered scones and——"

"Serena, be dumb!"

"Justinia, my love—I will—not!"

"Dearest Aunts," laughed Tom, clasping arms about each of them again, "tea is the thing! Tea with heaps of bread and butter, loads of cake and what not, here on the lawn, eh, Tim, old fellow?"

"Tim?" exclaimed Lady Serena, opening her blue eyes at Mr. Timkins.

"And I'm 'Tom', dear Aunts both, pray remember," said he.

"Tom?" demanded Lady Justinia, looking at him beneath arching black brows. "So, Justin, you persist in using that extremely commonplace name instead of your own?"

"Yes, Aunt," he answered, kissing the nearest of her haughty eyebrows, "commonplace 'Tom' better suits commonplace me."

"Just as you used to do when quite a naughty little boy! For shame, Justin,—there has always been a Justin and Justinia in The Family, and there always must or it will vanish, and that will be a woeful day for poor England. However 'Tom' is quite absurdly impossible for a Wade-Orrington! 'Tom' indeed!"

"And 'Tim.' Justin," said Lady Serena. "You called Mr. Timkins 'Tim', which does not suit him either. . . . Oh no, not in the least."

"Well . . . no," answered Tom, looking at him now with more knowledge. "I'm inclined to confess it doesn't. What name do you suggest for him, Aunt Serena?"

Now at this question, and for no apparent reason, she blushed shyly as any girl (of that period) and glancing down at the emerald ring upon her white finger, answered in her gentle voice, soft now as a caress:

"I think, perhaps,—no, I am sure,—a far more suitable name would be . . . Marcus, or . . . simply . . . Mark."

"By Jingo, Aunt!" exclaimed Tom, kissing her ruddy lips. "By George and Jove—you've hit it! You're right—absolutely! I've always imagined a fellow named Mark to be a strong, silent kind of bloke, a patient, much-enduring sort of chap, with dark hair going white at his temples and a fighter's mouth and chin,—and there he is to a T! So, Tim, old fellow, thanks to my Aunt Serena you're christened anew, henceforth and forever you are—Mark!"

Now why should Lady Serena blush again more girlishly than ever, and, bowing stately head, show thus for creature glorified by the shy, sweet Spirit of Eternal

Youth; a woman beautiful in her richly gracious maturity, a vision of all that was lovely and desirable? So thought one, as, in this raptured moment, dark eyes gazed deep into eyes of blue; a look, a sigh, a fleeting moment, a tender, lasting memory.

"Day-dreaming again, Serena! Justin, pinch her for me! Ha, if you won't, I will!"

"No need, pet," said Lady Serena, turning towards her imperious twin. "I am awake . . . in a world of . . . glory."

"A glory of fiddlesticks! You've been complaining of the heat all day."

"Oh, I know, sweet pet, but now——!" The speaker's lovely eyes beamed with a new light, her vivid lips quivered to wistful smile.

"Gracious goodness, Serena, why do you gloat? Suppose you ring for tea, the bell is on the table yonder."

"Justinia pet," murmured her sister, tenderly, "my darling, suppose I don't and you do."

"Pho!" exclaimed Justinia, snorting contemptuously, and, snatching up the bell, rang it furiously. In answer to which fierce summons, out from the house appeared an aged though dignified personage in fleecy whiskers, striped waistcoat and the more usual habiliments, of course, who, bowing to his ladies solemnly and to the visitors beamingly, murmured deferentially:

"I think I heard your bell, my lady."

"You are stone deaf if you didn't!" quoth Justinia. "Judson, of course I rang, and of course for tea, let it appear, and instantly!"

"Yes, my lady."

"With cake, Juddy, lots of it!" added Tom. "Not forgetting heaps of bread and butter. How are you, Jud, old sportsman? You never seem to change, no—not since my far, far distant schooldays. D'you remember the tricks I used to play you—and once even dared to give those whiskers a tweak to know if they were real? Jove, what a peculiarly scaly brat I must have been! How goes it with you these days, Juddy?"

"My lord," answered the old man, shaking hands very precisely, but his aged eyes very bright. "Master Justin, I am very well, I thank you, and all the better for seeing your lordship again, and as for——"

"Tea, Judson, tea!" snapped Lady Justinia.

"At once, my dear lady, at once!"

"And don't attempt it yourself, let the footmen bring it, remember now!"

"I will, my dear lady."

"He is always attempting too much!" said Justinia, so soon as the old butler was beyond earshot. "Some day he'll have a fit or something awful, and there will be a

nice kettle of fish!"

"Dear old fellow," said Tom, reminiscently. "How I used to plague him! Once I pinned a back-rapper to his coat-tail! Lord, what a fiendly young urchin and revolting pest I must have been!"

"Indeed you *were*!" said Justinia, in hearty agreement.

"Though never, ah—never to me!" murmured Serena. "To me, Justinia, he was always a dear, sweet, affectionate, loving lamb!"

"Serena, do not be so false and fulsome! Justin was an impish brat of a boy, forever in mischief or fighting other boys, you know he was!"

"Though gentle as a dove with me, my sweet, whenever you slapped him he came to me to be kissed, you will remember——"

"Serena, sit down and be hushed or go and put on your bustle!"

"Justinia—fie!" gasped her twin, sinking upon the nearest seat, and doing it very gracefully. "Indeed 'tis you now deserve to be slapped, my precious!"

"Aunt Justinia," laughed Tom, stealing his arm about her, "you do, indeed, so come and let her slap!"

"No—no, silly boy, she'd only kiss me, she ever does, no matter what I do or say. She is so maddeningly, placidly gentle, the poor, silly creature!"

"And yet," Serena retorted, "you would quite languish without me, my precious, yes, you would fade away and perish."

"Of course I should!" cried Justinia. "And this is how you trample on and triumph over me—just because you happen to be two and a half minutes older than I am . . . and thank heaven here's the tea at last! Here, Judson, 'neath this tree, in the shade!"

And when the two stalwart footmen, supervised by old Judson and directed by Justinia, had borne the heavy-laden table completely round the massive tree-bole,—into the shade and out of the shade, and finally set it precisely in its original position, they sat down to this peculiarly English meal, sipping and nibbling on the ladies' part, eating and drinking heartily on Tom's part while Tim (now and hereafter Mark) sat gazing nowhere in particular, and stirring his tea round and round until—cried Lady Justinia, arrogant nose up-flung:

"For mercy's sake, George Timkins, do stop dithering, and drink man—do!"

"Now, Sweetness," murmured Serena, white dimpled finger raised to admonish, "why bully the poor man when you have me? Besides, George being Mark, isn't George any longer."

"Stuff and nonsense, Serena,—silence yourself with a sandwich! Now, Justin, my dear, to what happy cause do we owe the pleasure of this most unexpected

visit?"

And hereupon glancing from one handsome, stately aunt to the other, Tom replied instantly:

"The hope that you will tell me about my mother—everything, yes, all there is to know."

Lady Justinia dropped the cake she had been nibbling; Lady Serena choked into her cup; Mark, leaning back in his chair, gazed up into the thick foliage above; and so, for a long moment, was a strange, tense silence.

"Well," exclaimed Lady Justinia, at last, "well . . . I never did!"

"Yes, Aunt, years ago you heard me ask much the same question, and you put me off. But I was only a boy then. To-day I ask you again—as a man."

"And to-day, Justin, for your own sake I still decline to speak."

"But to-day, dear Aunt, I am determined, and demand to know . . . for her sake and my own. So I ask you again, both of you, all of you,—what is the mystery of my mother?"

"Very well then," answered Lady Justinia, at her stateliest, "since you demand, I will tell you, in two words: shame and disgrace!"

"No, ah—no!" sighed Lady Serena, gently.

"Yes," said her sister fiercely, "shame and disgrace brought upon our proud and honourable name, contumely and scorn."

"How?" Tom enquired, hoarsely, since it seemed his own secret fears were to be realized.

"Your mother fled away, the guilty creature, with her paramour—"

"I will never believe it!" panted Lady Serena. "I did not then, and I will not now."

"Because you don't wish to, Serena, being such a silly, sentimental baby. But you know perfectly well——"

"Only what we were told, Justinia."

"Certainly, but—by brother Gawain himself, remember!"

"But even Gawain may be mistaken and——"

"Not of his own shame, Serena. Remember how he told us . . . ah, that dreadful hour! Himself so still, so pale, so quiet . . . it was like a dead man speaking to proclaim life ruined, home desolate, his honoured name a by-word . . . shamed before the world! I thought to see him sink in death before me . . . And all because of . . . that woman!"

"My mother!" said Tom, gently. "And called Janice,—a strange, pretty name. How old was she?"

"Old?" repeated Serena, tearfully, "she was little more than a child, a sweet, timid, gentle creature, a mother at seventeen."

"Ha!" snorted Justinia, contemptuously. "Yet old enough to know good from evil, bold enough to desert her noble husband, her splendid home."

"Because such splendour frightened her, Justinia, her noble husband neglected her—just when she needed him most, his tender care and sympathy."

"Nonsense and worse, Serena! Our brother was greatly busied just then with affairs of State, his duty to our Sovereign, Her most Gracious Majesty."

"What of me?" Tom enquired. "How old was I—then?"

"Not a year, Justin, you were exactly——"

"Did she—desert me too?"

"Well . . . no!"

"And 'No' indeed!" cried Serena. "You were her darling baby, Justin, the one joy and comfort of her solitude, her very life and soul! So when she fled she bore her baby with her."

"Stole Gawain's heir, Serena!"

"Took her babe within her bosom, Justinia!"

"But," said Tom, "my father . . . took me back again . . . how?"

"Ah, Justin," quoth Lady Justinia, "what dreadful, sordid business was your recovery! We dreaded a law-court, the publicity, the odium. What harrowing anxiety before your wronged father won you to his care!"

"So then," murmured Tom, "she . . . wanted me, did she? Did her poor best to keep me?"

"Justin, she fought like a tigress. Oh, viciously."

"No, dear Justin, like a yearning mother. Oh, desperately!"

"And . . . with whom," enquired Tom, soft and hesitant, "with whom . . . did she . . . elope?"

"This I . . . cannot say," murmured Serena.

"Because we do not know!" snapped Justinia. "So now, my poor Justin, now that you are informed, what have you to say of this shocking affair?"

"Nothing, Aunt."

"Oh, Justin . . . dear boy!" whispered Serena, reaching white hand to him. "But . . . what are you . . . going to do?"

"Find her."

"Her?" demanded Justinia, in awful tone.

"Her?" sighed Serena, clasping Tom's hand now in both her own, "Oh, you mean . . .?"

"My mother."

"Wrong!" exclaimed Justinia. "Unjust and most unfilial towards your father!"

"Glorious!" cried Serena, reaching out her shapely arms. "And your pious, sacred duty towards your lonely mother! So, Justin, come and be kissed!"

"Pho!" exclaimed Justinia, "such silly, sentimental mawkishness!"

"And pho to you, my fierce pet! Justin, go and kiss her, too, or she'll claw me for jealousy later on, the poor, passionate darling wretch. And now, Mr. Tim—no, Mark, take me indoors and I will show you my plans for the new cottages. Oh, but, Justinia darling, having regard to our guests, hadn't you better make——"

But here Lady Justinia gave another vigorous and prolonged performance on the bell until her sister and Mark had vanished, and the old butler presented himself in their place.

"Judson, what have we to offer our gentlemen for dinner?"

"Well, my lady, we've soup, oxtail, salmon, sweetbreads or lamb cutlets followed by roast fowl, and breast of veal, stuffed."

"Goodness gracious, man, is this all?"

"My lady for cold side dishes we can offer beef, roast, spiced and boiled, with ham, tongue and various savouries."

"No game, Judson?"

"Alas, none, my dear lady, it being——"

"This is quite mortifying, Judson! To-day, as you see, is an occasion."

"Never you mind, Juddy," said Tom, "we don't sound like starving . . . Come on, Aunt Justinia, take my arm and let's toddle along to the stables. . . ."

Later that night, being on their ways to bed, Lady Serena drew Tom aside into a shadowy alcove half-way up the wide, old stair.

"Justin," she whispered, "tell me, and promise, on your sacred word of honour, to speak truly."

"I swear!"

"Then . . . Oh, Justin, am I . . . growing . . . fat?"

"Dear Aunt," he whispered back, "you sweet loveliness, I vow and protest you might show as a perfect Rubens' Venus!"

"Rubens!" she murmured, pondering. "But all his goddesses are rather . . . fleshy, aren't they?"

"Deliciously so!" whispered Tom, and kissed her again.

"Do you intend to remain with us . . . very long, Justin?"

"No, I fancy we leave to-morrow."

"That is very soon, dear; I shall grieve to lose you, and yet it will be for me a

great . . . relief!"

"Eh,—relief, Aunt?"

"Yes, my dear, a relief, though quite painful too . . . because of . . . Mark."

"Oh?" murmured Tom. "Does this mean you hate or . . . love him?"

"Ah, my dear, I have loved him, and he me, oh these many years, and so deeply, so truly, that time but makes us . . . yearn the more. So I am glad you leave soon, because I am . . . quite . . . dreadfully . . . human!"

Drawing her near, Tom looked deep into the blue innocence of her gentle eyes; then questioned wonderingly:

"If you so love and need each other, why on earth don't you marry?"

"Ah, my dear, he is married . . . this is what makes everything so . . . dreadful! Long and long ago . . . before we ever met! Twenty weary years ago . . . I was only eighteen! Yes, he had a wife even then."

"A wife? Mark?"

"Oh yes. He married very young, of course."

"But good lord, Aunt—where is she?"

"Hopelessly mad, poor creature, and shut away long ago . . . and . . . Oh, my dear, there is no divorce for insanity!"

"How utterly preposterous!"

"So here is my grief, Justin dear, to wait and wait, knowing myself getting older every day with the haunting dread that I may become . . . fat . . . repulsive and——"

"Never!" exclaimed Tom. "Never in this world! Whatever else—you can never be repulsive!" And Tom said this with such evident sincerity and fervour that she kissed him with sighing murmur of:

"You comforting darling!"

Then they went on side by side, up the wide old stair: but reaching the door of her bedroom (his boyish haven from vengeful pursuit by some victim of his impishness) Tom paused to enquire:

"What was she like, my mother,—I mean, to look at? Not like me, of course."

"No, dear, not the least bit like you."

"Then she must have been pretty?"

"Yes, Justin. Oh very! A shy, lovely creature, born in the country, and should never have been anywhere else; a spirit of woods and leafy solitudes . . . no wonder she languished in London and was horrified by her husband's great houses and hosts of servants."

"Exactly!" nodded Tom. "Yes,—I know just how she felt. And where was she born?"

"In Cornwall, at a place called Tre—something or other, if it was not Pol or Pen."

"Trevore!" murmured Tom. "A ruin . . . a desolation that some day shall live and bloom again."

CHAPTER VI

OF A CHANCE MEETING UPON BODMIN MOOR

WESTWARD they rambled, on and about the great road, this ancient highway leading through an ever-changing countryside, over bowery heath, misty plain and desolate moor; past sleepy hamlet, drowsy village, busy market-town and stately city; climbing verdant hills whence the leisured traveller may behold something of this "jewel of earth" that so many have loved, lived, fought and died for; a green and bowery country of lush meadow and shadowy wood, lit by sparkling rill or winding stream. Here and there, rising grey and dreamlike amid the green, peeps shattered ruin of hoary castle, or gracious span of broken arch still beautiful in decay, to tell with dumb though plaintive eloquence of ancient glories wrought by skilled and loving hands long since forever stilled, themselves to mingle with the earth they loved and the white dust of this immemorial road. This historic track that through the ages has known the tread of innumerable travellers going East to the Great City, or West past the awesome mystery called Stonehenge, to the sacred shrine at Glastonbury,—pilgrims all who reached their journey's end long and long ago.

Tom's mind was busied with some such thoughts when, upon a certain bright morning not too uncomfortably early and after adequate breakfast (pink ham rashers decked in glory of golden-yolked eggs), he and Mark turned South into a wilder country of rolling moorland, a desolate solitude void of trees and seemingly of humanity, for upon the few roads that traversed rounded hills and down-sweeping dales, of wayfarers he saw none. A vast solitude, yet haunted by vague memories of a forgotten people whose imperishable handiwork persists in rugged monoliths up-starting from the heath, with hut-circles and rude earthworks crowning these solitary hills.

"So this," said Tom, pausing to mop perspiring brow and look around upon this immensity, "so this is Cornwall!"

"This," sighed Mark, also mopping, "this is Bodmin Moor, and a dismal weariness in such heat! Far better to have hired a carriage or horses."

"Yes, by Jove!" quoth Tom, "you're right as usual, old fellow! But I wanted to have a look at these dolmen things and what-nots. However, let's sit down and wait."

"For what, Tom?"

"Anything on wheels."

"My dear fellow, we may wait all day!"

"Then, my dear chap, let's wait sitting, and long enough to smoke a pensive, soothing pipe."

"Good idea!" said Mark. So down they sat, and thus at their ease, filled, lighted and puffed in deep and silent content, like the now familiar friends they were.

"Mark, my dear old horse," said Tom, after some while, "I think it only right to inform you that I know . . . I mean to say . . . all about you and Aunt Serena, bless her loveliness!"

"And I knew you knew. She told me, of course, and I've been wondering what you would think about it?"

"I've been thinking and wishing joy abounding, Mark, old fellow, to both of you, and soon, I hope!"

"Hope?" repeated Mark, biting hard upon his pipe-stem. "Tom, I've hoped for twenty-odd years . . . a goodish while out of our three score and ten! And . . . I'm forty-two!"

"And she, Mark, though a splendid woman, is still freshly sweet as a girl, youth dances in her eyes."

"Except when tears dim them, Tom!"

"She was always my boyish comforter, Mark. Nature surely meant her for a wife and mother."

"And I was scarcely more than boy when I married. It was in the days of my direst need. . . . I was desperately ill . . . she nursed me back to life and hope, so . . . I married her. She was gentle and good until her affliction came . . . since when she has been . . . worse than dead! A hopeless case . . . a homicidal maniac, Tom . . . and still she lives!"

Here ensued a puffing through long and mournful silence broken at last by Mark saying:

"See—away yonder!"

"Dust!" said Tom, sitting up.

"Something on wheels!" nodded Mark, "which is rather wonderful, hereabout, I may tell you."

"And . . . yes, by George, driven by a woman, which is even more wonderful!"

"Yet deusedly awkward, Tom. We can hardly stop a woman in such desolation."

"However," said Tom, rising, "I'll do my best."

So, having tapped out and pocketed his pipe, Tom watched the approach of this vehicle, a heavy, country dogcart, drawn by a tall, shaggy horse and driven by a woman who, seeing one man signalling to her with lifted arm and another crouched beside the road, now seized the heavy whip in ready hand, either as weapon or to urge her animal to faster gait; but, coming nearer, she did neither, instead she reined to slower pace, though sitting so very upright and alert, that Tom bared his tall head with its thatch of pale curls and so stood waiting.

A woman this, neither tall nor short, young of face and form, though the wind-blown tress of hair beneath the small, close bonnet gleamed and shone like silver.

Responsive to the supplication of Tom's lifted hand, she reined up her shaggy horse, viewing these two men with eyes long, wide-set and heavy-lashed beneath low sweep of dark brows, eyes whose velvety, midnight blackness contrasted vividly with her silvery hair; she glanced at Mark, she gazed down on Tom, his plain-featured, good-tempered face, his big-boned, powerful frame, his well-opened, honest grey eyes.

Now meeting this so feminine, searching gaze, Tom smiled, and in this moment showed so magically transfigured that this woman leaned down towards him, opened her lips as if to speak, yet uttered no word; wherefore Tom spoke instead:

"Do please forgive my venturing to stop you and in such lonely place . . . I hope I didn't frighten you?" He broke off, aware of the strange, deep intensity of her widening gaze.

"No," she answered in voice low and richly sweet, "I am not easily frightened. Please, why did you . . . stop me?"

"To ask very humbly if you would be so kind as to give two rather wayworn fellows a lift across the moor. My name is Wade, Tom Wade, and this is my friend, Mark Timkins. Now pray will you be so kind and . . . venturesome?"

For a long moment she made no answer, her gaze now on the far distance, like one striving to recall some vague memory or listening for some scarcely remembered sound . . . Turning at last and thus becoming aware of Tom's wondering gaze, her smooth, sun-tanned cheek showed a richer glow as she nodded, saying:

"Oh, of coursel The trap is rather loaded, I've been marketing, but if your friend can make room for himself at the back, you . . . may sit here . . . beside me."

Uttering mingled expressions of gratitude, up they swung, and, at touch of whip, the shaggy horse set off at a lumbering trot. Now as she drove and with no tree or hedge to shield her from the scorching sun, this plainly clad, weather-bronzed

country woman who talked like a lady, began to ply Tom with questions, though her dark, strange eyes seldom glanced towards him.

"Wade, did you say?"

"Yes, madam, Wade—Tom, and very gratefully at your service."

"From London?"

"No, Sussex, though I am often in London."

"Are you familiar with Cornwall?"

"Not in the least, and what I have seen of it so far, I find disappointing."

"Oh, really? Yet it is generally thought to be a beautiful county."

"But surely not hereabouts?"

"This is Bodmin Moor, and reputed to be haunted."

"I can well believe it!" Tom nodded. "A howling desolation where ghosts by the million might howl and flit, especially at night!"

"Yet . . . I love it," she murmured.

"Then I humbly beg its pardon," said Tom; "more especially if you happen to be Cornish."

"Indeed I am, and by long ancestry. And you, I suppose, were born in great, proud, pitiless London?"

"Oh no!" Tom replied, wondering at the sudden bitterness of this softly-pleasant voice. "No, strangely enough, I was born in Cornwall, too, at a place named Trevore."

The shaggy horse swerved suddenly, tossed up his great head and snorted indignantly to the sudden sharp jerk of his bit.

"What happened?" Tom enquired, glancing about for some explanation of this equine behaviour and seeing none.

"A stumble, I think. Stand up, Robin—do!"

"Odd!" murmured Tom.

"Very!" said Robin's driver, flicking him to faster gait, only to rein him in again. "Robin is usually such a steady going old thing. So you don't know . . . by the way, Mr. Wade, I am Mrs. Penhallo . . . and so you, never having been in Cornwall to remember . . . you are quite unfamiliar with your birthplace . . . Trevore?"

"No, but I shall be. Yes, I shall know it very well and soon."

"Oh . . . really?"

"Yes, I am on my way there now."

"Then I'm afraid you will find it more woeful . . . more desolate than this great lonely moor."

"Yes, I understand it is pretty much of a ruin."

"How do you know, if you have never been there, Mr. Wade?"

"I have my father's word for it."

"Oh!" she murmured. "He should know, of course."

"Mrs. Penhallo. I'm wondering if you happen to know it also?"

"Yes, quite well. I live at Merrion, a village close by."

"By George, how strangely fortunate."

"Fortunate?" she enquired, gently.

"I mean to say for me, of course."

"How, please, Mr. Wade?"

"Well, because if you would be so very good you might drive me there now."

"Oh, but I couldn't! It is much too far . . . a whole day's journey! Besides, I shall not reach there to-day or to-morrow."

"I see!" replied Tom. "Then please tell me about the poor, old house, just how badly it needs me to care for it after all these years of neglect. Is it completely ruined?"

And after driving some distance, she answered:

"No, not completely—not yet."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom, heartily.

"How shall you . . . care for it, and . . . why?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, I'm pretty keen on carpentry and what not, a bit of a dab with tools and so on. So I mean to labour on the old place for the fun of it, make it live and bloom again."

"Merely for the . . . fun of it?"

"Well, not exactly, no,—what I mean to say is absolutely not! No, I'm doing it for my mother's saks . . . in memory of her, as it were."

Plod of hoofs, rumble of wheels, creak of this old vehicle and no other sound, while Tom mused upon how best to begin upon his forthcoming labour, the tools and materials he would need; while Mark nodded slumbrous on the seat behind him, and the woman beside him gave all her attention to bony old Robin. At last Tom roused to the soft voice so near him:

"Then, is she . . . your mother . . . dead?"

"I hope not!" said Tom. "She merely happens to be . . . away. . . . And yonder are trees at last and a village. So this is the end of Bodmin Moor at last?"

"Oh yes, this is the end of the moor. And yonder, at those cross-roads, I must leave you, Mr. Wade. Your friend is asleep, I think."

"So he is, and here are the cross-roads. Hi, wake up, Mark, old man! Well now, good-bye, Mrs. Penhallo, our grateful thanks!"

"Mr. Wade, I was . . . very glad to help you. Good-bye!"

"Perhaps," said Tom, looking up at her, hat in hand, "perhaps we shall meet again at Merrion?"

"Perhaps!" she answered, and Tom was struck again by the soft, rich sweetness of her voice.

"Do you sing?" he enquired, on impulse.

"I . . . used to." So saying, she nodded, touched Robin with the whip and drove away.

"An odd, queerish sort of person," said Tom, pausing to look after her. "Something strange there, old boy."

"Eh . . . ah . . . where?" yawned Mark.

"Our lady Jehu."

"Oh, was she?"

"Well, wasn't she? Didn't you notice?"

"How should I, we were sitting back to back, besides, I fancy I almost fell asleep . . . this hot sun."

"Which reminds me," quoth Tom, "that I am deliciously thirsty, and yonder, very proper to the purpose, a little ale-house! Come, let us assuage."

CHAPTER VII

HOW TOM ACQUIRED A FAXSTOTUM

THE place was the "Red Lion," Truro; the time of day two of the clock, the scene a private sitting-room, with table spread for luncheon.

"Well now," said Tom, pushing aside empty plate and filling his favourite, bulldog pipe, a grim-looking, short-stemmed briar, "the word now is 'tools'! So Mark, old lad, I'm off to see what Truro can do in the matter."

"A trifle previous aren't you, Tom?"

"Not so, Mark, my buck, I merely grasp Old Man Time by his jolly old forelock."

"But you haven't even glimpsed Trevore yet to judge what materials you will require."

"Mark, old horse, a ruin is a ruin, Trevore is a ruin, and therefore in need of repair. From this I argue, therefore, new doors, window-frames, flooring, chimney-pots and so on, hence timber, saws, chisels, hammers, also trowels and what not,

which can be ordered beforehand. *Quod erat demonstrandum!* So I'm off to do it forthwith and eftsoons. What about you?"

"Letters, Tom."

"Always and ever a confounded bore, I think—what? However, if you happen to be penning an epistle to The Noble Sire, write the best you can of me. I suppose I must drop him a line or so, but not till I've had a look at his poor old ruin—Trevore. You ordered a trap for after tea?"

"Yes, we shall reach Trevore about sunset."

"Good! Well, so long!" Saying which, Tom clapped on his "deerstalker" and, with pipe in full blast, sallied forth. Now being alone, Mark took from his pocket a letter which had been waiting his arrival for some days, and opening it, read as follows:

"Orrington House,
"London.
"June 8, 18——.

"My dear Marcus,

"Your three letters, despatched on your very rambling journey, have caused me a growing and pleasurable surprise. The more so, as I have such implicit confidence in your cool and discriminating judgement of men and affairs generally. Hence I am the more impressed by the quite unusual warmth of your expressions concerning Justin. It is strange if, by and through you, my old friend, I am to become better acquainted with my own son! If, as you rather more than hint, I have completely missed the joys of fatherhood, my life, as you are fully aware, and must own, Marcus, has been almost entirely devoted to the service of my country, and I am happy to believe, not without some mede of success. Whether or no such can make up to a man for the corresponding loss of a close and intimate family life, more especially in such unhappy case as my own, is beside the question. As it is, I can but congratulate myself on having so lately placed Justin in the wise care of such tried and able diplomat and shrewd man of the world as yourself, who throughout the cares, responsibilities and dangers shared together in a busy and sometimes hazardous life, have never failed me. Now in regard to my desire for Justin's marriage, which I discussed with you when last in London. Lady Helena Samantha Dudeney, Marchioness of Dorincourt, the lady in question, arrived in England three weeks ago, just after your and Justin's departure, and is now in residence with her aunt and now legal guardian, Lady Oxted. To the eye Lady Helena is a truly beautiful creature, handsomer even than her photograph warranted; to the ear, however, she is quite preposterously American, her conversation being frequently interlarded with breath-taking idioms of her Wild Western upbringing, many of which are entirely beyond the powers of an English person to comprehend. Nevertheless, having due regard to her very pronounced beauty of form and feature, her birth and fortune, I am perfectly convinced I could make no better choice for my future daughter-in-law. Her mother, who died at her birth, was, I believe, the daughter of a Texas Ranger or Rancher, but her late father was George Dudeney who, you will remember, rowed Number Three the year we beat Cambridge so handsomely. George, I need hardly remind you, was the Earl of

Dorincourt's son and heir, who, after a violent family quarrel, emigrated to America in '69 as George Dudeney. And poor George's motherless daughter, reared, it seemed, among so many hard-riding, quick-shooting, wild-living men, inherits much of his fiery, headstrong spirit. For indeed, Marcus, she appears a madcap rebel, with no least respect for our English aristocracy or dignity of her own new title and estate as Marchioness Dorincourt, proclaiming herself an American citizen, and preferring to be known merely as Miss Samantha Dudeney. This extraordinary behaviour I now propose using to her own and my son Justin's future happiness. To which estimable purpose, therefore, the young Marchioness Helena, to be known, by her own desire, as Miss Samantha Dudeney, accompanied by Lady Oxted, Miss Sholes, her American nurse, and maids, will arrive in Cornwall this week, to pass the summer at Penruan House, near Merrion, which I have leased and had duly furnished for the purpose. Miss Samantha and Justin, brought thus together and in such lonely countryside, I entertain a reasonable hope that the desired result may eventuate.

"In which hope, my dear Marcus,

"I remain as ever

"Your assured, sincere friend

"GAWAIN

"MERIVALE-ORRINGTON.

"PS. I am heartily glad you floored him. That 'thunderbolt right' of yours seems potent and unerring as when it floored his father. Ah, Marcus, dear fellow, those were the days!"

Having read this characteristic letter with peculiar care, Mark's grave features were lighted by a smile that often recurred as he sat with busy pen writing an answer . . .

Meanwhile Tom, having purchased a carpenter's bench with every tool he thought might possibly be wanted, from sets of saws to mason's trowels, wandered hither and yon until, the clocks striking three and finding nothing of particular interest, he strolled into the "Red Lion's" roomy stable yard and was lounging there, pipe in mouth, when he was roused from peaceful thoughts of sawdust and shavings, screws, bolts and nails, by a sudden, shrill scream of pain, wailing outcries and the sound of blows. Guided by this dire clamour, Tom came to one of the many stables, and there beheld a tall, powerfully built man, very ornate as to person, thrashing an extremely small groom with the butt-end of a whip.

"Easy on there!" said Tom, over and round his pipe-stem. The man turned a handsome, coldly-vicious face to eye Tom beneath thick, black brows.

"Damned young dude!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "Pack off and mind your own cursed business."

"The question is," said Tom, removing the glowing embers from his cherished pipe and slipping it into his pocket, "the burning question is,—do you loose the infant or do I wipe my shoes on your carcase?"

The answer was prompt as painful, being a vicious blow from the whip which sent Tom's "deerstalker" flying and himself reeling till he brought up sharply against a wall. For a moment he leant there, tow-head a-droop and long arms dangling,—but beneath their pale brows his grey eyes were a menace . . . Then he leapt . . . and so was conflict. . . .

And after some while Tom stood away, and looked down at his now recumbent aggressor, and seeing he made no least attempt to rise, turned to be gone, found a modish hat in his path, kicked it forth into the yard, and following it, beheld a small group of ostlers and other horsy persons who grinned and nodded, whereat Tom grinned also, and made his way back into the inn, only to learn that Mark was out. So upstairs went Tom, and having splashed the painful lump on his head with cold water, and combed his yellow curls, he descended to the coffee-room, empty at this hour, and, seating himself in corner whence he might see the street, lighted his pipe to wait for Mark. But the afternoon was hot and drowsy . . . Tom's straw-coloured lashes drooped . . . his eyes closed . . . he slumbered.

"Oh—hif you please, sir!" Tom stirred. "Ho, Guvnor!"

Tom sighed, and waking to a touch, opened unwilling eyes to behold the very small groom, very smart and upright, cockaded hat in one hand, Tom's deerstalker cap in the other.

"Oh, so it's you again!" sighed Tom.

"Yessir, 'smee, and wiv your 'at as I've dusted careful and yere it is!"

"Chuck it on the table and my thanks with——"

"And my thanks t'yerself, sir, for pokin' S'Arry so proper and pretty. My eye, but didn't you just! Coo, luv a duck, I never see nuffink sweeter! So there's S'Arry gorn off an' left me, ar, and swearin' 'evins 'ard, 'ere's you sleepin' and dossin' so peaceful, 'ere's me, wiv your 'at, come to offer meself along of it, sir, if you please."

"Eh? What?"

"Meself, sir, for your groom, Guvnor. You'll never find none better'n me, wot I don't know about 'osses—ain't! Oh I'm a one-er wiv 'osses, I am."

"But I have no horses, at least, not in Cornwall."

"Then buy some, sir, and I'll show ye 'ow smart I 'andles 'em."

"Lord!" exclaimed Tom, fumbling for his pipe.

"'Ere y'are, sir!" cried the little groom, diving head-foremost beneath his chair. "You drops it, sir, when you drops yourself off into the balmy." So saying, the little "tiger" having retrieved the fallen pipe, wiped it carefully on the sleeve of his smart jacket and presented it with a queer, little, ducking bow.

"Boy," said Tom, taking his errant pipe, but looking at this small, keenly-

intelligent face. "Boy, who are you,—what's your name?"

"Why, sir, until you knocks 'im for six, I were 'tiger' to S'Arry Winby, wot calls 'isself Mr. Barclay down 'ere, or, ever since we went into Cornwall, becos 'e's a-chasin' anuvver skirt."

"Oh?" enquired Tom.

"Ar,—anuvver young she-male as I 'eard S'Arry tell 'is friend, Mr. Fox, was a nairess wiv lots o' tin an' a goddiss into the bargin!"

"Did he though! And what's your name?"

"Oh, I ain't got no reg'lar nime, sir, me 'aving been found on a doorstep by old Jacky Fry, as being a lonely sort o' feller on account of 'im 'avin sich a ugly old mug an' only one peeper, but wiv that one he can see more than most can wiv two. Jacky couldn't abear to part wiv' me, me being so little, no bigger'n a tuppenny rabbit, so 'e says. So 'e takes me in, names me Golia, as was a giant in the Bible, becos I ain't, and brings me up like I wos 'is son, only 'e don't beat nor yet kick me like fathers allers gen'rally does."

"Ah?" murmured Tom, lighting his pipe. "And who is Jacky Fry?"

"A cobbler, sir, a snob, mends boots and shoes, ar, an' 'e can make 'em, too, an' lots o' ovver fings, little carvin's in wood an' ships,—an' 'e can rig 'em, too."

"He sounds a jolly sort of chap."

"Well, 'e is and 'e ain't, sir, 'count of him being took on and off by the weezies."

"What are they?"

"'Is breff, sir,—comes too short it do, and sometimes don't come at all. The 'orspital says as 'ow all 'e needs is country hair, but there ain't none in London, so that's why I'm workin' so precious 'ard, as I must 'ave a job so as I can pay to bring Jacky into the country along o' me. So 'ow about it, sir?"

"About what?"

"Why, sir, seein' as I'm hout of work all along o' you crackin' my Guvnor so proper, don't you fink as you might give me a try and take me on."

"But what could I do with you?"

"Well, sir, if you hain't got no 'osses and don't intend to get none, why then I tell you wot,—take me on and lemme be your faxstotum."

"Eh? My what?"

"Faxstotum, sir, black y'r boots, answer y'r bell, look arter ye gen'rally, and all for—ten bob a week, sir! And cheap at the money. Take me or leave me, sir, I can't go no cheaper, becos o' Jacky, so . . . will ye, please?"

"By Jingo, it's a go! Goliath, you're engaged!"

"Then Gawd luv ye, Guv, you ain't never goin' to regret it."

"Just how old are you, Goly?"

"Well, Guvnor, me an' Jacky ain't rightly sure, but we puts me down for somewheres about sixteen."

"Yes, I guessed as much."

"Then you're pretty sharp, sir, I'm mostly took for a kid, specially by shemales, becos o' me size. And now, Guvnor, now as I'm y'r man, wot's first?"

"Well . . . first," answered Tom, viewing his new, small factotum with growing interest, "first . . . that livery, of course."

"Pretty smart, eh, Guv?"

"Yes, Goly, that's why it won't do for me. It must be returned to your late employer at once, or he may have you taken for a thief."

"Crikey, sir, I never thought o' that! Cor blimey, you're right, that's just wot 'e would do, the perisher! What'll I do, sir?"

"Where is your late master staying . . . what's his name again?"

"S'Arry Winby, an' 'e's putting up at the 'Royal' in Leming Street, sir."

"Then, Goly, you must get that livery back to Sir Harry Winby at once."

"Yessir, but—I can't 'ardly go about in nuffink!"

"Hardly. You must buy yourself some ordinary clothes, a darkish suit, with shirts, socks and what not. Take this fiver, and if it isn't enough, pop back for more."

"Enough, sir—a fiver! Cor, strike me perishin' pink, Guvnor, it's oceans too much!"

"However, you'd better take it."

"Blimey, Guv! Are you trustin' me wiv all this 'ere oof?"

"Of course. Fork it into your pocket."

"But . . . Oh, luv a duck—s'pose I cut off and don't never come back?"

"Then I shall lose five pounds and you will have to find a new master, so——"

At this juncture the door opened and Mark entered, saying:

"I've ordered tea, and the dogcart will—why, what the dickens—?"

"My new faxstotum, Mark."

The boy saluted smartly, saying:

"Ow do, sir. Yes, I've just been took on, sir, to look arter this 'ere gent, and 'opes as I'll prove as faithful and true and up to me job as wot I intends to be. And now, Guvnor, by y'r leave I'll cut along arter them noo duds." Having said which the boy favoured them with his odd little bow and went out, closing the door soundlessly behind him.

"Tom, you old ass," said Mark, shaking grave head, though his eyes twinkled, "what have you been up to?"

"Old lad," Tom replied, "I have—ah, here's tea! While you pour out the tea I'll pour forth my news, hearkee: . . ."

"Ah," sighed Mark, when the tale was told, "pity I missed it! Used your 'right' properly this time, eh, Tom?"

"And in the proper place, and exactly proper time, old horse, I'm happy to say. The fellow richly deserved and needed it."

"Evidently! And what did the boy tell you his name was?"

"Sir Harry Winby."

"Not a very common name, Tom. And staying at the 'Royal'?"

"Yes. And my faxstotum also informs me the fellow is using a false name, Barclay, because he is 'chasing a young she-male'."

"Ah!" sighed Mark. "I am glad you are blessed with such a punishing 'right', Tom."

"Which failed completely and ignominiously in your case, confound you!"

"Merely because I made you mistime me, old fellow. But what now of this precocious urchin, this saucy Cockney sparrow? What shall you do with him, suppose he ever comes back?"

"Use him on The Job, old horse, teach him the joy of tools and dignity of labour."

"Ah, my dear fellow, could you but do that . . . preach this gospel up and down the land, how work and craft of tools do truly dignify a man."

"But," said Tom, "I was meaning individual work, and in the open air or one's own shop, not—no, God forbid,—not in crowded factories."

"Yet, Tom, in factories are giants called machines, and it is by and on machinery that England has become mightiest power on earth."

"And by heavens, Mark, it is this same dam' machinery that is stripping our good countryside, crowding our towns and cities to breed slums and disease and slowly but surely stamping out true Craftsmanship. F'instance, take shoes and watches,—at one time a true craftsman chose his leather and with his awls and what not, created a shoe, a perfect piece of work, and took pride in it; another johnny constructed the marvel of a watch, every spring, screw and wheel! To-day your dam' machinery turns 'em out wholesale,—like sausages!"

"But surely, Tom, a machinist can be a craftsman?"

"Up to a point—perhaps! Ah, but the true joy of constructing some what-not by his own . . . his individual effort and skill is gone and forever lost."

"Tom, thou art a reactionary!"

"Mark, I am an individualist!"

"But, Tom, old fellow, I tell you——"

"And, Mark, my dear old chump, I tell you . . ."

They were still at it hammer and tongs, puffing smoke and arguments at one another, when the door swung open to disclose that which struck them dumb; a small, sorry object, hatless, dusty and torn, whose little, pallid face was streaked with blood, and, what was much worse, with tears.

"Goly!" exclaimed Tom, very nearly dropping his pipe again.

"Oh, Guvnor," sobbed the boy, "will ye take a . . . squint at me! I've 'ad a fair doin', I 'ave,—not arf I 'aven't! Thought I'd never git back wiv y'r money . . . y'r change . . . I takes back them duds, but 'e copped me, 'e did, and luv a duck—did 'e lay into me?"

"Goly, I do believe you're crying!"

"Yessir! But only . . . a bit . . . an' not becos o' wot 'e done to me, but . . . Oh, Guv, look wot 'appened to me noo togs!"

"Goly, my hearty," said Tom, leaning near to lay his arm across the boy's thin, drooping shoulders, "your clothes have lost their awful, horrid newness, and are now, just as I wanted 'em,—nice and dusty, with a bit of a tear here and there, as if you'd been working with me for months. So, cheer up! Did he hit you very hard?"

"Oh, blimey, Guvnor, didn't 'e! But I gets in a kick or two at 'is perishin' shins—not arf."

"Good effort, Goly! Now go and wash off the stains of battle, order yourself tea, and report to me in the yard at exactly five o'clock."

Hereupon, marvellously heartened to forget past woes, Golia grinned, made his little bow and vanished.

"Tom, I begin to like your little cock-sparrow. But why call the poor little chap 'Goly'?"

"Short for Golia, which is short again for Goliath, and so named because one was a giant in the Bible and the other isn't."

At precisely five o'clock, as a smartish dogcart appeared in the yard so did The Factotum, washed, brushed and combed to such effect that his new master exclaimed:

"By Jove, Goly, you look remarkably trim."

"Yes, Guv, a woman done it, one o' them there chambermaids in a cap an' doodahs,—only she goes an' spiles it all by wantin' to kiss me, thinkin' I was only a kid, same as they all do,—so I 'as to curse and blind a bit till she screeches an' runs. So 'ere I am, sir,—shall I take the ribbons?"

"No, thanks, Goly, I'll drive. And, by the way, I think I'll call you Go."

"Very good, sir, and all ready be'ind." So saying, the boy clambered nimbly to his place; and thus, with Mark beside him and his new factotum behind, Tom set off at a rattling pace. But what with tortuous roads and lack of sign-posts they went astray so often that the sun had set when they arrived at their destination.

Thus shadows were lengthening when Tom had his first sight of Trevore,—a grey shape rising ghostly amid a tangled wilderness shut in by great trees starkly outlined against an opalescent sea that held a waning glory.

A house of hewn stone was Trevore, larger than expected, and shaped like a great E; a strong place, built long ago to defy time and the elements, and therefore glooming now in sullen, slow decay, its silent doorways and blinded windows blocked by warped timbers and rotting shutters.

Thus, dying, stood Trevore as the sun went down on yet another of its many days, slowly perishing with neglect yet undaunted amid this riotous wilderness that had once been lawns and gardens.

Tom gazed speechlessly, and for so long that Mark, seated nearby upon the broken column of a sundial, questioned him at last:

"A ghostly place, eh, Tom? No wonder the country folk never venture hereabout, and especially after sunset! What do you think of it?"

"Grand!" murmured Tom. "And grandly pitiful. It's pathetic and calls me,—it's grim and commands me."

"Your birthplace, Tom."

"The home of my unknown mother! Her feet trod this earth, her eyes gazed on that old sundial, her voice echoed from these old walls . . . Yes, Trevore is haunted for me already . . . I believe Trevore has been calling me all these years . . . well, here I am at last . . . Can you tell me about how old it is, Mark? Elizabethan, of course, but parts of it seem older, but how much?"

"Well, according to ancient deeds and county records it is set down in Thirteen Hundred odd as Trevorth, and before that as Trevorthen, and before that again as Trevorthannack."

"So very ancient?" said Tom, his gaze still intent. "So very old, and yet, in spite of abuse and neglect, here it stands firm rooted still . . . part of Old England! So here, Mark, here I shall camp."

"Oh?" enquired Mark.

"Ar!" replied Tom, "which means, 'yes', my hearty. To-morrow I shall buy a tent and what not."

"Meaning you will live here?"

"I shall! And labour from dawn to dusk, like a horse, old horse."

"And what of me, Tom?"

"Ah,—that is the burning question! To be sure, the weather is glorious, the place salubrious, no lack of water, salt or fresh, and yet, as surely, I cannot ask or expect such as you to muck in and rough it with such as Tom Wade, who naturally enjoys mucking and messing about and roughing it. Moreover, and to boot, you can return to the August Sire and Anxious Parent to assure him his errant Heir has gone safely to earth, and is on The Job to stick on till it's completed."

"M—yes!" said Mark, thoughtfully. "And yet . . . you may as well buy a tent large enough for two, with a shovel and pick or so, for while you muck about with hammer and saw, I'll mess around chopping and digging."

"Cheers!" exclaimed Tom, throwing up his now somewhat travel-worn 'deerstalker.' "Spoken like a trump, a Trojan and a brick, old pippin! For, 'pon my soul, Mark, you've become so large a feature in my life's landscape that . . . well . . . I should miss you quite damnably. So now let's back to our inn, foaming beakers and supper, eh, old fellow?"

"With a will. For, Tom, I've found more joy in these last few weeks than in . . . twenty long years. But where the dickens is our small giant?"

"Why—there!" quoth Tom, as towards them, driven with great dash and speed, came horse and dogcart, to be reined up before them very dexterously, and with graceful flourish of whip.

"Now, gen'lemen," cried Golia, "if ye'll please take your places I'll show ye a real bit o' drivin'—though this 'ere four-legged screw can't 'ardly do me justice."

CHAPTER VIII

WHICH, BEING OF NO PARTICULAR IMPORTANCE, MAY BE SKIPPED

NEXT morning, aroused by some low, persistent sound, Tom opened unwilling eyes, to see his factotum beside the bed, bearing a tray with tea and buttered toast.

"Coo, luv a duck, Guvnor," quoth this small servitor, "you takes a precious lot o' wakin', you do! 'Ere's me been sayin' 'tea, sir, tea, sir,' and you a-snorin'——

"Go, I never snore!"

"Right-o, Guv, then I only thought you did! Milk an' sugar, sir?"

"Both, thanks."

"Wot abaht our other gent, sir, 'im wiv the black 'air an' eyes like gimblets,—do

I take 'im tea, too?"

"Certainly, Go, yes, by all means. Give him my compliments and say I hope he slept well."

"Yessir."

"And you might ask if you can shave him."

"Very good, sir. And when I've done 'im, shall I come back an' give you a scrape too? Ye see, I works in a barber shop once."

"Did you, by Jingo!"

"Yessir, and never cut nobody—much, not to matter."

"However, I rather think I'll shave myself as usual. But you may bring me hot water in about half an hour."

"Very good, sir! Tea all right and up to the knocker, sir?"

"Excellent, thanks."

"Then I'll cut along to t'other gent."

"Do, but mind you don't cut him too!"

"Trust me, Guv. Blimey, I got a razor-'and steady as a rock!"

In due season, his toilet performed, Tom descended to the coffee-room, there to find Mark scanning the morning paper, but a Mark who looked at him with twinkling eyes and lips twitching to a smile.

"Tom," said he, laying aside the paper, "that boy . . . that amazing boy of yours!"

"Aha, the young shaver suggested shaving you, did he? And I would point out to you that his razor-hand is steady as a rock! Also that he 'never cut nobody—much'!"

Breakfast now appearing with waiter attendant, down sat they forthwith, and for some while conversation languished.

Hardly was their meal ended than Go presented himself to announce:

"Ho, Guvnor, hif you please, there's two waggins outside asting for you, and all loaded up wi' wood an' I dunno wot. So wot'll I tell 'em, sir?"

"Say it's for Trevore, and tell 'em to wait my instructions. And order the dogcart."

"Very good, sir."

"By the way, Mark, I suppose before we take possession, as it were, we must be armed with The Parent's authority—what?"

"Certainly, Tom. But that is all arranged; I have but to secure the keys from your father's agents in Falmouth, Ratcliff, the lawyers. I'll go after breakfast."

"Good man! And while in Falmouth you might buy a tent or so, with beds and necessary what-nots. Meanwhile I'll get along to Trevore . . . must see my wood

and so forth unloaded where I want it."

At this moment The Factotum presented himself, to salute smartly and say:

"Dogcart's at the door, sir. And oh—hif y'please, shall I drive?"

"Of course, young Jehu! So-long, Mark!"

Thus presently, with 'young Jehu' perched on lofty driving seat, small hands grasping reins and whip with such assured dexterity, while Tom, seated beside him, glanced alternately at the small, enraptured face above him and the richly beautiful scenery around him, away they bowled.

CHAPTER IX

TELLS HOW THEY 'GOT AT IT'

THE waggons had been unloaded and driven away; and now, with old Sol high-risen to watch with his great eye, the restoration of Trevore had begun. Tom and his small, eager helper, bare-armed in their shirtsleeves, were levering away the warped timbering that had blocked the wide, once hospitable doorway of this so ancient Manor House. Plank by plank these disfiguring timbers were removed, to disclose at last a wide, gracious stone arch supported by ruggedly massive columns, one of which still bore the stout iron pins whereon had once swung a ponderous door. Tom viewed these with glistening eyes, then, slowly and almost reverently, stepped through this arch into the echoing dimness of a long chamber, or rather hall, treading a floor carpeted with the dust of years.

Now, standing in this that had been his unknown mother's home and his own birthplace, he stood very still, gazing up and around at massive carven ceiling beams, at the great open hearth with its ingle-seats, at carved overmantel and panelled walls, cobwebbed and discoloured, that had waited so long, and now seemed pleading the restoring touch and labour of his hands . . . At last Tom spoke, almost whispering:

"All right, Old House, good old Trevore that waited and wouldn't die . . . I've come back at last . . . it's going to be all right from now on! You haven't waited in vain!"

Then with Go behind him and both moving as if in some holy place, Tom mounted the broad stair, pausing to examine chiselled baluster and stately newel-post, and so to a wide landing whence rooms and passages opened right and left. He went from room to room, throwing back rotted shutters and unclosing such of the dim, old lattices as yielded to his hand. Thus every room and cupboard, every

nook and corner Tom examined, and now with the keen, calculating eye of the restorer, roof and wall, ceiling and floor, tapping and testing here and there with blade of his penknife, while his small companion, following like his shadow, and as silent, did much the same, nor did he speak until they were out again in the blazing noon heat; then:

"Coo, Guvnor," he exclaimed, "I felt like I was in a church, didn't you?"

"Yes, boy, I did," Tom answered, solemnly, "and somehow I'm glad you felt the same. What do you think of it, Go?"

"Well, sir, a bit spooky like."

"Folk say it's haunted, Go."

"Wot—ghosts, sir? Luv a duck, and no wonder!"

"Yes . . . no wonder!" Tom repeated; and stood gazing up at the old house so long that Go questioned him at last:

"Ain't you afeard o' ghosts, Guv?"

"No!" answered Tom, his gaze still intent. "And certainly not the ghost that might haunt this old place."

"D'ye expect to see a ghost, Guv?"

"Hope, Go,—hope is the word."

"Oh,—well, don't you s'pose, sir, as it's about time we made a start?"

"Right, my Goliath, it certainly is. And first—brooms and brushes, dust and cobwebs! We'll at 'em this instant! This will be rather like cleaning the Augean Stables, my Hercules."

"Well, I'm uster cleanin' stables, sir, so let's git at it."

Thus presently broom and brush were at work so vigorously that cobwebs vanished and dust rose in dense and stifling clouds in which swirling mist they laboured and sneezed, yet to such effect that after some while a grimed and dusty Tom, sneezed, coughed and wheezed:

"Spell—oh!" And out into the clear, sunny air stepped he, followed by an even dustier and begrimed assistant.

"Ha!" sighed Tom, seating himself on his yet unopened tool-chest. "That's—that! And, oh for a draught of that cold blessedness called—ale!"

"Yessir!" answered The Factotum, and sped away, to return not so speedily by reason of a dripping, two-gallon demijohn.

"Why . . . how . . . what the——" Tom gasped in sheer ecstasy, as cork popped and forth into mug held ready, gushed and gurgled the ale of his desire.

"There y'are, Guvnor, I been keepin' it cool for ye in the brook over there."

"Go," said his master like one entranced. "Goly, Goliath, my pocket giant, your

wages go up from this blessed moment!"

"Thankee, sir—'ow much, sir?"

"They shall be," here Tom imbibed a long, glorious gulp, and sighed deeply, "doubled."

"Oh, crikey, sir, that's 'andsome, that is! An 'ole blooming quid! Cor, luv a duck! Blimey, sir, you does me proud!"

"And—blow me tight," sighed Tom, "if you go on as you are going, Go, you'll go far, wherever you go, and there'll be a bonus."

"Bonus, sir,—'ow much, please?"

"Well, if you continue to show the same astounding zeal——"

"'Arf a mo, sir,—what's zeal, if you please?"

"Zeal, my Go, means 'go', a readiness for any kind of work and what not,—up guards and at 'em, a willingness to tackle anything that turns up to be tackled, never give in and never say die, and so on, if you know what I mean."

"Do I,—not 'arf, sir! That's me to a T., that is! When I was took to the 'orspital an' they thought I was goin' to pop off, they sends for my Old Jacky to say Good-bye. So 'e takes me 'and an' 'e says, says 'e, Goly, 'e says, never say die! Up an' fight, 'e says, 'ave another go at old Death wi' both fists, and fight for your life and Old Jacky!' So I fights, sir, and Old Jacky prays 'Our Father'! Old Jacky can pray when needful, 'arder than 'e swears, and—well, 'ere I am, sir, all alive and kickin'! And now, sir, 'ow much bonus, if you please?"

"Five bob a week while we're on this job, and Fifty Pounds when we've finished."

"Fifty . . . Pounds . . ." The boy's lips continued to move, but for a while no sound came; when at last he spoke it was in a broken whisper:

"Oh, sir, you . . . you ain't . . . coddin' me, are ye? You ain't bungin' up me ear'ole wiv spoof?"

"Certainly not!" answered Tom. "That's what you'll get if you go on as you're going, Go, my hearty."

"Blimey!" murmured the boy, his quick, bright eyes radiant. "Then I'll be able to bring my Old Jacky out o' London . . . yes . . . out o' the Old Smoke to where the air's fresh, like the doctor says."

"Good idea!" nodded Tom, refilling his mug.

"Guvnor, you've made me that dry I can't 'ardly swaller, so can I 'ave a drink, please?"

"Of course! The ale's beside you, and plenty of it, glory be! So help yourself, Goliath, drink and be thankful."

"Yessir, thankee, sir, but cider's me tipple along o' me promise as I swore to Old Jacky on the Book, so when not cider, water."

"What, is your Jacky a teetotaller,—blue ribbon and what not?"

"Well, no, sir, 'e likes 'is pint occasional, 'im 'avin' been a sailor ages ago, that's 'ow 'e lost 'is peeper, at sea. But 'e don't fink ale nor yet beer is good for a lad as wanted to be a champeen boxer."

"So that was your ambition?"

"Yessir, an' I done very good, won a lot o' battles, I did, till I took ill, an' that fair squashed me chances. And now I'll go fetch me cider,—and 'ow about summat t'eat, sir?"

"Ah," sighed Tom, "a sandwich, say, or crust of bread and cheese would have ——"

"Blimey, Guv, I can do ye better'n that! 'Arf a mo!" And away he sped again, to return with a capacious basket, wherefrom he now produced, and with as many flourishes, a cold chicken richly browned, a pile of ham, thin-sliced and pink, a dish of salad, with crusty loaf, golden butter, and cheese.

"There y'are, Guvnor!" quoth he, setting forth these dainties upon white cloth outspread in grassy shade. "'Ow's that?"

"Go," said his master; taking proffered knife and fork. "Goly, my zealous old buck, there is no word for it except—eat!"

"Not me, sir,—nossir, 'tain't manners till you've 'ad your whack."

"Factotum," quoth Tom, sternly, "sit down and eat with your master or take a week's notice!"

"Yessir, very good, sir!" said the boy, breathlessly obedient.

"Now before we eat, my Go, fill your cider-mug and let us drink health and long life to your Old Jacky."

"Oh, thankee, sir, wiv all me 'eart!"

So, the toast being duly honoured, they sat and ate together, and with excellent appetite.

Their meal ended, away sped Go to the little brook rippling pleasantly somewhere near by, there to wash plates and dishes before stowing them in the basket; while Tom, stretched at ease in shade of a tree, puffed fragrant contentment from his bulldog pipe, and gazed dreamily up at the old house,—until Zeal, on two legs, roused him with the question:

"Sir, ain't it abaht time we was 'up an' at it' again?"

"It is!" sighed Tom; then, stifling a yawn that made his eyes water, he rose, and at it again they went.

Diligently they laboured together, storing tools and wood in the now dustless hall, against chance of rain, until the setting sun cast lengthening shadows; they were still thus occupied when to them came Mark astride a spirited horse, at sight of which animal away leapt Go to grasp rein, soothe, pat and cherish the nervous creature while his rider dismounted.

"Good lad!" said Mark. "He's still a trifle fresh."

"'E'll be all right wiv me, sir."

"So it seems, my boy!" Then coming where a perspiring Tom was storing the last of his precious wood, "Well, what of the house?" he enquired.

"Marvellous!" Tom replied. "The main fabric is sound as a bell, a few floor-boards gone in places and most of the window-frames, but otherwise it's going to be a much simpler job than I thought. By George, they knew how to build in the good old, bad old days. Eight bedrooms, no bathroom, of course, three large attics, a grand hall, morning and dining-rooms—and the usual offices."

"And anuvver in the yard at the back, sir," piped The Factotum, who now approached with the horse nuzzling his shoulder.

"Did you get the tent, Mark?"

"Two,—a big one for us, and a small, bell-shapen affair for The Factotum."

"Beds and what not?"

"Three folding beds, Tom, and every what not I could think of."

"Good!" nodded Tom, reaching for his coat. "Then, seeing I and my small giant are worn, thirsty and deuced peckish, let's to the village inn for supper."

"The 'Three Pilchards,' Tom, kept by one John Pengelly, where I have ordered supper and arranged quarters for the night, if agreeable."

"Marvellous!" exclaimed Tom for the second time, filling his pipe. "Let's toddle forthwith. Go, my lad, give me a hand to get our steed between the shafts."

"Lemme, sir, I shan't need you, just smoke y'r pipe, sir, I'll have 'em ready in a blinkin' jiffy!"

"That boy," said Mark, actually chuckling as he swung nimbly to saddle, "is an original!"

"He is!" nodded Tom. "And so much besides that I have raised his wages."

CHAPTER X

INTRODUCES AN 'AGED SOUL'

THE 'Three Pilchards' proved to be a smallish, plain, very Cornish structure in the middle of a small, plain village which seemed the more so by contrast with the natural beauty of its immediate surroundings: glory of rugged coast with noble headlands rising majestic from a blue sea that, just now, was flooding the narrow, rocky porth where fishing boats rode at their moorings.

"Marvellous!" said Tom again, pausing to look round upon this fair prospect. "No wonder Mrs. Penhallo loves her Cornwall. And, by the way 'Penhallo' is rather a lovely name, Mark; musical and so on."

"Most Cornish names are, Tom."

"I suppose you knew the country hereabout before I was born, eh, Mark?"

"Oh yes."

"Mrs. Penhallo, that rather odd lady, told me she lived here in Merrion . . . I wonder if we shall meet again? 'Penhallo'—yes, it's a musical, pretty name."

"Well, now, what about ale, Tom?"

"That's music too, Mark! And I'll enjoy it out here. Have a pint sent out to me, old horse, and right speedily."

"Verily Thomas, eftsoons. Meanwhile I'll go and rid me of some of this Cornish dust, and you could do with a wash also."

"Yes, b'Jingo! Trevore is all over me! Goliath, cut off indoors, find my bedroom, and have plenty of hot water ready for me while I drink in Cornwall with my ale."

"Yessir,—a barf! Very good, Guv."

Thus presently Tom sat refreshing his inner man with stout ale and delighting his outer with vision of the glories of sea and landscape until, roused by a hoarse sigh, he glanced thitherward, and beheld a small, bent old man seated on bench nearby, contemplating an empty tankard and the beauties of earth and sky now glorified by sunset, with the jaundiced eye of cold disparagement, sighing meanwhile so heavily that Tom, leaning near, questioned him at last:

"My dear, old sir, why so low-spirited? I mean to say—no joy, no gladness and what not—and why?"

"Well, young maister, I be a old, disapp'inted soul, that's wot I be, and that be why."

"Tough luck, old boy! But what's your trouble?"

"Sussex!" replied the Ancient, with sigh deeper than ever, "Sussex be my trouble!"

"Oh?" enquired Tom. "I happen to know Sussex rather well,—how can Sussex trouble you so far away?"

"That's jest it!" moaned the Aged One. "Sussex be theer an' I be here, an' both

so fur from one another!"

"Oh?" said Tom again.

"Ar!" quoth Hoary Age. "Sussex be theeraway and I be here-along. And, wot's more, my ale pot be empty as a drum, it be."

"Why, then, of course it must be filled," said Tom, rising.

"Thankee, sir, and set down, I'll call John Pengelly drackly minute!" So saying, the old man lifted knotted staff and therewith rapped loudly on ledge of the open window beside him, until in answer to this insistent summons, out strode a smiling, ruddy fellow in jersey and long sea boots, to enquire:

"Eh, Jole—wot, another?"

"Ar! Me darter be away to Truro, so I be makin' a bit of 'ay while the sun shines, b'kindness of this 'ere young feller." The Aged Person's tankard being duly recharged, he sipped, nodded, drank and thereafter spoke:

"Young feller, I be Joel Bates, that be 'oo I am! Sixty odd years ago, me bein' then a innercent child o' ten smilin' summers, me lovin' parients ups and brings me out o' Sussex downalong 'ere into Cornwall! And wot, I axes ee, wot be the result?"

"Mr. Bates," answered Tom, gravely, "I cannot say."

"Then, young man, I'll tell ee. The result be as I been wishing Cornwall were Sussex ever since! Ah, with arl me throbbin' 'eart!"

"Then you hope and intend to go back to Sussex, I suppose?"

"Then you supposes wrong, young man! I bean't 'opeing nor yet intendin' no sich things no'ow."

"Why not, Mr. Bates?"

"Because, young man, me bein' 'ere by the will o' Providence 'ere I bides till Providence sends me back. For lookee, young feller, I beant never nowise the man to fly in the face o' Providence, not me—no! I never did and I never will no time under no carcumstance whatsoever, seein' as 'ow——"

At this precise moment, from the immensities above them a shrill voice hailed:

"Ho, Guvnor, all's ready! Water's ready an' waitin', an' me too!"

"Oo be callin' so shrill and owdacious?" the Hoary One demanded, indignantly.

"Well," replied Tom, finishing his ale, "so far as I have been able to judge up to now, yon was the urgent wail of a groom, a gardener, a barber, a carpenter, a boxer and a general factotum. So, Mr. Bates, I must bid you good evening and—hook it."

"But, young man, 'e says 'water'! So I says wheer's the fule, says I, as wants water, I says?"

"Why, since you ask me, Mr. Bates, I says here, I says. So if you'll excuse me

I'll pop along."

So into the 'Three Pilchards' Tom 'popped', and up a narrow though scrupulously clean stair to find his Factotum waiting to guide him into a small, trim bedroom where stood a large earthenware vessel half full of steaming water which Goliath explained by saying:

"I thought while you was abaht it, sir, I'd better give ye a proper sloosh an' rub dahn all over like, an' then give ye clo'es a good brushin'—eh, Guv?"

"Extremely zealous of you, Go, my man, but I'll 'sloosh' myself."

"But wot about y'r back, sir?"

"Oh, I'll manage it as usual. But I tell you what, you might go and bath Mr. Mark, after his dusty ride."

"Very good, sir! Lock the door, sir, there's women abaht—there always is!" With which, The Factotum sped away, leaving a chuckling Tom to his ablutions.

Going downstairs, after some while, Tom found himself in another small room, also clean and trim, where a pleasant-faced, motherly woman, evidently the presiding genius of this pervading orderliness, was laying table for supper.

"Good evening, sir," said she, greeting Tom with a bobbing curtsey, "I'm Mary Pengelly, and I do hope as steak cut thick, wi' onions, 'll soot ee. Your little boy do say as you'm main partial to onions, so I'm doing a plenty. I do hope as steak, cut thick——"

"Marvellous!" said Tom for the third or fourth time that evening. "Mrs. Pengelly, my mouth waters at the very idea . . . and . . . yes, by Jupiter, I can smell . . . those onions! Ha, most delectable and scrumptious!"

Mrs. Pengelly beamed, curtsied again and departed. Tom was at the window, gazing through glowing sunset at a golden headland rising in splendour from a purple sea, when came Mark, washed, brushed and actually laughing; at which unusual sight Tom chuckled also, with the question:

"What's the joke, old boy?"

"Our Factotum! Tom, this amazing urchin came prepared and actually demanding to . . . give me a bath! And in the hand-basin!"

"Zeal, Mark, zeal! Our Go is certainly a go-er!"

"Beyond question! Also he informed me he has been 'towel boy' in a Turkish Barf."

Here, after brief rapping, the door opened and Goliah announced:

"Supper's comin' along, gen'lemen!"

Which it did, in fact, borne by a smiling Mary Pengelly on dish of generous proportions,—a steak like a joint, rimmed sufficiently with fat delicately browned

and crisped, surrounded graciously with plenteous garnishment of savoury onions, the whole enriched with a thick, yet natural gravy . . .

With which this chapter shall end.

CHAPTER XI

BEING CHAPTER INTRODUCTORY TO——

A WEEK of unremitting toil in and about the ancient house of Trevore had made so little impression to the casual eye that the three labourers, just now seated at their midday meal, though eating with hearty appetite engendered of their late exertions and this sweet sea air, viewed the result of their past efforts with some discouragement.

"Not much to show yet, I'm afraid!" sighed Tom, cutting another slice from the joint of cold beef supplied by Mrs. Pengelly.

"Amazingly little!" Mark agreed, frowning at his blistered palms. "I'm becoming positively horny-handed what with pick and spade, and no wonder,—the density of vegetation hereabouts is tropical!"

"Oh, but, sirs and guvnors," said The Factotum, consolingly, "hanyone wiv 'arf an eye can see as 'ow somebody's been scratchin' abaht the old place, 'ere an' there!"

"Scratching!" sighed Tom. "The word is pretty apt, eh, Mark, old spademan?"

"The *mot juste*!" nodded Mark. "I'll trouble you for more beef, Tom. And this reminds me, though I don't know how it should, that I need more shaving soap. So I'll take the afternoon off and stroll over to the village and at the same time get anything else we may require."

"Jam, sir, an' sugar!" answered Goliath instantly. "An' tea an' tinned milk, sir. And we'll be needin' more salt butter for me an' fresh for you. An' there's only one tin o' sardines left, an' old Mr. Bates 'as got pots an' pots of 'oney for sale as 'e told me isself. An' we need some more heggs to go wiv our bacon rashers, an' there ain't too many o' them! An' our bread's a bit staleish—wot's left of it! An we ain't got 'nuff salt nor yet pepper, an' the mustard tin's empty, an' we'd better git some more corfee, so wot abaht it, Guv?"

"Sounds an utterly repulsive mixture, Go, my boy, and makes me wonder I can ever eat anything."

"Eat, sir? Crikey, you're a champeen eater, you are, and no error! I never see

nobody as took their feed more 'ole-'earted! The way as you can polish off y'r bacon and eggs of a morning is that pretty as I dunno wot!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Tom, glancing rather askance at the portion of meat upon his fork. "I suppose camping out, sleeping in the open air and so forth, encourages one to eat."

"'Sright, sir—not 'arf! Lumme, I never et meself like I do 'ere at old Trevore since I've took up wiv you. Being your faxstotum soots me fine, same as I 'opes I soots you, sir."

"So far, Goliah,—but I'm just waiting, of course, the chance to give you a week's notice——"

"Guvnor . . . Oh, blimey, sir—'struth! Don't say it . . . if ye was to git rid o' me now I'd feel like I'd cut me blinkin' froat, straight I should. Y'see I b'long wiv ye nah f'ever an' ever amen. Wot ud ye do wivout me t'look arter ye, you an' Mr. Mark, I like t'know. Arter all I done for ye an' tried so 'ard t'do! An' now . . . to talk about givin' me——"

Tom laughed, then, to his dismay, saw the boy's pleading eyes dimmed with sudden tears.

"'S all right, Guvnor," he explained chokingly, "it's only becos I'm . . . so perishin', frightful glad as you was only jokin'! So please go on wiv y'r eatin' and don't mind me."

"Well now," said Tom, after a rather uncomfortable silence, "Mark, I think you had better take my little Titan to help, though you'll probably need a couple of waggons as well."

And so, when platters, dishes, etc., had been washed, and put each in its appointed and individual place, for this was an extremely orderly camp, the marketers set forth together, much experienced man and eager boy talking together like the friends they had become.

So Tom was left alone. . . . And now it was that his good angel, seizing this chance, thought it well to introduce into his life,—and this story,—that Vital Element which should upset his serene assurance, should trouble, plague, mystify, endanger and finally, bless and alter his whole outlook: and this extremely potent agent of course The Element Elementally Feminine,—such Person indeed as requires and demands very rightly an entirely new chapter. As here followeth:

CHAPTER XII

A BLAZING sun, and Tom, shirtsleeves rolled high above powerfully-muscled arms, totally occupied upon the nice business of cutting and fitting a mortice, when he became aware of a voice which, though not at all ghostly, struck his preoccupied mind as a voice entirely out of place in this remoteness, where none but voices male should be. Therefore he arrested busy mallet and chisel the better to listen:

"Say—you! You over there—are you stone deaf?"

With some vague suspicion that the unknown voice might possibly be addressing himself, he now glanced up and about, and thus beheld a face peering at him above the old sea-wall,—a wild, wet face streaked and plastered with long strands of wild, wet hair, wide blue eyes that glared on him, lips fiercely scornful that cried on him:

"Yes, you—you great lummox, it's you I'm calling! Hell's bells,—how long must I hang on to your old wall . . . by my eyebrows? Get a move on . . . before I . . . flop!"

Tom dropped mallet, laid down chisel with due care for its edge, then moved—and to such effect that very soon his long arms had clasped and lifted a clinging dampness to safety. A tall young woman dripping sea-water from head to foot; an extremely shapely, well-rounded young woman whose form her clinging garments showed forth in no uncertain manner; an entirely self-possessed young woman who, winding her dark red hair into a thick rope, squeezed sea out of it, gazing at Tom the while with a pair of long-lashed, dark blue eyes rather as though he were something quite evidently noxious, or so thought Tom; also when she spoke her voice was of a low, rich quality suggestive of fresh cream, Tom thought, was decidedly unfriendly as her look, and this the word she uttered:

"Rubber!"

"I . . . beg your pardon?"

"Not granted, Mister Rubberneck!" she retorted. "And you rubbering and staring at poor, half-drowned me, and me feeling like a fried egg!"

"Really?" said Tom, mentally tottering.

"Yes, re-ah-lly!" she mocked scathingly. "Can't you see how I am? If those things in your head are eyes,—can't you see just how I am?"

"A trifle dampish!" Tom suggested.

"Dampish?" she cried, with angry flash of eyes and teeth. "Say, if you were half as damp you'd melt, which would trouble me none whatever! Where have I got to, anyway?"

"This is Trevore."

"Oh, and where's that?"

"Here."

"Shore, I know that now, but how far is here from Merrion?"

"About a mile. Do you live there?"

"No, two miles worse, I guess. And what am I to do? Will you just look at me!"

"I am."

"You shore are,—and me as good as nood!"

"Nood?" Tom enquired.

"Nee-ude!" she repeated, mincingly. "Oh—naked, then . . . and you staring ——"

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Tom, flushing, "I hope you don't think——"

"But I do think! And you are, too!"

"Then I must beg you to——"

"Save yore breath!"

"But I assure you——"

"You can't, and don't! So hush up. I'm thinking now, yessir, I'm thinking real good and hard however can I walk miles like this as good as nood, I mean naked ——" Here she sneezed.

"Well now," said Tom, "I'm going to think."

"Can you?" she enquired as if greatly astonished.

"Can I—what?"

"Think! And if you do think any, does it hurt you a whole lot? And if you can think, while you're thinking lend me your handkerchief while you do it . . . I'm . . . going to . . . sneeze again!"

Reaching the needed article from his discarded coat, he tendered it apologetically:

"It was clean this morning, but I'm afraid it isn't absolutely speckless."

"It'll do-o-o . . . give it me . . . quick!" And when she had sneezed more violently than before, Tom said:

"Thank heaven the sun is so extremely hot!"

"D'you call this hot?" she demanded witheringly.

"Well, don't you?"

"Not so you can notice it, nossir! You should just feel and see our sun where I come from!"

"Where, pray?"

"South Texas, away in God's Own Country!"

"But why should America be God's country particularly?"

"Just bee-cause!" she answered, on the brink of another sneeze.

"Look here, I say!" quoth Tom, anxiously, "you'll be taking cold if you stand there doing nothing!"

"And see you here!" she retorted. "Just what can I do about it? Tell me that!"

"Certainly!" he answered, instantly. "You can take off your things and sit in my blankets over there in the tent while I make a fire over here and dry them."

"Oh—can I?"

"Well—can't you?"

"Not in ten million years,—no, siree! Who are you dare suggest such a thing, anyway?"

"I'm Tom Wade, and a little better than I look, evidently. But then my looks don't do me justice, never did! But all the same——"

"And what," she broke in, "what sort of creature d'you take me for, I'd like to know?"

"An American girl who looks better than she will be if she catches cold, dies and is buried."

"And how," she questioned, viewing him with the utmost disparagement, "how am I to know you are so much better than you look?"

"By looking!" said Tom. "Look me over; I haven't got much of a face, I know, but take a good look at it and judge for yourself."

So, for a long moment, fearless blue eyes gazed deep into honest grey, until blue eyes closed to a sneeze more violent than any preceding. And when she had recovered sufficiently, this tall, shapely, strangely self-confident young woman nodded stately head, saying in voice grown almost kind:

"Tom Wade, I guess you're white, and on the dead level, but all the same I'll let our old sun dry me the best he can."

"Right-ho!" quoth Tom. "Then I'll light a fire to help him. Sit here on my tool-chest till I get you a proper chair."

"What—here?"

"A folding camp-chair from the tent."

"Is this box thing your tool-chest?"

"Yes, and very precious."

"So you're one of these English working-men, are you?"

"Ex-actly!" answered Tom, busied collecting shavings for the fire.

"Oh! And what d'you think you're doing around here, anyway?"

"Restoring the poor old house yonder."

"Well, I kind of like the look of it. Ancient buildings, really and truly old, are—no, is—one of the very few things we're shy on in America,—and this looks some aged and hoary!"

"Yes," said Tom, setting wood on his fire, which now blazed merrily. "Trevore was built somewhere about Twelve Hundred Anno Domini."

"Jumping snakes! That cert'nly is some age!"

"Yes, it was a home, folk were living here long before America was discovered."

"And that's shore something to think about!" she murmured, turning to glance at the old house with new interest. "To think it's been here all these ages! It kind of makes me feel humble somehow."

"Exactly!" said Tom, fervently. "You've said it! That's just how I feel about it. Yes, I feel it a privilege to work for the old place. . . . to do my best to help it really live and bloom again."

"Yes, it looks like it wants someone to love it."

"Quite!" exclaimed Tom. "Oh quite! Abso-lutely! What I mean to say is—you put my very thoughts into words and say 'em right."

"And that's just where you're wrong, Mister Tom Wade. Ex-actly!" she mimicked.

"How?" he enquired, watching how she began to unravel and shake out the long, wet strands of her dark, red hair. "Pray how am I wrong?"

"Because," she answered, crouching nearer the fire, "everyone I've met in England thinks my say-so is all wrong. That's why they've yanked me over here,—to teach me how to speak and act like an English lady. And what I've seen of your fine English dames I don't just cotton on to, no siree! And as for the men—Oh Dear Land of my Fathers!"

"What's wrong with them?" enquired Tom, placing another log on the fire.

"Everything!" she answered, with snap of white teeth. "Specially if they happen to be lords!"

"Oh!" murmured Tom, a little apprehensively.

"Shore!" she nodded, with the utmost finality. "For real men,—give me a bronc-busting cow-puncher like Tex Stratton, or a two-handed gun-toter like our Old Jake! Jake can let rip from both hips at once, and get 'em right and left! And I'm no slouch with a forty-five eether."

"Really!" said Tom, pondering this. "It all sounds extremely interesting . . . if I could get the hang of it, but I'm afraid I don't exactly twig."

"What's twig?"

"Apprehend your rather abstruse technicalities and what not, if you know what I

mean?"

"Well, I don't. Not a little bit,—so what?"

"Oh, never mind, let it go and tell me——"

"Let what go?"

"What you were trying to tell me——"

"'Trying' indeed!"

"Yes, about some person named Jake and——"

"Shore! Jake was Dad's foreman, and the dearest old galoot that ever hit leather, a two-gun fighter from Sonora, and had been Marshal of Deadwood, too, yessir,—and taught me how to thumb a trigger from the hip. And then there were all the other boys, a rip-snorting bunch, I'll say so! I used to ride the round-ups with them and Dad, and could rope and hog-tie a steer for branding, with the best, yessir!"

"Could you though?" said Tom, his mind whirling.

"I'll say I could, and can yet! Don't you believe me?"

"Certainly! I mean to say I should, of course, if I could get the vaguest glimmer of your meaning."

"Say now, Mr. Tom Wade, don' you understand plain English?"

"Well," he answered, dubiously, "I used to imagine I could——"

"Used to? Meaning you don't any more?"

"Not in the very least, I'm afraid."

"Mister Wade, what's biting you?"

"Nothing, thank heaven!"

"Well then, you're just plain, sure-enough dumb!"

"Dumb?" he repeated, looking up in dazed manner at the beautiful face outthrust at him so fiercely.

"Yes, dumb,—locoed! You're all solid ivory above the ears, and just use your head to grow hair and hang a hat on! That's you, Mister Wade,—now what d'you say?"

"Say," he repeated, shaking his head, "all I can say is that my saucy dears are playing me boxes of bricks for my lump of lead is all out of curl."

"Ho-ly Smoke!" she murmured, opening her blue eyes on him. "Are you plumb loopy or am I? Just what kind of talk are you giving me?"

"English, my child, which you don't seem to twig either. For instance: 'Saucy dears' are these shapely ears. My 'lump of lead'—this lovely head. 'All out of curl'—all in a whirl. Now do you twig?"

"Sure, I get you, Steve! If I say 'you're a daisy' it means 'you're just crazy', eh,

Mr. Wade?"

"Quite!" he nodded. "That's the idea. And now, please, tell me your name."

"Suppose I don't."

"Then of course I shall call you Venus."

"Oh, slush!" she exclaimed from behind her curtain of hair.

"Because," he continued, "you came to me like the lovely goddess—rising from the sea."

"She was Aphrodite, I'll have you know."

"That was her Greek name, you may take your choice, but if you——Oh, I say ——!" He broke off, his gaze upon her mane of hair which, drying to the genial heat of sun and fire, was now transforming itself into a shimmering red glory.

"Well," she demanded, parting this silky curtain to peer out at him, "what *do* you say?"

"Your hair——"

"What's wrong with it?"

"Oh, nothing, I was only thinking."

"What are you thinking?"

"That it's exactly right, colour and so on, for a Titian Venus."

"Mr. Wade, you can cut out all this Venus stuff,—my name's Doodney,—that's the English part of me."

"Doodney!" Tom repeated. "Doesn't sound English, somehow."

"Well, it is! And my first name's Samantha, and that's the American part."

"Fine!" said Tom. "Samantha is a pretty—no a handsome name, and suits you to perfection, Miss Doodney. Saman-tha,—yes, it's soft, sweetly musical—like a spoken caress. I mean to say it's—well—music, if you know what I mean."

"It was my mother's name; she was little and sweet, and died years ago, but it don't soot me, never did and never will. I'm too big and not a bit sweet,—well, I guess not! I take after my Dad, and he and the boys used to call me 'Sam'."

"Sacrilege!" exclaimed Tom, almost fiercely. "Entirely and preposterously wrong, and frightfully bad taste."

"Hold on right there!" cried Samantha, and quite fiercely. "Let me tell you my Dad was one of the best, finest, cleanest, square-shootingest he-men that God ever put breath into, and what was good enough for him, goes with me! Well, I guess yes! I'll say so!"

"Certainly, Miss Doodney! Any man who could have been your father must be all you say and more."

"And he was killed . . . shot in the back by a two-legged side-winder that Dad

had run off the ranch; a tin-horn, two-spot gambling crook from the Mexican Border. So we just naturally lit out after him, the whole outfit. . . . But it was Old Jake and I, being better mounted, ran him down in the badlands. Then before I could thumb trigger, he shoots down my cayuse—and there's me down and out too . . . so it's Old Jake shoots it out, and gets the murdering skunk plumb centre. So there's the end of a poison toad,—yessir there's one snake less in the world, but . . . it couldn't bring . . . Dad back to life. . . ."

The fierce, blue eyes were glaring at Tom now through glitter of tears, the sight of which wrought in him such yearning to comfort her that, words failing him, he looked his sympathy, then stooped to put more wood upon the fire; yet this strange young woman, quick to heed this eloquent look, was as quick to welcome it,—Tom felt his hand seized in warm, vital clasp and heard her say in voice softer, sweeter, gentler than he had thought possible, though she kept her face still hidden behind that shimmering screen:

"Thanks, Tom Wade, thanks . . . a whole lot! Only God knows how lonesome I have been . . . how much I've . . . missed my Dad! And I shore just hate to show my feelings,—and specially to these English! I'll say so!"

"I'm English, too, Miss Samantha, and thinking on your tragic story, I say thank God for Old England, where we don't allow murderous villains armed to the teeth to go about shooting people. You'll be safe here among us——"

"Who wants to be safe?" she demanded. "And I don't see such heaps to thank God for. England don't cut any ice with me. The only men who look like they are men are your police, and they only do because it's their paid job."

"We have a soldier or so——"

"Oh, shore, but they have to be, with their red-coats that could show up and give them away a mile off! And then—take a look at yourself!"

"I don't," sighed Tom. "I never do, except when shaving, and not much then. But what do you find so wrong in me?"

"Well, I reckon you wouldn't stack up very high if it came to a show-down."

"Perhaps not! Now what about a spot or so of tea?"

"Tea?" she exclaimed. "The way you Englishmen can sit around and swill the doggone stuff gets my goat!"

"Then why not tie it up?"

"Tie what up?"

"Your goat, of course. Though why you've got to lug the beastie about with you, if you really do——"

"Oh, shucks!"

"Is your goat a goat or only American slang? And if a goat, did you take the poor animal for a swim with you, and if so—where is it? But if only slang—what on earth does it mean?"

"Find out, Mister Smarty!"

"No, Miss Doodney. Instead I'll show you how to brew tea and exactly how to drink it."

"I'd rather you showed me your old home."

"Not 'home', just a house."

"What's the difference?"

"A house can't be a home until it has come alive by being lived in, taking its character from the folk who cherish or neglect it . . . if you see what I'm rambling about."

"Oh, I twig!" she nodded. "And I like yore idea, so you don't have to look so all-fired ashamed of yourself. And I'm dead set on seeing the old house now."

"So you shall after tea, when you're dry enough to leave the fire without catching your death of cold and——"

"Oh, go get your old tea!"

Away strode Tom, and soon returned bearing a folding table and thereon the usual paraphernalia for this truly English meal.

"Tell me, Miss Doodney," he questioned, setting fire-blackened kettle to boil, "don't you drink tea in the States?"

"Well, we do and we don't," she answered, watching the deft way he spread butter on bread with smooth, light caress of knife-blade, then cut the slice swiftly yet delicately, "we use tea, but our real drink is cawfee, and we make it lots of ways. But I like it best out of a tin pot right off the fire, good and sweet and plenty black and strong."

"Sounts a trifle grim!" said Tom, setting the teapot to warm. "I'm afraid you'll find our English tea much too feeble in comparison."

"However, Mr. Wade, I'll drink yore tea and try to like it. Yore bread and butter looks mighty appetizing!"

And so, tea being brewed, eat and drink she did, Tom also, of course, and each with such hearty appetite that for some while he was kept busy cutting bread and butter. At last, said she:

"Yore tea tastes better than I thought."

"The open air perhaps?" he suggested.

"Maybe, though I never enjoyed it like now. Are you fond of cookies, Mr. Wade?"

"I'm very keen on buns and cake and so on."

"Have you ever tasted a real chocolate-layer cake?"

"Never!"

"Or Angel Cake or doughnuts or turnovers or crullers?"

"I've not even heard of them, alas!"

"Well, maybe, if you behave I'll make you some."

"Cheers!" he exclaimed. "By Jove and Jingo that would be simply ripping of you!"

"Ripping?" she enquired.

"Yes, it means corking, splendiferous, scrumptious and so on."

"English isn't so simple as I thought!" she sighed. "And Englishmen aren't all such poor fish,—'specially one!"

"Glad you think so," said Tom, endeavouring not to look too self-conscious.

"Yes," she murmured, dimpled chin on hand, blue eyes gazing dreamily at the fire, "there was an Englishman I met on the steamer coming over, he seemed a regular fellow and ace high on looks!"

"Does that mean he was handsome?"

"It certainly does, and then some more."

"Oh!" said Tom, frowning into his teacup. "So you found one Englishman to admire?"

"Yes, but not for his good looks and pretty ways, but because he's a sure-enough man, yessir!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, in-deed! And don't you get all riled and het-up because I can admire a fine man—though he is an Englishman."

"Not I!" said Tom, rather grimly. "But what did you find so dashed admirable about the fellow, pray?"

"Well, Mr. Wade, besides being such a good-looker, he shore can use his fists, —my, my! Can he handle himself? Well, I'll say he can! Soon as we landed we had trouble about our trunks, and one of the officials got pretty snooty, and Mandy, she's my old nurse, shore told him off, which made him madder than a hornet. So I took a hand,—just then up came Romeo and laid into this roughneck good and proper! Mr. Wade, I've just naturally seen some fistic battles, but never anything to equal my Romeo,—feet so light and quick, and a punch like the kick of a mule!"

"May I offer you more bread and butter?"

"No, thanks. And, as I'm telling you, my Romeo just——"

"Cake, Miss Doodney?"

"Say, Mister Tom Wade, don't you want to hear?"

"Well, no—not particularly."

"I guess you think fighting's low, eh, Mister Wade?"

"Sometimes, Miss Doodney, and especially when ladies are present."

"Oh, shore—Mister Wade!" The beautifully-shaped nose was uplifted against him, the darkly-blue eyes glared down at him, the ruddy lips smiled scorn upon him, and Tom ostentatiously removed the butter-dish, saying:

"Your hair, Miss Doodney, though quite nice to look at, should not be eaten with one's butter. Now, may I refill your cup?"

"You may not! I guess I'm dry enough now to be hitting the trail."

"Not with your fists surely?" he enquired gravely, noting how her large though shapely hands had clenched themselves.

For a moment she scowled, then pursing her lips in supercilious bow, she rose and sank before him in slow and gracious curtsey, saying in affected, die-away voice and carefully-chosen English:

"Ooh Mister Wade, Miss Dee-oodney humbly presents her compliments and thanks for your kind hospitality, and begs to wish yuh a very Good-afternoon."

"And now," said Tom, helping himself to the last piece of bread and butter, "do up your hair, Samantha, shake down your petticoats, and take a look over the oldest house you've ever seen." Here once again they viewed each other, eye to eye; then Tom smiled,—Samantha flashed white teeth with soft, throaty laugh, and nodded, saying:

"Tom Wade, you're not such an ornery cuss, after all, so I'll be hornswoggled if I don't!"

"Hornswoggled?" he repeated, watching how she wound up and crowned herself with her shimmering red-gold hair.

"Shore," she nodded, pinning this shining coronet secure with hairpins she had produced as by some sleight-of-hand, "hornswoggled is shore-enough American, and in English would be 'gol-darned'—no, I reckon you'd say 'blowed'."

"Fine!" quoth Tom heartily, "'blowed' is truly English."

"But not very ladylike, Mr. Wade."

"It all depends on 'who' and 'how'!"

"I mean it won't do if I were to say it to your Queen Victoria when I'm presented."

"Well, hardly! So you're to be presented, are you, my poor Samantha?"

"Oh shore!" she replied, dismally. "And aren't I just hating the very idea!"

"Then why not dodge it?"

"Wouldn't I like to! But they've got me cinched."

"And please what's the English for 'cinched'?"

"Hog-tied."

"But that sounds perfectly frightful, you know."

"I do know it! Aren't I telling you?"

"By 'hog-tied' you mean compelled, I suppose?"

"You bet I do."

"Well, who's doing the compelling?"

"The whole outfit—my guardian and a crowd of these aristocratic dames and a perfectly awful English lord, an earl or something, and he's certainly the earliest earl that ever said 'Haw'!"

"Does he really say 'haw', Samantha?"

"I'll say he does—and then glares at me through an eyeglass arrangement till I feel like crawling through a crack in the floor!"

"An . . . eyeglass?" questioned Tom in sudden apprehension. "Did you . . . do you——"

"Do I what?"

"Happen to know his name . . . title and so on?"

"It sounds like Orringham or Storrington or something, but I hardly noticed anything except that frightful, glittering thing in his eye."

"I know—I mean to say I can well believe it must have been pretty scaly and what not."

"It was a gleaming frightfulness! I tell you this Earl is about the only thing on two legs that ever made me back down, that eyeglass had me buffaloed; it kind of got the drop on me like a sawed-off shot-gun, it cert'nly did!"

"Precisely!" quoth Tom, in heartiest agreement. "But what's he got to do with you?"

"Nothing, thank God!" she answered, fervently. "Except that he knows my guardian, and is arranging for my presentation at Court, like I tell you."

"Did you have much chat with him?"

"No, it was he did the chatting, and all about his son, a count or vis-count, and was I mad!"

"Oh—why?"

"Because, would you believe it,—this Earl warned me off—me! Told me his son was to marry some heiress! As if I wanted to marry his old son or any other son; Hells' bells,—I felt like flying right off the handle, and should have,—yessir, I should have told this Earl just how and where he got off—if it hadn't been for—that

eyeglass! So next time I'll just close my eyes and let him have it—good and strong!"

"And," said Tom, "the stronger the better."

"However," said she, rising to stretch her long, supple limbs, "I'm ready to see over the old——Oh, dear Land of my Fathers! Will you look at my gown?"

"A bit crumpled about the flounces and what nots, but sound enough otherwi ——"

"Crumpled?" cried she, striving quite vainly to pull and smooth the ruin of her delicate gown into some resemblance of the bewitching garment it had been. "I'm all out of shape! I come out where I ought to go in! Now aren't I just one unholy mess, I ask you?"

"Well—no!" replied Tom, judicially, "I should scarcely call you a 'mess' exactly —"

"Oh, wouldn't you! Thanks for nothing, Mister Wade! And just for that I'm going right now!"

"But what about the house,—looking over——"

"Con-sarn the house! It'll have to wait! I'm sure pulling my freight."

"Then I'll go with you a little way."

"Don't trouble yourself."

"It'll be a pleasure."

"But not for me—looking how I am. So good-bye, Mr. Wade!"

"When will you be here again?" he enquired, taking the hand she proffered.

"Well," she answered, at her gentlest, "I haven't seen over the dear old house yet, have I?"

"When?" he repeated.

"Sometime!" she answered; then, slipping her hand from his reluctant clasp, away she went—walking not with the leisured grace of a young goddess or heroine of romance, but precisely as a young woman conscious only that her frock was a 'fright', a truly deplorable, unsightly thing, to be hidden from the eye of day as soon and speedily as possible.

CHAPTER XIII

OF TOM, TEA AND MISS DUDENEY

"SOMETHING," said Tom that same evening, snuffing the ambient air as he replaced his precious tools in their chest for the night, "something smells

extremely appetizing!"

"'Sme, sir!" quoth The Factotum, flourishing the long-handled fork he grasped, "I'm a-cookin' y'r supper, Guvnor."

"Oh!" said Tom. "So you're a cook now, are you?"

"Yessir, I worked in one o' them harlamode shops once, washin' veges, peelin' taters an' watchin' 'ow things was done, so now I'm doin' 'em,—a stoo, Guv, an' it'll be nice an' gamey, or should ought to be."

"Gamey?" repeated Tom, glancing into the tent nearby, where Mark, in daylight's last ruddy glow, was writing busily. "Gamey, you hear, Mark? Sounds deuced suggestive, eh?" The writer chuckled and nodded.

"Ho, yessir," quoth their small chef, keeping a brightly-watchful eye upon the black pot seething gently above the fire, "this 'ere'll be a spicy stoo, and full o' flavour,—four onions, big uns, free spiced dumplin's, a rabbit, 'arf a pound o' pickled pork cut up, 'arf a pound o' b'lin' beef cut ditter, a tater or so, an' a swimmer."

"What on earths a 'swimmer', Go?"

"A slice o' bread, Guv, cut thick to ketch up the floatin' fat,—you'll see. Supper'll be served in ten minutes, prompt, gen'lemen."

And in ten minutes, sure enough, supper was served promptly, and in large tureen upon snowy tablecloth; a stew, richly brown and thick, which proved as delectable to taste as to smell, insomuch that Tom, glancing at Mark, nodded his approbation, saying:

"Old fellow, our general factotum becomes so entirely general that his fearful efficiency begins to overawe me."

"An amazing lad, Tom, and most engaging companion; his ideas on life are as shrewd and original as himself! We ought to afford him the chance to develop . . . broaden his scope."

"You mean have him educated?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Wouldn't it spoil him?"

"Perhaps. . . ."

"However, it's an idea, old horse, yes—it's certainly an idea. . . ."

Ten o'clock had chimed from distant church tower, and The Factotum having retired, albeit unwillingly, to his quarters in the small bell-tent, had left his two responsibilities to smoke their after-supper pipes beside the dying fire whereon Mark's musing gaze was fixed as he puffed, while Tom, puffing also, gazed as pensively up at the bright sickle of a new moon sailing high in a star-spangled

immensity, while all around them sombre trees and tangled thickets shut them in, with the ancient house glimmering ghostly amid the deeper shadows. An owl hooted dismally near by, answered as mournfully afar; from beyond the old sea-wall rose the hush and never-ending murmur of restless ocean; a distant church clock chimed the eleventh hour; and then Tom spoke:

"Mark, a queer, no—an odd, no again—a strange and totally unexpected thing befell me this afternoon in the shape of a . . . goddess!"

"Eh?" exclaimed Mark, forgetting to puff. "A—goddess?"

"Ex-actly! A goddess, old boy, though distinctly human, and speaking the most amazingly incomprehensible Yankee-isms at times. And I call her a goddess because, like Venus, she came to me uprising from the sea,—though not exactly,—because Venus didn't bother about clothes and what not, and this goddess was completely clad, and dripping at every stitch . . . but, judging by what I could see of her, she appeared to be Venus incarnate, and so on."

"Not really, Tom?"

"Fact, I assure you." Here Tom gave a very full and particular account of the incident, while Mark puffed and listened, but with eyes now very keen and intent.

"Did she favour you with her name?"

"Oh, sure, she did. Good lord, I'm beginning to talk Yankee too! Yes, she informed me her name was, and is, of course, Miss Samantha Doodney, which I rather imagine must be American for 'Dudeney'."

"How would you describe her, Tom?"

"Tall-ish," he answered, staring up at the moon again. "Tall and red-haired, Mark, but . . . so much more beside that it goes past describing . . . at least by me."

"Is she beautiful, Tom?"

"Yes, oh yes—quite."

"Attractive, Tom?"

"Well, I suppose so . . . probably . . . to other fellows, but, as you are aware, Mark, I'm not a judge . . . being no masher and none of these ogling, spoony, lady-killer fools, rather not!"

"Does she seem a flirt, Tom, or that way inclined?"

"No, by Jove, anything but! Not in the very least . . . that's why I feel able to . . . like her somewhat."

"And you tell me she is rather tall, and with red hair, Tom, though I should describe it as a beautiful auburn, myself."

"You, Mark? How can you know if you've never seen her?"

"But I have seen her, and quite recently."

"Oh? How? Where?"

"As we drove here this evening."

"But how are you certain it was she?"

"Because The Faxstotum exclaimed: 'Blimey, there's my old governor, S'Arry'."

"What?" exclaimed Tom, starting violently. "But we're talking of Miss Dudeney."

"She was with him, Tom."

"That—fellow?"

"Yes. Sir Harry Winby, according to Goliath. And a very handsome fellow he is,—though a little too 'dressy' perhaps."

"A low, flashy snob!" quoth Tom, fiercely. "And d'you mean to say she was actually——"

"Walking and talking with Sir Harry, yes, Tom. She laughed quite heartily at some jocosity of his. . . . An extremely handsome girl, Tom, a truly magnificent young creature!"

"So . . . that," said Tom, now scowling at the fire, "that, I suppose, is the fellow she calls . . . her Romeo!" He uttered the name with such ferocity of scorn that Mark smiled behind his hand. "A fellow she met on the ship coming from America!"

"He would seem to have made some impression, Tom."

"Oh, well . . . what matter to me anyhow? And my confounded pipe is foul! So I think I'll turn in."

"Good idea!" said Mark.

So to bed they went; but to-night, despite hard work and fresh air, Tom, and to his aggrieved surprise, did not, as usual, fall into the blessed unconsciousness of sleep, but after tossing and tumbling, punching his pillow and cursing it in whispers lest he disturb Mark, slumber took him at last . . . only to be wakened, and all too soon, by a loud and dissonant whistling, to find Mark's bed vacant, golden sunlight flooding the tent and with the appetizing aroma of coffee and frying bacon. Wherefore Tom dressed, shaved, and went forth into a golden morning, where The Factotum was preparing breakfast.

Their meal ended, Mark set to with axe and spade while Tom, with Goliath beside him, continued the construction of his window-frames of good solid oak, though every now and then he would lift head to glance up and around so furtively that at last his small henchman enquired:

"Hexectin' anybody, Guv?"

"Eh?" exclaimed Tom, instantly self-conscious. "What d'you mean?"

"Why, sir, you keeps peerin' and peepin' about so suspicious like, as if you was expectin' somebody to creep up an' cop ye one."

"Well, I'm not. . . . Hang on to this piece of oak and see if you can drill the dowel holes where I've marked 'em—the brace and bit is in the tool-chest. . . . Have you ever been a carpenter, among your other trades and professions, Go?"

"Not prezackly, sir, but I've often 'elped my old Jacky wiv 'is solein' and 'eelin', and sometimes wiv 'is little ships."

"Ah, those model-ships. I should like to have a look at 'em some day."

"So you shall, sir, soon as I gets my Jacky settled 'ereabouts. I seen a little cottage jest outside Merrion village as ud do Jacky prahd, and no error."

"Have you though, by George."

"Yessir, it's empty, an' 'e's agoin' to 'ave it soon as you pays me them fifty pounds."

"So you're pretty sure you'll earn 'em, Go?"

"Ho yes, Guvnor. I've wrote and told Jacky as 'ow they're good as in me 'and."

"Oh?" murmured Tom, glancing askance at the boy's small, eager face just now intent upon the job in hand. "Indeed, Goliath!"

"Ar!" He nodded with quick, bright up-glance. "You bein' a gen'leman o' your word an' me bein' the 'ardest-workin'est faxstotum wot ever took ye over, sir, and looked arter you the best as 'e ever knows 'ow, and that's straight, sir, cross me 'eart and wish I may die, see this wet and see this dry! An' I fink it 'u'd be a good idee, Guv, if you was to buy an 'orse and gig to do the fetchin' and carryin', we got plenty o' stable room—save ye money in the long run, sir, it will. And that'll be more work for me—only I like work specially wiv 'orses—and for you, Guvnor. So wot abaht it."

"I'll see about it."

"You don't 'ave to, sir. I've seen the very thing, a bay cob fifteen 'ands, goes easy in 'arness, and a gig slap-up, and only a bit wore, and a bargain. The bloke axed fifty, I says firty, and 'e comes down to firty-five, and cheap at the money."

It was during their midday meal that Tom, who had been unduly thoughtful, said suddenly:

"By the way, Mark, I shall want real lattice windows for my new frames, leaded lights, and the older the better. What can you do about 'em, old chap?"

"I can search about the countryside, Tom, and enquire of builders at Truro and Falmouth. We ought to be able to pick them up for a trifle. But what about fit? They will be all odd sizes and shapes, I suppose."

"Oh, I'll make 'em fit,—cut 'em, join 'em, shape 'em exactly as I want. And I'll pay anything in reason. So when can you start, old horse?"

"Start what, Tom?"

"Hunting!"

"To-day. It will be a pleasant change from digging. I can hire a nag in Merrion and ride——"

"Or charter a gig, Mark."

"Nossir, buy one!" cried Goliath. "The one I told ye abaht. The cove lives in Merrion, and only firty-five quid, Guvnor!"

"You'd better buy it, Mark, if only to give our Factotum something to do."

"I'll have a look at it, anyhow, Tom. And we'll start after luncheon, eh, Goliath?"

"Yessir! I'll be ready, sir."

"But you, Tom," enquired Mark, his keen eyes twinkling, "you will be all alone, old fellow."

"Oh . . . well . . . I don't mind that."

"I see!" said Mark in such tone that Tom ceased mastication to glance up, only to see Mark stooping for the knife he had dropped.

Thus it was that so soon as their meal was ended, the dishes and platters washed, put away and the camp tidied, Tom was left to work alone, and now with no sharp eyes to notice how often he glanced up from his labour.

But after an hour or so, finding his expectation vain, he completed one window frame and proceeded to get it in place, a difficult business, for the frame was cumbrous and heavy, and the fit tight; twice he almost had it in place, and twice it slipped,—and twice, being hot and fretful, he cursed the thing heartily. And then, as he struggled with this heavy frame—two slim, very capable hands, came to aid him, and a smoothly soft voice close beside him, said:

"My—my, Mr. Wade, you cert'nly can say an earful!"

"Samantha!" he exclaimed, and turned.

"Boost!" she panted. "Give it a boost, will you . . . before it slips and ruins me another frock! Forget the glad-eye stuff and push, darn it,—push!" Tom obeyed, and together they contrived to urge the frame into place,—then again he turned and looked at her; and Samantha, knowing her blue frock, and everything about her all that could possibly be desired, was quite content to be looked at.

"You cert'nly make yore windows mighty heavy, Mr. Wade!"

"And blue," said he, his gaze still intent, "blue certainly becomes you!"

"This?" she enquired, glancing down at the exquisite confection that veiled her perfections so tenderly, and lifting the skirts a few inches between dainty, ungloved finger-tips, "Do you think it kind of cunning?"

"I do indeed!" said Tom, fervently. "Cunning and sweetly sly, because though there's plenty of it, yet it doesn't hide too much of you, what I mean is,—it reveals

just enough and what not."

"What not?" she demanded, regarding him beneath knit brows, "what's that mean, I'll ask you?"

"Oh, well . . . 'so on' or 'so forth,' and so on, if you get my meaning."

"Well, I don't, and if I do, then I guess you're getting some personal."

"No, no, Miss Samantha, absolutely no, I assure you! Pray believe me I wouldn't——"

"Nuff said!" she nodded. "Let it ride, and show me the old house instead."

"Come then, it's waiting. The poor, old place has been deserted and desolate so long it's waiting for some woman to bless it with her presence and wake its welcoming echoes to her step."

"Any woman, Mr. Wade?"

"Certainly—not!"

"Then just what woman, please?"

"The . . . right one, of course."

"And am I the right woman?"

"I don't know—yet. The old house will tell us, I fancy."

So it was with a smile on her lips and light step that Samantha entered this ancient Manor House that had known the tread of so many feet as light and quick with life, and echoed to voices as sweet, long since and forever stilled, hushed and forgotten. Perhaps some such thought was in her mind, for she stood a while, unsmiling now and mute, looking up at massive, carven veiling beams and all around with blue eyes a-dream; or so thought Tom as he gazed at her,—this radiant vision of young womanhood, blue and ruddy-gold against the dingy, age-worn panelling.

"Well," she enquired, at last, and in tones unwontedly soft and gentle, "what does the dear, old house say of me?"

"What could it—after that?" he answered, as gently. "It can only say that you gladden it with your presence, and wake it from its long sleep, back to life, by your own vitality."

"Say now," she murmured, "you'll get me in love with the old place if I don't watch out!"

And now, light of foot, her eyes quick with interest, she wandered round the long, echoing chamber to smooth and touch aged panelling and deep-carved overmantel as if (thought Tom) she were caressing them; she throned herself on the worn ingle-seats beside the broad, old hearth, pronouncing them 'cute'; she admired the wide and gracious stairway, exclaiming at the ease of mounting the low, old-fashioned 'treads'; she paused to touch carved rail and massive newel-posts black

with age, and worn smooth by the hands of vanished generations. So up and from room to room they wandered, and everywhere Samantha found something to wonder at, and all to the vast satisfaction of Tom.

"What do you think of it?" he enquired when they were out in the sunshine again.

"Well," she answered, glancing up at Trevore with musing eyes, "if ever I should have to marry some poor fish and settle down somewhere . . . this would be the home I'd choose."

"My own idea exactly!" said Tom. "But—I say, you're not, are you? Not really?"

"Not what?"

"Thinking of . . . getting married and . . . so on?"

"Not so you can notice it—nossir!" she answered frowning. "The whole idea sickens me!"

"Same here!" he nodded. "I hold it to be perfectly noxious, myself!"

"And that's whatever!" said she, nodding also. "Yet my folks have gotten up some scheme to tie me up with some English aris-tocrat gink or other."

"Have they, by Jingo?"

"Surest thing you know, they have! But I'm not taking any,—not me! The whole business, wooing, kissing, wedding leaves me stone cold."

"Good!" exclaimed Tom, fervently. "Perfectly right! My Governor had the same revolting idea about me, so—we parted. Wedlock and what not is absolutely barred so far as I am concerned."

"And that goes for me too!" said she, almost fiercely.

"Yes, but," said Tom, struck by sudden recollection, "what about your dashed Romeo?"

"My what?"

"That fellow you met on board the ship."

"Well—what about him?"

"That's precisely what I'm asking you, Samantha,—what?"

"First of all, my other name's Doodney! And second of all, what's he got to do with you, Mis-ter Wade?"

"Oh, nothing, thank heaven! Except that I happen to know enough of the fellow to be perfectly certain I should not allow the fellow to walk and talk with sister of mine,—if I had one!"

"So?" she demanded, and quite fiercely now. "I'm asking you just how you come to know I walk and talk with him?"

"It just so happens that I do."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, bitterly scornful. "So you've been creeping and spying on us, have you!"

"Never in this world!" he retorted, just as scornfully. "Others saw you in his company—and—well, since you've such a rooted objection to matrimony, I naturally wonder—what's the idea?"

For a moment Tom thought she was going to strike him, and tensed to meet the blow; but instead, she recoiled until stayed by his carpentry bench, and leaning there, quite heedless of her delicate gown, threw back her head and looked down her exquisite nose at him with a contempt that, for a moment, seemed beyond words. And when she had surveyed him thus from pale, curly hair to dusty shoes and up again, she spoke—and between ruddy lips curled as scornfully as possible:

"Just what kind of creature d'you think I am, Mis-ter Wade?"

Now, perceiving the fierce, virginal purity of those fearless, blue eyes, Tom answered in tone completely altered:

"I believe you are rebelling against your own best instincts because you are so desperately lonely. I believe you are still breaking your heart for your father, and hiding the grief and pain of it by defying your better nature and setting your teeth against the world and everything in it. I believe that in your heart you are yearning for sympathy and——" He stopped, aghast, for the proud head was suddenly bowed . . . he saw the sparkle of falling tears . . . then she spoke in broken whisper:

"Ah . . . Tom Wade . . . how did you know? Yes . . .! Oh yes! I . . . I've missed Dad so much . . . wanted him . . . so desperately! I seem kind of lost . . . without Dad, and once or twice . . . I've thought how good it would be . . . to die and go back to him . . . that way! Life's so empty without Dad! Yes, I've thought about it."

"Was that," whispered Tom, "ah, was that why . . . you were so nearly drowned?"

"No, that was an accident—at first. But when the sea cornered me . . . I just sat . . . and sat . . . and let it come. And . . . yes, I guess I should have let it take me, only just then I heard someone whistling the 'British Grenadiers'."

"Yes, I was!" Tom murmured.

"But . . . ah, Tom Wade, that was Dad's own, pet call to me . . . that was just how he used to whistle when he wanted me . . . just those same few notes. And hearing them just then . . . well . . . it kind of seemed he was calling me again . . . calling me to go on living, and to make the best of things . . . for his dear sake. . . . So I waded ashore . . . and that's why. If you hadn't whistled Dad's call just when you did . . . and so exactly like he used to whistle it for me . . . I don't think I . . . should be here now."

Here they were both silent a while, neither looking at the other, and when at last Tom contrived to speak, it was in tone rather hoarse and shaken:

"This makes it easier to tell you that I . . . if you will allow me . . . or care . . . I should like to be your friend."

Slowly Samantha raised her head, and looking at him through glitter of tears, reached out and grasped the hand he had half extended, drawing it near to clasp it tight, but speaking no word.

"So . . . now," said he, "we're friends?"

"Yes, Tom," she murmured; "so now I'm Sam to you."

"No!" he answered, decidedly. "You will always be Samantha to me, it's a lovely name!"

"'Always' is a mighty long time, Tom."

"Always and forever, Samantha," he repeated.

"Say, now look you here——"

"I am!" he nodded. "I could go on looking all my life—and after!"

"You aren't trying to make love to me, are you?"

"Good Lord—no!" he exclaimed. "Don't I tell you I'm not that sort of ass?"

"Oh, yes, you tell me . . . but——"

"But what, pray?"

"Just look how you're hanging on to my hand!"

"That's friendship," he explained, "and I wasn't thinking . . . I'm inclined to be a bit absent-minded now and then."

"I need yore friendship, Tom, and I don't mind yore being absent-minded—up to a point, but——"

"Samantha," said he, earnestly, "I want you to believe that when I say a thing I mean it, yes, absolutely."

"I do believe you, Tom, I think I always will."

"Good!" he exclaimed, joyously.

"So now . . . if you'll let go my hand, I'll help you get tea."

"Splendid!" he nodded. "Of course, tea, by George! Come and collar the kettle and teapot while I lug out table and chairs. We'll have a fire going in a jiffy."

"And what kind of thing's a jiffy?"

"A very small space of time," replied Tom, setting up folding chairs and table.

While tea was brewing, Samantha, still quite heedless of her delicate finery, insisted on cutting the bread and butter, saying as she did so:

"Behind a tree . . . that one over there, you'll find a paper bag with something into it I guess you'll think worth while." So Tom retrieved this bag, from which she

drew a mouth-watering delicacy that she informed him was an angel cake.

Thus presently, seated in leafy shade and not too near the fire, they partook of tea together, and Tom had his first taste of angel cake, this truly delicious American confection. So they ate and drank, talked and laughed until, this delightful meal ending, she insisted on helping to wash-up and put away the tea-things.

And now, as afternoon drew to evening, Samantha told more of her adored father, how in England he had once been an officer in the Guards, and what a true man's life he had lived in America, a power against evil in that lawless country, the Mexican Border. She described the wide, trackless ranges of the Golden West where thousands of cattle roamed in wild freedom until the round-up for numbering and branding. She described the terrors of a stampede, especially at night; of roaring prairie-fires aflame to the horizon; of range wars, with the shooting or hanging of cattle-thieves whom she called 'rustlers'. She told of the difference between good 'bad-men' and bad 'bad-men'; of the cool nerve that may sometimes out-face the quickest-drawn gun. But mostly she talked of her wonderful father who, by his fearless will and mastery, backed by the loyalty and devotion of his gun-fighting cow-punchers, had cleared and cleaned up the country of every real bad-man that had once ruled by terror of the gun.

And Tom, listening to all this, and watching her beautiful face, the more lovely for its present animation, began to understand how tame and uneventful she must find life in this law-abiding, somewhat smug and matter-of-fact Old England.

Thus they talked in ever-growing friendship, until evening shadows began to lengthen,—and with these shadows came dissension, argument, and quarrel, thus:

"Well," sighed Samantha, rising, "I reckon I must be on my way."

"I suppose so," answered Tom, rising also, and also with a sigh. "It's marvellous how time flies when you don't want it to, and drags when you do!" Here he disentangled his cap from among sundry tools, knocked dust and shavings from it, and put it on.

"Oh," demanded Samantha, "what's the idea?"

"I shall escort you home, of course."

"Thanks, but you won't."

"Oh, but I shall. I simply must——"

"Don't trouble yourself."

"It will be a pleasure. You have a longish walk, I understand—so much the better."

"Mr. Tom Wade, please open yore lily-white ears and listen to me telling you again, I'm going alone."

"Samantha, it's very lonely hereabouts, and I simply couldn't allow you—or any other girl,—to go so far unescorted."

"You'll let this girl! And that's whatever!"

"I certainly shall not! And that's whatever again, whatever it means."

"See here, Mis-ter Wade, when I want yore company I'll let you know. So you'll just stay right here——"

"Impossible! I simply cannot let you go all that way alone . . . ha—unless you don't expect to . . . be alone!"

"Just what are you suggesting? I'll ask you."

"And I ask you, Samantha, are you expecting . . . hoping to meet . . . your Romeo again?"

"No, I'm not!" she retorted, and the more furiously because she felt her cheeks glowing. "And even if I were—what business is it of yores, Mr. Snooper?"

"D'you mean to say you . . . actually . . . like this fellow?"

"That's my own business. And suppose I do—what then?"

"Why, then, it's perfectly evident that you need someone to take care of you. I don't trust the fellow, and what's more——"

"Well, suppose you tell him to his face, 'stead of yapping to me behind his back?"

"Precisely . . . yes . . ." said Tom, choking back his indignant wrath, "that's exactly what I intend doing at the first opportunity."

"Let's hope he doesn't kill you, Mister Wade, or hurt you too much."

"I'll chance it!" said Tom, nodding grimly. "So now, if you're quite ready, shall we be going?"

"No . . . we . . . will . . . not! I'm not going to have you tagging along, nossir!"

"I'm afraid you are."

"Now just you listen here," cried Samantha, between gnashing teeth, "I just won't be bullyragged by you or anyone else! Hell's bells—no! Who are you to try hazing me?"

"Your friend and——"

"Well, it's all off from now on! You can cut out the friendship stuff right now. I'm through!"

"Oh no," said Tom, shaking his head. "Not me! Once a friend always a friend, and so forth, if——"

"Oh, shucks!"

"Please don't be rude, Samantha."

"Doodney's the name to you."

"Now, of course, you're being merely silly, spiteful and frightfully feminine."

"Well, I know I'm feminine, don't I . . . 'stead of the boy Dad wanted. . . . Oh, I'm feminine all right, that's why I hated myself, and tried to be as much a boy as I could for Dad's sake! That's why I made them call me 'Sam'."

"Oh, I say now, look here. I didn't mean——"

"I don't want to look there or anywhere near you,—all I want is to be on my way."

"You shall—at once, but, please, not alone, Samantha, and not because of this Winby fellow,—but there may be others . . . tramps or roughs about, and the way very lonely and——"

"Well now—say! Didn't you blow to me about yore Old England being safe,—all smeared over with laws and policemen and things, didn't you?"

"Yes, but not hereabout,—it's pretty dashed lonely, and if you should be accosted——"

"Oh, heck! You make me tired! Suppose some roughneck does meet me and tries some plug-ugly business,—do I scream 'help', or faint away and swoon like a lady should? No, sir, I . . . do . . . not! No, I act like a Western woman would —'specially if her mother's folk were Forty-niners! Turn yore back a moment and I'll show you." Wondering, Tom obeyed, heard the silky rustle of feminine draperies, and then her voice saying:

"Look you here!" He turned and saw upon the rose-pink of her open palm, a smallish but wicked-looking knife, hafted with ebony and silver, narrow and glittering of blade.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, frowning at this deadly thing with all an Englishman's disgust for such murder tools. "Why go about with a thing like that?"

"Because of Mexican and Injun half-breeds along the Rio Grande, in the States, and over here—well—just because it's become a habit . . . and because, too, it was given me by Manoel Lopez, our horse-wrangler, and the whitest Mexican that was ever miscalled a 'greaser'. He showed me just how to use it too,—watch now! What'll I aim at? There—the open lid of yore old tool box!"

Graceful sweep of arm . . . flash and flicker of thrown steel through the sunlight . . . and the stout lid of Tom's tool-chest quivered—transfixed by the flying deadly steel.

"Now if that box lid had been a man, Mis-ter Wade, he wouldn't be feeling so good, eh, Mister Wade?"

"Horrible!" said Tom, as he watched her jerk that deadly missile free, to toss aloft and catch by the haft with the dreadful skill of much practice.

"Ah!" said she, meeting his frown with smile of bitter contempt. "I guess you think knife-throwing is unladylike, eh, Mis-ter Wade?"

"It's worse, it's unwomanly!"

"Oh, is it! Well, let me tell you I can throw an Injun tomahawk pretty nearly as good! And a tomahawk, if you don't happen to savvy, is an axe,—which, you'll reckon, is even more unwomanly, eh, Mister Wade?"

"Oh, quite! Any young girl who goes hither and yon chucking axes and knives all over the place is . . . well . . . I ask you?"

"Haw!" she exclaimed, speaking again in scornful imitation of the English accent. "Ay pree-zume yuh think lake that, Mis-tah Wade, becors you're soft—like all you English, with yore police and laws and rules and regulations, and I don't know what all—you're just soft!"

"However, we've managed to win a battle or so, Miss Doodney. Now I suppose you——"

"No, now I'm supposing that yore idea of a terew woomanly wooman, Mis-tah Wade, is a spineless creature who'll just lay down and scream, and do nothing about it. Oh, fudge! Now I'll be going. . . . And I guess it'll be a goodish spell before I ever trouble me to make you another Angel Cake. Good-bye, and don't worry about me none whatever; you see I've got my protector right here. I call him Manoel, and I wear him in a sheath on my garter, the slickest thing you ever saw,—which you didn't and never will see, not likely! Once more, good evening, Mr. Wade, and if we should happen to meet accidentally anywhere, kindly remember my name is—Doodney."

So saying she turned and walked away, tossing up her glittering knife and catching it dexterously, while Tom watched until she was out of sight.

CHAPTER XIV

IN WHICH IS BRIEF MENTION OF THE GODDESS

SEATED in the tent at Mark's travelling desk Tom began a letter to his august sire, thus:

"My dear Father,

"Trevore is all and more than I expected,—so much so, that I am devoting myself to its sympathetic restoration with both hands, all my energies and such imagination as I possess. To which good purpose your son and heir, a do-little hitherto, proposes to do much, as carpenter, joiner, mason, plumber, tiler, thatcher, glazier, gardener, and anything else that the

old house calls for. And now, sir, the burning question is,—what shall be the future for this grand, old, English homestead? When Trevore is its stately, old self once more, shall it be left again empty and uncared-for, to sink back into gloom, desolation and decay? I do most sincerely hope—absolutely not! And, therefore, my dear Father, I beg of you the privilege to be allowed the pleasure of refurnishing the dear old place at my own cost, and according to my own ideas and belief as to how itself would wish. For, sir, it seems to me this ancient house possesses an individual personality of its own, haunted, perhaps, by the very many generations of persons with whom it must have been so closely associated since the first foundations were laid so many hundreds of years ago. If you give me this privilege, I propose to pass much of my time henceforth at Trevore, with occasional intervals in London, Sussex, Scotland, or where you will. As to the people hereabout, county and country folk, I know nothing of them, having been so continuously busy with Trevore. However, I intend looking them over pretty soon, and not as your son Merivale, but as Tom Wade, carpenter, joiner, etc,—by which means I shall perhaps be better able to judge the real from the other sort. Now as regards Marriage (with capital M) my dear Sir and Sire,—absolutely no. For I am still of the same mind, which is, I venture to repeat, No (with a capital N) categorically, absolutely and irrevocably. Indeed, of late I am more opposed to Wedlock and what not than ever, any such idea strikes me as revolting, offensive, and utterly repellent."

Here Tom's somewhat discursive pen faltered, so, laying it down, he lit his bulldog pipe, and was endeavouring to draw inspiration therefrom when upon the afternoon stillness broke the sound of wheels and hoof-strokes, and glancing thitherward, he saw a horse and trap approaching down the long drive, a smart vehicle with Goliath perched upon lofty driving-seat, small hands grasping reins and whip, but small face turning very often to nod down at Mark, who smiled back at him. So deeply engrossed were these oddly-assorted companions that Tom, feeling somehow like an eavesdropper, withdrew into the tent; but scarcely had he taken up pen than a shrill hail caused him to put it down again.

"Hi, Guvnor, if y'please will y'come and look us over."

Tom looked, and beheld a smart gig, drawn by a well-groomed, upstanding cob.

"'Is name's Pepper, sir, risin' five, sound wind an' limb, come along at a spankin' pace an' never turned an 'air. Look at 'im, sir,—clean in front, plenty o' power be'ind, good round barrel, sweet legs an' picks 'em up proper 'e do, no interferin' nor nuffink. Ooh, an' a coupla sacks oats an' this 'ere noo w'ip into the bargain, eh, Mr. Mark, sir? And, Guv, y'r Pepper's a reg'lar goer, yet so easy to 'andle, mouth like silk, watch now!"

So saying, the eager boy wheeled this powerful, glossy-coated animal and drove away—at such smart pace as soon took him out of sight. Then Mark laughed, saying:

"Tom, our Faxstotum grows upon me! At first I thought him no more than

cheeky London arab, then, too good to be true, and now, upon my word, I believe he is both. I've been hearing about that old cobbler, Jacky, his foster-father . . . a brave tale that, Tom! And yonder comes our small giant . . . there's ecstasy for you!"

"Yes," nodded Tom, "he seems to love and know something about horses . . . and the bargain looks a bargain to me."

"So I thought, Tom, and snapped it. So your lordship possesses yet another turnout,—how many will this make?"

"Heaven knows," answered Tom, "but more than Tom Wade will ever use, I guess. And, by Jove, there I go again! These Americanisms are mighty catching."

"Which reminds me, Tom—we met your American goddess again this evening, and looking handsomer than ever,—blue goes admirably with her auburn tresses, and well she knows it, of course."

"Yes," said Tom, "And . . . was she——"

"Eh?" questioned Mark, his keen eyes suddenly intent. "You were asking——?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Tom, turning as Goliath drew up before them with a flourish.

"'Ow abaht it, Guvnor?" he enquired, looking down at Tom very anxiously. "Sir, I 'opes as 'ow you're pleased wiv this 'ere Pepper, and do, please, look at the gig! Good as noo, sir, and yet you ain't said no word abaht 'em good or bad, so I'm gettin' a bit upset like, 'cos I'm 'fraid you ain't so pleased as wot you ought to be."

"Oh, but I am, Go. The whole outfit is better than I expected. Just as soon as I've finished a letter, you shall drive us to Merrion for the post, and then we'll see what Mrs. Pengelly can give us for supper. How's that?"

"Mag-nificent, sir! I'll give Pepper a spot o' water and a rub dahn while we're waitin'."

Tom's letter being duly finished, away they bowled for Merrion village, through the moon-shot dusk of this warm, still summer evening, and were almost in sight of the village when Goliath, pointing airily with his whip, announced:

"There's where we met my old guvnor, S'Arry, again 's artenoon a walkin' wiv 'is 'skirt'!"

"His what?" Tom demanded.

"'Is young lady, sir,—'er wiv the red 'air as I told ye abaht."

"Oh!" said Tom, and relapsed into gloom and silence, heedless of Goliath's chatter; while Mark's keen eyes missed nothing of his scowling brow and fierce clenching of powerful fist,—noting which phenomena, Mark smiled furtively, and winked up at the rising moon, whose silver sickle had become a radiant crescent. Being now within sight of the 'Three Pilchards' Mark clapped him lightly on broad shoulder saying:

"Wake up, Tom, old fellow! Still dreaming of your goddess?"

"Eh—goddess?" muttered Tom, starting. "No, nothing of the sort, Mark,—what rot you talk. Save your breath to call for ale." And so,—as they drew up before the tavern, Tom hailed, with a rollicking joviality so very much over-done that Mark actually chuckled.

CHAPTER XV

HOW AND WHY TOM BOUGHT A STICK

"HOUSE-HO!" cried Tom, as he swung lightly from the high gig. "'Three Pilchards' ahoy! Ale-ho! Two tankards, Mr. Pengelly . . . why, there's my old friend, Mr. Bates . . . three tankards, landlord! How are you, Mr. Bates? A truly beautiful evening!"

"It be, sir, sure-ly! Ar, and arl the better as you spies me in time to mek it three,—for me pot be empty again, it generally allus is, though I don't gollop an' swaller me good ale like some! No, I takes it slow an' respeckful like good ale should ought to be took."

"Quite!" nodded Tom. "Except when a poor bloke is absolutely parched as I am . . . and, cheers,—hither cometh Mr. Pengelly with the three! Hail and welcome, Mr. Pengelly, let three be four, and drink you with us."

"Thankee, sir, I'm sure, and I dunno as I wun't!"

Here ensued a blissful silence, wherein the three pewters were slowly tilted skyward; Tom sighed, and set down his tankard half-empty, Mark did the same. Old Mr. Bates did not, watched by Tom and Mark, his tankard continued to tilt slowly but surely, up and up—until it was fully inverted upon the clean-shaven visage of Mr. Bates, who, sighing now in his turn, glanced wistfully into his depleted vessel, shook his hoary head at it, placed it gently upon the table and, meeting Tom's surprised look, frowned, saying:

"Don't ee go for to ax me 'ow I done it, for I can't nowise tell ee, no'ow!"

"Mr. Bates, you've astonished me no end!"

"Young man, I 'ave astonished meself no question! Yere I sets, a very ancient, aged party, a—wondering powerful 'ard 'owever I come to du sich a thing,—an' so unexpected-like!"

"Mr. Bates," said Mark, smiling, "I am also wondering so much that I think you had better have another try."

"Ar, mebbeso I'd better, sir, and thankee!"

"Jole," warned Mr. Pengelly, comely head outthrust from open lattice, "that'll be three pints, an' your darter Mary do say as——"

"Hish, John! Tek the kind gen'leman's order. Wot's me darter Mary know about sich things? Why—nowt! Besides, she'm away to Falmouth, and wun't be 'ome till last ferry, which du give me an 'ole hower. So sharp's the word, John lad!"

"Meanwhile," said Mark, rising. "I'll go in and enquire what Mrs. Pengelly can provide for supper."

"Quite!" said Tom, and instantly relapsed again into silence and gloom, until roused therefrom by some hard object obtruding itself in his side, and glancing round, beheld this to be the Aged Person's extremely knobbly stick. Having thus attracted Tom's attention, the Aged Party remarked:

"Three pints can't nowise do no man no manner of 'arm, eh, young man?"

"On the contrary, every manner of good," sighed Tom, "especially if he happens to be feeling slightly mouldy and what not."

"Mouldy?" repeated the Aged Party, fixing Tom with a very bright, somewhat malevolent eye, "a young, strappin' feller like you didn't ought nowise, never an' no'ow to feel hisself turnin' mouldy . . . 'ows'ever I ain't a bit surprised seei' as 'ow . . ."

"Seeing as how what?" Tom enquired.

"Seein' as 'ow you'm a flyin' into the face o' Providence so owdacious bold—along o' that theer old, 'aunted, ruinated, ghastly Trevore!"

"Ah, but," said Tom sitting up, "Trevore isn't going to be a ruin much longer. And as for ghosts, I haven't seen the least sign of one yet—though I rather hoped to."

"Eh—'oped? Ah, well, young man, you jest wait till moon be full! Theer be lots of 'orrors and unchancey things do 'appen in full o' the moon. 'Tes then as the sea comes above flood and goes beyond ebb! 'Tes then as wise women, as some names witches, do go a-creepin' to c'lect roots an' yarbs and simples! 'Tes then as young fules goes a-stealin' t'court and mek love and marry and get theirselves loaded down wi' care an' babbies. Ar, and 'tes then as ghosts do flitter and flutter, pale an' 'orrorsome,—for them as be blest wi' eyes to see! The full o' the moon be the time,—like as I were a-tellin' this yere young American lady while I were a-prunin they ——"

"Eh—what?" exclaimed Tom, starting violently. "American lady . . . who . . . where . . . what's she like?"

"As I were a-cuttin' of and prunin' they rose-trees as 'ave been neglected so

shameously——"

"Yes, but . . . I say, Mr. Bates, this American lady . . . is she a Miss Dudeney? And where——"

"So neglected, young man, as I doubts if——"

"Is she tall, Mr. Bates, and with . . . rather nice red hair . . . and living somewhere about here . . . and could you tell me where, and——"

"The question bein', young man, whether four pints aren't better for a man, in a manner o' speakin', than three?"

"Oh rather! O course! Four it shall be if it so happens you can tell me where ——"

"Young man, I can tell ee plenty, seein' as 'ow I be workin' in the gardin theer every day, and this yere young American lady doin' 'er best to 'elp me——"

"Ah, does she though? Well, what I——"

"She do, young man, a-diggin wi' me spade, forkin' wi' me fork, snippin' wi' me shears, though I tell 'er she can't nowise do much 'arm." The fourth pint here presenting itself by means of a head-shaking John, Mr. Bates waved him away, sipped, nodded and leaning near, spoke in harsh whisper:

"These yere ladies, two on 'em oldish and one on 'em young, be a-livin' not 'arf a mile down the road, to Penruan they be."

"Half a mile! Thanks!" said Tom, rising.

"Bide ee a minute, young man, and lissen t'me, will ee! This yere young lady bein' oncommon 'ansome, is bein' took a powerful lot o' notice of by three-four rough-lookin' chaps as I don't nowise like the shape on,—peepers and pryers they be!"

"Oh?" enquired Tom, sitting down again and leaning toward his aged informant. "Just how d'you mean, precisely?"

"Young man, this yere last week there be allus one or two on 'em 'angin' about the place . . . jest as it gets darkish-like."

"Splendid!" murmured Tom, leaning nearer. "Go on, Mr. Bates."

"Eh—splendid, says you?"

"Yes—no! I mean to say dashed annoying and what not, of course. But go on, tell me about these peepers and pryers, Mr. Bates."

"Well then, every evenin' o' late when I'll be puttin' away me tools to go 'ome, if I 'appen to look, I'll gen'rally-allus see a face peepin' atop o' the wall, pryin' at the 'ouse-like."

"Have you warned the police?"

"'Ow can I when theer aren't never no pleeceman nigher than Truro. No, I

ain't 'ad no chance to warn no perlice."

"Splendid!" said Tom, again. "How much for your stick, Mr. Bates?"

"Stick?" enquired the Aged One, staring.

"Yes, this very fine, knobbly affair," said Tom, catching up the article in question.

"Young man, it ain't for sale nowhen, no'ow and——"

"Take this sovereign," said Tom, thrusting the coin upon the astounded Ancient. "And, Mr. Bates, if my friend——"

"Eh—eh?" gasped Hoary Age, staring at the gold upon his horny palm. "A pound for me old——"

"Quite, Mr. Bates,—so when my friend asks where I am, you will tell him I have gone for a stroll, you understand?"

"Yessir, but——"

"And Penruan House, you say, is about half a mile."

"Yes . . . yes, sir, you can't miss it . . . stands back apiece from the road it du . . . in its own gardins, with a wall. And these yere peepers and pryers be gen'rally-allus round t'other side, away from road, where theer be a little wood, a coppice, sir, and——"

"Splendid!" quoth Tom, for the third time. "And please remember—I've gone for a stroll before supper, you'll not forget!"

"Not me, sir—ho, not me."

"Good!" So saying, away strode Tom, and as he went, twirled the knotted stick joyously in powerful grasp, while below his breath he whistled 'The British Grenadiers'.

CHAPTER XVI

INTRODUCES 'BEETLE-BROW' AND A LARIAT

THE moon was well up when Tom had his first glimpse of Penruan House; a lonely mansion surrounded by spacious gardens and backed by a little, gloomy wood. Tom halted to glance about and frown up at the moon which, though not yet at the full, gave so much light that, instinctively, he kept to the shadow of hedge or tree until he was in the denser gloom of this high garden wall. Here he paused again to listen and glance about, then, creeping forward, silent and stealthy as any Indian warrior upon the war-path, began to follow this wall, alert and eager for whatever was to be. A gliding shadow amid the shadows, a grim smile upon his lips, in his

wide, grey eyes the joyous light of battle; swiftly he advanced until, turning an angle of the wall, he halted suddenly, for there, within a few yards of him, was a man standing upon what appeared to be a pile of logs, a burly fellow who, peering over the wall from shadow to moonlight, thus showed a quite brutal visage, with small, bright eyes beneath scowling jut of black, bristly hair, a particularly rough-looking customer, whom Tom instantly tabulated mentally as a 'beetle-browed ruffian'. And now as Beetle-Brow scowled and peered, little dreaming of what was in store for him,—Tom, grasping the Aged Person's knobbly stick much as his Primordial, Woad-smeared Ancestor may have gripped stone-ax, so now Tom crouched for devastating action when—a remarkable happening occurred, so fantastic, indeed so astonishing and altogether unbelievable, that Tom checked in his leap, crouched rigid and spellbound. . . . Something, dim-seen, swished upwards whirling against the moon,—something that writhed, twisting snake-like,—something that swept down upon Beetle-Brow—something that, clutching the thick neck of him, jerked, tightened and dragged him, gasping, wheezing and choking quite horribly, down and down until his bullet head lay across the coping of the wall. . . .

And then in Tom's astounded ears was a voice richly sweet and familiar though not in the least creamy:

"I've roped him, Mandy! What'll I do with the doggone polecat?"

Answered another voice in somewhat nasal accents:

"Yank him, Honey! Yank him till he yawps!"

"I am, Mandy, I shore am! Another yank and I'll yank him to Kingdom come."

Beetle-Brow, struggling frantically in the strangling noose, was now emitting such truly fearful noises that Tom leapt, mounted the wood-pile, and looked down into the face of Samantha, pale and set in the moonlight.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "So it's you!"

"Of course. But I say, Samantha, easy on or you'll choke the ruffian."

"Well, why not?" she demanded, though relaxing her pull on the rope slightly. "Why not choke the poison toad?"

"No reason in the world except that it may prove a bit awkward and what not for you and all of us. I mean to say dead bodies are usually pretty hard to dispose of and so on——"

"The stranger's shore right, Honey Bud," said the nasal voice speaking from immediately below; "unhitch and let the tarnal snake wriggle, he's black in the face already."

"Quite!" said Tom. "And when he's got his breath and feels sufficiently able, I'll do all that's needed to convince our ruffian of your displeasure."

"You will?"

"Certainly! It will be a joy, absolutely."

"Mean you'll lick him?"

"Oh yes," answered Tom, freeing the helpless captive, who now leaned feebly across the wall, drawing his breath in agoned gasps.

"D'you figure you can?"

"My dear girl, of course. Hop up here and watch, if you doubt my ability."

"Why, then, reach me yore hands and heave . . . Mandy, give me a boost!"

So Tom reached down to the hands upraised to him, strong hands that clasped and clung while he lifted and hauled until somehow she was seated upon the broad coping of the wall.

"Some weight, I guess?" she enquired, ordering her draperies but looking at Tom.

"Oh, not so very," he answered, gazing at Samantha . . .

And then together they glanced around and looked at each other in speechless dismay, for Beetle-Brow had vanished . . . Borne to them from the gloomy coppice was the sound of some large creature blundering in panic flight.

"Shall I go after him?" enquired Tom, glancing in the direction of these sounds with eyes of yearning.

"D'you really want to—honest Injun?"

"I do," he replied. "I do indeed!"

"Then stay right where you are and tell me how to goodness you happened along."

"No, Smanthy!" said the voice. "First off, just yuh make me known t'yore friend."

"Shore, Mandy dear, this is him—I mean he!"

Now why should Tom feel so ridiculously pleased and elated because of this so personal pronoun?

"Oh, is that so, Hon?"

"Shore. This is Mister Tom Wade! Mr. Wade, down below us there is Amanda, my Mandy. She's gotten other names like 'Susannah' and 'Sholes', but she's just Mandy to me, always has been and always will! What d'you think of him, Mandy?"

"Shucks, girl,—I can't see enough of him, way up there, to tell!"

"Why then, Miss Mandy," said Tom, removing the deerstalker, "I'll do myself the pleasure of——"

Setting hand upon the coping, he jumped, stumbled, recovered and saluted Miss Amanda, cap in hand. . . . A gaunt woman, with face rather like a horse, Tom

thought, until near enough to see her eyes, large, deep-set and shrewd, and her mouth, generous, wide and whimsical, though now a little grim,—until she smiled.

"Miss Mandy," said he, smiling also, and speaking in tone sincere as his look, "I hope we are going to be friends, that you'll do the best you can with my face, and try to like me, will you?"

"Say now," demanded Samantha throned above them, "how about him, Mandy?"

"Ace high, Honey! He antes up right smart. Mister Wade yuh look like a square-shooter, and I allow we look like being friends from now on—shake!" Tom clasped the hand outthrust to him, and was surprised at the power of its grip, as he answered.

"Miss Mandy, you honour me."

"Well!" exclaimed Samantha, indignantly. "Now, gol-darn you, Tom Wade, you never once said anything about me honouring you."

"Smanthy, jest yuh come right down off'n that wall instanter. No, you can't,—wait till I go fetch the ladder."

"Miss Mandy, pray allow me."

"Shore I will," said Samantha. "I don't need any old ladder while you're around, Tom Wade."

"Certainly!" said Tom, reaching up long arms. "Jump and I'll——"

"Nossir, not on yore life! Now I'm in yore Old England I'll be dignified. You will lean against the wall, then I'll step down on yore shoulders—if you can bear me, can you?"

"I'll try."

"Then when I'm there, you bow down slowly, right down till I can step off you gracefully like a lady should, you savvy."

"I also twig!" answered Tom. "Here I am,—are you ready?"

"Not till you bob yore head down—and keep it down!"

"Certainly!" said Tom. "Now . . . step carefully."

"You don't have to tell me, I certainly will! There,—now lower me . . . gently . . ."

"And now," said Tom, this intricate manoeuvre safely accomplished, "please tell me how in the world you managed to catch old Beetle-Brow, that powerful ruffian—how?"

"Easy as kiss my hand, Mr. Wade. I just crept me in the shadows and roped him with my lariat. There it is by the wall!"

"A lasso!" exclaimed Tom, taking up this truly wonderful implement, fashioned,

as he made out by close inspection, of beautifully-plaited hide. "And do you mean to say you can catch anything in this loop affair?"

"Well, you saw! And didn't I tell you I can rope anything with anyone, yessir,—good as any puncher in our outfit, can't I, Mandy?"

"None better, Honey."

"Amazing!" said Tom.

"Only to a sure-nuff tenderfoot."

"Well now," said Miss Amanda, "let's all set down and have a tell—on the bench where we can see each other, and yuh between us, Mr. Wade—so! Now first off," said she, leaning to peer at Tom from the right, "jest what d'yuh know about these toughs?"

"Yes," demanded Samantha, peering at him from the left, "just what,—and how d'you happen to be around here, anyway?"

"Only because of what my old friend, Mr. Bates, told me."

"Our old gardener man,—well, let's hear all he told you, and when?" said Samantha, and in such tone that Tom now peered in his turn as he answered:

"The old boy informed me this evening that he had noticed some rather ugly customers hanging about here lately, so I came along hoping for the best."

"Best?" repeated Samantha, peering closer. "Oh! And what were you hoping?"

"Merely to take a crack at them and what not."

"And that," quoth Miss Amanda, warmly, "that was real neighbourly, Mr. Wade! But there's no call for yuh to crack down on 'em, we don't want yuh to go gunning for 'em or shooting 'em up any—not yet."

"'Shooting'?" repeated Tom. "'Gunning'? Oh no,—no, certainly not. I mean to say—definitely no! Here in England, instead of guns and things we generally use a policeman."

"Yes," sighed Miss Amanda. "I've heard tell how shooting is kind of discouraged over here; folks don't seem to onderstand that snakes, two-legged and the other sort, are allus best dead. So to-night because we didn't happen to have a policeman handy, I passed the buck, and got Samanthy to use her rope on the side-winder 'stead of me cutting him down permanent with hot lead in the shape of a forty-five slug."

"Sounds rather inclined to be slightly drastic" Tom murmured. "I fancy a bobby or so would meet the case . . . The question is,—who are these fellows, and what are they up to?"

"Yes!" nodded Samantha. "Suppose you tell us."

"I?" exclaimed Tom. "My dear girl, how in the world . . . here now, I say, what

are you suggesting?"

"Just what you're thinking!" she retorted; then, seeing his look of blank amazement, continued bitterly, "Why are you around here spying on me, too?"

"Do you mean to say," gasped Tom, frowning, "that you can believe me such a contemptible cad, such a low-down, sneaking——"

At this moment from the house came the summons of a sweet-toned bell.

"Supper!" quoth Miss Amanda, rising. "Mr. Wade, how about yuh coming to eat with us, besides I'd like for yuh to meet Lady Oxted."

"Kind of you, Miss Amanda, but no, thanks; I'm not dressed for company, and I've no least appetite . . . So, thank you again, and good-night, Miss Amanda!"

"S'long, friend!" she answered, shaking his hand as a man might have done. "I'll shore be glad to see yuh around again soon! Come yuh, Samanthy."

"I will, Mandy—when I've seen—yore friend on his way!"

"I'll go at once!" said Tom, suiting act to word; but though he strode fast, Samantha kept beside him; thus, when she spoke, it was breathlessly:

"So—this is how you've been . . . keeping tabs on me . . . creeping around the house at night . . . spying on me and . . . my friends."

Tom stopped, and snatching off his cap, stooped to peer into her face.

"Samantha," said he, grim of eye and mouth, "if you can truly think that of me, I ——"

"That," she repeated, scornfully, "that, Mister Wade, is just what do I think, and just how I know you knew of my meetings with Sir Harry!"

"Miss Dudeney," said Tom, between shut teeth, and twisting his cap between powerful hands—much as if it had been Sir Harry's neck, "since you can believe . . . and dare accuse me of such contemptible baseness . . . allow me to bid you good-night and a final, absolute good-bye! At the same time I beg you will be good enough to keep away from Trevore for the future!" So saying, and looking very desperately grim and pale in the moonlight, Tom swung on his heel, clapped on his crumpled cap, and strode away at such pace that Samantha, being just then far too haughty and dignified to run after him, turned and went slowly, very slowly, towards the house. . . .

And it was about now that Mark, having partaken of an excellent supper at the 'Three Pilchards', was adding this postscript to his weekly letter for the Earl's perusal:

"PS. Your scheme is evidently succeeding, for Justin is head over ears in love with her already, though the poor fellow has no least idea of it yet. To-morrow, on my way

'casement-hunting', I shall call at Penruan, see Lady Oxted, make the acquaintance of your prospective daughter-in-law and later inform you what transpires."

CHAPTER XVII

SHOWS HOW AND WHY A GODDESS BECAME HUMAN

MEANWHILE Tom, burning with 'sense of wrong and outrage desperate', was striding at furious pace until, becoming unpleasantly heated and moist, he checked his wild career and finding he yet grasped the Aged Person's knotted staff, instantly therewith smote the empty air; somewhat relieved by this, he continued his way until, espying a milestone conveniently low, he seated himself thereon to wipe fevered brow and muse upon the hollowness of life and things in general, the vanity of human wishes, the gnawing canker of burning injustice and the soul-shattering discovery that the world was merest dust and ashes.

Meditating thus upon his milestone, Tom laughed with that extremity of bitterness to which only Youth (with a capital Y) may ever give vent . . . And it was at this precise instant that Beetle-Brow, supported by an ally chiefly remarkable for a thickened ear known in sporting circles as 'cauliflower',—it was now, as if conjured up by the awesome bitterness of Tom's laugh, that Beetle-Brow was so extremely unwise as to step from shadow of adjacent hedge, brandishing a bludgeon intent on summary vengeance.

"Watch out, Joe," he growled, "and see me knock fifteen different kinds o'——"

Tom vacated his milestone with a leap; the Aged One's knotted staff whizzed and Beetle-Brow crumpling beneath its impact, sprawled in the dust; Cauliflower-Ear's growl changed to a painful grunt as he checked to the sharp thrust of this same staff, thus proffering bristly chin to Tom's fierce-driven left fist that, smiting hard and true, dropped him to lie inert as Beetle-Brow.

A little surprised by the swift completeness of his victory, Tom was surveying the fallen with the eye of much experience when he heard the patter of swift feet, with flutter of petticoats, and glancing round, beheld Miss Amanda speeding towards him, and as she drew near, saw also that in purposeful right hand she grasped a long-barrelled revolver.

"Well, well—" she panted, "well, by the Great . . . Horn Spoon, I . . . never saw the like! So fast . . . so almighty quick! And both o' them! Ain't dead—or are they?"

"No, oh no," answered Tom, his awed gaze upon the great, deadly thing in her hand. "No, Miss Amanda, they're merely taking a short nap . . . a bit of a drowse and what not. But I say, Miss Amanda,—why the cannon?"

"This?" she enquired, spinning the heavy weapon dexterously upon a finger. "I jest onlimbered in case. I gen'rally go heeled at night, see yuh here!" And, opening her mantle, Miss Amanda showed herself girt by a broad cartridge belt bearing two well-worn leather holsters, saying:

"These yere were my pop's guns, Mr. Wade, and were never drawn in vain! Now what about these two p'ison toads?"

"They'll be up and about shortly," replied Tom, peering down at his late assailants, "I'm waiting to see if they want any more. See, our Beetle-Brow stirs already!"

"Oh, I guess he and his pard have had aplenty. So come yuh with me, we've shore got to talk. And, because I like the way yuh look and act, I'm going to cut out the 'Mister' and call you Tom."

"Splendid! So now, Miss Amanda, if you'll holster the artillery I should be honoured if you'll take my arm, Miss Mandy——"

"And yuh can cut out the 'Miss'!"

"Thanks, frightfully!" said Tom.

So, arm-in-arm, they went along the moonlit road until, reaching a narrow by-lane with grassy bank, she led him thither.

"Tom," said she, sitting down and beckoning him beside her, "I want to tell yuh of my Honey Girl, because she's just about all I've got in creation to care a hoot about. And, oh, Tom, since leaving God's Own Country we've cert'nly been the lonesomest female critters in this whole round earth, yessir, we shorely have! Y'see nobody over here seems to onderstand us, our ways, our talk,—so now I'm praying hard to the good Lord that you're as much a man as yuh look, and one can trust as a friend,—can I, Tom?" Now seeing the trouble in her look, hearing it in her voice, and sensing all her desperate appeal, he reached out both his hands saying:

"Yes, Amanda, you can trust me through thick and thin . . . on my honour!"

Comforted alike by his evident sincerity and the firm, strong clasp of his ready hands, she smiled, nodded, then sighed:

"Oh, Tom . . . I've been so alone and nary soul to onderstand or help . . . and I'm scairt stiff for my Samanthy."

"But who would dare harm her, Mandy?"

"Her ownself,—and that's my worry! There's wild blood in her,—she don't give a hoot for any one or any thing! And since her Dad was killed she's—well, she don't

seem to care what happens to her . . . can't bide still . . . and has nobody that savvys her moods 'cept me. At home in Texas she had the open range, hundreds of miles and thousands o' cattle, and the outfit, and old Jake that was like a granddad to her, —over here she's got—only me!"

"What is your chief anxiety, Amanda?"

"Well, besides her looks there's her dollars, and ever since we left the Mexican Border there's been aplenty men making their plays for her."

"Which," quoth Tom, scowling up at the moon, "is only to be expected, I suppose."

"Yes, Tom, but 'stead of holding 'em off like she used to . . . she kind of leads 'em on now . . . 'specially one, an Englishman and shore nuff bad medicine as I tell her,—and she just won't see it."

"Who is the fellow?"

"One of these English aris-tocrats called Sir Harry Winby."

In the shadowy hedge immediately above them something more solid than any shadow moved stealthily, and all unnoticed.

"So you think," said Tom, "you are afraid she really loves him, Mandy?"

"No, I don't think, and I ain't a bit afraid of any such ridiculous nonsense, Tom."

"But we know she meets the fellow."

"Shore she meets him, frequently, and gets letters from him every day."

"Does she, by Jove! So he actually dares . . . has the infernal impudence to write."

"He certainly does . . . she's showed me some and—what love letters—my land!"

"Why, then," quoth Tom, with harsh finality, "that settles it of course, absolutely!"

"Settles what, Tom?"

"The fact that she loves this fellow."

"Oh—why?"

"Well, if she's always meeting him and reading his dashed letters—this proves, beyond all possible doubt, she must return the dashed fellow's confounded passion and—what not."

"It don't prove anything of the kind, Tom, nary a bit,—except that she's more of a woman than I thought."

"Mandy," he sighed, "I'm afraid I don't follow, I mean to say I'm completely up a tree,—I haven't the vaguest idea of what you mean. But then I don't pretend to understand the feminine mentality in the very least, and never shall, of course."

"Meaning yuh don't onderstand a real genu-ine female woman, Tom, nor ary

other man, I reckon! Yuh're not a married man, that's shore, eh, Tom?"

"Rather not!"

"Nor thinking of it?"

"Good heavens—no! Nor ever shall! I'm not the marrying type . . . I've no least appeal for women or they for me,—I'm a born bachelor, Mandy."

"Just think o' that now! Though I never knew of ary a man that wasn't! But as I'm telling yuh, this Sir Harry is certainly pursooing right close and determined! And his letters,—full of 'when will you marry me' and 'dears' and 'darlings' and 'beloveds' and 'sweethearts',—enough to turn yore stomach!"

"Quite!" said Tom, fervently.

"So I've been kind of wondering lately, Tom, if it wouldn't be best for me to discourage Sir Harry with a gun."

"Well—no!" sighed Tom. "No, Mandy! Though it may be quite a sound idea and perfectly natural method along the Mexican Border, here in Old England it is most certainly barred. There must be no shooting, Mandy."

"But how if he's out to kidnap her, Tom?"

"Good Lord! You don't . . . you can't really believe it possible . . . here in Eng ——"

"But I do believe it, Tom! It would explain these toughs, wouldn't it? Suppose these men are in his pay? Rich folks are always being kidnapped for marriage or ransom in the States,—now mind I'm telling yuh! So now what d'yuh say?"

"Mag-nificent!" exclaimed Tom, and so fervently that Miss Amanda leaned nearer the better to see his face.

"Say now, Tom," she demanded, "jest what are yuh giving me?"

"Myself," he answered, joyously, "myself as your friend. Mandy, to tackle these dashed ruffians with the help of another friend a human Thunderbolt, Mandy! Though, by George, the prospect seems too good to be true."

"Tom, will yuh please talk so I can make sense of it?"

"Why then, my dear, you will please leave everything to my friend and me, his name is Mark Timkins by the way,—you need have no more trouble or anxiety in regard to this Sir Harry fellow and his ruffians, not the least! We will interview him soon as possible, and show him the error of his ways."

"Yes, but what of my Honey Girl? . . . If she finds out——"

"Well, since you ask me, I should say that she would be an extremely awkward handful, a most difficult person to kidnap under any circumstances! She's no downy dove or tender chicken, Mandy, rather not! Especially remembering that quite murderous stiletto thing she chucks about with such ghastly skill and deadly

precision! Indeed, I'm pretty sure it would require a whole army to capture your Honey Girl or——"

"Is . . . that . . . so?" cried a furious voice; and down from the imminent shadows above—down upon them, with great show of ankle and leg, slithered the indignant subject of their anxious discussion.

"So!" quoth she, furiously, "here you sit, the two of you, talking of me like I was a babe in arms, a slushy love-fool and a female thug——"

"Shore!" Amanda cut in. "Because yuh act like each of 'em in turn, Samanthy!"

"Well now, listen, the both of you,—if I want to marry Sir Harry there's nobody in this whole round earth going to stop me! As for you, Mis-ter Wade, I'll ask you to mind yore own business and leave mine alone . . . and, Mandy, if you come trying to kiss me good-night you'll find my door locked, because if you're a friend of Mis-ter Wade you're none of mine,—and that's whatever!" Then turning from Amanda to frown contempt upon Tom, she threw up rebellious head and swept haughtily away, unheeding alike the tender pleading and stern commands of Miss Amanda who, thus helpless, looked at Tom, saying:

"Go fetch her back for me, Tom."

"Certainly!" he answered, rising with alacrity. "But suppose she refuses?"

"Then jest yuh grab and bring her along."

"With pleasure!" He nodded, and sped in pursuit. Thus very soon he was beside her.

"Samantha," said he, meekly, "will you please walk back with me like a good girl or must I obey Mandy and . . . grab you?"

"Just you try—and see what happens!" she retorted threateningly, and with defiance in every lovely line of her. Wasting no more words, Tom acted instantly, and with such unexpected power that Samantha felt herself up-whirled towards the bright crescent moon, saw her feet kicking in wild, most undignified manner, and so vainly that she strove the more desperately, so that Tom staggered, and in that moment took a sharp blow that set his nose bleeding; but this being nothing new for Tom, he merely tightened his grip until, gasping, she submitted and lay passive. Then he set her down and with long arm about her yielding waist, walked her back to where Miss Amanda sat waiting like a figure of doom.

"My good gracious!" she exclaimed. "Oh, Tom, what's the catamount done t'yuh?"

"Only tapped my claret, Mandy. Your Honey Girl's fist, though hard as a rock, is so much better than her dagger that I'm duly grateful." Here, groping for his handkerchief to staunch his wound, he felt it snatched away and then found

Samantha doing this for him.

"Don't think I'm sorry for you!" said she, fierce of voice though gentle of hand.

"No, of course not," said Tom.

"Or that I regret it one little bit."

"Certainly not!" said Tom.

"Though I'll have you know it was an accident."

"Oh, really?" said Tom.

"Yes,—really! You went and stuck yore nose right in my way."

"Ah,—did I?" said Tom.

"Cert'nly you did! If you hadn't I should have struck you where I intended."

"Where was that?" enquired Tom.

"In yore great, hateful chest."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"Yes!" she nodded. "And I'll have you know that you've bruised me shamefully!"

"Where?" enquired Tom.

"Never you mind, only you have!"

"Then," said Tom, "I suppose I ought to be sorry, but, as a matter of fact, I'm not."

"Which just goes to show me what a real, frightful brute you are, Mis-ter Wade."

"Yes," Tom agreed, meekly. "Oh, but—I say, you're all splashed and spotted with my gore."

"Don't I know it!"

"Well, if you'll lend me my handkerchief I'll wipe it off for you."

"Oh no, I'll take it to bed with me."

"Good Lord! What for?"

"To remind me what a beast you are. Now if your horrid nose has quit bleeding —take it home and bathe it."

"Very well," said Tom, submissively.

"But it's still dripping—I never saw such a nose!"

"Quite!" said Tom. "It's not much of a feature—beauty and so forth, but it does well enough except when a lady hammers it. Now, if you'll unhand me, madam, I'll be off."

"But you can't go—bleeding all over the countryside!"

"Why not?"

"Oh—fudge!"

"Of course I might use my cap."

"You stay right there!" she commanded, fiercely.

"Very well, ma'm," he answered humbly. Here, turning her back, she stooped; Tom heard a rustle of draperies, followed by the sharp sound of rending fabric:

"Use that!" said she, and into his hand thrust a soft, lacy bundle.

"Thanks! What is it?"

"Part of my petticoat—if you must know."

"Rather jolly lace!" he murmured, examining it curiously.

"Never mind,—use it until you can find a sheet."

"By Jingo,—it's stopped!"

"What has?"

"My nose—bleeding and so forth."

"Then give that back right now!"

"NO!" said Tom, firmly, thrusting this delicate bundle into his pocket. "My injured proboscis might start again,—besides I want your lacy fragment to—take to bed with me."

"Say now . . . whatever for?"

"To remind me what an amazon you are, with a fist like a pile-driver."

"Oh, have I—indeed?"

"Exactly! I never felt a smarter half-arm wallop."

"Well now, before you hit the trail listen to me, Mr. Wade,—and this goes for you too, Amanda! I'm not going to be babied by anyone, especially you, Mis-ter Tom Wade! I'm of age, and my own mistress, and my friends are my own business! I'm going to come and go and act just how and when and where I like, and there's no one ever going to interfere."

"Yes,—there's me for one!" quoth Amanda, grimly.

"And me for another," said Tom, meekly.

"Shore!" nodded Amanda. "Get this, you, Samanthy,—we're a hook-up, Tom and I, pardners from now on, and we're a-going to ride herd on yuh to see as yuh don't get yoreself all bogged down or roped, ear-marked and branded by any cattle-thieving rustler or smooth-tongued, ornery cuss—even though he does wear such a cute, little black mus-tache!"

"Mandy! Amanda Sholes"—the sweetly-rich voice was husky now, and almost choked with fury—"just for that—watch out! Some night I'll be missing and . . . if ever you see me again . . . I'll be his bride! I only have to give the signal his men are waiting for——"

"His men?" exclaimed Amanda. "Whose men?"

"Sir Harry's, of course. You saw one of them to-night—over the wall there

_____"

"The . . . wall? But . . . am I crazy or did I see you rope and nigh strangle the _____"

"Shore you did,—that was my way of saying 'no—nothing doing—yet'. But some night soon, maybe, it'll be 'yes'—and then instead of my rope will be his rope-ladder,—and I'll be away to . . . Gretna Green, or wherever the place is he wants me,—and what'll you do then?"

"Pray for yuh!" answered Miss Amanda, in voice suddenly low and pitifully tremulous. "Pray God make me able and worthy to love and take care of yuh like I promised yore dear Father. . . . For, just before he died . . . here on my breast, his last thought was for yuh. . . . 'Mandy,' he whispers, and me wiping blood from his pale lips, 'Mandy, she's a grand girl . . . there's wild blood in her . . . but she's clean and sweet and true . . . she only wants handling right . . . so, Mandy, now that I'm going to . . . her angel mother . . . take care of her . . . be her mother and father and . . . God help and bless yuh.' Then he smiles up at me, happy-like, and was gone . . . back and up . . . to yore mother and the Lord God . . . leaving only pore me to care for yuh . . . and so . . . I'm a praying now as I prayed then . . . Oh, dear God, help me to do it right!"

"Mandy!"

The word was a heart-breaking cry, and Samantha was down on her knees in the dust, her shining head in Amanda's lap. But Amanda's long, gaunt arms were close about her, and Amanda's tears were falling like precious, glittering jewels upon that defiant young head now abased in such passionate grief that found vent in breathless sobs:

"Amanda . . . ! Oh . . . Mandy, pray for me . . . for me . . ."

And with this desolate cry echoing in his own heart, Tom drew silently away and left them to each other.

CHAPTER XVIII

OF TEA, ANGEL CAKE AND MRS. PENHALLO

FOR the next two days, while Mark and The Factotum scoured the country for leaded windows, Tom laboured hard on the old house, though to be sure he often stilled his noisy hammer fancying he heard a light footstep, or checked the strokes of his plane to glance in a certain direction quite eagerly, and, being as often

disappointed, wrought on the more diligently.

It was in mid-afternoon of the third day that at last, and when least expected, he glimpsed the flutter of feminine draperies approaching along the winding drive, and, restraining his instant desire to leap thitherward, continued to go on with the particular job in hand as though entirely oblivious of all else; having thus quelled his impetuosity for perhaps half a minute, he turned with the more eagerness—only to behold Mrs. Penhallo standing a little distance away watching him great-eyed from the shadowy brim of her neat, plain bonnet.

Now though Tom's disappointment was bitter, he contrived to smile a welcome . . . but those sadly wistful eyes were not deceived, and Tom, becoming aware of it —went towards this slender figure that struck him now as forlorn and solitary, saying in his heartiest manner:

"Mrs. Penhallo, I'm awfully glad to see you."

"Are you?" she questioned, gently.

"Yes, yes, indeed I am!" Then somehow her two hands were in his, and he was surprised to feel how close and strong was the clasp of those slender, ungloved fingers.

"Were you expecting . . . someone else?" she enquired, almost humbly.

"Well," he answered, rather awkwardly, "as a matter of fact . . . I was rather."

"Then . . . I'll go . . . if you will please loose my hands."

"Oh, no . . . I mean to say don't hurry off so soon, I beg. Instead come and sit down . . . the chair yonder—do now." So he led her where in leafy shade stood the two camp chairs and table. "Now," said he, "do please rest, you look tired."

"I am—a little," she answered, sinking into the chair with small, hushed sigh of weariness. "You see I am a busy person. I fetch and carry, and besides I teach the village children, a sort of dame's school."

"Well, now at least you shall rest, and while I boil the kettle for tea please sit there and see what I've been doing for poor old Trevore,—first this pillow for your head."

"You're very kind!" she murmured, while Tom gave all his attention to building and lighting a fire, wholly unaware of the eyes that watched his face, his quick, deft hands, his every lithe movement, with such strange, wistful eagerness, yet when he glanced up from the now blazing fire it was to see her looking away at the old house.

"Well," he enquired, "what do you think of it—my work I mean, the new window-frames and what not?"

"You have done more, much more than I should have deemed possible in the time."

"How kind of you to say that! I've worked pretty hard, but was afraid there wasn't much to show for it . . . you see I intend what I do shall endure, and so I'm going at it very thoroughly."

"Yes," she murmured, "you are bringing it to life again just as you promised."

"Though," said Tom, spreading the tablecloth, "I like to believe Trevore never was quite dead, only asleep and . . . waiting."

"Waiting?" she repeated. "For what?"

"To wake again . . . for joy . . . happiness and a fuller living . . . if you know what I mean. You see, Mrs. Penhallo, as a matter of fact, this old place being my mother's home and my birthplace . . . almost seems to be . . . part of myself. . . . Sounds odd and perfectly ridiculous, doesn't it?"

"No!" she answered. "Not a bit . . . ah—no!"

"Thanks!" said Tom, beginning to cut bread and butter. "Thanks awfully!"

"Why do you thank me?"

"For being such a sympathetic, grandly understanding person."

"I suppose," said she, watching the deft movements of his powerful hands, "I suppose you know Trevore is said to be haunted?"

"Yes," he nodded, smiling down into her intent face, "but if so, then I'm pretty sure it is haunted by very gentle ghosts, and especially—one."

"You . . . mean . . . ?"

"My mother." The chair creaked suddenly, and Tom saw Mrs. Penhallo was leaning back, her drooping lashes dark in the oval of a face so pale that he enquired anxiously:

"Mrs. Penhallo, what is it?"

Her eyes opened, and she smiled up at him, and Tom wondered at the sudden radiance of her look.

"Silly of me," she answered, almost gaily. "I thought you had . . . cut yourself."

"Bless you, no!" he laughed. "I'm used to all manner of edged tools."

"Talking of ghosts," said she, "do you think . . . your mother may haunt Trevore?"

"I'm hoping so," he answered gravely. "Yes, either in spirit or life."

"Are you so anxious to meet her . . . living or dead?"

"Yes," he answered, almost whispering, as he turned to gaze at the ancient house, "living or dead! When I was a child I grieved for her, when I was an impish boy I needed her,—now that I am a man . . ."

"Well?" she breathed, leaning swiftly towards him. "And . . . now?"

"I should like to . . . comfort her," said he.

So for a long moment he gazed at Trevore, his birthplace, and she at him; then Tom went on cutting bread and butter.

"Eight!" said he. "Eight slices should be enough to get on with, d'you think?"

"Goodness gracious—yes!" And in her voice now such ringing gladness that Tom, seeing how she smiled, did likewise; then:

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I was clean forgetting! Mrs. Penhallo, do you like cake?"

"Sometimes. Why?"

"Because I happen to own a cake, or part of one, a rather choice effort called 'Angel Cake', an American concoction."

"American?" she repeated. "There is a young American lady come to live quite near my cottage."

"Oh?" exclaimed Tom; and then after momentary pause: "Have you met her?"

"Not properly. They are rather grand people, with hosts of servants,—but she has spoken to me several times."

"Has she though? What . . . d'you think of her?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I mean to say, do you like her?"

"I'm not sure. Do you?"

"Well . . . yes," he replied, balancing a teaspoon on his finger. "Oh yes, I think she's . . . rather a good sort."

"And a very beautiful girl, Mr. Wade."

"Ye-e-s," he answered, dropping the teaspoon and staring down at it. "Yes, I fancy she is rather. . . . But what I like is . . . well . . . there's no ogling, flirtatious rot about her, not the least! And then, besides, she's got precisely the same idea as I have about marriage and what not,—thinks the whole business is perfectly pestilential,—hates the very idea."

"Really!"

"Yes indeed! She's the most common-sense girl I've ever met,—not that I know many, rather not!"

"Why not?"

"For one thing because I haven't the kind of face that appeals to The Sex. I'm not built for a spoony lady-killer—not me! And then again—women don't attract me in the very least—young ones, I mean, and I'm pretty sure they never will."

"I wonder!" The words were softly spoken, yet the shapely lips that uttered them were smiling.

"Mrs. Penhallo," quoth Tom, shaking his head with the utmost resolution, "allow

me to tell you since, by George, I'm telling you so much—which surprises me because considering we are almost strangers——"

"Are we?" she broke in.

"No!" he answered, instantly. "By Jove and Jingo—no! And that's the queer part of it—we never were strangers! From the moment I stopped you on Bodmin Moor we seemed to be . . . well . . . not a bit strange, if you know what I mean?"

"I know!" she answered, happily, for now the smile seemed to have got into her gentle eyes; and suddenly it occurred to him that despite plain attire and silvery hair Mrs. Penhallo was a strangely beautiful woman. Something of this realization must have shown in that honest face of his, for, meeting his look, she flushed, and became only the younger and more lovely.

"Didn't you say something about cake?" she enquired, smiling now with eyes and lips.

"Of course,—the Angel Cake!" said he, starting afoot.

"Take care you don't trample on the teaspoon!" she warned; so he picked it up and strode off in quest of the cake, while she looked after his tall, stalwart form; and now those smiling eyes were the brighter for a sparkle of tears that were gone long before Tom came back bearing all that remained of the famous Angel Cake.

"Not much left, I'm afraid, but enough for you to taste, Mrs. Penhallo, so I won't cut it."

"Gracious!" she exclaimed. "I could never eat all that, Mr. Wade."

"Well, please have a try. . . . Now, what do you think of it,—rather delicious?"

"Yes, very! She is an extremely good cook, your American lady."

"Yes,—but—permit me to correct you,—she is no lady of mine, absolutely—not! The last time we met we parted in—dudgeon. A ridiculous word, always made me think of fish when I was a brat,—yet extremely apt." Mrs. Penhallo laughed, and Tom, surprised again by her youthful look despite silvery hair, enquired, impulsively:

"Please may I ask, frightfully rude of me I know, but pray how old are you?"

"I'm . . . frightfully—nearly forty, Mr. Wade!"

"Extremely sporting of you to tell me, though you don't look anywhere near it,—and would you mind, I mean to say, will you drop the Wade and call me 'Tom'—please?" At this she turned to look at the house again, and with head thus averted, answered:

"Yes . . . I will if you . . . will tell me more about . . . your mother."

"How I wish I could!" said he fervently. "But I never saw my mother to remember . . . no, not even her picture, so I've no idea what she looked like, and, what is perfectly awful, I don't know if she is alive or dead—though I think I told

you so."

"Poor . . . boy!" she murmured, still gazing at the house.

"Yes, I was a pretty lonely urchin! At school I used to wonder why every boy had a mother except me. But to-day . . . well, here I am working on Trevore, where she was born,—hoping that when I have restored the old place it may call her back to me, somehow, or, as I said, be haunted by her gentle ghost . . . if you know what I mean."

"Yes . . . Tom," she answered, turning at last to smile at him though with sensitive lips that quivered. "Yes, I know just what you mean."

"Why, then . . . do you think it very odd and strange that a man who has never seen his mother or heard her voice can . . . want her . . . grieve for her . . . do you?"

"I should think it . . . very wonderful!" she murmured.

"I suppose," said Tom, reaching absently for the last slice of bread and butter, "it's quite too much to hope or expect that you may possibly . . . have known her . . . my mother? Her maiden name was Janice Vivienne Trevorna. You didn't, of course?"

Mrs. Penhallo took so long to answer that Tom had demolished his bread and butter except for an inch or so—and this now fell to the grass and lay unheeded, for:

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Penhallo. "Yes, Tom, I knew Janice Trevorna."

"Jove!" he exclaimed, beneath his breath, but with such look that Mrs. Penhallo continued rather hastily:

"I can only tell you that she was a country girl, rather shy and very spoiled, because when her parents died she went to live with a wealthy aunt beyond Helston, who petted and pampered her."

"Oh, but," said Tom, "I thought she lived here at Trevore."

"So she did for part of each year . . . she loved Trevore so much that when her aunt died she came back and lived here alone with her old servants until she married . . . some gentleman from London. . . . She never lived at Trevore after that."

"But I understood," said Tom, "indeed everyone supposed to know told me I was born here at Trevore."

"Then everyone was wrong, Tom. Her baby came to bless and comfort her at Lamorna . . . that I do know, and this is all I can tell you."

"What was she like—to look at? Was she very beautiful?"

"Not particularly."

"Can you describe her for me?"

"She was slim, of medium height and dark . . . yes, her hair was black as midnight. . . . Goodness! There's Merrion church clock striking five already!"

"Then perhaps you don't know why she left my father?"

"How can you expect me to know such a thing?"

"I don't, of course," he sighed. "Thank you for telling me as much as you have. Though I'm still wondering and . . . rather troubled."

"Why, Tom?"

"To know if she lives, and if so—where. And just how she . . . ran away from home, and so on."

"I wonder if——" said Mrs. Penhallo, sweeping the crumbs from her lap. "But, yes, you must surely have heard she . . . eloped with someone, haven't you, Tom?"

"Well," he answered, in voice like a groan, "something of that kind. What do you think?"

"Shocking!" she answered, retying her bonnet-strings. "Oh—very shocking indeed!"

Yet no one could have appeared less scandalized than this calm-eyed, dignified lady who now rose saying:

"I think it is time I went home."

"Not yet, please!" said Tom, rising also. "Let me show you what I am doing inside the house, may I?"

"I should love it," she answered, gently. "Besides, I'm curious to know if you have been able to find the secret chamber—the priest's hiding-place?"

"Good heavens—no!" exclaimed Tom. "Is there one? Great Jove and Jupiter, this is simply magnificent! I rather wondered if there would be one somewhere, but couldn't find a sign anywhere."

"No, it's very cleverly hidden . . . a dreadful memorial of the cruel, Bad Old Days, Tom! Come and I'll show you the way of it. . . . You see," she explained, as they entered the echoing hall, "I used to visit . . . your mother here quite often, and she taught me the trick of it. Now we must reach into the chimney. . . . I'm afraid we shall get very sooty."

"Oh no," he answered, eagerly. "I've had every chimney swept, and thoroughly overhauled outside and in."

"Well then, stand beside me here, and take care to keep away from the hearthstone! Now do you see those stone bosses each carved with a Tudor rose,—the one in the darkest corner of the chimney there? Yes, that's it! Now—pull—hard!" Tom obeyed, vainly at first, then, with harsh, grating squeak of rusted machinery, the broad hearthstone slid forward, disclosing a square opening in the floor with a narrow stone stair descending into darkness.

"Grand!" he exclaimed, peering down into this gloom. "Perfectly splendid!"

"No, very gruesome and cobwebby, Tom! Those steps lead down to a little dark, dreadful room with a bed, a table and a chair, all very old, of course, early Tudor, your mother used to say. So you see, Tom, here on the hearth would be a great fire of logs so that when the pursuers came searching—who could ever possibly imagine the poor, hunted fugitive was lying below? Now push the boss-thing!" Tom did so, and back slid the great hearthstone, making such noise that the sound of hoofs and wheels outside was quite unheard. Thus, when Mark entered the house, all he saw was Tom's lower half—and a woman who turned and looked at him; and meeting this wistful gaze, Mark halted suddenly and stood utterly still, then opening his lips to speak, said nothing, for this woman had laid finger on lip. So Mark smiled, took off his hat, bowed and addressed himself to Tom, who ducked out from the wide chimney to say cheerily:

"Mrs. Penhallo, this is my friend, Mark Timkins, your other passenger on Bodmin Moor. Mark, old fellow,—Mrs. Penhallo—who, by Jingo, has just shown me here, look, Mark—how to come at the secret chamber. So what I say is,—let's get candles and explore eftsoons and right speedily."

"Not now," said Mrs. Penhallo, gently, "at least I cannot. My cottage is beyond Merrion and——"

"Oh, but I'll drive you there, of course," said Tom, "if you don't mind waiting until——"

"No!" said she, gently, but with the utmost decision. "If Mr. . . . Timkins will be so good, I will leave you to explore. So, good-bye . . . Tom, and thank you for making me so welcome."

"You'll come again—soon?" said he, taking the hand she extended and clasping it in both his own. "You really will—and very soon?"

"I really will!" she answered.

Thus presently seated beside her in the dogcart, Mark took the reins, nodded to Goliath, who gave Pepper his head and that impetuous animal whirled them away.

CHAPTER XIX

WHICH IS ONE OF SURPRISES, MORE OR LESS

MRS. PENHALLO turned to watch until Tom and Trevore were hidden from view, sighed deeply and said murmurously:

"So it appears that Sir Marcus Felton is still Mr. Timkins?"

"Yes, Lady Wade-Orrington."

"Lady Wade-Orrington!" she repeated, her dark brows knit in painful thought. "I was . . . his wife for a year . . . only twelve months, though it seemed an eternity—then! It was exactly twenty-two years and eight months ago yesterday that we eloped—no, that you carried me off, snatched me from the very brink of death and saved . . . two lives. But for you, Marcus, I should have been a suicide and a murderess!"

"You were so very young, Janice, so utterly lost and solitary."

"I was a little fool, Mark! Spoiled, pampered, wilful . . . pitifully ignorant of the world . . . and he was quite too splendid to trouble for poor, wretched me."

"Your husband, Janice——"

"Don't call him that!"

"The Earl then, was a man deeply involved in great affairs even in those days, a young man greatly burdened with——"

"And I was his child-wife, frightened out of her poor, silly wits by his great houses, his state, his servants, his sisters—especially that shrewish Justinia,—but, oh, most of all, by his superbly, politely cold, arrogant self—my too-lordly spouse! Marcus, in a week's time I shall be thirty-nine, yet the mere thought of him chills me even now!"

"Yet he is a pitiably lonely man, Janice. Beneath that armour of cold placidity he is very human."

"And believes the worst of me."

"As you meant he should, Janice."

"Yes—yes, I did! I wished to humble his lofty arrogance and hateful pride! So I wrote telling him I had gone away with a far better, nobler man,—which was perfectly true, Marcus, for so you were and are! But . . . I let him believe that man was my lover, which, of course, was a deliberate lie, and therefore wicked, I suppose. And yet—remembering all I suffered—needlessly perhaps, being such an ignorant little fool, but . . . ah God,—when I think how he forced my darling baby from my arms and left me desolate. . . . Oh, when I remember that long agony of empty yearnings, I have no least regret! No wonder grief turned my hair white! I know I should have died but for your sympathy and the tender love of your angel mother."

"Instead of which, Janice, you became the daughter she had always longed for. It comforts me to know she died in your arms, Janice."

"Yes, here on my heart, Mark, and you so far away—in Turkey was it not?"

"Yes, with the Earl on a secret mission. And when we returned you were gone!

Why did you run away and hide yourself—and here, of all places?"

"What else could I do? And I came here because I knew this was the last place he would expect to find me . . . and, besides, who was there to recognize poor, middle-aged, white-haired Mrs. Penhallo for Janice Trevorna or the Countess of Orrington? So here I came, and here I live with Martha, my old nurse. And because I am a very busy person, work and the long years have tempered my grief, hard work is a quite wonderful comforter. But, Mark—dear, good man, know this, that you, who were always the strong Champion of Lost Causes, you and your beloved mother have been the one sweet and fragrant memory in my unhappy life—until I met . . . ah yes, until God let me find . . . my son."

"What do you think of him, my dear?"

"Think of him?" she repeated, locking her slender fingers and looking down at them through sparkle of happy tears. "Oh, Mark, these hands felt his clasp awhile ago, a man's strong clasp and yet . . . it brought back the sweet memory of his little, clutching baby fingers! And this is what I think of him: That he is not a bit handsome, except when he smiles, nor is he the least little bit what I dreamed or expected, and yet—he is just exactly what I would have him. He is my baby grown big,—my boy—my great, strong man—flesh of my flesh—my own Justin! But, oh dear God—to have only known the joy of caring for him all these desolate years! To have watched him grow and develop! To have soothed his childish troubles, kissed away his boyish hurts, gloried in his splendid youth,—all these joys are lost to me . . . all this I grieve for bitterly—bitterly. Is it any wonder that I hate the cruel wretch, the cold, proud man who snatched from me these blessings,—can you, could anyone wonder?"

"I can sorrow for it, Janice."

"Then don't!" she pleaded, laying gentle hand upon his sleeve. "You have your own grief, my poor Marcus . . . your wife, the girl you married for pity so many years ago, you dear, great-hearted fool! Is she still hopelessly alive?"

"Yes, Janice."

"Oh, Mark, sometimes one doubts the mercy and justice of God, I did, as you know! And yet to-day He has given me back my baby glorified by manhood! Perhaps this is an omen . . . I pray it is, for your sake, I shall pray most fervently, Mark dear. And now let us talk of my great, big son . . . what can you tell his mother about him, please?"

"First, when and how did you recognize him, and after all these years?"

"On Bodmin Moor."

"But not at once, surely?"

"Oh no, it took me quite—ten minutes, perhaps a little more. Of course I knew

you at once, Mark, though you never so much as glanced at me."

"No,—for what with our long walk and the heat I was nearly asleep, in fact I did drop off. But how on earth did you know Justin so soon?"

"A mother's instinct, perhaps, then seeing him with you—and when he told me he had been born at Trevore, which he was not, of course,—then, oh, Mark,—then I knew him, and nearly drove old Robin into the ditch! And though he does not take after his poor mother he is not in the least like his lordly father, thank Heaven! Now what can you tell me about him—go on, Mark—do!"

"My dear, I can tell this,—that you have found him precisely when he will most need your mother-love and counsel!"

"Oh, why, Mark—why?"

"Because, though he doesn't know it yet, the poor wretch is deep in love, Janice."

"Yes, and with this American creature!"

"Oh? Then he does know,—he told you, did he?"

"Of course not. What he told me was that he hated all idea of love and 'what not, if you know what I mean',—what strange, queer phrases he uses, Mark,—and he said this with his dear, honest eyes all a-dream with love. His eyes and mouth are his best features. But, Mark,—this American girl——"

"Is the lady his father has selected for him to marry, and——"

"Then of course he must wed someone else."

"She is Helena Samantha, Marchioness of Dorincourt, very wealthy, I believe, and certainly a beauty. Though down here she passes as Miss Samantha Dudeney."

"Yes, I've seen and spoken with her."

"Don't you like her, Janice?"

"No, I do not! At present, anyhow, and more especially if she is—his father's choice!"

"Though," said Mark, smiling, "Justin has no least suspicion that she is. Indeed it was to escape meeting her as the Marchioness Helena, and his prospective bride, that your Justin comes down here and instantly falls in love with her as—Miss Dudeney. And, my dear, after actually defying his father and to his very face!"

"Oh, the brave darling!"

"Yes, he is indeed your own son, Janice. For, like his young mother, he preferred freedom to luxurious slavery, or, let us say, a gilded submission. So to-day instead of lounging in London or aboard his father's yacht, you find him plying hammer and saw—but—up to his ears in love with the very lady of his father's choice, which is decidedly ironical, Janice!"

"Ah, but splendid!" sighed she, clasping her slim hands beneath dimpled chin. "Yes, he is indeed my son, my own boy. I am no longer the grieving, childless woman. . . . God has been kind to me at last. . . . Though I'm afraid I haven't been very patient, Mark."

"No," he agreed, with his slow, whimsical smile, "you certainly are not the meekly submissive creature one might suppose."

"Ah, you think I have grown hard,—yes, perhaps I have . . . my heart would have broken else. I cannot forget, and shall not forgive, the cruelty of my . . . my lordly persecutor!"

"You are very bitter against him, Janice."

"Yes,—yes, I am, he stole my baby."

"But, my dear, you must remember your baby was heir to a great name and vast possessions,—Gawain's only son."

"He was my son, too! My only possession, my all . . . everything I had to live for."

"Well, but now," said Mark, soothingly, "now that you have found him . . . has he any idea who you are?"

"No, oh, no—men are always so much blinder than women! And yet when he looks at me with those dear, steadfast eyes of his . . . it is not as he would look at a stranger. And when he said he hoped Trevore would be haunted by his mother or her ghost . . . when he told me how he had . . . wanted me, grieved for me . . . Oh, Mark, it nearly broke my heart,—and yet I was glad, beyond words, and yearned to cuddle and kiss him as a mother should . . . and I very nearly did."

"I'm beginning to wonder precisely why his father sent him down to Trevore."

"Oh, to be near this American girl, of course."

"Yes, but he sent her down here also, though she doesn't know it. Now why, Janice, why should Gawain, with choice of so many other estates, Sussex, Kent, Scotland, Southern France, select little, quiet Trevore,—why, Janice? Is it because he knows you are still living hereabout?"

"How should he know this when I have taken such precautions, Mark?"

"My dear, the answer may be: because he is that silent, serene power named Gawain, and knows far more than anyone can possibly suspect. Yes," said Mark, thoughtfull, "even I, who have worked and travelled and lived with him so many years."

"Oh, but you always thought him so very wonderful, Marcus!"

"I do, and always shall! For, Janice, I have seen him front death undismayed. I have known him faced with crises when the least weakness . . . one false step or

mistake might have plunged Europe into war! My dear, your husband is perhaps the greatest, wisest, most——"

"Oh, a wise fool, Marcus, that ruined his own and my life! Please do not sing his praises to me. No, tell me, instead, of my son."

"First I must say this,—if his father, knowing you lived in Merrion, sent Justin down here, it was, I now feel sure, with the assured hope that he would soon or late meet his mother. And why, Janice, why do you suppose?"

"I don't suppose, Mark."

"Then I will. And my supposition is,—that by means of the son, the father shall meet the mother—and then——"

"A perfectly horrid suggestion, Mark,—oh, hateful, and one I refuse even to think of! And you must promise that when writing to the Earl you will make no mention of me,—promise now!"

"Oh, I do most faithfully!"

"That's a relief!" she sighed. "Now let us talk of my son. First you will assure me he is not in the least clever like his father!"

"No . . . he is utterly unlike Gawain."

"For which, Heaven be praised! Then next you will tell me he has no dignity, no poise, presence or ridiculous touch-me-not stateliness!"

Mark smiled, he even chuckled as he replied:

"None whatever, Janice! Your Justin is my Tom,—honest and ingenuous as he looks! Indeed, there are no modish affectations about your son and my friend."

"Dear Mark!" she sighed, patting his arm caressingly. "I am so happy, so glad you love him, too, because you are very wise, Mark, so wise and grave and quiet, you always were. A strong defence for the weak and helpless, or where should I have been? Yes, where should I be now—but for you, dear good friend? Dead and forgotten . . . my poor little baby unborn. To-day I am alive to glory in my great, strong son . . . because of you, Mark. You who were not afraid to snatch me from death to your dear mother's comforting arms and cherishing love . . . You have never told him . . . the Earl, how you saved his poor, wretched young wife from suicide and murder?"

"Hush, my dear! No, of course not . . . though I have often wished he knew. Honouring him, as I always shall, this has been a black shadow between us, chilling our friendship. But the secret was yours also, and thus my lips were sealed."

"Mark, do you think such a hatefully proud wretch could ever understand and forgive,—not that there ever was anything really to forgive—no, indeed, rather should he be eternally grateful to you,—but would he, could he?"

"Yes, Janice, yes, I am sure he would, for, as I told you, he is a very solitary man."

"Oh . . . well . . .! But here we are talking of him again instead of my Justin. Tell me, why in the world does he call himself 'Tom'?"

"Because he is Justin. And Justin, being himself, detests pomposity or anything the least ostentatious."

"The dear lamb! How like his poor, meek, unpretentious mother!"

"My dear, there is nothing lamb-like about your Tom, quite the reverse, I assure you! Your son is a man of his hands."

"His dear hands! Yes, I know he is very clever with hammers and things,—he showed me some of his work, those window-frames. And he is bringing Trevore back to life for his mother's sake—my sake! Oh, Mark, how wonderful it is to have such a fine, great, strong, clever, darlingly blind man for a son!"

"And when is Tom to learn he is blessed with such a mother to cherish and truly love him at last as only a mother ever may—when?"

"I . . . don't know!" she answered, wringing her clasped hands nervously. "Oh, I don't know! Never perhaps. The very idea frightens me! Shall I be his blessing or . . . his curse? Will he love me . . . will he be able to . . . honour his mother as a son should? I know they have defamed me to him, poor boy,—and so it is that although I yearn to claim and mother him I am afraid, Mark, dreadfully fearful of my own dear son."

"Can I help you, Janice? Shall I explain to him?"

"No—ah, no! Bless you for the kind thought, but no! What happens it must be just between him and me . . . and in God's own time."

It was now that, warned by the sound of speedily-approaching hoofs, Mark reined in towards the hedge and a horseman went by at a gallop, a remarkably handsome cavalier, extremely smart from crown of jaunty hat, worn at knowing, rakish angle, to heels of spurred and polished riding boots.

"Ah!" exclaimed Mark, frowning after this impetuous rider, "Penruan House must be somewhere hereabouts?"

"A mile or so further on, Mark, and not far from my cottage. Do you happen to know that very dashing and splendid gentleman?"

"No, I do—not! Except that he calls himself Sir Harry Winby."

"He is superlatively handsome, Mark, but quite too elegantly romantic to be real, —yet a dangerous creature, an odious menace to' coy virginity,—not that she strikes one as particularly coy."

"Whom do you mean, Janice?"

"This American girl, of course. Yonder too smart Adonis haunts her persistently,—a most determined wooer . . . and the foolish miss is often in his company,—at least I've seen them together more than once. Now if she is light and worthless and my dear son really and truly loves her—how then, Mark?"

"How indeed?" he sighed, greatly troubled, "for Tom isn't the kind of fellow who can fall in or out of love easily. Something must be done about it."

"Something shall, Mark, and by me, please understand, by me! I will meet this girl, Miss Dudeney, cultivate her, talk with her, and know the truth of her, one way or the other, very soon . . . And there is my cottage down this side lane, you can see its thatched roof above the trees."

Descending at her cottage gate, she paused to look up at Mark's troubled face, with eyes brightened by a new gladness, saying:

"Dear man, you are worrying about this girl for Justin's sake, though I don't think you need. Anyhow, I want you to do nothing in the matter for the present,—leave it all to me, will you, Mark?"

"Gladly, my dear."

"And not a word to my son about her—or his mother,—promise!"

"I promise."

"Then good-bye, dear Mark, until we meet again—which may be sooner than you expect. Good-bye, and may God bless you with the happiness you deserve."

CHAPTER XX

HOW SAMANTHA MADE A FRIEND

IT was next afternoon that Samantha strolled villagewards with two letters for the post, one addressed to:

Sir Harry Winby,
Royal Hotel,
Truro.

The second

Mr. T. Wade,
Trevore Manor House,
Nr. Merrion.

Samantha walked slowly, for the day was very hot and languorous; and strolling

thus, she glanced very often at these two letters, very thoughtfully at the first, but frowningly upon the second; suddenly and almost furtively she hid them both in the bosom of her very expensive summer gown that set off her face and form so artfully, and turned, as out from leafy by-lane stepped her neighbour, this young-old woman whose garments, though of cheap material and plain to austerity, could not hide the gracious dignity of their wearer.

"Good afternoon!" said Samantha, stopping. "You're Mrs. Penhallo. I know because old Mr. Bates, our gardener, told me. And I'm Samantha Doodney. Now if you're going to the village I wonder if you'd mind me tagging along?"

"I should be very glad, Miss Dudeney."

"I'd like to tell you," said Samantha, as they walked on together, "how I just love that little home of yours down the track there. I think it's the cutest thing, with all that fuzz on the roof—thatch I guess you'd call it. You see, I'm from the States, though I guess you can tell that from my talk."

"And how do you like England, Miss Dudeney?"

"Well—I do and I don't, ma'am. Yore England shore takes a whole lot of getting used to and the people a heap of knowing. They don't kind of shine up to strangers like our folk do out West, and they don't talk or act the same—none whatever!"

"Do you know many people—hereabout?"

"No, ma'm, I don't. We live kind of seclooded at Penruan."

"But surely you must have met one or two people, Miss Dudeney?"

"One or two. Oh, sure, and that's about all!"

"Do you wish to go into Society, Miss Dudeney?"

"No—ma'm! Not so you could notice it—if Society means these aristo-cratic dames and lords—not me! That's why I'm shying off being presented to yore Queen Victoria."

"But surely that will be a great honour."

"Oh, I guesso!" moaned Samantha drearily. "But—not to me, Mrs. Penhallo. I'll shore get me all tangled up, and shan't know where I'm at. If they'd only let me be myself—a sure-enough, dyed-in-the-wool American, instead of trying to turn me into an English lady aristo-crat, I might swing it. But as it is, I just feel like a two-spot in a dirty deck."

"My dear—that sounds very dreadful!"

"Oh, Mrs. Pen, it shore is dreadful! Sometimes I get pie-eyed, locoed, and all tuckered out. There's poor Lady Oxted doing her darndest to get me to talk more like an English lady should, but it doesn't come natural. I guess my American tongue isn't shaped right to get round some of these swell English words,—and I'm better

across the saddle of a bucking mustang than flapping a fan and curtseying in a drawing-room, all dolled up in a dress yards too long. And I just hate these bustle-things, and won't wear them—not in the country, and that's whatever! And in spite of Lady Oxted, too! She's a dear, but darn English, she nearly threw a fit the first time I called her 'Babs'. But then—well—Barbara's such a mouthful—now isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Penhallo, her pretty mouth curving to sudden smile, "it certainly is . . . Are you very lonely here?"

"Lonesome?" sighed Samantha, turning up her quite beautiful eyes. "Well now—say,—I get so lonesome I could scream! Most all day I sit around like a bump on a log, or read a book, or help old man Bates garden, or ramble around like a lone steer! If I could have a real, good cry like other girls it might do me good,—but tears don't come easy with me. I'm no good as a cry-er, I guess. So I just yearn for my own country . . . the old Rio Grande and . . . break my heart for . . . my Dad. It's more than a year since he was killed, but I miss him more to-day than I did even then!"

"Oh, my dear!" murmured Mrs. Penhallo, for beneath Samantha's frown of pain her eyes were suddenly abrim with tears. "Oh, my precious child!" sighed Mrs. Penhallo, and closed those wide, sorrow-filled eyes with two gentle kisses. And in this moment, down on her shoulder sank the girl's proud, young head, and clasping her tender comforter in yearning arms, Samantha whispered brokenly:

"Oh . . . Mrs. Pen. . . . I am . . . I'm crying . . . at last!"

"Do, my dear one—do!" murmured her comforter. "For I, also, know the blessed relief of tears!"

So there in the open road, with the sunlight glad about them, they stood, grieving girl and lonely woman, with arms that clasped and clung, while Samantha gave vent to the heart-breaking grief she had held in check so long; and no mother's hand could have been gentler than this that dried her eyes when the passion of her sorrow had spent itself.

Then, looking into the gentle face of her comforter, Samantha whispered:

"Oh you . . . dearest Mrs. Pen, I'm real glad we've found each other, for . . . somehow . . . you kind of seem . . . like the mother I never knew . . . though I guess you're too young to mother great big me."

"My dear, I'm older than you think."

"And I'm twenty-one and a bit. And, oh—I shore do love the way you say 'my dear'. And when you name me will you please call me Samantha—or Sam? Dad always called me 'Sam'. You see, he kind of wanted me to be a boy, but when I turned out to be a girl—well, he just made the best of me . . . and he did it so that I

loved him like I'd been son and daughter too!"

"He must have been a grand man, my dear, to be so beloved."

"Oh, he was! Yes, he shore was! Born in England here and in his ways and talk just as English as you are, dear Mrs. Pen. So you see I'm half English myself."

"Well now," said Mrs. Penhallo, as they walked on again, her hand now held close within Samantha's rounded, vigorous arm, "dear girl, I want you to know you need never feel so terribly lonely again, you know where my cottage is, the door shall always open to welcome and comfort you."

"And I'll certainly visit you. Oh, I shore will! You've made me feel different already. And I'd like to bring Mandy, if I may?"

"Why, of course."

"Now let me tell you I'm thinking of buying me a bronc."

"A bronc, my dear?"

"Well, a mustang, a riding horse, if I can get the right sort—with plenty of pep,—or say two or three. You see, like Dad, I love horses, I always did."

At this moment, as if conjured up by her words, towards them came a smart phaeton drawn by a pair of splendid animals and driven as smartly by an equally splendid young gentleman.

"Well," exclaimed Samantha, viewing these high-stepping, glossy-coated creatures with sparkling eyes, "talking of horses, will you look there! Oh, Mrs. Pen, there's beauty and style for you!"

"Yes, dear, he is indeed a remarkably handsome young man."

"Man? Oh, sure, Sir Harry's easy to look at, but I meant his horses,—real dandies!"

As she spoke, Sir Harry Winby flourished off his smart hat with a gallant grace, then swung his splendid team and reined up in masterly style.

"Good afternoon!" he hailed. "Samantha, I was on my way to you, as per arrangement, and to show you my new turnout: what do you think of it?"

"Grand!" she exclaimed, viewing the two high-spirited horses with the eye of knowledge. "Harry, they are—It! Yessir, they cert'nly are!"

"Then step into the phaeton and I'll show you their action and paces! In with you and——"

"Oh, but I'm forgetting my manners! Dear Mrs. Pen, this is my . . . friend Sir Harry Winby. Harry,—Mrs. Penhallo."

"How do!" quoth he, with careless, very perfunctory bow, his long-lashed, dark eyes on Samantha's glowing loveliness. "Grand afternoon for a spin, so in with you, Samantha!"

"Nothing doing!" she replied, her gaze still upon the horses, "I'm on my way to the village with Mrs. Penhallo."

"Well, put it off!"

"Not so you can notice it, I won't."

"Then I'll drive you there."

"Yore buggy hasn't room for—three."

"Eh? Three? Oh—certainly! Yes, plenty of rooom for you both! You beside me here and your friend in the rumble behind."

"Rumble, d'you call it? Well, that'll soot me. Mrs. Pen, sit you in front by Sir Harry, will you, please?"

Mrs. Penhallo was about to refuse, but seeing how Sir Harry scarcely troubled to hide his annoyance, she instantly got in beside him, and settled herself back in the luxuriously-cushioned seat, with a shy murmur of thanks.

"I think, ma'am," said Sir Harry, impressively, "I'm sure you would find yourself far more comfortable in the rumble."

"Oh yes, sir," she agreed in the same nervous manner, "I know I should, and indeed I should greatly prefer to be there, but it is not very far to the village, and now I'm here I'd better remain."

"Suit yourself, ma'am!" said he, turning from her to address Samantha:

"Are you all right there—sweetheart?"

"Shore I am, except for the sugary stickiness."

"What do you mean, darling?"

"Now you're all dripping molasses, and that's worse! Say, now—what's biting you to-day, Sir Harry, a honey-bug or what? Why slobber me with sweetness all at once? I don't mind you using my front name—much, and I don't kick at an occasional 'dear' even from you, used properly, but I've no kind of use for your darling-sweetheart stuff—nossir! What d'you think, Mrs. Pen?"

"Oh, my dear, I'm sure your gentleman is only attempting to be gallant and lover-like,—are you not, sir?" she enquired in her gentle, murmurous voice,—and no one could have sounded more shyly humble or seemed more innocent; yet Sir Harry, glancing askance at her, scowled the blacker as Samantha said sharply:

"Well, he isn't my gentleman or my lover—yet, no, ma'm—none whatever. Now, Harry, get a move on if you're going to,—let's go."

At this, Sir Harry used his whip so viciously that these spirited horses reared, started off at a gallop, only to be checked, and with such cruel strength that they snorted with pain; whereat Samantha cried out in quick fury:

"Let up, Harry, will you! That's no way to use such animals, you'll saw their

heads off, poor things, and have us all into the ditch! Hold on, Mrs. Pen."

"Oh, I am, my dear, I am!"

"The brutes are too infernal fresh!" quoth Sir Harry, reining to a trot by main force. "No need for alarm with me at the ribbons."

"Oh, isn't there?" cried Samantha, angrily. "Well, if that's the way you drive I'd like to take over and show you how. You shore wouldn't last long on my outfit if you savaged my horses, cutting and spoiling their mouths."

"Nonsense!" He laughed with airy flourish of whip as the frightened animals settled down to smooth, even pace. "You were frightened, Samantha, and no wonder, for, as I tell you, these four-footed brutes are devilish——"

"No!" she broke in. "There's only one here, just one brute with two feet."

"Hush, my dear!" said Mrs. Penhallo, gently, "the gentleman is doing his best, so pray don't reproach or make him angry or nervous, he will do better still when he is a little more used to driving such fiery horses, so——"

"Madam," quoth Sir Harry, between shut teeth, "I've been handling and driving horses all my life."

"Really?" enquired Mrs. Penhallo, all innocent surprise.

"Yes, really, ma'am! You believe me, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"I didn't know you and Miss Dudeney were even acquainted!"

"There's lots of other things you don't know, Harry. Mrs. Penhallo is a very dear friend of mine."

"Oh! Since when, may I ask?"

"Since before the Flood, if you must know. And what's more, I'm going visiting with her for tea this afternoon."

"But, confound it, Samantha, you can't! You promised, and I arranged to take you driving this afternoon."

"So you shall. When you've driven me to Mrs. Jebb's store in the village you may drive me back to Mrs. Pen's cottage. Oh, frown if you like, but if you're real mad—don't go flogging yore horses any more."

"No!" he answered, with laugh fierce as his look. "I'd rather use my whip—to better purpose."

"Shore—I know! Well, just you have a try and see what happens! And there's the store right by the 'Three Pilchards'. And what are Pilchards anyway?"

Sir Harry merely shrugging disdainful shoulders, Mrs. Penhallo answered:

"A fish, my dear, rather like a herring, but smaller, and more—oily."

Mrs. Jebb's shop, being the only one in Merrion village, was large and

somewhat gloomy, whereas Mrs. Jebb was small, bright, deft of hand and quick of foot as she had cause to be since her stock was vast and her wares multifarious: for here one might purchase anything from butter to books and candles to cough mixture. Yet Mrs. Jebb, having a place for everything and everything always in place, was never at a loss, and consequently smiling and serene. To-day being Saturday, the shop was full, and Mrs. Jebb and her two maids were kept busy; thus Mrs. Penhallo, waiting to be served, was seated in quiet corner while Samantha, in the act of posting her two letters, hesitated, crumpled one angrily, thrust it back into its fragrant hiding-place and dropped the other into the box. Mrs. Penhallo was wondering at this when she heard a peculiarly harsh voice near by, and glancing thither, beheld a burly fellow chiefly remarkable for eyebrows and jaw.

"No, ma'am," he was growling, "you've give me wrong, I asks and pays for shag, and you've give me twist,—shag's wot I want."

"It were me as axed for twist," said another voice scarcely less raucous and pertaining to a second burly fellow, whose grim visage was rendered the more so by reason of a strangely thickened and shapeless ear which arrested Mrs. Penhallo's attention; therefore she looked at these men with her quick, bright eyes, and knowing them for strangers, watched them out of the shop, and thus witnessed an odd and stealthily suggestive by-play . . . Sir Harry, lolling gracefully in the phaeton, was lighting a cigar when these two men stopped, turned, and made as if to address him, whereat he scowled and gestured them away so passionately, with the hand holding the ignited match, that it went out, and, tossing it viciously after the now hastily-retreating forms of Beetle-Brow and Cauliflower-Ear, he lit another. Yet, when her household purchases completed, she followed Samantha out to the phaeton, no dashing gallant could have appeared handsomer or more gaily assured than this elegant Sir Harry.

"Now, Samantha—dearest!" said he reaching his hand for her, but she merely glanced at it, and stepped into the rumble; thus, once again, Mrs. Penhallo took her place beside him.

Scarcely had their wheels begun to turn than she began to talk, and now she appeared neither shy nor humble.

"Oh, Sir Harry, I noticed the queerest object in—Mrs. Jebb's shop, of all places,—a rough-looking man with one ear all crumpled and swollen quite dreadfully; I wonder if you could tell me what would cause such very strange disfigurement? Can you?"

Sir Harry's cigar which had been cocked up at jaunty angle beneath his small, black moustache, sagged down all at once, and he glanced at his questioner

sideways, and beneath knit brows.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, removing the cigar for better articulation, "and why the—pray why, ma'm, should you expect I can tell you?"

"Because you, Sir Harry, being a London gentleman, a man about town, or should one say—a man of the world? must, of course, know a great deal about that which is termed 'life'—which means other men—and women."

"Well—yes," he nodded. "I do get about, see what's going on, y'know, and, not being a complete fool, I've a fairish idea of things in general."

"I'm sure you have," she murmured, "that is why I asked you about that man's very peculiar ear."

"Certainly. Any sportsman could tell you that a fellow with such an ear is or has been a bruiser, and taken so many hard punches on that left ear that is has become swollen into what is called a 'cauliflower ear'."

"Poor man, how very painful for him! But how interesting! One naturally wonders what such a person is doing in this little quiet village."

"Shore!" laughed Samantha, who had been leaning forward all this time listening with an amused but eager interest. "Just what would such a plug-ugly be after, Harry? Birds'-nesting, likely as not, or catching butterflies?"

Sir Harry's cigar having gone out, he hurled it away, and reached for the whip.

"Oh no!" cried Samantha. "No more of your rough stuff or hazing—not on yore life! We're going right fast now, so be good t'yore horses and leave that whip alone. Shucks, Harry-boy, you're some bad actor this afternoon, so peevish! What'll Mrs. Penhallo think of you?"

"I know . . . exactly . . . what I think of you!" he muttered in passion-choked voice.

"Well, go on,—say it!" she challenged. "Spiel yore say—so let's hear."

"I think," he retorted, "I'm dev'lish sure and certain that you are the most tantalizing armful of smooth-white loveliness that ever lured a poor devil to confounded distraction, my beautiful darling!"

"And that's—that!" she tittered. "And shore some earful! And now, Sir Harry Winby, shall I tell you just why I let you tag around and walk and talk with me? No? Then I will! Listen! I suffer you to walk with and talk to me because it's such a gol-darned relief when you don't. I'm like the poor lunatic that banged himself on the head with a coke-hammer because it was so heavenly when he stopped."

"You are certainly like a lunatic, Samantha—ah, but, by Gad, you're so beautiful and could be so adorable I'll put up with all your whims—when you are my beloved wife."

"Harry," said she, in kinder tone, "I do believe you would. So don't go getting all het-up and riled because I jolly you along. And, anyway, we're friends, and I'm not one to change quick—whatever else I am. And now it's So-long,—we get down right here."

"Get down?" he repeated in fierce dismay. "Oh, but—you can't—you mustn't, —you shan't!"

"And so quick and easy—like this!" she mocked, and leapt nimbly from the still-moving vehicle.

"No, Samantha—please!" he cried, pulling up so suddenly that once again the horses reared. "Samantha," said he, looking his handsomest and pleading his very humblest, "don't . . . ah don't leave me like this! Let me take you for just a short drive . . . I'm sure Mrs. Penhallo will excuse you . . . Oh, my dear—do come! You can visit this good lady some other time."

"I cert'nly hope so, Harry. But now it's good-bye for the present. And don't go whipping yore horses or breaking yore neck—or what'll I do when I want to laugh? And next time come you without yore fine rig . . . I like to be on my own two feet when you are around."

"What do you mean by that, Samantha?" he demanded, grasping his whip in powerful fist. "What the dickens are you suggesting now?"

"That I prefer walking, Harry,—and that's whatever! So good-bye for now, and next time come you a-walking."

With smile that showed his white, rather cruel-looking, teeth, Sir Harry bowed, flourished his hat gracefully, and drove away like young Phaeton himself.

"Well now," said Samantha, drawing her companion's hand within her arm and clasping it there. "I do hope you didn't mind me inviting myself to tea with you, Mrs. Pen?"

"My dear, I loved you for it."

"Oh, did you? And—do you?" enquired Samantha looking down into the gentle eyes that now gazed into her own with look so eloquent that Samantha's round bosom swelled, and she said, almost whispering: "Oh, but you do love me . . . your dear, kind eyes are telling me . . . and you will . . . keep on loving me from now on . . . you will?"

"Yes, Samantha, I do love you, and shall always love you, my dear."

"Now . . . just for that," said Samantha, with sound very like a sob, "just for that I'm going to kiss you—right now!"

"Oh, sweet and blessed child . . . I want you to. Come and be mothered."

And with sound that really was a sob, Samantha obeyed.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DIPLOMACY OF MRS. PEN

SITTING in Mrs. Penhallo's pleasant garden, where flowers bloomed and herbs grew, filling the sunny air with their mingled fragrance, Samantha glanced from the dainty, though well-laden, tea-table, round about and up at this roomy cottage, with its bright lattices twinkling beneath deep eaves of cosy thatch.

"Oh," sighed she, "this sure feels and looks like a real home!"

"And it is one shall welcome you, my dear, whenever you will."

"And that's going to be real frequent from now on . . . or . . . anyway . . . as long as I'm here in Cornwall. Which makes me wish I'd known you before to-day."

"Do you mean you are leaving Cornwall?"

"Yes!" answered Samantha, with slow, strangely solemn nod.

"Soon, my dear?"

"Pretty soon . . . I guess."

"It will grieve me to part, Samantha."

"And me, too!" she murmured, sighing. "Oh, Mrs. Pen . . . dear Pen, I begin to hate the very thought of it—now!"

"But you will come back to me . . . some day?"

"I . . .! Oh, I don't know!" Here Samantha, clasping hands beneath dimpled chin, enquired with look very like anxiety: "What d'you think of Sir Harry?"

"I don't!" answered her hostess, gently.

"Don't what?"

"Think of him."

"Oh, but why not?"

"Because I don't like feeling angry!"

"Angry? Who with?"

"Myself, for troubling my head about such a man."

"Oh!" murmured Samantha, rather breathlessly.

"Yes!" said her hostess serenely.

"But isn't he the real English aris-tocrat?"

"No, my dear, a poor imitation."

"Well then, his looks,—isn't he just the handsomest he-thing you ever saw?"

"Yes, I think so, but I'm quite sure he is much too handsome to make a good husband. Milk and sugar, my dear?"

"Both, please . . . which means you don't trust him."

"No more than you do, Samantha."

"Oh!" she murmured again, and selecting a sugared tea-cake, raised it to her lips, set it down on her plate and enquired: "Why do you suppose I don't trust him?"

"Because of our feminine instinct, womanly intuition or plain, ordinary common sense, my dear."

"I'd like to drop the 'Mrs.' and call you 'Pen' if you don't mind. May I, please?"

"Why, of course you may."

"Well now, Pen dear, I'm just dying to tell you something . . . if you'll promise and vow to keep it a dead secret, will you?"

"Yes, Samantha, you can trust and confide in me always, I promise."

"Oh, Pen . . . Pen dear, you're such a blessing to me, I wonder however I shall do without you . . . because I've made up my mind . . . almost . . . to e-lope!"

Mrs. Penhallo, in the act of drinking her tea, paused, then sipping daintily, set down her cup tenderly and said gently:

"Sir Harry's suggestion, of course."

"Yes. All the way over from the States he's been asking me to marry him, and now he wants me to e-lope . . . a carriage to Gretna Green and be married over an anvil by a blacksmith,—which is certainly Old English, and terribly ro-mantic,—now, isn't it, Pen?"

"Oh very! But, my dear, you're letting your tea get cold."

"Tea!" repeated Samantha, with a shaky little laugh. "Oh, Pen, you sure are the very dearest thing to take it all so calmly, and be so kind about it—instead of flying off the handle and reproaching me."

"Dear child, I don't reproach you because you are so very troubled already."

"Pen, how d'you mean—troubled?"

"By your own sweet, womanly conscience, and the sacred memory of your loved father."

"Yes," whispered Samantha, "yes, I am . . . but how . . . how did you know?"

"Because I truly love you, my dear."

"Oh! Gee!" gasped Samantha. "You'll make me do the cry-baby act again if you don't let up! Anyway, I wrote telling Harry I'd go next week any time he wanted me! I wrote to-day, this morning——"

"And this afternoon, Samantha, now—this very moment I'm praying God that was the letter you did not post."

"So you saw, did you, Pen? You shore see a whole lot with those gentle eyes of yours! No, I didn't send the letter,—when it came to a show-down I just couldn't."

"And just for that," said Mrs. Penhallo, rising, "just for that, Samantha dear, *I'm*

going to kiss you."

"Oh . . . now," gasped Samantha, starting afoot to meet this embrace, "you dear, sweet, lovely Pen . . . you make me want to laugh and cry both together!"

"I've been intending to tell you," said Mrs. Penhallo, when they were seated again, "that I thought your Angel Cake quite delicious,—though to be sure he hadn't left much of it."

"Angel Cake? He? Who? You never mean—him!"

"But I do mean him, Samantha."

"Which him?"

"Tom Wade, of course."

"So—you know him, do you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Then tell me, just what do you think of Mister Tom Wade? His looks, first off?"

"Rather ugly, my dear."

"Ugly?" Samantha repeated, pondering the adjective. "Well . . . no! He's not much of a 'looker', that's shore, but I would hardly call him 'ugly'—'homely' we'd say in the States, same as over here you'd say 'plain'. Though I like his eyes, and he's got a pretty good mouth, rather like yours, Pen, and his chin's not so bad as chins go. What else d'you think of him, Pen?"

"That besides being plain he is rather nice, he's big and strong, and made to endure, a man to depend upon and trust."

"Ye-e-s, he's kind of nice . . . Oh, but then let me tell you, Pen dear, he's brutally strong—and don't I know it! The way he threw me around—and me all arms and legs! Pen, I felt so terribly undignified that I lammed out and let him have one right on the nose—by accident! And then, of course, he went bleeding all over me and Cornwall till I simply had to tear a piece off a perfectly new lawn petticoat edged deep with Brussels lace, the cutest garment, Pen, and quite ruined because of Tom's Wade nose, which isn't a nose to make a girl leave home or shout about, anyway!"

Mrs. Penhallo laughed, then shook her head, saying:

"I am sorry to hear he is such a brute."

"Oh, he certainly is! Though it was Mandy sicked him on to me. Mandy's my old nurse, and the dearest thing—except now and then when she gets hot under the collar. I'd like for you to know her, so I'll tote her along to you pretty soon, if you don't mind."

"My dear, whenever you will."

"Oh, fine! I guess you'll like Mandy, and I'm dead certain she'll take to you—on the jump, same as I did, because you're so real sweet and gentle, Pen dear, and yet

so quick and wise,—my, my, I'll say you are, yes, ma'm! But, talking of this Tom Wade, I figure he's dead straight, and on the level, and what's more, there's no slick, lah-di-dah, love-making foolery about him, and what's best of all—nobody could ever mistake him for an aris-tocrat, imitation or genu-ine! What's tickling you, Pen?" she enquired, for Mrs. Penhallo was laughing again, and so joyously that Samantha did likewise.

"My dear," said Mrs. Penhallo, wiping her eyes, "I was trying to imagine . . . Tom Wade . . . in a viscount's coronet and robes!"

"Yes," laughed Samantha, "that would shore be a comical sight,—a workman's overalls and clay pipe would soot him a heap better."

"My dear, how did you happen to meet him?"

"Well, he sort of yanked me from a watery grave, Pen. But was it ro-mantic? No, not on your life! There was me feeling like a fried egg and looking like a drowned rat, my muslins wringing wet and showing me up like I'd been nood,—and there was he looking me over and pretending he wasn't, and both of us wishing each other somewhere else . . . You see, Pen dear, I'd been caught by the tide, and thinking and grieving for Dad and wishing myself dead with him till I heard him whistle 'The British Grenadiers'—Tom Wade, I mean . . ."

Here Samantha gave a very full and particular account of this never-to-be-forgotten incident, inspired to the recital by her hearer's profound interest and gentle questioning; in the midst of which vivid tale she broke off suddenly to exclaim:

"Well, now, say—will you look who's here!"

Glancing up and around, Mrs. Penhallo caught her breath, for coming towards them was Tom himself. Catching sight of Samantha he faltered in his long stride and stopped; beholding Mrs. Penhallo's slim hands outstretched in wordless greeting, he uncovered his hay-coloured curls and approached hastily, cap in hand.

"Why, Tom," said his hostess, rising to welcome him, "how nice to see you here! Sit down, you're just in time for tea . . . sit and talk to Samantha while I go for another cup and saucer and some—real bread and butter!" Then having smiled and shaken hands, away she went, leaving them together.

CHAPTER XXII

OF MRS. PEN, HER ADVICE

"HOW'S the beak?" Samantha enquired as Tom drew a chair to the table.

"The snout," he answered, sombrely, "the proboscis or nasal appendage is well as can be expected having regard to your hammer-like fist, madam."

"However," said she, moving this way and that to survey the feature in question from different angles, "it's not a bit swollen like I expected, and as it ought to be."

"Not now," he sighed, shaking his head, "but you should have seen it that same night, by Jupiter!"

"Was it more terribly frightful than usual?"

"Far more! Which reminds me,—how's the petticoat?"

"Into the rag-bag for dusters, if you must know!"

"Shame!" quoth Tom.

"Shore!" she nodded. "I don't know how you can talk of such things. I ought to blush."

"You are!" he retorted.

"I cert'nly am—not!"

"And quite prettily—almost."

"That's just sunburn."

"Well, look at this and blush properly," and from breast pocket Tom drew a handful of crumpled lace.

"Tom Wade, you give that right here, this very moment!"

"Samantha Dudeney," he replied, thrusting the lace back into pocket, "not on your life! I sure won't! Not so you can notice it! You see I'm becoming quite American in my say so, aren't I?"

"Oh, shucks! What d'you want it for?"

"To keep, Samantha. To carry in my bosom until I'm an old, old man with hoary eyebrows and a long, white beard, to remind me of the days of my wild youth and a fair woman's knobbly fist."

"It's not the least mite knobbly!"

"And it felt," sighed Tom, cherishing his nose with gentle hand, "it felt like a jagged rock!"

"Oh, talk sense. And say, what are you doing around here, anyway?"

"Well, if you must know, Honey Girl, I guess and I calculate——"

"Not a bit like it, Mr. Wade, yore American is a heap worse than my English. So just do yore best in a few simple words and tell me what you're pirooting around here for. Is it for Mrs. Pen, me, or a free meal?"

"All and each, but chiefly for Mrs. Penhallo and tea."

"Thanks terribly for nothing, Mr. Wade!"

"My dear Miss Samantha."

"The name's Dee-yewdney to you—for the present."

"I'll endeavour to remember, madam . . . I wonder what's keeping Mrs. Penhallo?"

"Cutting bread and butter, I guess, stacks and stacks of it for Mr. Wade."

"Probably," he nodded, "yes, probably, because she expects Miss Dudeney will have cleared the table by now of all eatables,—allow me to proffer you yet another cake, Miss Dudeney."

"Now just for that," she hissed between white teeth bared at him quite ferociously, "just for that, Mr. Hateful Wade, I've a right good mind to pour the teapot over you."

"As you will, Miss Dudeney, though, being direly a-thirst, I'd rather have it in a cup, if you know what I mean . . . But what I really am here for is to ask Mrs. Penhallo to advise me."

"Then you're certainly come to the right place,—by accident, of course,—for Mrs. Pen is surely the wisest, sweetest, loveliest thing that every happened,—yessir, I'll say so!"

"Precisely!" quoth Tom, fervently. "Yes, I want to ask her advice about a letter."

"A . . . love-letter, d'you mean?"

"Well, yes, I suppose it is."

"Oh!" exclaimed Samantha, turning to frown across the sunny garden. "Then you'll be wanting me to make tracks."

"I beg your pardon,—to make what?"

"To hit the trail, vamoose, light out and make myself scarce."

"If Miss Dudeney would kindly favour Mr. Wade by addressing him in plainer English——"

"D'you want me to go? Shall I leave you—and yore love-letter—with Mrs. Pen?"

"Oh no—no, this letter happens to be all about you."

"Me?" she repeated, with a kind of gasp, and glancing at him with an expression that was almost apprehensive. "Did you find it lying about anywhere—this letter?"

"No, I received it in the usual way—through the post . . . and it is a letter dictated by a very true love and devotion, beginning like this: 'My silly Honey Girl acts like she will make a fool of herself and hell of her future unless—'"

"Mandy!" Samantha exclaimed angrily; "she wrote that, of course! So now I'll ask you to give me a look at that crazy letter."

"Well—no!" he answered, gently. "As soon as Mrs. Penhallo returns you shall

hear me read it,—then you and she can advise me what's best to do in the matter. We'll take counsel together and——"

"We'll take nothing together, thank you!" Samantha broke in fiercely. "If you think I'm going to sit around and hear poor Sir Harry scandalized, and behind his back at that—you've just got to think again. No sir,—not me, I'm on my way right now!"

Samantha rose swiftly yet with grace, shook down her frills and flounces indignantly, set dimpled chin aggressively, turned to be gone haughtily, and found Tom's very solid person barring her way completely.

"I say, you know, look here," said he in some dismay, "you simply can't go running off like this! I mean to say—looks a trifle odd and what not—you really can't——"

"Oh, can't I! Well, stand out of my road and just watch me."

"But . . . Samantha . . ."

"Doodney's the name t'you from now on! So, please, Mister Tom Wade, get out of my way or—I'll scratch and scream till you do!"

"Very well!" said he, obeying, cap in hand. "I wish you good afternoon and a pleasant walk, Miss Dudeney."

"Before I go, listen you here, Mr. Wade! Sir Harry's my friend, and Loyalty's my second name. And, what's more, he may be waiting around to meet me right now, so——"

"Oh, he is!" Tom nodded. "I passed him on my way here. Yes, he's hanging about for you as usual! But . . . my good Heavens,—how you can stoop to carry on with such a very obvious rotter and absolute bounder,—how you can be so beastly selfish and cruel to grieve and break your Amanda's heart is more than I can understand——"

"That'll be all from you, Mr. Wade, you've said aplenty! I don't mind what Amanda writes or says, and I shore don't care a hoot what you're pleased to think, nossir! But what I do know is—you're a brute and a beast, and I'm mighty glad I made yore ugly nose bleed! And what's more—if I want to meet and e-lope with Harry, nothing's going to stop me—not you, anyway!"

"No, certainly not me!" Tom agreed. "For no one can hope to save a perverse fool from misery if——"

"So . . . I'm a . . . perverse fool . . . am I?" she demanded breathlessly.

"What else?" he answered, sighing drearily. "Your future unhappiness is so terribly obvious to all except yourself! But what troubles me is—who will be able to comfort Amanda when you are gone?"

Instead of attempting reply, Samantha bowed her head, and for a moment stood thus, silent and motionless, then, turning suddenly, she sped away, leaving a very troubled and anxious Tom to gaze wistfully on her vacant chair.

Thus, when at last Mrs. Penhallo reappeared bearing a well-laden tray, it was a rather awkward Tom who hastened to relieve her of this pleasant burden, saying as he did so:

"I'm afraid your other guest has bolted."

"Dear me!" murmured Mrs. Penhallo, quick to heed his troubled look. "Did you quarrel?"

"Well, not exactly,—she took offence because of a letter I brought to read you for your advice."

"Oh! Then you . . . didn't come because you . . . knew Samantha was here?"

"Good Lord—no! I hadn't the least idea you and she were acquainted. No, I came to you because I need your help."

"That was . . . nice of you, Tom!" she murmured, looking at him with a glow in her dark eyes. "I shall always be very willing . . . very happy to help you at any time, my . . . dear boy."

"Thanks!" said Tom, reaching impulsively to touch the slender hand that was poised upon the teapot handle. "Thanks, most awfully! I knew you would, I felt it in my bones, that's why I came to you."

"As I hope you always will!" she answered in voice like a caress, filling his cup with the hand he had touched, a hand so unsteady she must needs use both.

"Well, here's the letter," said he, taking it from his pocket, "shall I read it to you?"

"Not yet,—have tea first, here is bread and butter I cut especially for you . . . and if you can eat and talk, tell me about this letter before you read it, who it's from, and why it offended Samantha."

"It's written by Amanda Sholes, her old nurse, and a good sort; rather a dear, in fact, though a trifle too warlike for these simple rustic solitudes."

"Warlike, Tom?"

"Oh, rather! She carries a brace of revolvers like young cannon, and seems so ready to loose off and bang away with 'em that I'm a trifle anxious lest she may."

"Good gracious, Tom, she sounds quite terrible!"

"And she could be terrible and will be—if she thinks shooting necessary. And yet, as I say, she's really a perfect dear, a rather grand person, I think. I wish to Heaven she were acquainted with you."

"Samantha has promised to bring her to tea very soon."

"Well, the sooner the better," nodded Tom. "You are so eminently sane and wise, such a gentle, quietly dominating person."

"Am I—really, Tom?"

"Oh, yes! And with a marvellous gift of sympathy and understanding, and then, besides, you're so capable and very comforting."

"Dear boy," she murmured, "instead of paying me compliments, get on with your tea—this bread and butter I cut for you!"

"I am, and enjoying it. And they're not mere compliments but bald statements of self-evident facts . . . for I never met anyone like you before, and never shall again, I know, because . . . well . . . you're different, if you know what I mean? What I mean to say is—I regard you as one apart—absolutely!"

Here Tom gave all his attention to the bread and butter, while she, seeming to ponder this very involved statement, watched him with adoring eyes, yet when she spoke her voice, though gentle as usual, sounded quite matter-of-fact.

"And now you may read me the letter—unless you would like more bread and butter?"

"Thanks—no!" he answered, and unfolding the letter read from it, forthwith:

> "'My dear Tom, my silly Honey Girl acts like she will make a fool of herself and hell of her future with this Winby horsethief unless I shoot him up good and proper as I certainly will, England or no England, if needful!'"

"But, Tom, she never would—surely?"

"Exactly!" he replied, rather anxiously. "I can't be sure, and this is what rather bothers me. You see Amanda has lived all her life on the Mexican Border, where people are somewhat apt to use guns and knives and what not as a usual expression of opinion."

"Please go on with the letter," said Mrs. Penhallo, refilling his cup and then her own to bear him company. Tom continued reading, thus:

> "'I have prayed on my bended knees as I am praying now, pen in hand, for the good Lord to help me, and so He will that is sure, though I'm certainly not just sitting around twiddling my toes, no, sir! I've gotten my dad's two guns oiled and loaded just in case, and I'm keeping my two eyes wide open and likewise my ears. Yesterday I found a letter that shows how this Winby has gotten everything fixed to run off with my Samanthy and get married some place called Gretna Green with a blacksmith and an anvil like you read of in those old-fashioned romances, and she just crazy for romance, and always was. What Samantha needs is a real good spanking with her Dad's slipper, but he's dead and gone, and I'm not up to it. So how am I to save her from Harry Winby and her ownself has me beat. She is so blind and he is so slick, and being of age she is her own mistress, and can do as she

likes. If I tell Lady Oxted she will only throw a fit and send for the police, and what can they do I'd like to know? Worse than nothing, because Samantha is a free citizen, and of age, like I say. So here am I writing to you but so fussed up with anxiety and prayer that I hardly know what I am writing. But if you should happen to meet up with H. Winby, please, Tom, to do your best to choke him off my Samanthy.'"

"Which," quoth Tom fervently and nodding at the letter, "which I most certainly will!"

"Not literally, I hope?" enquired Mrs. Penhallo between two sips of tea.

"That was rather the idea," he admitted.

"Very foolish," she murmured. "Quite ridiculous, and utterly futile!"

"Oh?" he enquired.

"Yes!" she answered, with emphatic nod. "By hurting the man you would only make him the martyr of your brutality, and Samantha would leap to comfort and defend him—very properly!"

"Properly?" Tom repeated. "Can you possibly mean——"

"Oh, yes, I mean every womanly woman should cherish and comfort the stricken, and Samantha is extremely womanly."

"And a dashed silly one!" he muttered.

"Of course, Tom. But who is not silly—at times? I have very often been silly, and—even you have been silly, perhaps, though very seldom, of course!"

"By Jupiter!" he exclaimed. "I believe you're laughing at me!"

"I'm sure I am!" she replied, and laughed outright, so merrily that Tom grinned in sympathy, then shook his head, saying:

"I fear you don't take this business seriously, which surprises me."

"Oh, but I do!" she answered, though a smile curved her shapely lips.

"I mean to say," Tom pursued, somewhat ponderously, "this fellow Winby is, if you know what I mean, a regular scallywag, an absolute bounder and what not, and ought certainly to be choked off in no uncertain manner."

"Yes, Tom, I'm persuaded he is all you say, but then he is so dashing and supremely handsome that he might be quite irresistible were Samantha someone else. But his blandishments will be quite in vain, your anxiety needless, and Mrs. Amanda has no least cause for worry because Samantha is so very decidedly—herself . . . if you know what I mean?"

"I'm afraid I don't exactly," replied Tom, so entirely unaware of her gentle mimicry that she laughed again, saying:

"Oh well, please go on with the letter."

So Tom went on reading obediently:

"'On second thoughts, Tom, you can leave me to deal with H. Winby, for, glory be, the Lord has this moment answered my prayer and shown me a way out. Wherefore I am truly glad. Meet me in the lane to-morrow at half after five, and I will tell you how I will fool and make a monkey out of Sir Harry and throw a scare into him as well. Yes, the gracious Lord has surely shown me how, wherefore this night I shall sleep.

"'His humbly grateful

"' AMANDA SHOLES'."

"And there," said Tom, "the letter ends. What do you think of it?"

"That I am going to like the writer."

"Yes, but about Samantha and—this Winby fellow,—what do you advise me to do?"

"Nothing, Tom."

"Oh, but, I say——"

"Yes, my dear boy, when you meet Amanda say to her she need not trouble to scare Sir Harry or worry any more, you may comfort her with the assurance that her Samantha will never elope with this man."

"No . . . really?" exclaimed Tom, opening his grey eyes wider than usual.

"Yes, really and truly, Tom!"

"But . . . how in the world do you know? What makes you so very certain?"

"Because she is Samantha and I . . . am myself and also because we have learned to know and love each other. Hark! There is the quarter past five striking! So off with you, Tom, or you will be late for your appointment, and you mustn't keep poor Amanda waiting. Besides, I'm curious to know how she proposes to make Sir Harry a fool. So come to tea again soon, and tell me all about it."

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW SIR HARRY PLANNED CONQUEST AND MATRIMONY

IT was about noon that Sir Harry Winby, having completed an extremely careful toilette, crowned himself with jaunty hat and surveyed the effect in the rather inadequate looking-glass with critical approval; then giving an extra up-twist to the handsome black moustache that adorned his shapely, full-lipped mouth, and tilting the smart hat to slightly more 'fetching' angle over one bold, long-lashed eye, he smiled at his superb reflection and turned to sally forth prepared thus, and expectant of assured success and final conquest.

But at this moment a waiter knocked and presented himself to say:

"Mr. Fox to see you, sir." Even as the words were uttered, Mr. Fox appeared, banished the waiter with languorous gesture, closed the door and sinking into the only easy chair, sighed plaintively:

"How do, dear boy, how do! So many dashed frightful stairs to get here."

"Well, why the devil trouble yourself?" demanded Sir Harry, turning back to survey himself in the mirror again.

Mr. Fox was an extremely languid, die-away gentleman, ornate as to person, who, not content with moustache, sported also a pair of neat side-whiskers of indeterminate hue which when under any mental stress, he was wont to caress and cherish or clutch and wring according to circumstances.

"I know," quoth Sir Harry, baring his big, white teeth at his reflection quite ferociously. "I'm perfectly aware, Arthur, that I live up too many damned stairs, and am lodged as no gentleman should be, just for the present, curse it! But we're going to alter all this, my buck,—ha, yes, we're going to roll in the lap of Luxury and Beauty—with Capital letters—that is to say I am—and devilish soon!"

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Fox, soothing his left whisker with a hand delicately gloved in canary yellow. "And the sooner the better for—both our sakes, dear boy! Funds are running dooced perilously low, and consequently I'm feelin' a dashed sight lower! So, Hal, the question is—when?"

"When what?"

"When are you goin' to land this dainty fish . . . make off with this Golden Beauty and her splendour of dollars—when?"

"Dammit, Arthur, don't rush me!"

"Oh no, yours truly never rushes,—too infernal fatiguin'. But, Harry, dear boy, this can't go on, there's a limit, and it's pretty nearly reached!"

"Arthur, what in hell d'you mean?"

"M'dear feller, just think! You've been spoonin' this girl now all across the Atlantic Ocean and half England, and are as far from bein' happily wed and rollin' in oof as ever! And at this moment——"

"Well, what now?"

"Now here you are, Harry, cuttin' no end of a dash for her benefit, here's your dem prize-fightin' blackguards eatin' and drinkin' their ugly heads off—all at my expense, and nothing to show for it. So I tell you again—there's a limit, Harry, and when you reach that limit I quit the game and cut my losses."

"So—that's it, hey?" demanded Sir Harry, turning on the languid speaker in highly threatening manner. "You mean to welsh on me, do you?"

Mr. Fox's caressing fingers became a clutching hand that grappled his whisker,

though he nodded languidly, saying in die-away accents:

"Don't come any of your fistic furies with me, dear boy, you'd regret it quite damnably! I merely take occasion to remark, between friends, that I shall stand in with you to the limit, but beyond that—exit Arthur!"

"But, damme," fumed Sir Harry, "don't you stand to win hands down? Haven't you got my written agreement to pay you handsomely, yes, b'Gad, a devilish stupendous sum just so soon as I bring off this marriage?"

"Oh, certainly, dear boy, I shall do pre-tty well if—ah, that little cursed word—if, and when you do the trick! But shall you, can you?"

"Certainly I can. It's good as done already—yes, the matter has progressed more rapidly than you know."

"Ex-cellent! Let's hear. You've suggested an elopement, I think?"

"Precisely! I've stuffed her handsome noddle with all the romantic stuff . . . fast-driven carriage all the way to Gretna Green *à la* the eighteenth century."

"But, Harry, what dooced absurdity!"

"Of course, Arthur. But then it's her whim, she's keen for the romance of it,—old-fashioned runaway marriage,—to be wed at the anvil by a sooty blacksmith with key instead of ring! Oh, she's got it all pat, read of it all in some fool novel or other, and since she insists, why the devil not? I'll take precious good care we're tied fast, and legally married, you may take your oath!"

"That's all pretty well, Harry, so far as it goes, but it's all in the air! Have you done anything besides mere talk? Anything positive, actual, anything—well—let's say—physical?"

"No! And there's been no strong-arm tactics—yet."

"Amazin'! Hal, you astound me! No wonder the business hangs fire! What the dickens makes you so doosed extraordinary squeamish all at once, and with so much of the rhino in sight—what——"

"A knife, Arthur! Which is a very sufficing and cursedly obvious reason. She carries a knife."

"My . . . dear . . . feller!"

"Oh, you can stare, Arthur! It sounds ridiculous and utterly preposterous to English ears, but it's a devilish fact! She not only carries the damned thing, but she'd use it. Yes, by God, she would, and on the slightest provocation—and enjoy it too, damme!"

"Harry, if you're not spoofing me——"

"I'm not, Arthur, no, I'm not! It's an actual, positive fact! You must understand she's no sweet, bread and butter miss, or like any English girl to scream or weep or

swoon conveniently,—she's a creature from the wilds, and devilish untamed,—the wilds of Southern Texas along the Mexican Border where men, and women, too, wear six-shooters and bowie-knives, and don't think twice about using them."

"The dey-vil!" drawled Mr. Fox, cherishing his whiskers with both hands, "the soooner I'm out of this most infernal——"

"Wait now, Arthur! Hold hard, man, can't you? I have everything schemed out."

"Though you've never dared to even kiss her yet, and under the circumstances I can't blame or reproach you."

"Yesterday I could have, to-day I shall kiss her, to-morrow I go the limit, by the end of the week she'll be only too anxious to elope and—"

"Ah, but her knife, dear boy, what of her knife?"

"I shall trick it away from her—and then——"

"Yet, Hal, suppose she's too quick and strong—even for you?"

"Nonsense, Arthur! Besides, there'll be Sim and Joe, with the carriage waiting close by! It will be all perfectly simple and easy, everything duly arranged for. I tell you, Arthur, it's good as done! I shall possess a beautiful young wife and countless millions, and you'll be dam' well paid for your part in financing the scheme, yes, damme, old man, you'll be rich into the bargain."

"Oh, well, good luck t'you, dear boy, not forgetting yours truly! And now I suggest—a bottle! Let's descend to the lower regions and drink to the future, soon-to-be, Lady Winby, in the bubbly."

So downstairs to the somewhat dingy coffee-room they went, two very elegant gentry whose order a somewhat gloomy but obsequious waiter hastened to obey.

"By the way," said Mr. Fox, lounging more or less gracefully upon the table, "I passed your erstwhile small 'tiger' in the street."

"Then damn him!" mutter Sir Harry, fiercely.

"Oh, why, dear boy,—wherefore the ferocity? I always thought him a particularly smart little shaver."

"The little devil has been haunting me lately, here in Truro,—at Merrion,—on the road beyond,—the little swine has been forever peeping and prying and—grinning at me, but never within reach! If ever I do catch the little demon, damme but I'll mark him for life!"

"Tut, tut, Harry! Why trouble for such a mere child?"

"Child? I tell you he's a small devil, curse him! And what's more, he's in service with——"

"Tush, tush, Harry! Yonder comes the bubbly. . . ."

CHAPTER XXIV

WHICH DESCRIBES A WOOING AND ITS AFTERMATH

SAMANTHA started upon her afternoon walk somewhat later than usual, for the clock of Merrion Church had chimed the hour of three when she was aware of approaching hoofs and wheels, and guessed this must be Sir Harry driving to meet her, until a strange and high-pitched voice spoke somewhere in the air above her:

"Ho,—hif you please, miss!"

Glancing round and up, she beheld a small, sharp-featured personage seated in a very high dogcart, whip and reins in one hand, a folded paper in the other.

"Ho, miss," he repeated, "I gotta letter for your very own 'and,—this un! So will ye take it, please, and gimme a answer as is expected?"

"Yes, but—who are you?" she enquired, looking up into a pair of quick, bright eyes.

"I'm faxstotum, groom, coachman and cook to Mr. Wade, that's me, miss. So, lady, will ye catch 'old of 'is letter, please—and an answer waited for, ma'am."

Taking the missive, which was no more than the folded page of a note-book, Samantha smoothed it open and read these words scrawled hastily in pencil:

"DR. SAMANTHA,

"This is to warn you that your Romeo, with his two ruffians, means to kidnap you. If you feel like taking a chance, go on and meet him in the wood as usual,—if not, get into the dogcart and be driven to safety by my Factotum, Goliath.

"Yours
"TOM.

"PS. I think you should take a chance for all our sakes."

"Well, well!" murmured Samantha, calmly refolding the note as she surveyed its small bearer. "Are you Goliath?"

"Yes'm, an' Mr. Tom's my Guvnor, and expects a answer, please, so——"

"And is yore name really and truly—Goliath?"

"Yes, lady, an' my Mr. Tom said as there'd be a answer——"

"Where is he, your Mr. Tom?"

"Well, miss, 'e ain't very far, 'im an' Mr. Mark's jest waitin'—rahnd the corner-like."

"And with a whole crowd of policemen, I guess."

"Pleecemen, miss? Ho no, lady, there ain't none in these parts, they keeps 'em mostly in London. No, there's only Mr. Tom and Mr. Mark, but they got sticks,

leastways my Guvnor 'as, and both o' them 'opin' for a bit of a barny."

"What's a 'barny'?"

"A fight like. Ye see, miss, S'Arry wiv 'is two pugs is a-waitin' for ye in the woods meanin' to carry ye hoff in a kerrige, an' so my Guv and Mr. Mark is a-waitin' to cop 'em in the hact, an' 'ave a proper go at 'em. And so, miss, we'd all be oncommon obleeged if you'd give us the chance. 'Cause, lady, this 'ere S'Arry's a dead wrong 'un, an' deserves all as 'e'll get—if honly you'll give us the chance."

"You shore seem to know all about it!"

"Yes, lady, 'course I do. Y'see I worked for S'Arry once, so I know as 'e's a rank bad un. So I been keepin' a eye on 'im lately I 'ave, 'cordin' to orders."

"Whose orders?"

"My Guvnor's. So, please, miss, what's your answer to that there letter?"

"Well," answered Samantha, tucking the note deep into her bosom, "I like taking chances, especially in this Old England, so I'm cert'nly going for a walk in the woods and see what happens."

"Cor—luv a duck, but you're a sport, you are, lady! No wonder 'e's so sweet on ye!"

"Oh? Who's sweet on me?"

"My Guvnor, Mr. Tom, is."

"How d'you know? Has he told you?"

"No, lady, not 'im, 'e ain't one to talk o' sich things, ho no! But—there's signs, miss."

"What signs?"

"Well, 'e don't take so much notice of 'is food now as wot 'e should ought, and at night 'stead o' goin' t'bed like Mr. Mark, 'e sets a-starin' up at the moon when there is one and dahn at the fire when there aint—and wiv 'is pipe aht too! And then 'e's been an' cut an 'eart on is favrite tree, a proper big 'eart, miss, wiv a arrer stuck into it an' a T for Tom an' a Ess for you."

"How d'you know it's for me?"

"Cos there ain't no other lady I knows on as begins wiv a Hess."

"Oh! And—which tree?"

"Lady," said Goliath, fidgeting, "you'll be keepin' S'Arry an' 'is blokes waitin'."

"Let them wait! You just tell me which tree is the one."

"The great, big, hold 'un on the lawn, ma'm. But my Guvnor'll be wonderin' wot's keepin' me sich a time, so——"

"Let him wonder, it'll do him good! When did he cut this silly heart on the old tree?"

"Yestiddy hevenin', miss, and whistlin' that doleful as never was! And now, please——"

"Does this rig belong to him, this horse and buggy?"

"Yes'm! I picks 'em up for 'im, and a rare bargain too! Wot d'ye think o' the 'oss, lady, 'is name's Pepper?"

"A pretty good looker. I must get me a string."

"String, ma'm? I got a bit in me pocket."

"I mean a string of ponies—horses for riding and driving, a remuda, three or four, or half a dozen, aplenty, anyways, because I shore love horses."

"Coo—lummy,—do you, lady? And—arf a dozen? Luv a duck, you're a reg'lar one-er, you are, miss, and no error."

"Now you'd better be on yore way and you can tell yore Mr. Tom I shall certainly take a walk in the woods—though I wish I had a pencil and scrap of paper to——"

"'Ere y'are, m'lady!" answered The Factotum, promptly, and from his small person produced a stump of blunt pencil and piece of somewhat dingy and crumpled paper.

"And you tell me," said Samantha, taking these articles with a smiling nod, "he cut that heart last evening?"

"Yes, m'lady, wiv 'is 'ammer and chisel, and very neat too, y'see my Guv's a reel, proper workman 'e is!"

And now, using the tail-board of the dogcart for desk, Samantha scribbled this reply:

"DR. TOM WADE: Of course I'll take a chance.

"YRS. S. DUDENEY.

"PS. England is not such a tame old place after all, thanks to dear Sir Harry. So good luck to you and me."

"There!" said she, folding and handing this note to the eager messenger. "Give him that! And now take these five shillings for yoreself."

"Thankee, my lady, but—I couldn't. Y'see, besides being my Guvnor's faxstotum and cook and valley and gardener and coachman, I'm 'is 'ead groom as well, and 'e pays me accordin', ah, an' a fifty-quid bonus! So hif you don't mind, lady, I——"

"But I do mind! If you don't take the money this moment I'll throw it away!"

"Oh well, me lady, seein' as 'ow, I'll take 'em and thank you from me very 'eart, —cos I'm savin' every penny! And now, miss, good arternoon, lady, and best o'

good luck! Just wach an' see wot's goin' to 'appen to S'Arry an' 'is bruisers!"

Then this strange, perfectly assured and indomitable young woman smiled up at Goliath, nodded, and went serenely upon her way to front Villainy without the least hesitation, walking indeed with such light and joyous grace that The Factotum, gazing after her, murmured:

"Cor blimey, Pepper, me buck, if our Guv's got 'is heye on 'er and thinkin' o' double-'arness, well, strike me perishin' pink, I shan't mind so much, cos she's a reg'lar one-er, she is, and no bloomin' error! Now, smart's the word, me lad,—pick 'em up proper!" So saying, Goliath drove away at speed, while Samantha, walking leisurely, crossed the wide meadow towards those shady woodlands that she knew now for leafy menace. Nor had she gone far amid this rustling leafage when she espied Sir Harry lounging gracefully against a tree. And never had he looked handsomer, or more exactly what a gallant, adoring lover and hero should be than now, as, with sleek head bared, he hastened to meet her.

"Dear angel!" he exclaimed. "My Beautiful, I was afraid you were going to disappoint me!"

"I was detained," she murmured softly. And oh, the bewitching play of coy-drooping lashes. "And I'm—not an angel."

"Not you!" he exclaimed rapturously. "You are a glorious woman . . . my woman and beloved wife soon to be. Give me your arm, your lovely, slender waist."

"Well, no!" sighed she. "I don't like being cuddled or pawed any time, even by you!" And oh, the sweetly tender inflection of her voice!

"Ah, my beloved," he whispered, taking her hand masterfully, "how I adore your sweet coyness! But I, and love, will teach you joys and delights undreamed, when marriage has made you mine, my ownest own."

"But it hasn't, yet! So, Harry, if you want me to go a walk with you, do leave go my hand, please." Kissing her slim fingers passionately, he sighed, looking meaningly into the eyes that, instead of quailing shyly as he expected, met his bold gaze so steadfastly; but Sir Harry, unwarned by this, became only the more urgent and intense, wooing with an ever-increasing ardour, like the much-practised and accomplished philanderer he was.

Thus wooing and wooed, they walked slowly on until, reaching a little glade discreetly secluded, Samantha paused: and here Sir Harry folded possessive arms about her, whispering:

"Oh, my beloved, my adored one—come, I need you."

"But what for?" she enquired, and with such cool placidity of tone and look that Sir Harry's fervour chilled somewhat, yet only for a moment, then his clasp

tightened, and he became the dominant male, whose mastery should compel her maiden coyness to his arrogant will; so now he frowned as he said, and with a gleam of sharp, white teeth:

"Samantha, you've dallied long enough. You are mine, you always were, and now I'm going to make you so, body and soul, here and now, my beauty."

"Oh?" she enquired, still passive in his embrace. "Just what are you getting at, Harry, I'd like to know?"

"I mean that I'm going to make you my own property, my Beautiful. I'm going to take you at last, my Beloved One, and I'm going to take you—now!"

"Oh?" said she again, watching the evil menace of him with unswerving, dauntless gaze, but moving neither hand nor foot. "Now first you listen to me, Harry Winby, and listen good! I shorely don't like either the look or sound of you none whatever. So if you're suggesting this fool e-lopement there's nothing doing, and if you're hinting at—anything else—watch out you don't get hurt."

"Listen, Samantha, my darling," he pleaded, warned, at last, by her strange quiescence rather than her words, "I adore you, I'm mad for you, and cannot bear to wait any longer—and good God—why should we? I have everything prepared, a carriage waiting and quite nearl So come, my own darling, to-night you shall travel in my loving arms, to-morrow we'll be married. So now, kiss me, Samantha, give me those luscious, maddening lips."

With both hands she spurned him away so violently that, loosing her, he staggered; then Samantha moved at last,—an upflash of lacy petticoats, a glimpse of silk-clad, extremely shapely legs, and Sir Harry recoiled before the glittering menace in her white fist.

"Now," said she, between gnashing teeth, "be on yore way, Mr. Sedoocer! I'd rather kiss a poison toad—so get a-going, and don't ever come my way again or shore as you're born I'll let daylight into you good and plenty!"

"But, Samantha," he gasped, like one utterly dismayed, "Oh, my precious darling, believe me you mistake and misjudge me, you do, upon my word of—ha!" he cried, suddenly fierce and glaring as at someone immediately behind her. "So it's you again? Get out or——" Taken completely off her guard, Samantha glanced round expectantly—then she was struggling vainly in Sir Harry's arms, a desperate man whose cruel fingers were crushing her slender wrist until, despite all her fortitude, the knife fell; Sir Harry whistled shrilly—she heard the hurried trampling of heavy feet, then felt herself seized by other hands.

"Rope, me lady!" chuckled Beetle-Brow trussing her dexterously with the length of cord he bore. "Tit for blooming tat, me lady!"

Even as he thus mocked her, and before she might scream, Cauliflower-Ear stifled her too-late, passionate outcries in the thick overcoat he held ready, and Samantha, thus rendered blind, dumb and helpless, was borne away. But her captors had not gone very far when they were halted by a fierce challenge, and dropping Samantha, turned to front Vengeance making at them in three separate shapes, two being large and powerful, and one small though ferocious.

Then as Samantha lay a mere shapeless bundle upon the grass, she thrilled to the sounds of furious conflict,—trampling feet, thud of heavy blows, gasps, snarls of pain and rage. After some while as she strove vainly against the muffling coat that blinded her, small hands came to aid her, and a breathless voice panted:

"Arf a mo, m'lady! There y'are!" Her head freed, Samantha, sitting up in her bonds, beheld Tom Wade cherishing a bruised and lumpy jaw and seated upon the feebly-writhing form of one whose battered features bore only faint resemblance to the handsome 'Romeo' and dashing lover, Sir Harry. But Tom was smiling as he gazed entranced, not at Samantha, no, his wide grey eyes were following the swift, lithe actions of one man who fought two,—for 'The Thunderbolt' was showing how and why he had earned that title. So, glancing where Tom looked, Samantha beheld such a peerless exhibition of the Noble Art as few eyes are ever privileged to witness. A man this who fought joyously, whose quick, light feet kept him ever out of harm's way; before this master of ring-craft, of foot and fist, mere brute strength and viciously desperate onslaughts availed not; a master this, whose powerful fists smote two for one, and never amiss, blows timed to a second, that checked the fierce rushes of his two assailants, stung them, staggered them, and finally smote them headlong, to lie prone, and with no least will or ability to rise.

And now, surveying these two fallen bruisers, themselves now so very bruised, dazed and bloody, Mark shook his head, glanced down at his knuckles, looked at rapturous Tom, and said, rather mournfully: "Alas, Tom, old fellow, 'twas ever thus! I always finished off my men too soon."

"Oh, Mark," said Tom, sighing also, "what a marvel, what a perfect ab-so-lute master you are!"

"I'll say so, yessir!" Samantha added. "I'm looking at an Englishman that surely ought to be American, and a Texan, what's more! Mr. Mark, just as soon as yore little Goliath has cut me loose I'll admire to shake yore hand!"

"Take them both, Miss Dudeney!" he replied, with one of his rare smiles, and, reaching down, lifted her lightly afoot; thus they stood for a moment hand in hand, surveying one another, then Samantha smiled, saying:

"Mr. Mark, my name to you is Samantha from now on!"

"Then, Samantha," said he in his deep, gentle voice, "you honour me, and may I say how very much I admire your cool bravery, and how grateful we are, Tom and I, for permitting us this opportunity of rebuffing these ruffians."

"Oh, Mr. Mark," she answered, with ripple of laughter, "I cert'nly just love yore word 'rebuffing', and the way you 'rebuffed' them. Come, now, let's all go along to that old Trevore house and I'll pour tea for you—if you'd like me to."

"I should," he answered, smiling. "I should indeed."

"And I!" quoth Tom, rising from the prostrate 'Romeo', who made no effort to do the like, but lay there entirely unregarded. "A perfectly corking idea. I'll show you the old, secret chamber, the priest's hiding-place."

"Secret chamber?" exclaimed Samantha ecstatically. "Oh dear land of my fathers,—and you never told me of it!"

"I've hardly had a chance. You see, it was only a few days ago that Mrs. Penhallo showed me how to come at it."

"Mrs. Pen did? Oh dear land of my fathers! Well, let's go—now, this very instant!"

"At once!" said Tom. "The dogcart's close by."

And so presently away they drove gaily, all four, leaving behind them two bruised and battered men, who cursed loud and long as they followed the one who went before them in a vengeful fury far too deep for any words.

CHAPTER XXV

OF A CANDLE-END, BONES, AND AN UNOPENED LETTER

BY means of a shapeless candle-end and Tom, Samantha was exploring the secret stairway, passage and chamber, and being duly awed by their grim suggestiveness of long-past terrors and suffering.

"So here," said she, peering about this small, blind chamber, "here's where the poor runaways used to hide in those cruel Bad Old Times?"

"Yes," answered Tom, holding the candle-end aloft that she might better inspect this grim place, "here they fled, and with Death clamouring at their heels, the Terror of hue and cry—which meant the whole country was up and after them, poor chaps! I dare say many a wretched fugitive has crouched here shivering while he listened to his pursuers searching the old house for him, which must have been pretty dashed unpleasant."

"Unpleasant? Frightful, I'll say! Yes, I'll say it was!" she replied in such unusually gentle tone that Tom, looking at her, now, thanks to this candle-end, saw her face so sweetly gentled by pity that he knew in this moment that she was indeed a woman truly beautiful.

"Oh!" she breathed. "The mere thought gives me the shivers! These poor, hunted creatures hearing death all around them! Thank God we live to-day!"

"Yes, indeed!" he said, gravely. "To-day we reap the harvest our ancestors planted with anguish of labour and suffering and in spite of tyrannic oppression and cruel injustice. We should be very humbly grateful to those long-forgotten dead, these so many nameless martyrs for our present freedom."

And now it was Samantha's turn to gaze at Tom in the dim light of this fateful candle-end whose flickering beam revealed now in his plain, strong face something far better than mere comeliness of feature, or even the peerless, haunting beauty of the Apollo Belvedere.

"Oh!" she murmured.

"What?" he enquired.

"Nothing . . . except spider-webs and dust! Which is a shame, Tom Wade, because you ought to keep this place, this . . . haven of the defenceless, swept and garnished,—like a shrine. First brooms, Tom, then scrubbing brushes and lots of soap and water."

"Yes!" said he. "Yes—a shrine! By Jove and Jupiter you seem able to put my very thoughts into words, and far better than ever I can,—which is rather marvellous! Yes, the place shall certainly be 'swept and garnished' for sake of those old folk who suffered and died long ago that we might enjoy a better, happier world than they ever knew."

"Tom Wade," she exclaimed, as though in wondering surprise, "if I can sometimes speak yore thoughts by accident, you can say more in a sentence than others can in a week of Sundays! And you can make yore words sound like they mean something! Yes, you shore can talk—when you take the trouble. I guess, besides being no ordinary working-man, you're one of these high-brow scholars and don't like it known."

"No," he answered somewhat ruefully. "Oh, no, rather not,—quite the reverse, in fact! For though I've read pretty widely for, pleasure, I'm simply not there as a cram, I mean to say, real study, *literae humaniores* and what not. I was generally ploughed in every exam."

Now it was at this precise moment that an inquisitive spider, perhaps attracted by the flame of this candle-end or Samantha's equally bright eyes, thought fit to

descend by a gossamer thread, on a tour of inspection, and so close to Samantha's lovely face that, clutching dainty frills and flounces close about her shapeliness, she started back, colliding with Tom, who dropped the candle-end,—out went the light and—she was in his arms, all vital loveliness, warm, soft, fragrant,—and Tom, being human, kissed her,—only once, but lips met lips. . . . Then he released her and they stood motionless, quick-breathing, unseen in the darkness, yet so acutely sensing and aware of each other that Samantha finding speech beyond her for the moment, was dumb. Thus silence endured until at last Tom spoke in breathless dismay.

"Good . . . lord! This is simply . . . dashed frightful, you know!"

"Do . . . I?" said she, also rather breathlessly.

"Of course!" said Tom, in voice like a groan. "Here am I . . . behaving like that Winby bounder! It was . . . absolutely rotten of me . . . wasn't it? I mean to say . . . down here . . . alone and so on . . . I'm most fearfully sorry."

"Are you . . . really?"

"I am! I am indeed . . . more than I can say. I do hope you don't think me . . . that sort of brute?"

"What sort?"

"To . . . take advantage of your helplessness."

"But I wasn't helpless! Not until you got me in yore . . . yore brutish, bear-like hug! Yes, you are a brute—or aren't you?"

"I almost begin to fear I must be, which shocks and surprises me no end,—if you know what I mean?"

"Well, but do I?" she demanded. "You aren't, by any chance, trying to make love to me, are you? I'll have you tell me so I shall know how to act."

"How should you act?"

"Accordingly! So is this your idea of love-making or isn't it?"

"Well, no . . . hardly . . . rather not! I mean to say——"

"Aren't you shore of yoreself?"

"No, by George, I'll be dashed if I am!"

"Then d'you know what I think?"

"I've no idea,—that's what rather floors me. So pray, what do you think of me?"

"That you're a poor fish!"

"Quite!" muttered Tom. "As I feared! And this drops me for the count, knocks me completely into a cocked hat. All that remains for me is to beg you'll overlook my deplorable lapse . . . forgive and forget,—will you?"

"No to both!" she answered promptly. "Now suppose you find yore bit of old candle and light it so I can see where I'm at."

"Certainly—of course," he said, with the utmost meekness. "I've a box of lucifers in my pocket—somewhere. . . . Oh, here!"

Having retrieved and re-lit this fateful candle-end, Tom stood gazing at its steady flame and she at Tom, and both without uttering a word, until, at last, sighing so deeply that the light flickered, he said:

"Anyhow, I never felt so confoundedly humiliated in my life! Or so ridiculously silly!"

"Silly?" she demanded indignantly. "Just what do you mean by 'silly'?"

"Romeo nonsense!" he answered bitterly. "Passionate, romantic rot and what not! I shall be sprouting a moustache next, and calling you 'angel' and 'beloved' and 'adored darling'——"

"D'you mean," she cried, in quick, breathless fury, "that you heard? Oh, beast—were you peeping and prying on us—in the wood?"

"Of course I was! I watched every move, heard every dashed word. You don't imagine I'd have let you run the risk of such an infernal scallywag alone, do you? Rather not! So I watched and listened, and by Jupiter and Jove—it made me sick—positively dis-gusted me!"

"Oh, did it, Mis-ter Wade!"

"Absolutely! I yearned to choke the fellow there and then."

"Well, why didn't you—yes, and before he had his two thugs tie me up?"

"I judged it best to wait a bit—under the circumstances. However, love-making seems a pretty sordid and somewhat scaly business, doesn't it, Samantha?"

"Oh—abso-lutely!" she mocked.

"Quite!" said he gravely. "And, by George, when you nearly grassed the fellow and whipped out your dagger, I felt like snatching you up in my arms and kissing you."

"Did you, Tom?"

"I did . . . yes . . . like a brother, of course! Yet, even so it was confoundedly odd, dashed extraordinary impulse—considering all things."

"What things?"

"Well, I mean to say! Having regard to the undoubted fact that you and I are so utterly against all that sort of thing,—the love-making rot . . . kissing and so on . . . marriage and what not. I mean to say we see eye to eye, one mind, one thought, if you get me."

"Just what are you trying to say, Tom?"

"That you, Samantha, are as precisely dead set against ever marrying any dashed bloke as I am of ever wedding any poor confounded girl. We agreed that the

whole business is distinctly and decidedly repulsive, didn't we?"

"Oh?" she murmured. "Did we?"

"Certainly! It was while you were drying by the fire——"

"When you called me 'Venus'!"

"So I did,—and by Jove, as you looked then—all dripping from the sea and ——"

"Don't dare say 'good as nood'."

"Certainly not! I'd no least idea of saying anything of the sort."

"Well, don't go thinking it either."

"Oh, I say now—be reasonable, Samantha! My thoughts, at least, are my own, and are, I assure you, quite natural . . . I mean to say—proper, respectful and what not, if you——"

"Anyways," she retorted, "ever since I met Mr. Wade the idea of marriage is cert'nly more odious than ever! So you can be mighty sure nobody's going to hound me into a husband's paws—nossir, not me, not so you can notic——" The word was broken by a horrified gasp, and in that same moment she was in his arms again.

"There . . . oh . . . there!" she panted. "Over there . . . in the corner . . . bones! Oh, my heavenly home,—a heap of bones!"

"By Jupiter . . . so they are!" said Tom; then with one arm still close about her trembling form, he drew a slow pace nearer this dusty, gruesome heap, while Samantha, pressing closer against his comforting solidity, enquired in awe-stricken whisper:

"Are they . . . human . . . a skeleton?"

"No," he answered, spreading this heap with toe of his shoe, "these are merely the bones of oxen and sheep, beef and mutton, my dear."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, freeing herself from his clasp. "How frightfully tame and disappointing. Ah, but," and shuddering, she clutched his arm again, "are you sure and quite positive, Tom?"

"Perfectly! See, this big bone was once prime ribs of beef and this smaller one a mutton chop—though you needn't let go my arm again unless you feel absolutely compelled."

"Well, I do!" said she loosing him instantly and stooping in her turn to peer down at those dusty relics. "But just how did these bones get here, d'you suppose?"

"That," said Tom, shaking his head, "that is the question, how indeed?"

"Anyway, there's something among them that isn't a bone, see—right there!"

"You mean this?" said Tom, stooping to peer more closely. "Why . . . Good Lord . . . it looks like——"

"Oh—a letter!" said Samantha, and again in awed whisper.

"Yes," he replied, whispering also; then taking up this unexpected find, he blew from it the dust of years, and holding it to the light, saw first—that it had never been opened, and turning it over beheld, plain to read though the ink had faded, one word that for the moment checked his breath and held him rigid and motionless for this word was

JANICE.

"Oh, Tom . . . Tom, for mercy's sake—what is it?"

"Look!" he answered, between stiff lips. "This is the name of . . . my mother. . . . And she . . . never read this letter . . . you see, the envelope is still intact!"

"That's mighty queer!"

"Queer—yes, and . . . worse, perhaps."

"How d'you mean, Tom, how worse?"

"This may be . . . and I believe it is or was . . . a message of vital importance . . . years ago."

"Well, why not open it and see?"

"Because I'm almost certain this was written by . . . my father."

"Then come out into the sunshine and try to be sure!" So saying, she led him from this little, dark chamber, out into the narrow passage where daylight dazzled them, up the short flight of stone steps and so into the hall.

"Here!" said Samantha, seating herself in the ingle. "Sit here, Tom, and make perfectly certain, and when you are sure—open the old letter, anyway, and see what it's all about, for I'm just dying to know! Well, do you know the writing now?"

"No—no, I don't!" he sighed, in troubled perplexity. "I can't be sure . . . yet who but my father would use her first name?"

"Lots of folk maybe. . . . But, Tom, I guess by rights we ought to send it to her right away and tell her how we——"

"But, Samantha, didn't I ever tell you? I don't know where she is . . . I never have known. I'm not sure, even, if she is still——"

"Then open it right now! Open and read it this very moment,—maybe it will tell us just how and where to find her."

"I wonder!" he murmured, still hesitating.

"Then quit yore wondering, and get busy instead—open it and see."

Taking out his penknife, Tom slit this time-yellowed envelope with reverent care and, with Samantha's rounded chin upon his shoulder, smoothed open this long-ago folded letter very tenderly and began to read. . . . Now, seeing the first written words, Samantha uttered a soft-breathed "Oh!" and drew away, leaving Tom to

read alone; when he had done so he was silent awhile, then:

"Did you read it, Samantha?" he enquired, softly.

"Of course not . . . only the first line, but I should cert'nly love to, if——"

"You shall read it with me."

So with their heads very near one another, they perused this letter; and these the words:

"London.
"July 6th, 18—

"My Janice and Beloved Wife,

"Knowing you soon will bless me with Fatherhood, I write these hasty lines on the eve of my departure abroad upon matters of great moment, for war is in the air except the situation be handled wisely, and I am all too conscious of the vast responsibility laid upon me. Yet even so, my truest, most sacred thoughts are with you, my girl-wife, who so soon must go down into the Dark Vale of Death to come forth again, I pray God, with a new, young life in her mother's arms. Beloved Janice, if I have seemed remote of late and strange to you, do pray forgive my seeming coldness, and know it occasioned by the many and onerous duties imposed upon me by my Country and Sovereign. I have devoted all thoughts and energy of late how best to serve our England and Humanity by holding back, as far as honour may, from the ghastly horrors of a great conflict. Believe and know that I love you now, and ever shall. Sir Marcus sends word our carriage waits, so must I leave you in the very shadow of death, but I pray Almighty God, it may be to the glory of Motherhood and a long happy life with,

"Your ever loving and devoted husband,
"Gawain."

"Oh!" Samantha exclaimed, below her breath. "How he loved her."

"Yes," sighed Tom. "It rings true . . . every single word of it. And, Samantha, he wrote it . . . the year I was born."

"If ever," she murmured wistfully, "if ever I should be so . . . so silly to let any man ever marry me, this is the sort of letter I'd love to get from my husband . . . tender and . . . reverent."

"Yes!" sighed Tom. "Tender and loving and reverent,—and this is what makes it all the more absolutely frightful!"

"Oh—how,—what?"

"That she . . . never received it. My poor girl-mother never read, never had the joy and comfort of one loving word of it."

"Yes, that is frightful, Tom,—it's tragic."

"Quite!" said Tom. "Had she read such words as these . . . her life would surely have been happier . . . utterly different . . . and mine also! You see, Samantha, just before or after I was born she ran away, and no one seems to have heard of her

after they took her baby from her."

"Oh, the cruel wretches!" exclaimed Samantha fiercely, and then as suddenly tender: "The poor dear . . . so lost and desolate—and—a girl-wife. So, of course, we'll just have to find her."

"But, Samantha, don't I tell you . . . I don't know if she's living or dead."

"Well, then, we'll shore have to make shore—do our best, anyway."

"We?" questioned Tom, turning to look at the lovely, eager speaker.

"Yes!" she nodded. "Us, you and me! We'll advertise in all the noospapers, we'll engage a whole lot of slooths—detectives—we'll start things humming and right soon! Anyway, I'm in on this, and cert'nly going to help you all I know how. Yessir, I am so!"

"Samantha!" said Tom, leaning towards her impulsively. "Oh, Samantha, I . . ."

"Well?" she enquired, and very kindly, because of the look in his eyes and the emotion that seemed choking him, "Try again, Tom."

"Samantha, all I can say is . . . I mean to say you're a . . . perfect brick."

"Oh?" she replied softly. "Then all I can say and mean to say is that, though I guess you mean it kindly, a brick is about the last thing on this round earth I want to be. But now—about this letter."

"Yes, what do you advise? Ought I to return it to my father?"

"Not on yore life, no, siree! Not yet, anyway, it would only get him all worked up to no purpose. No, my advice is—let's call Mr. Mark in and show it him right now, then let's all three talk it over together."

"Samantha, I believe you're right."

"Shore I'm right! Mr. Mark's head isn't just for hanging hats on to, there's brains into it that act like greased lightning and——"

At this moment they heard Mark's clear, deep voice summoning them to tea, and then Mark himself appeared saying:

"The Faxstotum bids me inform you tea will be ready in two jiffs."

"Old fellow," said Tom, rising, "here is a . . . a letter we found in the secret what-not, how it came there and why it was never opened only the Lord knows. We want you to read it, old horse, then sit down and talk over what's best to do with it. Remember, Mark, we found it unopened and therefore it had never been read—all these years no eyes had seen it until a little while ago!"

So Mark took the letter and having perused it very carefully, stood dumb, gazing wide-eyed on vacancy while the two watched him and waited, scarce-breathing.

When at last Mark spoke, it was in hushed tone and with gaze still abstracted:

"She will . . . she must believe . . . at last!"

"Who?" Tom demanded, breathlessly. "Mark, who will believe . . . and what?"

But refolding the letter gently, Mark, gazing at it with the same abstracted expression, merely shook his head; then because he was speechless, Samantha replied for him:

"Why, Tom, he means yore mother will believe yore father shorely loves her, at last."

"Good God!" Tom whispered. "Mark . . . old fellow . . . is Samantha right? Tell me for mercy's sake, man!"

"Yes," he answered.

"Then . . . Oh, Mark, she is alive . . . my mother?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Alive!" he repeated. "Alive! And you knew it . . . knew and never told me! Why not—in God's name?"

"By her own express command, Tom."

"Well, but now, Mark, now that I know she lives. . . . Oh, this alters everything! I must go to her at once, wherever she is,—I must and will—yes, I'll start this moment."

"Impossible, Tom."

"How impossible—and why?"

"Because your solitary mother must not see the son her empty arms have yearned for all these years, until she herself calls you to her love."

"Oh, nonsense! Rot . . . absolutely absurd!" fumed Tom, all hot impatience. "She is my mother, and my place is beside her. So, Mark, I demand to know where——"

"Hush up, Tom! Be patient a while," murmured Samantha. "Have a little sense. Mark's quite right and you're all wrong, Tom. For, don't you see——"

"No, I don't see!" cried he, a little wildly. "This letter is the best, finest introduction to my unknown mother that any son could possibly have,—yes, such tender, manly letter will make everything right and——"

"But—will it?" sighed Mark. "After twenty-two years of bitter solitude and heart-break? I doubt it, Tom."

"Well, I don't," he retorted, hotly. "No, not for a moment! Such letter would comfort any grief, remove any doubt, absolutely. Yes, and win the forgiveness and love of any wife. So what I say is——"

"Just please hold on a minute and hear me!" Samantha broke in. "Are you listening?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, now, didn't you tell me how 'they'—meaning your Dad, of course, took

yore mother's baby from her, didn't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"You can cut out the 'but', Tom, because if your Dad snatched her baby from her mother's arms,—which he shore did,—it's going to take more than just one letter, no matter how beautifully expressed, to soothe her down one little bit, or fill her poor, empty, desolate heart with love for him or anything to do with him—and that's whatever, yes, siree! You're only a man that thinks he's right, but I'm a woman and know! And now you can lay a gol-darned blue stock that I'm right! And just because I am so right, you listen to me some more. My advice to the both of you is for Mark, if he knows her hideout, which I guess he shore does, is for him to hit leather and be on the trail right away,—show her this letter, tell her about you, give her time to get used to both, and see how she acts. And I'm going to tell you that whatever she does will be for the best, and in her own time and way she'll make everything all hunky-dory."

"Hunky-dory?" questioned Tom, gloomily.

"Means A.1., O.K., all to the good and with bells on,—if you know what I mean, pre-cisely! What d'you say, Mr. Mark?"

"That it is the only wise course, Samantha. And, my dear, I beg the honour to be your friend Mark, henceforth."

"Why, sure, Mark! And I'm saying the honour goes both ways, yessir! Now come and I'll pour out tea like an English lady should."

CHAPTER XXVI

OF AN AGED TREE, A WOBBLY HEART, AND A SMEAR OF BLOOD

MARK had departed upon his mission; Tom still seated at the tea-table was telling Samantha all he had been able to learn through the long years, concerning his unknown mother; The Factotum, seeing them thus engaged, had removed himself discreetly to the stables where now grooming (and quite needlessly) a glossy-coated Pepper, he was laying this intelligent creature odds of fifty to one upon the speedy nuptials of their 'Guv'.

"And to think," said Tom, for perhaps the hundredth time, "to think she is alive! That Mark knew, yet never gave me the least hint."

"Certainly he didn't! How could he when he'd promised not?"

"But . . . never to have uttered a single word!"

"And quite right too! Because one word leads to others."

"Oh, but, confound it all, Samantha,—he might at least have let me know she was not dead."

"And if he had, there'd have been no holding you—no, siree! You'd have been up and off hunting her, right away."

"Not if first he had exacted a promise that I would not," said Tom, indignantly. "However, it was most cert'nly unfriendly of Mark, it sure was!"

"And I'm telling you," she retorted, "it was con-foundedly honourable of Mark. Yes, abso-lootly! And I guess my English talk is as good as yore copy-cat American."

"But, Samantha, seriously, had he only let me know she was alive, given me the merest hint of her appearance and what she was like to spea——"

Samantha cut him short with a giggle; then seeing his indignant expression, shook her head at him, saying:

"Oh, Tom Wade, you might have seen and known all this for yore ownself if those things in yore head that look like they might be eyes, could see any further than that funny object you call a nose. Or again, you might ask me, though, like Mark, I shouldn't tell you—now."

"Samantha," said Tom, leaning towards her across the table with sudden eagerness, "do you actually mean . . . what on earth do you mean?"

"Find out," she retorted, rising with nimble grace. "Use yore brains—if you have enough, and while you do, let's take another peek at the old priest's hideout, come and show me all over again just how it works."

"Not unless you explain and tell me——"

"Not a word, nossir, never a one! Come and show me the hideout or I'll be on my way home."

"Oh, very well," sighed Tom, gloomily submissive. So together they crossed the wide stretch of grass that by Mark's care was becoming more like the smooth lawn it had been in ages past; and Samantha's bright, quick eyes were glancing askance though heedfully at a certain great tree shading this lawn, while Tom's grey eyes glanced askance yet as heedfully at Samantha's radiant beauty, thus they were both quite unconscious of the vengeful, lurking shapes that menaced them or the furtive eyes that watched with such vicious intentness precisely how Tom manipulated the lever that opened and disclosed the secret of the ponderous hearthstone,—eyes that discreetly vanished when Samantha, having peered down into the gloom below, drew back, saying:

"No, Tom. I guess I'll wait till you've cleared out a few million of the spiders.

Let's now take a look at the stables." So again they went into the evening sunshine.

"That's not the way to the stables," said Tom.

"Oh well, come and show me this nice old tree instead."

"Tree?" he repeated in surprise.

"Shore! A twiggy thing with leaves and branches, that one!"

"But, what the dickens,—why look at a tree?"

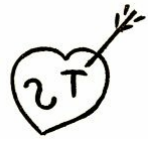
"Because it's there to look at, and, besides, I like trees."

So saying, she led him to this aged giant who stretched his great branches wide above them as if to protect both from oncoming evil, while Samantha paced slowly around the massive trunk until Tom, wondering, enquired:

"Samantha, what in the world are you looking for?"

"This!" she answered, pausing suddenly and with somewhat disparaging gesture.

Now looking whither she directed, Tom saw this:



"A bit wobbly and lop-sided!" was her verdict. "But you can see what it's meant for,—though you've got the S wrong way round."

"Eh?—I have?" gasped Tom, gazing at this carving in wide-eyed astonishment.

"Sure! And you might have given Cupid's arrow a few more feathers and——"

"Good—lord!" exclaimed Tom, disgustedly. "D'you mean to say you . . . actually . . . think I—did—that?"

"A waggly heart!" she nodded. "With an 'S' for Samantha, wrong way about and a T for Tom struck with a moulting arrow!"

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed, indignantly. "I mean to say—confound it all, Samantha, as if I could possibly do anything so out of shape . . . and so dashed idiotic!"

"Are you trying to tell me you didn't do it?"

"Of course I am,—certainly! How could you ever think I would or could? I mean to say—anything so putridly bad, so perfectly silly and absolutely futile!"

"Oh, is it?"

"Well, isn't it? Can't you see it is,—don't you know it is?"

"Then, if you didn't do it,—who did?"

"By Jupiter,—that small imp of mine,—Goliath! Wait here,—I'll bring the little

rascal to explain and confess."

So away strode Tom, leaving Samantha beneath the great, old tree whose mighty arms could not protect her from other arms that seized her, swung her helplessly aloft and stifled the cries she would have uttered; while on sped Tom,—to be smitten headlong by unseen hands, kicked and spurned by merciless, vengeful feet, and, rendered thus unconscious, to be dragged away,—with nothing to show of this sudden, murderous attack except a smear of blood upon the trampled grass.

Thus, once again, the ancient House of Trevore was left to brood in its customary solitude amid the drowsy hush of early evening—until—all at once in the echoing stable yard rose stamp and clatter of impatient hoofs, and away leapt the horse, Pepper, bestridden by a small, desperate rider, pale of face and wide of eye, who with voice, hands and goading heels urged the eager animal fast and faster—to such purpose as shall be told in:

CHAPTER XXVII

OF GUN-PLAY AND AMANDA

THE two-horsed, closed carriage driven by Beetle-Brow with Cauliflower-Ear beside him, slackening speed to turn a sharp corner of this lonely, country road, was met by thunderous smoke, red flame and the whine of flying bullets: Cauliflower-Ear's hat was whisked from his astonished head, Beetle-Brow, ducking instinctively, dragged at the reins, and the carriage, swerving wildly, brought up with sudden, lurching jolt and a wheel in the ditch.

And now, while the terrified horses reared and plunged, the carriage door opened and out tumbled Sir Harry Winby to behold a tall, solitary woman grasping on either hip a formidable, long-barrelled revolver whose grim muzzles instantly belched flame and smoke at his own shrinking person with hissing bullets that sprayed him with flying dust and gravel.

"Amanda . . .!" he gasped, reeling back before this deadly, thunderous blast, "Don't . . . don't murder me! Good God, woman . . . are you mad?"

"Yesssirree!" she hissed. "I'll s-say s-s-so! I'm maddern'n a nest of hornets! Yuh doggone s-snake! S-so jest yuh hand me out my Honey Girl or take what's coming—all three o'yuh!"

"But, Amanda . . . Miss Sholes, I——" His words were lost in the roar of those terrible guns whose bullets striking the road at his feet, sprayed him again with flying

earth.

"Now, yuh buzzard, do I get my Samanthy or do I cut yuh down with hot lead—which?"

"No . . . yes, yes!" he cried. "I've . . . Sim, come down and give me a hand, come—and hurry, damn you!"

Pale-faced and cowering before the dire threat of these smoking muzzles, the two cowed and abject ruffians obeyed and hastened to lift their helpless captive from the vehicle.

"Over there—on the grass!" quoth Amanda, gesturing with one of her murderous-looking weapons. "So! Now yuh skunks and pizen-toads, listen yuh t'me. Jest because this is England I don't shoot yuh good 'n' dead like I ought, though my soul's shore yearnin' and trigger-fingers itchin' thereto! So thank yore stars for Old England this day! Ah, but—if ever I see any one o'yuh again, hide or hair, then by the Etarnal I'll shoot yuh instanter deader 'n' David's sow. I'll fill yuh so plumb full o' lead that all youh'll need thereafter will be wooden overcoats, and that's whatever! Now git—vamoose—before my guns do their dooty and let daylight into yore sinful carcasses, good and proper! And hoof it on yore own laigs and travel quick 'n' lively!"

Forthwith they obeyed, yet not so speedily for all their sweating haste as the bullets from those dreadfully accurate guns that whizzed so perilously near about their scampering feet. Amanda waited until sight and sound of them were lost in distance, then holstering her reeking guns, she wept, heartily and at leisure, completely ignoring Samantha's stifled moans and futile struggles until, thus soothed and relieved, Amanda dried her eyes and looked down at last upon this dusty, helpless captive.

"Well, Honeybunch," quoth she, gently reproachful, "will yuh jest see now what yore doggone bullheadedness has done for yuh—all snarled up in yore own fool wilfulness! Say now, hain't yuh ashamed at yore silly self?"

Gagged and helpless though she was, Samantha instantly contrived to shake her head.

"Oh!" sighed Amanda. "So it's 'no' is it? Then I guess I'll set down a spell and let yuh lay right there and think it out till yuh nod yore fool haid to signify yore dooly humble and——"

Samantha as instantly nodded, though her beautiful eyes showed wide and fiercely rebellious. Amanda seated herself on grassy bank near by, folded her long arms and said, grimly:

"I shore wish, and only the Etarnal knows jest how I'm wishing, for some right

man to be here and lay yuh over his knee and spank you good and proper! And I'm figgering that man should be Tom Wade, he's gotten a fine, big hand! Yes, Tom Wade's shore the medicine yuh're needing right bad! So what I'm aiming to do is ——"

Aware of quick, light feet rapidly approaching, Amanda looked round and beheld Mrs. Penhallo hastening towards them, who, glancing fearfully from Amanda's guns to Samantha's helpless form, and from these to the ditched carriage and its immediate vicinity with horrified expectancy said breathlessly:

"I heard firearms . . . shooting! Oh, I do hope and pray you haven't . . . killed anyone?"

"No, ma'm," sighed Amanda, "not yet. Jest a mite o' fancy triggering for the behoof of Winby and his gang, them having my Samanthy a captive hog-tied and gagged, helpless as a sack o' pig-meal like yuh see her right now."

"You are Miss Sholes, I think?"

"That same, ma'm, and yuh are Mrs. Penhallo, I know."

"Yes. Now, please, hadn't we better untie poor Samantha?"

"I reckon so, ma'm. If yuh'll take her above, I'll free her below."

Hardly was the gag removed than Samantha, drawing a deep breath, burst into indignant speech:

"Amanda Sholes, now just you listen and know how gol-darned wrong you are. Harry Winby jumped me at Trevore just after tea . . . he and his roughnecks got away with me so slick and easy that it just naturally makes me mighty anxious for Tom Wade——"

"Oh, did they attack him also, my dear?" enquired Mrs. Penhallo, calm of voice though her hands had begun to tremble. "Have they hurt him, Samantha?"

"Pen dear, I don't know. When they got me he'd just gone around to the stables,—but I'd have thought he must have heard, for though I couldn't scream, I shore put up some fight. . . . So, if he did hear why didn't he do something to rescue me,—or have a try at it, anyway? Because I know he would have, yes, I'm dead certain he would have laid out one or two of them."

"And that's whatever!" nodded Amanda, grimly. "Tom would ha' tackled 'em if they'd been an army, and most likely downed the three o' them to boot! So the sooner we find out just why he didn't—"

"Right now!" cried Samantha, rising to her feet with an effort. "And me so darned stiff I can scarcely walk."

"You've no call to, Honey, we're going in H. Winby's rig, and pronto. Will you drive or will I?"

"I will, of course, Mandy."

Wasting no more time in speech, Samantha mounted to the driving seat, turned the carriage with practised ease and away they sped, Mrs. Penhallo and Amanda seated in this fast travelling vehicle, who now, though swayed and jolted, and despite clatter of hoofs and wheels, yet continued to hold converse thus:

Said Mrs. Penhallo:

"What a fortunate accident that you happened to meet those wicked wretches, Miss Sholes."

"Ma'm," answered Amanda, "the accident was a boy—on a hoss! And I'm 'Mandy' to yuh, and I'd kinda like to call yuh 'Mrs. Pen' same as Samanthy does, if agreeable."

"Please do, Mandy. And now pray tell me of this boy."

"Comes a-galloping hell fer leather and 'Oh, Miss Mandy,' cries he, and how he knew my name I jest can't think, 'Miss Mandy,' he cries, all breathless like, 'Sir Harry's got yore young lady, and they've sloshed my Guvnor, so I'm looking for Mr. Mark, have you seen him?' 'No,' I says. 'But what are yuh tellin' me of my Samanthy?' And says this boy, 'They've got her tied up in a carriage and driving this way, so watch out, ma'm!' 'Which I certainly will,' I says. And, Mrs. Pen, watch out and wait for 'em I shore did, and with thumbs on the triggers of pa's guns which I had hastened indoors to don. So when this Winby and his varmints infests the scenery, I let 'em have it, right and left, good and quick and close until I'd shot 'em into the ditch. The rest yuh know."

"Did you . . . wound any of them, Mandy?"

"Mrs. Pen, it grieves me to confess I did not, nary one, I didn't even so much as notch an ear or crease a scalp—this being England. . . . Land sakes!" she exclaimed as the fast-driven carriage lurched round a bend in the road, "Samantha's shore travelling!"

"Which is the measure of her anxiety and mine, Amanda,—so she cannot go too fast for me. Do you think anything has happened to Tom Wade . . . that he is in danger . . . or . . . injured?"

"Mrs. Pen, I can only tell yuh that, given square doos and a fair deal, Tom'll shore beat the Old Nick outa those two-legged pests and lay 'em cold, all three."

"I know he's very strong and brave."

"Mrs. Pen, you've said it correct. Tom is shore so much the cleanest, squarest, dingbustedest he-Englishman that I'm saying he ought to be American and Texan at that—yes, ma'm, I guesso!"

"I'm glad you think so well of him, Amanda."

"Mrs. Pen, I think so well of friend Tom, that if I had my way, I'd have my Samanthy hitched fast to him in Wedlock's bonds, quick and shore as shootin'! I would so, because Tom's the medicine she needs to cure her doggone bullheadedness, and that's whatever!"

"She is a very beautiful girl, Amanda, and, beneath all her wilfulness, very sweet and womanly."

"So you've seen that, have yuh, Mrs. Pen, my deary? Yuh know she's dead straight and real good, for all her gol-darned foolishness?"

"My dear Mandy, of course! This is why I have grown to love her so soon and yet so very truly."

"Love her? Do you, by Jink! Then let's yuh and me dally a wide loop and rope 'em into the matrimonial corral which——" But at this moment the carriage stopped with a jerk and Samantha leapt to earth crying:

"Follow me! This is the way he went!"

Across the wide lawn she led them, beneath the branches of a great, old tree, past a tall, neatly-trimmed yew-hedge, then halting suddenly, pointed with down-stretched, tremulous hand.

"Look!" she whispered. "Ah—look!"

Now glancing whither she directed, they beheld upon the trampled grass a great, ugly smear of blood.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HOW, IN HIS PAIN AND DARKNESS, TOM FOUND HIS MOTHER

TOM opened his eyes to darkness and pain such as he had never known in all his twenty-two vigorous years; for though inured to hard knocks in the ring and upon the football field, here was agony that held him powerless, that racked each joint and sinew, making his every breath such painful effort that when he strove to sit up a wave of nauseating faintness swept him again into merciful unconsciousness.

Ensued a time of deep oblivion: then of troubled dreams, partial wakefulness with returning anguish that spurred him back to awareness of his helplessness,—a feeble, shattered wreck lost in this stifling dark . . . Something was creeping into his eye, causing an intolerable itch until with effort that made him groan, he contrived to lift one hand, wiping away a crawling stickiness he knew was blood.

And now becoming used to the darkness, he made out the loom of a narrow

stair rising above him, and knowing by this just where he lay, found such strength and comfort that he attempted to shout.

"Mark!" he cried. "Oh—Mark!" But was greatly surprised and dismayed to hear his voice so hoarse and faint. Then because shouting was a vain agony, Tom knew he must—somehow—anyhow, climb these dim-seen steps, this ancient stone stairway that Samantha and he had mounted so lately with such ease, yet which now seemed a dread feat almost impossible of achievement. Nevertheless, Tom set his teeth, and made the attempt, dragged his broken, pain-racked body a little distance, only to sink and lie inert again, his battered face upon the age-worn flagstones. When next his eyes unclosed, it was to a blind glare,—but against this dazzling radiance loomed a head down-bent above him; then he was aware of soft arms cradling him upon the bosom of one who gave forth a sweetness he thought was mignonette: now breathing this fragrance vaguely familiar, gazing up into this misty face, he muttered between swollen lips:

"Who . . . is it?" And a tremulous voice replied:

"Oh, my Justin . . . Tom, my darling, you are in your mother's arms again . . . at last, thank God!"

"My mother?" he repeated. "Then I thank God, too! Mrs. Pen, of course! I might have guessed . . . always a . . . confounded blockhead or I should have known you were . . . just you! Ah, mother, it's grand to . . . have a mother just when . . . I need her most . . . Nothing matters now . . . it's so wonderful to know you at last . . . the very mother I would . . . have chosen."

"It's heavenly . . . to have a son!" she murmured, brokenly. "So big and manly. Oh, but, my darling, how they've hurt you! This great, awful gash in your dear brow."

"Ah!" he exclaimed as if in sudden anguish. "That reminds me! What of . . . Samantha?"

Almost as he spoke, down to them from the sunny air above came Samantha's voice, strained and breathless with anxiety:

"Is he conscious yet, Pen? Here's some brandy I found in the tent . . . Oh, how is he now?"

"Fine!" answered Tom, and contrived to speak quite cheerfully despite cut and bleeding lips. "Since you are safe, all's well . . . hunky-dory, yes, ma'm, and with bells on, . . . and what not."

"Oh!" gasped Samantha with sound very like a sob as she sped down the steps. "You cert'nly sound all alive—but look like you'd been poleaxed!"

"Ah, but, Samantha, I've found . . . my mother . . . or she found me! So all's

well . . . at last."

"Is it?" said she, then caught her breath, to see how this blood-stained face, though battered almost beyond recognition, yet contrived to smile up at her. "Are you in much pain, Tom?"

"Nothing to matter," he answered, rather indistinctly. "I feel much better than I must look . . . bathed in my gore and so forth . . . be up those . . . dashed steps . . . soon as I've got my second wind . . ."

"Oh, yes, you're fine and dandy—I don't think!" said Samantha, very tenderly. "Now jest you sip this brandy! Oh, Pen dear, why doesn't Mandy bring something to bandage him before he bleeds to death? Oh, Pen, if he dies——"

"He won't!" she answered, gently assured. "I've checked the worst of it. Give him the brandy."

Now gazing up into Samantha's beautiful face, made the lovelier by a new, half-shy tenderness, Tom sipped the potent spirit obediently, then spoke in stronger voice:

"Ah, mother, our Miss Doodney is looking at me with most un-Samantha-like gentleness—as if I were a helpless infant, a babe new born."

"Dear son, all men are babies, especially when hurt or in trouble. Oh, here comes Amanda, at last, with the water. Take it, my dear, and sponge away the blood while I hold him."

"Oh, I say," Tom expostulated, "I'm not so absolutely helpless as all that."

"Oh, aren't you?" retorted Samantha, tucking her sleeves above round, white arms. "Well, just let's see you get up and dance."

"You shall . . . pretty soon."

"Well, just for now lie still, baby, and let me wash your poor, dear, little face."

Very gently the ghastly stains were sponged away, only to reveal features so gashed and brutally marred that she felt sick and faint, but, quelling this weakness, murmured:

"Poor baby!"

"Madam," he replied, despite soft-dabbing sponge, "I am astounded to find your hammer-like fist can be gentle and light as wing of butterfly or——"

"A sheet!" quoth Amanda, descending to them at this moment, "which I have ripped up for lint and bandages. How yuh doing now, Tom?"

"Better and better!" he replied. "It's grand to lie wounded, Mandy, with three angels of mercy hovering around me."

"But say, Tom, how come yuh to let them murdering hoss-thieves beat yuh up so bad that here's us been beseeching and supplicating the good Lord on yore behoof

with every breath! How come, Tom?"

"An ambush, Mandy. I was down and out before I knew what hit me. Then it seems they tossed me down here,—though how they knew the secret of this hiding place I can't imagine."

"That's easy too!" nodded Samantha. "I guess they just peeked and watched you work that lever-thing. There!" she exclaimed, dabbing his cuts and bruises very gently with the towel. "Now let me lift you so Pen can put yore poor old head in a sling—so!"

"Mrs. Pen," quoth Amanda, watching with expert eye the quick sure movements of those dexterous, ministering hands, "I've set a good few bandages my ownself b'reason of bullets or bowie-knife, but I reckon yuh're no slouch neether,—that'll hold him good till we can yank him up and away to a doc. Yes, ma'm, I guesso. But what I'm now trying to figure out is—jest how are we to get him out o' this vault—up into God's sweet, good air—how?"

"On my own two feet, of course," answered Tom, sitting up despite the sharp pain that racked him.

"No!" cried Samantha.

"Wait, oh, wait!" his mother pleaded.

"Hold on!" quoth Amanda.

But forcing pain-racked body to obedience, Tom struggled to his feet, and reached the stair in three or four wavering strides; then, because of failing, agonised flesh, he groaned, but because of indomitable will, he laughed—even as he sank down and yet down into deeps of stifling gloom . . .

Yet in this dreadful darkness hands were reached to him, arms clasped and lifted him up and out of this fearful shadow to a consciousness of light, of comfort and a voice that crooned, tenderly murmurous:

"Hush-a-by, baby,
On the tree-top,
When the wind blows
The cradle shall rock.
If the bough breaks——"

Tom began to laugh, but sobbed instead, and peering up through the lightening gloom:

"Mother!" he whispered.

"Yes, my darling, yes . . . I am here . . . So, now my great, big son . . . my little, lost baby—sleep!"

CHAPTER XXIX

OF A SON, HIS SCARS AND HIS MOTHER

THIS book, written in a time dark with evil, dreadful with war and grievous with tragedy and suffering, being merely tale of a glad sane world and a kindly home-folk, shall therefore have little to do with the harrowing psychology of the sick-chamber, heart-breaking suspense or Death's grim shadow, but passing lightly over a weariness of anxious, watchful nights and days, come to a certain golden morning when Tom was able to sit up in bed and look about him with eyes quickened by new life and shining for joy of it.

In sunny garden, beyond latticed casement set wide to the fragrant air, birds were in full song, because, as hath been written, it was morning; but it was not to this glad chorus that Tom was listening so intently . . . for rising to him from below-stairs were soft, homely sounds new in his experience—murmur of voices, a busy stir and bustling to and fro; quick, light footsteps with that which is the best, merriest and most alluring of all sweet, homely sounds, especially to a hungry man,—the clatter of cups and saucers.

So with his bright glance roving about this small, dainty chamber that he knew must be his mother's bedroom, Tom hearkened to these right blessed sounds, and, despite pain of body, felt a great peace and grateful comfort of mind since he had indeed found 'home' at last.

It was now he became aware of yet other sounds, an odd scraping and rustle amid the leaves outside the window, and glancing thither Tom beheld uprising against the sunny radiance, a shock of hair, two round, staring eyes and a mouth that gave utterance to a hoarse though joyful whisper:

"Cor blimey, Guv—it worked! You ain't agoin' to die!"

"Die? Who—me?" questioned Tom, careless of grammar.

"Yessir—you!" whispered Goliath, leaning in at the window. "I can see as you ain't going to peg aht, not yet, croak and be screwed dahn into a corfin an' buried."

"Good lord, no, rather not, by Jove and Jupiter, not me."

"But they all thought you was, Guv—ah, and said you was——"

"Who did?"

"Them women, and the doctors. So then me and Mr. Mark and Pepper we finks the same. Been off our feed we 'ave, sir—'specially me! But it's all right nah . . . I can see as you ain't agoin' to kick no bucket, because . . . Oh, luv a duck—it worked!"

"How d'you mean?" Tom demanded. "What worked—no, wait a bit! How did you get up there, a ladder?"

"No, sir, the ivy."

"Then down with you, my small ass, before you break your confounded little neck."

"S'all right, Guv, ivy's easy. This ain't the first time I've shinned up here. I've took lots o' peeps at ye, and last time you looked so like a dead 'un that . . . Oh, strike me pink, sir, I very near did fall. So that's why me and Mr. Mark worked it—and here y'are goin' to grow well again accordin'."

"Just what did you and Mr. Mark work—and before you answer, come in off that ivy—come in, I say."

"Yessir,—only s'posing Mrs. Pen ketches me?"

"What matter?—and anyhow you can duck under the bed. In with you this instant."

"Right y'are, sir!" So saying, Goliath scrambled nimbly through the window and crossing the room on tip-tie, obedient to Tom's gesture seated himself beside the bed.

"Now," said Tom, "let's hear! Have I been so very ill?"

"Crikey—yessir, you have and no error! Three doctors and nobody allowed to come near you 'cept the women."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Mrs. Pen, Mrs. Manda and—her."

"Which 'her'?"

"The one as I see pipin' 'er heye over you, Guv. Miss Samanthy, o' course."

"You mean she was . . . crying over me?"

"Yessir. She'd turned on the waterworks proper, and a sittin' in this 'ere very chair, and me 'angin' on to the ivy-stems outside the winder."

"And . . . crying over me, was she, Goly? Are you sure?"

"And certain, Guv, cross me 'eart! I see the tears drippin' and droppin' off of the hend of her nose or hope I may die."

"And what was I doing, Go?"

"Lyin' so still, ah, so like you was dead, Guv, that I thought as how you was a goner, and very near took and fell off the ivy. So that's why we took a chance and worked it, Mr. Mark and me."

"How? What do you mean?"

"Well, when I come dahn off of the ivy to where Mr. Mark was waitin' in the garden——"

"Oh, so he watched you climb, did he?"

"Yessir, that was the only way we could come nigh you becos' o' the women and doctors. So when I told Mr. Mark jest how dead you was lookin', says he to me, says he—'Yes, Goliath, to-night is the cry-siss,' he says, 'to-night it will be life or death.' 'Why then, sir,' I says, 'to-night I ain't agoin' to try for to sleep because I couldn't.' 'Nor me,' says he. So, 'stead o' goin' back to the 'Pilchards' us walks dahn the garden here till we comes to the little arbour. So in we goes and dahn we sits in the dark. But in a bit, Mr. Mark strikes a match to light 'is pipe and I see as his face is pretty near as pale as yours looked in bed, Guv. So, arter a while I says to him, 'Mr. Mark,' I says, 'when I lay a-dyin' in the 'orspital my old Jacky gets dahn on 'is knees and prays for me to live—ah, prays so almighty hard that it worked and kept me alive, and if it did the trick for me—why not for the Guv? 'Ow abaht it, sir?' I says. And when he'd thought it over, he knocks aht his pipe very gentle and 'Goliath,' he says, very solemn, 'you're right,' says he. 'It's now or never. We'll do it,' 'e says. So dahn we kneels in the dark—and wot 'e prays I dunno, and wot I prays 'e dunno becos we both done it private. But it worked, Guv, for you ain't agoin' to die no more than I did along o' my old Jacky, and so——" The boy started up as his quick ears caught the sound of feet ascending the stair. "Blimey, Guv," he whispered, "she's a-comin' . . . so good-bye and good luck.—I'm an off 'un."

And off he sped and had vanished through the window, even as the door opened.

"Good morning, mother, my dearest!" said Tom with such smile and in voice so hearty and strong that the hands bearing his breakfast tray nearly let it fall, while the large, dark eyes opened wider in joyful disbelief.

"Oh . . . Tom!" she exclaimed, breathlessly. "Oh, but . . . this is wonderful! You sound and look . . . almost well."

"Exactly!" he nodded. "We understand your son has been somewhat under the weather of late, a trifle indisposed and what not, but this morning he is so very much himself again that he feels most tremendously hungry and——"

"Oh . . . God be thanked!" she sighed, looking on Tom now through a glitter of tears.

"Amen!" said Tom, fervently.

"God has given you back to me this second time, my darling."

"Well then," said Tom, reaching out his arms, "put down that tray, you dearest of mothers, and come and be kissed." Down went the tray with a clatter, and for a long moment mother and son clung together.

"Oh, Tom," she murmured at last, clasping his bandaged head between her two gentle hands, "I didn't think life could ever hold such happiness . . . for me."

"Ah, but . . . mother . . . my dear," he answered, a little brokenly, "by George you . . . are going to be happier still."

"That would be impossible," she whispered, holding him closer. "With my son's arms about me strong with life, and his dear eyes looking at me bright with love and the joy of living—I shall never be happier than I am at this moment. Oh, I'm letting your breakfast get cold."

"No matter."

"But aren't you hungry?"

"Ravenous."

"Bless you!" she murmured, kissing his bandaged forehead. "And there on the tray for my big son's breakfast is—what do you suppose, Tom?"

"A beef steak—I hope, or ham or sausages or grilled——"

"Goodness gracious—no, certainly not!" she exclaimed sternly, yet with lips quivering to a smile. "No, darling, with these two hands I have made you a nice large bowl of—bread and milk!"

"Then, mother," groaned Tom with eloquent shudder of abhorrence, "be an absolutely adorable parent and throw it out of the window or give it to the cat. Your poor, loving but starving child needs real food—say bacon and eggs, I can smell them from here! And coffee—oh, delicious! So, mother dear, be your dearest and cherish your famishing offspring with——" He paused at sound of a slow-plodding, prodigiously heavy tread upon the stair. "Mother," he enquired, "who in the world can that be?"

"Ah," she murmured, resettling his pillows, "only Doctor Chenoweth, the one man who helped to save my one and only son!" Then, crossing to the door, she opened it to say in a glad welcome:

"Good morning, doctor,—come and behold a miracle."

Doctor Chenoweth, a ponderous man both in habit of body and speech, trampled into the room, looked at Tom, rasped big fingers across big, ill-shaven chin, nodded great head with its shock of untidy, grey hair, and spoke:

"Ha, the corner, I perceive, is turned, I say turned and very suddenly the crisis, ma'm, is passed; vigorous youth, Mrs. Penhallo, has very certainly kicked old man Death out o' the window sky high. Our invalid will soon be *non est*, but hale and hearty. I say hearty and on his legs again, by reason of Nature, nursing and Gabriel Chenoweth and our patient's remarkably thick skull. I say skull, Mrs. Pen, which does credit to one and all, each and every. Mr. Wade, young man, for your quite

admirable body, I say your clean, sound constitution, you should be eternally grateful to your parents."

"Indeed I am, sir," replied Tom, glancing at his mother who, standing behind the doctor's broad back, blushed quite youthfully.

"Also, young man, you are, I repeat, blessed with an abnormally, I say preternaturally, thick skull; you would certainly be dead, I say dead and buried, but for your osseous processes. All you require now is sleep, sir, is food, Mrs. Penhallo, and plenty o' both, ma'm."

"Food!" repeated Tom. "Food—precisely! What I mean to say is—food! Doctor Chenoweth, you've hit it right smack in the bull's-eye! A steak, say, cut thick—with onions, of course, and a mushroom or so——"

"Bread and milk!" said his mother.

"Or a ham rasher," sighed her son, "pink and juicy! Or kidneys and bacon topped with eggs——"

"Tongue!" quoth Dr. Chenoweth.

"Ye-es!" Tom agreed. "Tongue will do, though I rather hoped——"

"Your tongue, sir—put it out, I say out with it!" Slowly and with the utmost unwillingness Tom obeyed. "That'll do, sir!" growled the doctor, drawing his watch as it had been some offensive weapon. "Now—pulse! Ha—good enough. Heart like a steam piston, I say piston and sound, Mrs. Pen, as a bell, ma'm."

"However," said Tom, scowling fiercely as his bandages would allow, "I'm deuced hungry, I mean to say—famishing and swooning for real food."

"Hum!" quoth the doctor. "Bread and milk."

"No!" cried Tom.

"Certainly not, sir, I say not. Slops, Mrs. Pen, have served their turn. Nature craves, ma'm, and Nature knows. We will indulge our young man in reason. I say reason and discretion. One egg—boiled, Mrs. Penhallo, and of bacon—one rasher. Should Nature desire more, Reason bids us fob the glutton off with a thickish gruel or sweetened arrowroot. For tea—one cup, and of toast a slice. For supper—fish, a fillet, or we may allow the wing of a chicken. And now, Mrs. Pen, warm water if you please, we will adventure to remove his bandages, for good and all this time."

So Tom's head was unbound, his battered features laid bare to show, among others, a great, jagged wound, a livid scar that ran from eyebrow to hair. Doctor Chenoweth viewed this ghastly disfigurement with a look of profound satisfaction; he touched it caressingly with blunt finger-tips, he smiled upon it, nodded at it, and finally addressing it in hushed accents, murmured:

"Bee-u-ti-ful!"

"Oh, doctor, how can you say such a thing? It's dreadful . . . frightful . . . and will leave a terrible scar, you know it will."

"Mrs. Penhallo, of course it will, you are perfectly right, ma'm, our young man is very definitely scarred for life! But then, pray remark how clearly well the outraged tissues are knit and no pus, I say no pus, ma'm, or least inflammation! What redundant vigour is here, what abounding vitality and—what a skull,—hard as the Adamantine Crag! Young man, your cranium is a perfect museum piece. Now, Mrs. Penhallo, we will continue the opiate for this night at least. And so, Mr. Wade, I'm proud of you, sir. I say proud and per-fectly content. Good morning. Mrs. Penhallo, pray a word with you."

Now being alone, Tom sighed wearily, sank back to the comfort of his pillows and thinking of Samantha's radiant beauty and his own scarred unloveliness, uttered another sigh very like a groan while with tremulous hands, strangely weak and uncertain, he tried to feel and judge of his disfigurement. He was thus occupied when the door opened suddenly and quick to heed his mother's as suddenly anxious regard, smiled, saying lightly:

"Adorable Parent, I seek to know the worst of this thing I call a face. So please set down that tray and give me a looking-glass."

"Yes, my darling, yes, of course," she answered as lightly, though the trouble in her eyes dismayed him. "But see, I have brought your breakfast—bacon, Tom, eggs and coffee with cream, so . . . please . . . won't you eat first."

"Not so, my Precious, first the looking-glass."

Sighing, she went to the dainty dressing-table, slowly she took up the small hand mirror and unwillingly she gave it—then stood very still to watch and wait scarce-breathing, while Tom surveyed his so cruelly marred visage, feature by feature; for a long, long moment they remained thus, neither moving and both speechless—then her heart swelled, her tense body relaxed, she felt the scald of tears,—for Tom was smiling, he even contrived to chuckle.

"My poor mother!" he said with whimsical grimace. "Oh, lor—what a rum-looking son you have! He was never exactly the young Adonis or Apollo Belvedere, but—now, ye gods and little fishes—what a phiz! Whenever we stroll abroad, you and I, we shall be Beauty and the——"

"Darling!" she sobbed, folding him close to bless his scars with the tender compassion of her lips. "Oh, my dear, brave son that can smile and jest . . . at such a time! Ah, my dearest, your scars are now my pride and glory, because they prove you the man I hoped and prayed you might become . . . long ago . . . in that most wonderful hour when your mother . . . first clasped you to her heart . . . as I am

doing now! Oh, Justin, my little son . . . my great, strong Tom-man you . . . are more to me . . . now than ever . . . And oh, I am letting your breakfast grow cold again!"

"Who cares!" quoth Tom. "Stoop and let me dry your lovely eyes—such great, big tears."

"No, no, dear, silly man, these are tears of joy, so let them fall . . . and for goodness' sake let me give you your breakfast!"

But when this so-yearned-for meal was set before him, Tom looked at it, sighed over it and sinking back upon his pillows, said with rueful smile:

"Mother, my dear, I think perhaps . . . after all . . . the bread and milk."

CHAPTER XXX

NOON

THE sun, high-risen, showed to Tom's drowsy eyes that now most familiar and welcome of sights—a silvery head down-bent, a strangely youthful face with its jet-black, low-arching brows, dark, long-lashed eyes, sweet-lipped, shapely mouth above the smooth-white curve of resolute chin. Thus feature by feature Tom surveyed the face of this lately-found mother now become so inexpressibly dear and needful to his very existence,—and she, plying busy needle, wholly unaware of this close scrutiny.

And now Tom's glance, attracted by this flying needle, watched the quick, sure movements of those busy hands, saw them somewhat coarsened by years of ceaseless work that yet made them only the lovelier therefor, or so thought Tom. So he watched the graceful movements of these laborious hands in a dreamy content until he saw they were busied upon an object that stirred him to instant speech:

"Great Jove and Jupiter—my stocking!"

She started, and glanced up with ready smile, saying:

"You've had such a lovely sleep, my darling."

"Yes, but . . . I mean to say . . . one of my confounded old stockings."

"Yes, dearest, one of the many, and all of them in woeful need of darning."

"Oh, but, mother, I say you know . . . you shouldn't," he expostulated. "What I mean is . . . well . . . darning a fellow's stockings . . . throw 'em away, I always do . . . and besides it's no work for . . . the Countess of Wade-Orrington."

"Perhaps not, my dear, but extremely right and proper for Tom Wade's mother."

"Ah, but," said he, "Tom Wade's adorable mother is also Tom Wade's father's

wife——"

"Ah—no!" she exclaimed, with look and in tone of such fierce abhorrence that Tom actually started. "Never," said she, between set, white teeth, "never again! I am Penelope Penhallo, and always shall be, just as you are my dear son, Tom."

"But, mother——"

"No, Tom, please. This subject is quite hateful, so pray don't speak of it."

"Then, my dear," said he, propping himself on an elbow to lean nearer in his eagerness, "I simply must tell you . . . down in that old hiding-place at Trevore I found a letter yellow with age . . . addressed to you, and never opened, and I'm wondering how it got down there and why . . . God in heaven . . . why you never read it."

The busy needle was arrested, the dark eyes regarded him and the shapely lips answered with an untroubled serenity that chilled him rather dreadfully.

"Tom, dear, do not distress your poor head with something that is much better forgotten."

"For-forgotten?" he stammered.

"Yes, dearest, of course. As for the letter, I imagine it must have been carried off by my dog, a young fox terrier, and so very mischievous I called him 'Havoc'—but it was all so long ago."

"But lately, Mother, I gave this letter to Mark who promised you should have it."

"Oh, yes, Mark gave it to me."

"Well, did you read it—at last, after all these years, mother?"

"Yes, Tom, I read it."

"Well . . . now . . . doesn't this make any difference . . . I mean your feelings towards my father? Surely it must!"

"Not the slightest, my son."

"But . . . mother . . . such a noble letter, so reverent and tender, so utterly sincere."

"Words, my darling, just words! His pen is eloquent as his tongue—almost. Now suppose we talk of something less objectionable,—these very hole-y stockings of yours, how dreadfully uncomfortable they must have been, my poor darling."

"Mother . . .! Oh, mother!" Tom gasped. "You that are so . . . so kind and gentle to everyone else . . . have you no forgiveness, no mercy, no least kindness for the lonely man who is my father and your husband? For . . . yes, indeed, you are still his wife, and——"

"Oh no, Tom love, she died twenty-two years ago of a broken heart, he killed her, and no words of his, spoken or written, can bring back the dead . . . Ah, now

my poor boy, don't look so grieved . . . when your mother has found you and happiness at last."

"I am happy, too," sighed Tom, quite dismally, "except when I remember him—my father, this most lonely man, for he is and always has been solitary. I can see now, and understand at last something of the suffering he hid behind that awful serenity . . . the dreadful glitter of that eyeglass."

"Darling," she retorted lightly, "I cannot believe it, no, not for a moment. But if he has been able to suffer a little, it is but right and just——"

"Yet . . . mother, suppose he still loves you."

"Nonsense, Tom! I cannot suppose such ridiculous impossibility! He could love nothing but his name and . . . the hateful fetish he calls 'honour'. My lord the Earl is too splendid a gentleman to be human——"

"No . . . no . . ." cried Tom, breathlessly. "Mother . . .! Oh, you are frightfully mistaken and . . . yes, cruelly unjust."

"I am at least human and a woman!" she answered, gently. "And you are my dear son, and it is time you took your medicine."

"Mother, do please let me . . . try to explain . . ."

"No, my dear, you cannot, no one possibly could."

"I want to tell you what a great and splendid man he really is, I want you to know at last——"

"Stop!" she cried, and was afoot, white head back thrown, dark eyes blazing beneath black brows darker now for the frown that knit them so fiercely. "I forbid you to utter another word, or to mention him again! He broke my heart twenty-two years ago, and now . . . Oh God . . . if he should . . . come between us again." Then she was gone, swiftly, silently, and Tom was staring blankly at the closed door.

Shocked, troubled and utterly dismayed, Tom was still gazing at this now forbidding door when he saw it begin to open, slowly, stealthily, inch by inch; then, as he watched in wonder that held him speechless, in came a glossy silk hat adorned with a smart cockade, followed by two bright eyes and a small face lighted by sudden, white-toothed grin. The door opened wider, closed without a sound, and there stood revealed the very smartest of small grooms, the sharpest, most dashing of 'tigers' from resplendent hat to gleaming top boots.

"Ho, Guvnor," whispered this apparition, "will ye take a squint at me, please? Ain't I a regular knock-aht?"

"You are!" replied Tom, but in such tone that the boy's sensitive mouth drooped, his eyes showed suddenly wistful.

"Ain't you pleased at me, sir?" he enquired anxiously. "Don't I soot? Will ye

please look at me buttons, real silver, sir, and there ain't no paper fits no wall better'n these here togs fits me, sir! Mr. Mark stood over them tailor blokes while they measured and fitted me, 'e did,—made 'em take 'em in here and let 'em out there till they was all to the Sir Garnet Wolseley like you see. And he's bought me a faxstotum rig-aht too, Guv!"

"Has he, by Jove!"

"Yessir, a coat wiv' tails! And silver buttons too! Luv a duck they're a treat! Striped weskit and piped trahsis. And then besides, Guvnor, while you was laying here so ill and sick, I gets a letter from Bob Cribb, in London, as is a pal o' mine, tellin' me as 'ow my Jacky has got the weezies worser than ever, and was needin' me. So when I tells Mr. Mark and shows him Bob's letter—blimey if 'e don't start for London with me right away on the railway and when we comes back—strike me perishing pink if he don't bring old Jacky along of us! And there 'e is—in the little old cottage in the village, 'appy as a lark and busy as a bee! And wot d'ye say to that, sir?"

"Good for Mr. Mark," sighed Tom.

"Yessir, and no error, Guv! There ain't nobody in this perishin' world like Mr. Mark, and you, sir! Jest wot I thinks o' the two of ye ain't to be said—becos there ain't no words, only strike me blind and wish I may die if I don't do everythink to show you summat o' wot I can't say. . . . Oh, luv a duck—I'm turning on the . . . waterworks! So, by your leave, sir, I'll 'ook it, sharp and skippy."

"All serene, my Giant. And if Mr. Mark is about, say I want to see him,—ask him to step up here."

"Yessir, hemmediate, Guv!" And, dashing away tears of gratitude with one small fist, but flourishing glistening, cockaded hat gallantly with the other, Goliath vanished silently and speedily as he had come.

A light, firm tread upon the stair and Mark appeared, his usually sombre eyes shining with gladness, his powerful hand outstretched in joyful greeting.

"This," said he, grasping Tom's thin fingers, "this is indeed a miracle, old fellow!"

"Yes," smiled Tom. "It seems you and our Faxstotum, our *multum in parvo*, 'worked it'! Eh, Mark?"

"Beyond doubt!" he replied, in his calm, grave manner. "It was touch and go with you, Tom."

"So I gather. I nearly 'took the count', it seems. Which reminds me,—how long have I been down and out here?"

"Six weeks and three days, Tom."

"Well . . . cor blimey and love a duck!" Tom exclaimed. "So-long and I

remember nothing of it! But now . . . by George, how glad I am to see you, Mark, old horse. You look strong as a horse, and I'm weak as any confounded kitten, which is only to be expected, I suppose. But, tell me, you didn't, you haven't informed of me to the Sire, our Lordly One, I hope?"

"Not, yet, Tom."

"Good! And you will not,—he must know nothing about it, at least until I am up and about again."

"But, my dear boy——"

"Promise me, Mark, promise me!"

"Very well, Tom. Then what about your attempted assassins, these murderous ——"

"Dear old lad, don't bother with 'em, they're not worth it! Besides, I've something far more important to worry about. Something that bewilders me and troubles me no end. I need your advice and help, Mark. Sit down and listen—so! First I want to tell you of this blessed, lovely, strong-willed, tender, hard-hearted mother of mine—Mark, she amazes me and shocks me! And it's about that letter, of course, that grand letter written by my father so long ago—which she never received because, it seems—a dam' dog ran off with it! Well, as you know, she has read it at last, she tells me, but—oh, Mark, my dear old boy, she is so bitterly hostile, so coldly implacable, so gently—unforgiving that I am, as I say, quite amazed and utterly bewildered. She is such an angel of gentleness to everyone except—my father."

"Yes, Tom."

"Well, what am I to do about it? How can I reconcile them, this husband and wife, this man and woman to whom I owe my existence? How am I to win her to forgiveness, this sweetly-tender, iron-willed, perfectly inflexible mother of mine—how, Mark, how?"

"Heaven only knows, Tom."

"You see, old fellow, we both know my father is and always has been a . . . a dashed lonely, solitary soul."

"Very solitary, Tom."

"And I believe he still loves my mother. Yes, and lately I've thought this was his reason for sending me down here to Trevore, I mean to say I believe he knows she is living hereabouts, and hoped we should meet, she and I. What d'you think, Mark?"

"I believe you are right, Tom."

"Well then, old fellow, how on earth am I—are we—to bring these two lovers,

these two grand people, together again? How can I soften my gentle mother's hard heart? How can we melt her flinty pride, Mark, for God's sake—how?"

"Never, I'm afraid, Tom, because we are—merely men."

"What then, d'you mean to say we must do nothing, make no least effort?"

"No, Tom. I think you, being her son, should make any and every attempt. But, because she is a woman, you must have a woman to advise and assist you."

"Yes, but who,—what woman?"

"Samantha, of course, Tom."

"Great Jupiter—what an ass I am! Samantha—yes! She is the very one, the only one! And the sooner the better. Is she anywhere about, old horse?"

"No, Tom, at least I didn't see her in the cottage."

"Which is perhaps just as well . . . what I mean is . . . she hasn't seen this frightful phiz of mine without its bandages and what not, and naturally I feel, well . . . a trifle diffident letting her see it, for the first time. What d'you think of it, Mark,—a bit of a mess,—what? Well, speak out, no hedging, be the absolutely frank, old comrade and companion,—let's have it."

"Well, it's certainly a disfigurement, Tom."

"Quite!" he nodded. "I myself noticed what a dashed repulsive eyesore it is—in both senses of the word,—a blot, old fellow, a blemish, a maculation, hence it fills me with a certain coy reticence in its exhibition to the public gaze—especially Samantha's." Tom paused to glance round as the door opened.

"Mother?" he said wistfully.

"Yes, my darling. Did you take your medicine?"

"No, by George, I clean forgot it."

"Yes, dear, of course you did, so I am here to give it to you. . . . Besides, he looks a little flushed and feverish, Mark, so no more talking, off with you, dear man, until to-morrow. Remember, Tom, although you are out of danger as well as your bandages, you are still my beloved invalid."

"Am I, mother,—am I really?"

"Yes, ah, yes indeed!" she murmured, touching his scarred brow with hand that blessed him.

"Glory!" he exclaimed, radiant-eyed. "Now give me yon foul physic and febrifuge—no, first a kiss to sweeten it. . . ."

"There!" said she when, having been kissed, he had duly gulped and grimaced his medicine. "Now bid Mark good-bye until to-morrow. You must sleep again, my child."

"You hear her, old fellow?" sighed Tom. "This mother of mine, this most lovely

parent, having dosed her obedient offspring with noxious nostrum, will now compel him to slumber, hushing her infant with a lullaby—or won't she, mother dearest?"

"She will, Tom, if her great big baby will close his already too-bright eyes,—come, shut them, this moment."

"There you are, Mark! You see how she browbeats and bullies me, you see?"

"Yes," said Mark, gently, "I see . . . all I have hope to see. . . ."

EVENING

Old Sol having duly performed his journey across the heavens and thus made a day of it, was now trending Westward so flushed with his exertions that land, sea and sky were flushing also, in a word—it was sunset and Tom, blinking drowsily in this evening glow, became suddenly very wide awake, for at the window, outlined against this roseate glory, was a shape extremely shapely, and this a feminine back all lovely curves and contours. Tom propped himself upon an elbow, a glad welcome upon his lips,—then, remembering his scars, sank back again, hiding his blemished face in the pillow.

Thus for some time while Samantha continued to gaze out at the sunset and Tom to cower under the bedclothes, a poor wretch fearfully self-conscious,—and all for dread of what he might see in the first startled glance of two feminine, searching eyes. . . . At last, because he was afraid, he sat up again, and clenching tremulous fists beneath the bedclothes, widened unwilling lips to a fatuous grin and exclaimed:

"Hallo, Samantha!"

Slowly she turned and coming beside the bed, stood very still and mute, looking down into the eyes that gazed up at her with such painful expectancy. So, for a long moment they surveyed each other quite speechlessly, then:

"Hello!" said Samantha.

Now though her tone was extremely casual, yet in her blue eyes, instead of the expected horrified repulsion, Tom beheld a look, an expression so very different that, words being inadequate, he remained dumb, while she busied herself to smooth the bedclothes, and resettle his pillows.

"Bone, Tom!" she nodded. "You are all solid bone above the ears. I said so the very first time we met, and now Doctor Chenoweth says the same."

"Oh, really? I mean to say did he?"

"Why sure he did—almost. He's telling everyone you have an abnormally thick head."

"Skull, my child! Skull was the word he used."

"Same thing!" she nodded.

"With a vast difference! But I say, Samantha, the burning question is . . . now that you're able to get a look at it, what do you think of my poor old phiz?"

"Phiz?" she enquired.

"Yes, my physiognomy, my countenance, visage or chivvy,—this!" said he, laying finger on scarred brow, "somewhat fearsome and frightful, eh?"

"Well," she answered, viewing him with lovely head aslant, "it begins to look more like it might be a sort of a kind of a face some day—in time."

"Hurrah!" he exclaimed, gaily. "That's the best of a face like mine, boots may trample it, bludgeons may batter and bang it about, altering its shape here and there, but it can't look any the worse, can it?"

Samantha laughed, though rather shakily,—and then, to her own mortification and Tom's surprise, a large crystal tear hopped somehow upon her shapely nose and then another . . .

"My word!" exclaimed Tom. "What's wrong? Why the woe?"

"Nothing!" she snapped, blinking violently beneath brows that scowled.

"Oh?" said he.

"What d'you mean by 'Oh'?"

"Well, I rather thought I spotted a spot—a tear, I fancy and——"

"Well, don't go fancying anything so doggone silly! What would I go slopping tears around for, I'd like to know?"

"So should I, Samantha, so why weep?"

"I don't—I'm not!"

"But I'm sure I spotted——"

"You didn't! I'm not the slushy, weepy sort,—not me, nossir! So now——Oh shucks, what's a tear, anyway?"

"The outward and visible token of emotion, so I'm wondering——"

"Hell's bells,—can't you leave my tears alone?"

"No, I should rather like to feel them and——"

"How d'you mean, feel them?"

"With my lips, Samantha,—kiss them away for you."

"Say now, Tom Wade, is this where you begin to go all goo-goo and make love to me—is it?"

"Oh no, rather not—absolutely no! The idea being mere brotherly appeasement of a sister's silent woe and what not, if you know what I——"

"I don't know what you mean any more than you do. So now, instead of getting yourself all loopy and locoed, talk sense,—if you can."

"As a matter of fact, Samantha, I want to ask your advice and help."

"Well, why don't you, instead of talking a lot of hooey?"

"Hooey?" he enquired. "Afraid I don't twig."

"Hot air!" She nodded. "Which is good, plain American and means 'nonsense'. Now if you want my advice, go ahead and ask, let's hear how and who and what."

"Then in a word, Samantha, it's our Pen. She surprises and distresses me, for though she's the sweetest, tenderest, gentlest of mothers she's the most pitiless, implacable, relentless, stony-hearted wife that ever vowed to love, honour and obey ——"

"Which doesn't surprise me any!" Samantha retorted. "No, not one little bit!"

"Oh?" exclaimed Tom. "But, I say——"

"No, I'll say like I said before,—when a husband-beast steals a mother's baby and leaves her arms empty and heart desolate, then if she doesn't loathe and detest the thief, she just isn't human—not a human mother, anyway, and that's all there is to it!"

"Yes, but, Samantha, suppose he loves her, my father, and——"

"Suppose nothing! He took her baby, didn't he? He made her life an age-long desolation, didn't he? He cert'nly did, and she isn't going to forget it! I shouldn't—not ever—no, sir, not likely!"

"Lord!" gasped Tom. "Lord love us! Are all women such unforgiving creatures?"

"No, only real mothers, I guess! Tom Wade, I'm telling you a true mother's love for her baby is like nothing else on this round earth, she lives for it, breathes and suffers with it, would give her very life and soul for it any old time. The baby's little, clinging hands can lift her above all fear or thought for herself, and . . . yes . . . no matter how deep she may have fallen and sunk, her baby's little hands are strong enough to lift her up and . . . back to Heaven at last . . . and to God's forgiveness for all past mistakes." Samantha paused, quick-breathing, and Tom, beholding her now, flushed and lovelier with deep emotion, lay back on his pillows, awed and silenced.

And now upon the evening hush stole the drowsy twitter of birds beneath the eaves, the rich sweetness of a thrush or blackbird piping farewell to yet another day, a song softly plaintive as are all farewells; thus when at last Tom spoke he sounded rather plaintive also:

"Samantha, you're rather a . . . surprisingly wonderful person and I'm . . . deeply grateful."

"Oh, but what for?" she inquired, in tone soft and sweet as any thrush or blackbird. "Why be grateful, Tom?"

"For allowing me the privilege of knowing how . . . well . . . truly wonderful you

are. What I . . . I mean to say is . . . marvellous, ab . . . solutely!"

Now looking at this flushed and stammering Tom, reading in his honest, grey eyes such deep sincerity, she flushed also, glanced towards the sunset's fading glory and enquired:

"Weren't you going to ask my advice about something, Tom?"

"Yes . . . yes, I was," he answered, rather diffidently, "but you rather . . . well . . . flummoxed me."

"Then unflummox yourself and ask me."

"Well, I was wondering . . . hoping . . . that perhaps . . . you would help me to scheme and contrive somehow to . . . bring them together—my father and mother . . . will you, Samantha?"

Chin in hand she surveyed Tom's eager face, and because in his pleading voice was something very like humility, she checked the instinctive 'no' upon her lips and questioned gently instead:

"Just what's he like, your dad? Do you take after him any?"

"Good lord—no! Decidedly not! For one thing he's dashed handsome, elegant and so on. And for another, he's confoundedly clever, perfectly sure of himself—I mean to say—imperturbable, and never at a loss."

"Ho-ly smoke!" she murmured. "He cert'nly sounds terrible!"

"Eh? Terrible? Oh!" exclaimed Tom, and lay mute a while to ponder this. "But," he continued at last, "but then besides, Samantha, his manner and bearing are quite —well, irreproachable, I've never seen him fussed or flurried or in a fury, no,—the angrier he is the gentler he seems. He is indeed a gentle man, yet strong as tempered steel. Also he can be kind and extremely generous, masterful though just, calm and reasoned of judgment and extremely patient . . . a rather amazingly wonderful person, Samantha."

"And sounds like a dozen!" she added. "Yes, and each of them an uncomfortable sort of cuss!"

"Eh? Cuss?" Tom ejaculated in startled accents. "I'm afraid I don't——"

"Shore!" she nodded. "That's good American again, and means the same as your English 'chap' or 'bloke'. What of it?"

"Good lord!" quoth Tom, blinking, "I could never imagine my father being a cuss, much less a . . . a bloke or chap."

"And that's why I'm dead sure I shouldn't cotton to your father, Tom, no, I shouldn't like him one little bit."

"Ah, but you would, Samantha, once you learned to know him. I'm only just beginning to really understand and appreciate him myself! For whatever he may be

he is most certainly a man!"

"Oh, I guess he's a man all right,—terribly English and impassive, a regular poker-face, no heart on sleeve business for him!"

"However," said Tom, sitting up to speak more impressively, "I believe, yes I'm quite sure he still . . . loves my mother, and also . . . is hoping to meet her . . . anxious to win her back to him, if you know what I——"

"Has he told you so?"

"Good heavens—no!"

"Then how can you be so darn sure?"

"I hardly know,—instinct perhaps. But why did he suggest I should come all the way to old Trevore,—why, do you suppose?"

"I can't suppose,—so why?"

"Because he must know my mother lives here, and meant I should meet her."

"Then just why didn't he come and meet her himself, I'd like to know?"

"Oh . . . well," answered Tom, at a loss, "after twenty-two years——"

"You've said it!" nodded Samantha. "Twenty-two years! If he'd really loved her he'd never have done without her so long and wasted so much time! I guess not! Twenty-two years,—hell's bells—no!"

"But, Samantha, how if he found out only lately?"

"Then the moment he knew where she was he should have hit the trail on the jump, hot-footed it into Cornwall and never let up or rested till she was in his arms and had told him 'yes' or 'no'."

"A somewhat tempestuous method, Samantha."

"Well, so it should be."

"Oh? Really?" enquired Tom, thoughtfully.

"Yes, really!" she nodded, frowningly.

"Hum!" quoth Tom. "Rather more—fiercely urgent than tenderly—respectful or ——"

"Respectful!" she repeated, scornfully. "There are times when a real live woman doesn't want or need a man's respect,—when she'd rather have herself in his arms than him on his knees praying to her like they did in old-fashioned times and sometimes even now—in books!"

"Oh?" murmured Tom, again. "Then pray how d'you imagine a real woman prefers a man to propose and . . . so on?"

"I'm not imagining any such fool thing."

"Then let us, for a moment, discuss the subject with a—calm, dispassionate aloofness. Love, I believe, is generally considered an elemental emotion, and

therefore chiefly physical, though I am also aware it may be a purely mental attraction so far above the mere physical that a man may truly love a woman without the least . . . well, I mean to say,—for her mental attributes only,—the beauty of her mind and nature and what not, if you know what——"

"Oh—fudge!" exclaimed Samantha.

"Now that," sighed Tom, "that sounds rather as if you meant to be almost rude."

"Shucks!" exclaimed Samantha. "And that means I cert'nly do! Because you're talking a lot of hooey—and you know it!"

"Do I, Samantha?"

"Shore you do! For do I have to tell you there never was a man loved a woman who was content with—just her mind? Now was there?"

"Some men have to be——"

"And that's just evading the question! So now instead of breathing out such lots of hot air, try to answer a real, sensible question—if you can."

"I'll do my poor best, Samantha."

"Well, then, have you talked about your father to our Pen?"

"To be sure I have."

"Well, doesn't she say like I told you she would? Doesn't she turn down the whole proposition good and hard?"

"Yes, but——"

"Why, then, I guess there's no more to it. But tell me, did she just smile sweetly and say in her dear, gentle way: 'No, darling, that's all by with!' Then shake her pretty head, all placid and serene?"

"Anything but!" answered Tom, sighing. "No, quite the reverse! She grew strangely angry, almost raged, in fact."

"Oh!" exclaimed Samantha, opening her blue eyes rather wider than usual and leaning suddenly nearer. "Oh—my, my! And very angry, was she, Tom?"

"Yes," he replied, sighing again, "most surprisingly angry,—this is what shocked and troubled me."

"Ah, troubled you, did it?"

"Of course, for as we know, she is usually so very sweetly gentle. So, naturally I ——"

"Tom—you big goof! My land, what poor blind creatures you men are! Can't you see—no, of course you can't! So I'll tell you this cert'nly changes the whole bag of tricks!"

"Eh—bag of tricks? I don't quite——"

"The lay-out, the entire shooting-match,—oh, the situation then."

"Does it? But how? I still don't see."

"Of course you don't, my poor, blind mole! So listen and I'll tell you . . . If a woman's love is dead and buried in her heart she can bear to think of it with a smile or maybe a sigh. Ah, but if it is all alive and vigorous, she either weeps and yearns or throws a fury and defies it to hurt her any more—which it always does, of course!"

"Then . . .! Oh, Samantha . . . my dear, you mean——"

"Tom, I'm telling you she still loves him because she can't help it, and hates the very idea of it accordingly. So she tries not to think of it, but does think of it, and so gets real angry to be reminded of it—and no wonder . . . Anyway, that's how I figure it out. So if she still loves him,—well, it's up to you and me to see she gets him, I guess."

"Yes, by Jove!" quoth Tom, fervently. "The burning question is, when and how?"

"That's for us to manage," she nodded, "which we cert'nly shall, because I'm out to help you all I know how."

"And," sighed Tom, "I can only say 'thanks!' But please know I am no end grateful, I mean to say—more than I can ever tell you, Samantha."

"Oh, but say, Tom, I haven't done a thing to be so grateful for—yet. But from now on we are going to work and scheme and plot and plan for our Pen's happiness, we surely are, yessir, I'll say so!"

"And I'll say again, Samantha, that you're the absolute marvel, the most wonderful girl I ever met—or shall ever!"

Now the better to say this, Tom hove himself up from his pillows, wherefore she reached out a hand to stay him, a shapely, strong, extremely capable hand which, feeling itself prisoned by two others yet made no least effort at freedom; so, lifting this strangely submissive hand to his lips, Tom kissed and kissed it with a fervour so extremely unlike a brother that Samantha, chancing to meet his eyes, flushed hotly and drooped her head with such new and unexpected shyness, such strange and surprising humility that blundering Tom instantly freed her hand, though very unwillingly, and went on to explain in his ponderous, most Tom-like manner:

"And then besides, you see . . . what I mean to say is . . . my face, Samantha. They've made rather an unholy mess of it, haven't they? I was afraid it might shock you at first, but . . . if it did, you managed not to show it! And for this I'm so infinitely grateful that . . . though I'm doing my best to tell you, I'm pretty certain you'll never really know how much, because I'm not too good at saying all I mean, and never to you . . . especially when I mean it so deeply and truly that it goes beyond telling,—so I hope you can guess something of what I can't say."

Samantha uttered a sound that might have been a laugh or sob, then stooping

quite deliberately, kissed his scarred brow lightly, tenderly, with no least hurry, an eloquent caress, nothing like a mother and anything but sisterly; after which feeling there was nothing to be said, she turned and sped away before he could say it.

CHAPTER XXXI

OF SAMANTHA, COUNSEL, AND RECRIMINATION

THE bright-eyed robin in the gnarled old apple-tree that cast a pleasant shade in Mrs. Penhallo's sunny garden balanced himself upon the extreme twiggy end of a branch to peer down at the monstrous, long-legged creature seated in cushioned chair, this foolish human who, instead of consuming the delectable fare set out on the table before him, luscious cake and new milk enriched by yolk of eggs and rum, was busied with pen and ink, and evidently finding it a vain and troublesome labor, for:

"Oh, dammit!" Tom muttered, scowling fiercely at his three attempts at as many unfinished letters, as under:

Attempt No. 1.

"MY DEAR SAMANTHA,

"If your continued absence is occasioned by troubled memory of your kiss, please be assured that I have forgotten all about it."

Attempt No. 2.

"DEAR SAMANTHA,

"Because, in your mercy and sweet pity for a poor scarred wretch, you stooped to kiss him (me), this surely is no cause for you now to avoid him (me) like the plague, and stay out of my sight, for I hasten to assure you I . . ."

Attempt No. 3.

"MY DEAR S,

"Why no sight of you lately? If you are thus avoiding me because of a kiss bestowed in pity upon a poor wretch in your angelic mercy, let me at once reassure . . ."

Attempt No. 4.

"MY DEAR GIRL,

"If you are fussed about what happened between us last time we met, do not, for heaven's sake, allow such silly trifle as a kiss intrude to spoil a friendship which is, for me at least, far more precious than any such sentimental rot, because, as we have agreed, kisses and so on are strictly barred for such as we who . . ."

"Oh, curses!" sighed Tom plaintively, and tearing up these four vain efforts, he

rammed the crumpled fragments into his pocket to be destroyed more completely later on, and leaning back in his easy chair, glanced upward, and thus came face to face, as it were, with this befeathered boldness, Master Robin.

So Tom gazed up at the bird who, balanced on swaying twig, peered down at Tom, first with one, round bright eye then the other, emitting a short, flutey chirrup that may have been derision or comradely greeting. However, Tom instantly did his best to chirrup in reply, and breaking off a generous lump of cake, proffered it on open palm, saying:

"Greeting, Bob-Robin! How about a beakful of chocolate layer-cake, old fellow? Won't you?"

With small head cocked at knowing angle, Master Robin seemed to ponder his question, flashed a bolder glance at the speaker's scarred though kindly face, his big, inviting hand, hopped nearer, then, making the most of his red breast, poised himself for even bolder venture—uttered a shrill, indignant chirrup, and whirred himself back into the apple-tree as towards them across the smooth lawn came another vast human, a blue-fluttering, red-gold, creamy-white monster who, glancing at Tom, read his instant thought, and as instantly flushed, and, being furious with herself therefor, frowned at Tom, who had struggled to his feet.

"Why trouble to get up?" she demanded ungraciously.

"Oh, just to show you I can, and the better to welcome you at last, Samantha."

"What d'you mean—'at last'?"

"Three whole days, Samantha, and no least sign or sound of you—and why?"

"Well, I've been real busy, if you must know! Yessir, making candies and cakes for you to throw away to the birds!"

"One bird, Samantha, and one crumb! Oh, and by the way, I'm forgetting all about it, y'know."

"But I don't know what you're trying to tell me, so I'm asking just what?"

"Well, I mean to say I don't want you to imagine for a moment . . . I want to assure you . . . what I mean is—I'm forgetting all about it!"

"All about what, please?"

"Well . . . that kiss."

"Oh! Are you?"

"Certainly I am! Of course! Just because you . . . stooped to comfort a poor, dashed wretch who was feeling pretty low, he doesn't expect you to go on repeating the . . . the dose."

"Doesn't he, Tom?"

"Not likely! No, indeed, rather not! So you needn't be so confoundedly stand-

offish."

"That's real fine of you!" she nodded. "But . . . do you think you can?"

"Can what, Samantha?"

"Forget all about it."

"Of course not, but I'm doing my best."

"Oh! Then why go on reminding yourself and me about it?"

"Merely to let you know, to assure you that I don't intend to take advantage of your pity or expect any more of it. So you needn't fight shy of me, what I mean is—hold me at arms' length any longer."

"But I'm not holding onto you any old way that I can notice."

"Well, anyhow you needn't be so confoundedly dignified and remote. We are merely good friends, aren't we, Samantha?"

"Why, cert'nly."

"I mean to say—no 'he and she' sentimental foolery and what not, Samantha."

"But we are he and she, aren't we, Tom?"

"Yes," he sighed. "Yes, by Jove and Jingo, we are . . . and so very much so that we must do our best to ignore it abso-lutely!"

"How, Tom?"

"By contriving somehow or other to regard each other from a strictly platonic point of view, calmly, dispassionately, without thought or least idea of . . . of anything beyond mere goodfellowship. Agreed, Samantha?"

"Oh, shore!" she murmured between ruddy lips whereby peeped a shy dimple.

"Then let's shake hands on it, Samantha, like jolly good fellows." Which Samantha did, but so unlike any fellow, good, bad or indifferent, indeed with such supremely feminine look and grace that Master Robin, watching bold-eyed from his tree nearby, uttered small, derisive, chattering noises.

"So now," murmured Samantha, "now that I'm your jolly good fellow, let's talk of what I'm here to talk about."

"Right!" quoth Tom, drawing his chair nearer the rustic seat whereon she had throned herself. "Fire away, Samantha."

"Yes, but first, Tom, when we're alone together, wouldn't it be better you called me 'old fellow', or 'chap', or 'bloke', like you do Mark,—though not 'old horse', of course."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Tom, in shocked accents. "Certainly not——" Then espying the dimple, he laughed. "No," said he, "I'll call you Samantha, because I think it such a beautiful name, and suits you so perfectly."

Here Master Robin uttered a chirrup so loud and shrill that Samantha, glancing

up, saw him balanced upon his swaying twig and taking up the crumb of cake proffered it upon her slim, pink palm, pouted her ruddy lips to whistle softly,—notes of such sweetly compelling intimacy that no creature on earth could possibly resist—or so thought Tom and Master Robin, also, it seemed, for down he swooped, hovered fluttering to this hand's slender allurement and was away, crumb in beak.

Now leaning back on the rustic settee Samantha crossed her shapely limbs, thus proffering to sight a pair of slender, shapely feet clad, dight or rather bedecked in boots that seemed to challenge attention,—dainty, high-heeled boots of multitudinous buttons, close-fitting boots that went up and up so high that they finally lost themselves in a foaming whiteness of richly delicate lace, boots, indeed, that lured Tom's eye and riveted his attention until:

"Whatever," murmured Samantha drowsily, for the morning was warm and slumberous, "whatever are you staring at, I wonder?"

"So am I," answered Tom. "I'm wondering how high they go?"

"What go where, Tom?"

"Your boots. Somewhat nobby affairs!"

"If 'nobby' means buttony, they cert'nly are! It took my maid ages to do them up. And they go up just high enough to be comfortable and keep out the dust. And though they are too chic and ridiculously *à la mode* for country lanes, I put them on to-day because I haven't tried them out since I had them made in Paris. And now let's talk of your Dad."

"Eh?" exdaimed Tom, wincing slightly. "My father? But why? What about him?"

"All about him, Tom. And first off—is he a workman, a builder and carpenter, like you?"

"Well, no—not exactly."

"Then what does he do for a living?"

"Oh, any amount of things, I mean to say—nothing particular nowadays,—what I mean is—he has retired on his laurels and what not, if yo——"

"Shore, I get you, Tom. You're trying to tell me your old man has made his pile, aren't you?"

"Oh . . . well . . . something of that sort."

"Good enough! Then there's nothing to hold him from hoofing it into Cornwall on the jump?"

"No, I suppose not, although——"

"Then the sooner we round him up and get him corralled here in the village the better."

"Ye-e-s," answered Tom, dubiously, "that might do if he happened to be a

horse, but you see——"

"It will be a cinch! All we have to do is let him know you're sick in bed and yearning for sight of him and——"

"But I'm not."

"Then you'll just have to be."

"Oh, but, Samantha——"

"Unless you can figure out some better way,—can you?"

"Not for the moment, no. It will need time, deliberation, profound meditation and so on. So I propose we defer it, just for the present,—put it off until I am really and truly on my legs again, up and about and so forth—say, until I've finished Trevore."

"Jumping snakes,—that'll be months."

"Oh no, weeks only. And then, as I say, there's no frightful hurry. Such extremely delicate business cannot and must not be rushed, rather not! The word is—wait."

"Tom," she retorted, curling ruddy lips at him, "you sound like you were getting cold feet!"

"Lord, no, Samantha, not I, with this good old sun so warm."

"Oh, fudge!" she exclaimed scornfully. "Now look you here, Tom! If our Pen wants him she's shore going to get him, yessir, she is so—if I have to hot-foot it to London and yank him along here into Cornwall my own self!"

"Oh, but, Samantha, I say, you know, that's simply not to be thought of."

"Well, I'm thinking of it right now."

"But it would be ab-solutely preposterous!"

"Who cares, anyway?"

"I do, Samantha. Besides, it would be perfectly impossible and——"

"Not for me, at least, not till I've had a real good stab at it."

"Precisely how should you set about it?"

"Well, having roped and backed him into a corner, 'Mr. Wade,' I'd say, 'your son, Tom, now on his bed of pain, needs you, so I'm right here to lead you to him, instanter'."

Tom smiled, he chuckled, he laughed so heartily that Samantha, smitten dumb, arose with the utmost dignity the better to frown; and having thus quelled his surprising levity:

"Tom Wade," said she icily, "if there's anything in this round earth I scorn and have no use for—it's a quitter! And that's just exactly what you are! So what's so funny, I'd like to know?"

"Samantha, I laughed only because the mere idea of your roping and backing my governor into any corner, strikes me as being so rich, so ab-so-lutely comical——"

"Oh, does it!" she exclaimed, fiercely indignant.

"Well, yes." He answered meekly, striving to appear duly solemn. "I mean to say,—when you propose treating my August Sire as if he were a horse, it seems to his son—well, just a trifle odd, that's all. So now do, pray, sit down again like the sweet soul you are."

"Tell me," she broke in, "are you dead shore he still loves our Pen, your Dad?"

"Yes, Samantha."

"Then it's cert'nly up to his son to make things hum on his behalf, pronto,—and that means right soon."

"The question is, how, Samantha?"

"Like I say—by a letter."

"Ye-es, I might do that, I suppose."

"You shore must, and no 'suppose' about it, eether!"

"Though I'm not too good at letter-writing," sighed Tom, "and especially to my governor!"

"Well, then I suggest yore letter should go something like this: 'Dearest Dad, having lately come forth of Death's dark shadow I now see all things with noo vision, especially yoreself, my dear father (or dad). So my dearest wish is to have you beside me, helping me back to health, that from now on I may act to you more like a son should.' There! I guess that about covers it,—it'll make him sit up and take notice, don't you think?"

"I do!" sighed Tom. "I do indeed! And I'm afraid that's why it—won't do."

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"Because it isn't the kind of letter he would expect from me, or I could ever write to him. No, my letter would be more like this: 'Dear Father and Sir, I write in the hope——"

"Well, that won't do eether."

"You think not, Samantha?"

"Hell's bells—no! It's altogether too high-hat! Just you begin with 'Dear Dad'. Gee-whiz, Tom—why not write like an ord'nry usual sort of son should to an ord'nry human father?"

"Perhaps," answered Tom, hiding a smile in his hand, "because we neither of us are either."

"Are you laughing at me?"

"Not at you, Samantha."

"Oh, well," she said wearily, "write it the best you know how. I see you've gotten pens and ink there, so do get on with it and use them." Obediently Tom

reached for a pen, dipped it in the ink, shook his head, and laid it down again.

"What's eating you now?" she demanded.

"Time," he sighed; "such letter needs time for leisured meditation, it can't be hurried, and I must not be harassed. I had better wait until the spirit prompts and ——"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, in a hushed sort of fury. "So it's like that, is it? You mean to walk out on me, so I'll have to handle this business alone, but you'll not, no, siree. I'll see you fried first. And, Mister Wade, get this—from now on I'm going to cut out the whole darn bag of tricks and you, too. And that's whatever!"

"Now, Samantha, please don't be so frightfully unreasonable,—you know I don't mean——"

"Well, I do! I mean I'd rather be unreasonable from now to Kingdom come than a poor gink, a miserable mutt with ice-cold feet like you—that doesn't know his own mind."

"But I do."

"Yes, you do—like hell!" Tom flinched as if she had struck him.

"I say, you know," he remonstrated, in shocked amazement, "that is no talk for a woman's lips, especially yours, Samantha!"

"Oh, isn't it! Well, that's nothing to what I can do when I really cut loose. Mister Wade, when inclined I can cert'nly cuss hard and fluent and swear a blue streak."

"Then pray don't."

"Wouldn't you like to hear me, and get a few hints?"

"No!" he answered, sternly, "I should not!"

"Would it shock yore dainty ears, Mr. Wade?"

"Horribly! Hideously! A swearing woman is a perfectly repulsive creature!"

"Re-ah-ly, Mister Wade?"

"Really and truly, because she merely shames her own womanhood."

"Well, now, if you'll allow me, Mister Wade, I take real pleasure to tell you I often cuss, and frequently swear dam' hard when things like you annoy me, and feel so much better for it that I shall cuss and I shall swear just as often as I feel so inclined, and feel a good rip-snorting cuss is needed,—like this, listen and get an earful."

"For God's sake . . . no!" gasped Tom, like one in sudden agony.

"Oh!" murmured Samantha, and stood dumb; so for a long, breathless moment they looked upon each other, eye to eye. Then Samantha took up her very small, long-handled parasol, opened it with a petulant jerk, drew frills and flounces about herself, and, turning to be gone, said over her shoulder:

"Anyway, Mister Wade, before I make you another chocolate cake—all hell shall freeze! Good-bye!"

Left alone thus, Tom stared disconsolately on the empty air, sighing often and profoundly. And it was now, when most needed, that to him came his mother, a light in her eyes, a snatch of song upon her lips, until, espying his untouched rum and milk, she chid him gaily, she ruffled his straw-coloured hair, kissed the top of his head, and setting the glass to his lips commanded him to empty it immediately, and when he had obeyed her, enquired casually:

"Samantha has gone then?"

"Sweetest of she parents," he replied, "the answer is in decided affirmative. Which leads to the question: has Mark shown up yet?"

"To which, my rather pale and bony son, I reply in as decided negative."

"He's rather late this morning, isn't he?"

"A little, perhaps. You are very fond of our Mark, aren't you, Tom dear?"

"Yes, indeed! His friendship honours me—yes, by Jove and Jingo, because he's such a man, a grand fellow and right sturdy friend."

"Yes," she murmured tenderly. "Mark is a great and noble friend."

"Ex-actly!" quoth Tom, fervently. "There are too few like Mark, so wise, so quiet and dashed unexpected! You have known him years, haven't you, mother?"

"Nearly all my life, Tom."

"Did you ever meet his unfortunate wife?"

"Never, dear, though, strange to say, she was born and bred near here—in Truro."

"But I rather thought she was a Londoner. I know he met and married her there—in fact he told me so."

"Yes, dear, but it seems she was unhappy at home—a drunken father, so she fled, and eventually found her way to London."

"And now," said Tom, "shut away in a madhouse, hopelessly insane!"

"A homicidal maniac, Tom,—the poor creature!"

"And poor old Mark! If ever a man deserved happiness, he does—and love waiting to bless him—all these years, and waiting still! Poor, dear old fellow, if only ——Ha, and yonder he comes at last!"

Tom broke off, turning to glance towards the wicket-gate as came the sound of hoofs and wheels approaching down the lane. But when at last this gate clicked open it was to admit, instead of Mark's tall, vigorous form, the small though resplendent person of Goliath, who came striding, top-boots glittering, silver buttons twinkling, top-hat gleaming,—which last he removed with a flourish, and wherefrom he

produced a letter, saying, as he presented it with his queer little jerking bow:

"Morning, sir, and same to you, ma'm! And I 'opes—h-ope as you're feelin' more spry-like, sir."

"Thanks, Goly. I'm pretty bobbish. But why this letter? Why didn't Mr. Mark come himself, as usual?"

"'Cos—b-kors hit ain't possible, sir. Y'see 'e's gorn, Guvnor! Ah, and in a reg'lar perishing 'urry—h-urry too, sir."

"Eh? Gone where?"

"The Smoke, sir. London, Guvnor, this morning."

"But why this sudden, infernal haste?"

"Business, sir—that's all he says to me, business."

"Now, why on earth?"

"Tom, dear," said his mother, laying her gentle hand upon his that held the yet unopened letter, "suppose you read what Mark has written here?"

"Yes," said Tom. "Yes, of course, what an ass I am!" But when he had opened the missive all he saw were these hurriedly scribbled lines:

"MY DEAR TOM,

"I write in haste to tell you I am called away suddenly on matter of urgency. Hoping to be with you again soon.

"I am,

"Yours in all friendship,

"MARK.

"PS. Should I see your father I shall make no mention of your injuries, as promised."

"Very odd!" said Tom, glancing in some dismay at his mother who with him had read this too brief message. "It tells nothing . . . I mean to say——Mother, what's the meaning of it all?"

"I wonder!" she murmured, looking down upon this hurried scrawl with troubled eyes.

"Ma'm," said Goliath, putting on his hat that he might take it off to her again, "it was all along o' the letter as the postman, Bob Penhaligon, give me to give to him, which I does, and him at breakfast, eggs and a nice fick rasher of 'am, h-am, and the moment 'e reads it 'e don't eat no more, not a bite, but up 'e gits and 'Golia,' says 'e, 'go harness Pepper,' which I done, and there's Mr. Mark ready and waiting. So into the trap 'e jumps, off we go to the station at Grampound, and just afore the train starts he gives me the note to give to you which I've done—and that's all. Only, sir, I'm wondering 'ow abaht me leaving the 'Pilchards' till 'e comes back again, and

stayin' along o' my old Jacky, to report here every morning at nine sharp for your orders, sir."

"So your old Jacky is down here, is he?"

"Yessir, three weeks ago, like I told you. Mr. Mark's doing, sir, on account of 'is wheezies being so bad. So I thought as if you was agreeable I'd stay along of Jacky, please, Guvnor?"

"Good idea!" nodded Tom. "And you can tell him I shall pop along one of these fine mornings to make his acquaintance. Do you suppose he likes cake?"

"Not 'arf he don't, Guvnor, and so do I."

"Then hang on to this,—catch hold. And, my smart young Giant, if you should happen to see our Miss Samantha anywhere about, tell her that I am quite completely out of chocolate layer-cake," here Tom's right eyelid flickered, "out, Goly, finished, not a crumb left, and that I'm hungry for more,—d'you twig?"

CHAPTER XXXII

INTRODUCES OLD JACKY

UPON the newly-mended wicket-gate that opened upon the small, recently-trimmed garden of a certain very small cottage hung a board with these words carefully painted thereon:

JOHN FRY
Boots and shoes made or repaired.
Clocks or watches doctored.
Knives and razors
ground, sharpened and set with care
and despatch.

In the front room of this cottage, at large cobbler's bench, before the wide lattice set open to the fragrant sunny morning, John Fry himself, perched upon battered, three-legged stool and busied with the intricacies of a disembowelled clock, became suddenly aware of a gleaming brightness inthrust at the window, and, glancing up, saw a vividly beautiful though rather petulant face framed in wind-blown tresses of red-gold hair, ruddy lips, sullenly a-droop, long-lashed, darkly-blue eyes beneath low arch of brows knit in peevish frown; now beholding all this with his one eye (the other having gone into retirement behind a neat, black patch or shade) John Fry lifted blunt fingers to beetling eyebrow and smiled; but this was such a smile as

brightened his ever somewhat grim, weather-beaten features, such compelling smile, indeed, that my Lady Petulance instinctively smiled responsive, and said in smooth, richly-soft, rather drawling voice:

"I guess you must be Goliath's Jacky."

"And I know you are Miss Samantha."

"Shore. You'll know that of boy Goliath if he's talked of me to you like he's talked of you to me,—how you found him a poor, deserted baby on a doorstep and acted father and mother to him ever since, which was cert'nly very kind and generous, though why you tagged the poor mite with such a name as Goliath shore has me buffaloed."

"Well, Miss Samantha, he was such a very small atom of humanity, d'ye see."

"And there's not a whole lot of him now, Mr. Fry, though what there is seems real slick and sufficient for anything. He's shore right smart for his size. And just how did he describe me, I wonder?"

"Very justly, Miss Samantha, yes, with remarkable accuracy."

"Yes, but just how?"

"He informs me quite often that you are the most beautiful lady anywhere around."

"Oh!" murmured Samantha. "And you think that's an accurate description, do you?"

"Yes, madam, I do."

"Well, Mr. Fry, he cert'nly described you all wrong to me, because you're not one little bit like I expected, not in your looks or ways, and cert'nly not in your talk. And I'm wondering why?"

"Perhaps, because, though I had little or no schooling, I'm pretty well read in the great Book of Life. I've had three very good instructors named Poverty, Travel, and Reading. I've been an omnivorous reader of books."

"What sort?"

"Any and every I could get hold of."

"What are yore favourites?"

"Well, if I had to, I could be well content with the Bible, *Robinson Crusoe*, Montaigne's *Essays*, *Tristram Shandy*, Plutarch's *Lives*, and the *Spectator*."

"That's only six."

"Ay, but in these six is summarized the whole Great Book of Life."

"Just what d'you mean?"

"Human experience, good and evil, joy and sorrow, triumph and failure."

"Oh!" murmured Samantha, glancing from the speaker's intent face to his big

hands and clumsy-looking fingers, that yet manipulated tiny screws and delicate cogwheels so deftly. "And so," she enquired after brief silence, "you've travelled, have you, Mr. Fry?"

"I began life as a sailor, Miss Samantha."

"Were you ever ship-wrecked?"

"Twice, madam, once dismantled in the Bay of Biscay and once driven ashore in the Pacific—which I found anything but pacific."

Mellowed by distance the clock in Merrion church tower began to strike.

"Ten o'clock!" sighed Samantha. "Where's Goliath, I'd like to know?"

"He drove to Mrs. Penhallo's, madam, to wait upon his master for orders, as usual."

"Yes, but what's keeping him?"

"Probably his master."

"He would!" she snapped. "Just because I need Goly to drive me to Truro!"

"You know Mr. Wade, I understand, miss?"

"Oh, shore. Do you?"

"Well, I do and I don't, for though I've never seen him, I know from Goly that he is one of the best, handsomest——"

"Hold right there! Goly's got him ear-marked as wrongly as he had you, because nobody could ever describe him as handsome,—I mean Mr. Wade, of course."

"Indeed, madam?"

"I'm telling you! And if he keeps that boy much longer I shall miss my chance of those horses, and I'll cert'nly be sore and mad as a hornet!"

"Horses, Miss Samantha?"

"Shore—four or five I mean to buy if they add up to anything like I want."

"Four or five, ma'm," said John Fry in quite different voice and accent. "Shore sounds like you was honin' for a remuda."

"Oh . . . say," exclaimed Samantha, widening her blue eyes in glad amazement and speaking quite breathlessly, "that sounds mighty good to me . . . that's . . . real shore-enough cow talk! Gee-whiz, Mr. Fry, for a moment I felt like I was back in my own country."

"The States, Miss Samantha?"

"You've said it!" she sighed. "The dear old U-nited States, and mine the best of them all . . . to me, the State of the Lone Star."

"Texas," nodded John Fry, "and the biggest."

"Yes," she answered, sighing deeper than before; "the biggest and for me the loveliest, especially down South along the old Rio Grande! Ah, if you could only see

it."

"Miss Samantha, I have."

"You've seen it . . . my Texas?" she gasped. "You've . . . been there?"

Once again John Fry smiled, and leaning back on his three-legged stool, answered in the vernacular:

"Shore, ma'm. Five years I druv the chuck-waggon and punched cattle for the Box Bar O outfit."

Samantha opened her beautiful eyes wider than ever, her rounded bosom surged tempestuously, then, leaning half-way through the window, she reached out both hands in eager welcome, saying, in voice broken by emotion:

"Oh . . . now you shore do . . . sound like home! Oh, Jacky, the Box Bar O was right next to our ranch . . . owned by Seth Travis . . . dear, old Pop Travis . . . he was our nearest neighbour, and friend of my own dear, splendid father. Our outfit was the Triangle D for Doodney."

Slowly, yet with effortless ease, John Fry arose, a slim, wiry man from grey head to trim feet.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed softly. "I'll be all-fired, everlasting dingbusted ef this don't beat the head off any doggone thing that ever come galootin' down the trail, it shore does, and that's whatever, Miss Samantha! For, ma'm, I'm tellin' yuh as we Travis rannies rode many a round-up with the Doodney punchers, and them with us, to help each other out, d'ye see? And what's more, the Triangle D and Box Bar O together done shot up and cleaned out more'n one gang o' rustlers as infested the Border in them days, ay, long afore you was foaled, ma'm, I reckon. Yes, they was pretty lively times, and a Sharp's Express or Colt forty-four plenty needful."

"Oh!" gasped Samantha. "Oh! . . . then maybe you saw . . . even knew my wonderful dad?"

"Ma'm, I certainly did so! And 'wonderful' is a word as done fits him slick and snug as a six-gun in greased holster! I was with him and his top-hand, Jake Fisher, and the rest of his boys, we being loaned for the occasion, on a drive along the old Chisholm Trail when we run into a gun ruckus along o' some hell-beaders tryin' to stampede the herd. It was a right smart gun battle, and yore dad never let on he was winged till it was all over and him with a bullet in his shoulder."

"Yes," she cried. "Yes . . . that was before I was born, but Jake's often told me of it. . . . Ah, but he was killed at last . . . shot in the back . . . bushwhacked! And I'll never get over the grief of it . . . the bitter loss!"

"'Twas a man's death, Miss Samantha, in his boots! And shore am I that he went to his God unfearing, like the grand man and great gentleman he was."

"Jacky," said she choking back a sob, "I guess this makes us friends from now on, friends and pardners, Jacky—shake! Oh, never mind wiping your hand, give it me!"

And when they had performed this rite very solemnly:

"Now," quoth Samantha, "I'm coming in for a regular sit-down pow-wow and you're going to talk real, dyed-in-the-wool American cowman talk, yessir!" And through the window she came, heedless of her brand-new riding outfit to which she drew his attention with a scornful gesture, saying:

"Will you get an eyeful of these doggone fool things, Jacky? Look, divided skirts instead of breeches and chaps,—just because this happens to be England!"

"Well, ma'm," he answered, ruffling his short, grey hair, "this yere being Old England, God bless it,—none o' the womenfolk ever think o' forking a saddle, d'ye see."

"And don't I know it!" she sighed, throwing herself upon his three-legged stool. "But tell me, Jacky, how come I find you mending boots in England, a shore-enough cattleman like you?"

"'Tes a long story, Miss Samantha, ma'm, but it all done began when my ship was drove ashore like I told you, a tee-total wreck, and me a lad and quite destitoot. But I tramped inland, ay, among the real old Indian folk—Inca and Aztec, and found 'em real folk, too. On I went, turning my hand to anything as offered, and grubbed along somehow till I reached Mexico, and then the cattle country—ay, and rustlers' country too—and crossed the Rio Grande into Texas. So I turned puncher, first cook, then horse-wrangler, then roper, and finally a pretty good all-round cow nurse. And that's the how of it, Miss Samanthy."

"And whyever did you leave it all and come back here mending boots—why, Jacky?"

"Because, Miss Samantha, just as the United States are your America, this England is well, my old England."

"Yes," she answered, gently. "Yes, I get you,—home is always home, calling you back. Ah, but sometimes it calls in vain, Jacky, and then——Oh, well, what will be, just has to be, and that's all there is 'ot it! . . . Listen! I do believe——"

Wheels and hoofs approaching rapidly, and with these a voice that hailed.

"Hey, Jacky, 'ave ye seen Miss Samantha anywhere? She was to wait here and ——"

"She cert'nly has!" cried Samantha, indignantly, rising to speak through the window. "I'll say she has! What's been keeping you?"

"Well, miss," answered The Factotum apologetically, but saluting smartly with his

whip, "it was my Governor, Mr. Tom——"

"Oh, was it indeed! And did you tell him you were to drive me to Truro?"

"Yes, miss, and he laughs and says, says he, 'no cake, no Truro,' he says. And that's why."

"Cake?" she demanded, angrily.

"Yes, ma'm. Y'see it's more'n a week now since I give you his message as how 'e was out o'choclit layer-cake and starvin' for more, and you ain't took no manner o' notice."

"Oh, well, now you're here at last, we'll go,—just wait till Jacky has cleaned up and got into his hat and coat——"

"Jacky, miss?" gasped The Factotum in round-eyed amazement.

"Me, Miss Samantha?" enquired Jacky, almost as breathlessly. "Eh, me, marm?"

"Why shore! A real, rip-snorting, old cattleman like you,—I'll ask your advice and take it—maybe. So hustle, pardner, we're late enough already."

Thus presently away they drove; and a wonderfully companionable trio they were, and a cheery journey they made of it, more especially Samantha and John Fry, who held animated converse anent cayuses, pintos, bronc-busting, bucking, sun-fishing and reatas, dogies, sleepers, mavericks and moss-heads, good bad-men, tied guns, trigger-thumbing, draw and stud poker, faro, red-eye, meschal and the like recondite matters until they reached Truro, its busy streets athrong with traffic, for to-day was market day.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HOW SAMANTHA BOUGHT A 'BOMBSHELL' AND RODE HIM

"BUT here's only three!" said Samantha, viewing with expert, critical eyes, the three sleek animals that were being paraded for her inspection by as many grooms. "Only three, Mr. Pendruddock, and you mentioned four in your letter. So where is the fourth?"

Mr. Pendruddock, an extremely trim, horsey person, removed the straw he had been chewing, looked at it, put it carefully behind his ear, and answered, between close-shaven lips:

"Well, Miss Dudeney, as a matter of fact, madam, he's not,—no, most certainly I cannot recommend him as a lady's mount."

"However, Mr. Pendruddock, I'll look him over just the same."

"But, madam, I am telling you, in fact I do assure you——"

"And, Mr. Pendruddock, I'm shore telling you—I take a peek at number four or I don't buy one, two or three,—no, sir, the deal is off."

"Oh, well, Miss Dudeney, if you insist you shall see the brute. Higgins, trout out The Parson,—and you'd better have Jim with you."

"The Parson?" repeated Samantha. "What kind of name is that for a horse?"

"Madam, I don't know. The animal is not mine. All I can tell you is that he's down as The Par——" Mr. Pendruddock's throaty voice was drowned in sudden uproar,—a fierce, squealing whinny, shouts, ringing clatter of wild hoofs, and into the spacious yard came one horse and two men, who shouted and struggled, sometimes upon *terra firma* but frequently with feet kicking helplessly in air; a horse this, black as midnight from velvet muzzle to sweeping tail, and all gleaming, quivering might from trampling hoofs to lofty crest, a horse whose eyes rolled, whose nostrils flared, snorting proud defiance on all creation.

"Ho-ly smoke!" murmured Samantha, clasping her hands.

"Madam!" said Mr. Pendruddock, fumbling for his straw. "Miss Dudeney—The Parson! And quite unfit for any lady, as you see."

"And some horse!" she sighed. "What d'you say of him, Jacky?"

"A right handsome animale, marm! Power and speed,—but he'll shore need handling."

"True for you, sir!" quoth Mr. Pendruddock, speaking over and round the straw he was chewing again. "A real bit o' blood, by Cannonball out o' Daisy-flower, sound as a bell, a rare bargain at sixty guineas—and no lady could possibly ride him."

"Maybe so," answered Samantha, "but I'm an American, and I guess that makes all the difference. Anyway, my offer's forty. Throw in any old hull—saddle, I mean, bridle and quirt, and call it forty-five."

"But, Miss, I . . . no, I really couldn't entertain such figure."

"Fifty then, and I'll take the other three at thirty each. What d'you say?"

"Make it one-fifty for the four and call it a bargain, Miss Dudeney."

"Not on yore life!" she answered, gently though firmly. "Call it a hundred and forty and say it's a deal." And after a moment of apparently profound meditation, Mr. Pendruddock, sighing deeply, nodded dejectedly and said mournfully:

"Done!"

"And now," said Samantha, when the financial part of the business had been settled, "if you'll have your men saddle him, we'll be on our way."

"Saddle him? The Parson? But, madam, Lord bless us . . . then you mean to ride

the brute?"

"That's what I'm telling you, and just as soon as you have him saddled."

"No, Miss Dudeney! You're asking for bad trouble. So you must excuse me. I wash my hands o' the business."

"Meaning you won't?"

"Just that, miss. I'll have no part in such recklessness, and I'll give no such order."

"Then I'll do it my ownself,—yes, and better. The poor creature's been hazed till he's wilder than he would be. Where's the bridle and saddle, anyway?"

"Here, Miss Samanthy," answered John Fry, stepping forward with the articles in question. "And I guess you've hit old man Truth plumb centre,—this yer' critter's been handled wrong! So first off, let's you and me just talk to him and soothe him a mite. This here animale ain't a wild, unbroke mustang, nor buckin', mankillin' bronc, he's a horse with his nerves all out o' kilter, he just knows as folks is nervous of him and acts according." So saying, Old Jacky, ex-bronc buster and horsemaster, set by his burden, relieved the only too willing stablemen of their restive charge, and, uttering soft, inarticulate, murmurous sounds, began to pass his hand down, slowly and gently, from the shivering animal's flattened ear to twitching nostril, while Samantha, keeping well in the nervous creature's sight, slowly approached and did the same. Thus with voice and touch they soothed jangled nerves and calmed outraged pride until the sensitive ears, no longer flat aback, pricked forward, the luminous eyes gentled, the delicate nostrils breathed easier. Watching her chance, Samantha stole the bit deftly between jaws opened to receive it, and slipped on the bridle; seeing which, Jacky had the saddle in position and girthed with the assured ease of much and long practice.

"Cinch him good and tight, Jacky, and hold on till I say 'go'!"

"Shorest thing, marm."

"Madam," cried Mr. Pendruddock, backing away as he saw her preparing to mount, "you do this against my advice, and entirely at your own risk."

"And that's whatever!" she laughed; then with swift, graceful leap, she was in the saddle, had shortened her reins, found the stirrups, and, sitting well down, American fashion:

"Go!" she cried.

Jacky freed The Parson's head, and, stepping back, stood poised for swift action, should it be necessary,—then he relaxed and smiled; for with joyous, ringing cowboy shout, with hands, knees and spurless heels, Samantha was urging her mount to show his paces. And this he did instantly,—not with the untamed fury of a

mustang, bone-shattering, four-footed bucking of a ferocious bronco, but like a proud, high-spirited animal whose ancestors for a thousand years have been bred to the service of man; he reared, he plunged, he pawed the air with lashing fore-legs, he kicked out fiercely with his hind; but the hands that governed him though strong, were gentle, the heels that pressed, the knees that urged, woke in him the knowledge that he must go forward. So, gathering mighty limbs under him,—forward he went and at such speedy gallop as soon bore him and his joyous rider out of sight.

"Jacky!" gasped The Factotum. "Oh, Jacky . . . ooh blimey, she'll be killed!"

"Sonny boy," answered his foster-parent still in the cattle-country idiom, "any galoot as says that same is shootin' plumb wide o' the mark! Our lady is shore saddle-broke and wise to hosses from her bib and tucker days! And likewise bein' the daughter of her dad, yeller proof. So there ain't no sense nor reason for you nor me to get anyways worked up."

"But, Jacky, that horse is dangerous, the man says so."

"Son, that hoss is only dangerous to any tin-horn as he feels and knows is scared of him. That splendid horse, Goly, my lad, has no real vice, only nerves. So don't worry your small head none about our lady. Instead, come and help me round up and hitch them three other animals to the tail-board o' the buggy, and let's be off right pronto."

"All right, Jacky, only—cor luv a duck, but you do talk funny to-day."

"Son, this day I am renewing my youth. Come, let's go—and were I a betting man, which I am not, I'd lay you a golden sovereign we shall see our Miss Samantha riding to meet us on a horse mild as a dove and meek as a lamb,—or pretty near."

Thus presently, watched by a Mr. Pendruddock who champed his straw viciously but spake not, they drove out of the yard and away. Scarcely were they out of Truro town upon the open road than they espied dust afar, an oncoming cloud that, speeding nearer, resolved itself into a horse approaching at gracious, easy canter, and a rider who waved gauntleted hand to them, crying gaily:

"Oh, Jacky, he's a beaut—isn't he just?"

And John Fry answered as gaily:

"A shore-nuff reg'lar jim-dandy, Miss Samanthy!"

"The question is," said she, wheeling to ride beside the trap, "what shall we call him? 'The Parson' will never soot."

"W-e-ll," answered Jacky. "Con-siderin' as his side was Cannonball how would Bombshell soot?"

"Ace high!" she laughed. "Bombshell he is, and shall be."

CHAPTER XXXIV

HOW MR. WADE SILENCED MISS DUDENEY, AND WHY

SUN is shining, birds carolling and Tom whistling to the tap of his hammer, for days have sped bringing health with a new strength and vigour,—thus except for scarred brow, Tom is himself again—almost. To be sure his hammer rings merrily, but his visage is gloomy and his rendering of 'The British Grenadier' per whistle aforesaid, is slow, dirge-like, and often broken by gusty sighs, at which times he straightens brawny back to glance wistfully in a certain direction, sees no living creature, and so back to his labour and mournful whistling; for despite bird-song, sunshine and recovered health, Tom is lonely and unwontedly depressed. And this for the following reasons, namely:

1. Mark is still away, and no letter since that first brief note.
2. The Factotum, his small, cheery giant, has driven with Mrs. Penhallo to Truro.
3. Samantha has consistently avoided him of late.

So Tom, in his solitude, hammers, whistles, watches and sighs through the heat of afternoon until a sound of hoofs and wheels breaks upon the stilly air; Tom glances up hopefully, beholds, Pepper approaching at rapid trot, and sighs again, for the smart dogcart is empty save for Goliath, who, reining up with flourishing salute of whip, cries cheerfully:

"'Ere . . . h-ere we har, Guvnor, and 'ow's yourself, sir, h'all a-blowin' and a-growin' I 'opes."

"Fairly so, my Totem. But you're getting your aitches confoundedly mixed, aren't you?"

"I finds 'em a bit horkard like, Guv, but I h-ave to stick at 'em like I promised Mr. Mark. And, sir, I gotta letter for you, I have."

"Ha, from London, Goly. Mr. Mark at last?"

"No, sir, it hisn't from London nor yet an 'im—it's an her, a miss, Guv, a lady, sir. Got it in me 'at, h-I'ave."

"Then out with it this instant."

"Yessir. She stops me on the road, Miss Samantha did, and 'Goly,' says she ____"

"The letter, boy, the letter!"

"Ay, Guvnor,—lo and be'old, here it is, sir!"

"Ha!" quoth Tom, clutching this missive, which he saw had been stamped for the

post. "Now tell me what she said."

"Well, sir, she comes all of a gallop on Bombshell, her noo 'oss, what I told you of, pulls him hup 'longside o' me, 'ands over that letter, and says she, 'Give this to your master and remember to tell me wot 'e says when he's read it,' she says. 'Yes, ma'm,' says I. So, Guvnor, if you'll get on and read it, I'm a listening."

"What for?"

"All as you says of it, so as I can tell Miss Samantha like I promised."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well cut off now and stable Pepper."

"Yes, sir, I'll be back in a jiffy."

Tom broke the heavily-waxed seal, unfolded the delicately-perfumed paper and read:

> "Miss Dudeney presents her compliments to Mr. Wade and begs to inform him that as she finds him so undecided, half-hearted and perfectly spineless as regards his parent's future happiness, she is leaving him to it, and taking up horses instead. Mr. Wade may have heard that Miss Dudeney has lately bought a few, and may probably acquire others. Having engaged a stableman she now requires a groom, and has made an offer to Goliath at double his present wages, he refers her to Mr. Wade, his present master.
>
> "Therefore, Miss Dudeney wishes to know when and how soon Mr. Wade can arrange to part with the aforementioned Goliath, or lease him for a period to be determined.
>
> "An answer by return will be esteemed."
>
> "PS. Mr. W. will probably notice, this being the letter of a Perfect Lady and in her best English, that Miss Dudeney has refrained from any hint of a curse, and not even permitted herself the pleasure of the least little swear word."

Tom scanned this letter and frowned; read it again and smiled; perused it slowly a third time and laughed: then found Goliath beside him again.

"Well, sir, wot d'ye say, hif you please?"

Tall master glanced down at diminutive Factotum who, gazing up at him rather anxiously, touched whip-hand to hat-brim, repeating his enquiry:

"Wot's your word, sir, please?"

"Factotum," quoth Master, "I fancy you know what this letter is about?"

"Yessir, I got a bit of a h-idea."

"Miss Samantha wants you to be her groom."

"Yessir, I know that."

"And offers double what I pay you."

"Yessir, I know that, too."

"Let's see, your wages with us are one pound a week, aren't they?"

"Yes, Guv, and very 'andsome, too!"

"But two pounds will be handsomer."

"Yessir."

"Well, what d'you say?"

"Nothin', sir. It's for you to say and me to 'ark wi' both me listeners."

"Then I say you were wiser to accept."

"Do ye, Guvnor?"

"I do indeed. Two pounds a week is very generous, a splendid offer."

"Yessir, that it is, only it ain't enough."

"Isn't it, by Jupiter!"

"No, sir, nor three, nor four, nor ten ain't enough neether. Cor blimey, not 'arf it ain't! Cos, dontcher see, sir, you're you and I'm me, and us bein' so, Guv, you're my Guvnor, and I'm your general faxstotum world without end, amen!"

"Oh!" murmured Master.

"Yes, sir!" answered Factotum with the utmost decision and finality. "We're us, Guv, we are."

"But," said Master, folding the letter very carefully, "money is pretty useful."

"Crumbs, Guv, not 'arf it ain't! Ar, haven't I knowed it all me life? Cor luv a duck, that I 'ave, sir, and no error!"

"Well, two pounds are better than one,—and you need money for your old Jacky."

"Not like I did, sir, 'cos Miss Samantha's been and took Jacky for 'er 'ead groom and stableman."

"But I understood he was a cobbler."

"Yessir, and a reg'lar good 'un, too, like he were a prime sailorman, and now I find as how 'e were an h-orseman and cattle-puncher in America, too."

"Your old Jacky seems a surprising sort of fellow."

"Guvnor, he's been surprisin' of me ever since I were a kid, 'e has."

"So then you mean to refuse Miss Samantha's offer?"

"Yessir, that I do."

"Have you told her so?"

"Well, no, not yet, Guv. I didn't like to disapp'int her too soon or sudden. Y'see, sir, her being a feemale woman and such a lady, I thought as it might come better from you, sir."

"Did you, b'gad! But, Go, my small stout henchman and jolly old Factotum, I'll tell you what. Seeing that Miss Dudeney, as you so truly remark, is indeed a female

lady and I am only a male man, I think we had better compromise and let her have you for the time being,—borrow you a while."

"But lumme, Guv, what'll ever you do without me?"

"Oh! I'll manage somehow or other."

"No, sir, can't be done no'ow, and not to be thought of."

"You see, my Goly, in a week or so I shall have finished my work on old Trevore, I'm sorry to say."

"Then you'll need me more'n ever, sir."

"Yes, I shall miss my Factotum . . . but then I'm not really parting with you, Go, rather not! No, I'm merely lending you, allowing Miss Dudeney to borrow you for the time being."

"Yessir, but if I'm with her I can't be along o' you, so why not up and marry her, Guv, and fix things proper for all parties, 'er and you and me, for good and all?"

"Ha!" quoth Master. "That would be one way to resolve the difficulty—always supposing she didn't say 'no,' which I'm pretty sure and dashed certain she would."

"Don't you b'leeve it, sir! She's as sweet on you as wot you are on her, that's certain."

"Eh?" exclaimed Master, not a little taken aback. "Oh? Indeed! and how—why are you so sure?"

"Because, sir, it's so plain it can't be mistook nor missed, not by me it can't. Cor blimey, sir, I could see as you and her was meaning for each other if I was stone blind and wi' blinkers on, I could! And that's why I'm always doing me best to give ye a leg-up like faxstotum should ought."

"How, my Totum?"

"Well, sir, t'other day I says to her, 'ma'm,' I says, 'my pore Governors beginning to worry me no end!' 'Oh, why?' says she. 'Off his feed, ma'm,' says I. 'Palish in his gills, ma'm,' I says, 'and he don't even smoke his pipe proper no more!' 'Oh, 'ow's that?' says she. 'Becos, ma'm,' says I, 'wot 'e needs constant is chocklit cake and the h-and wot makes it,' I says."

"Did you, by Jove!"

"Yessir. An' then she smiles and shakes 'er h-ead, sad-like, and says she, 'If he ever gets it he'll have to do more than just want,' says she. So, Guvnor, wot abaht it?"

"What about what, my Go?"

"Doin' summat, sir, becos she don't seem to drop in on us like she used to do, do she, Guv?"

"True enough, Goly. She does not exactly weary us with her company of late.

But then, why should she?"

"Well, but, sir,—why shouldn't she?"

"No least need, Go, seeing we are hale and strong again, no longer a poor, dashed invalid for her to pity and what not."

"And that's why you should ought to do summat, Guvnor. If she won't come to you why not you go to she—no, you don't have to, cos there she is."

"Where?" demanded Tom, glancing suddenly about.

"On the road, sir. I'd know Bombshell's gallop anywhere. Yes, here she comes!"

"So I see—by heavens, that great black brute's running away with her! He'll kill her!"

"Not 'im, Guvnor! I used to think so at first, but cor luv a duck,—not now! Y'see Miss Samantha ain't like no ordinary feemale lady—not 'arf, she ain't! Rides like a man, she do!"

"Eh—a man? You never mean—astride?"

"Yessir, that I do, becos' she do, like you'll see in a minute. Ar, and though she is sich a reg'lar feemale, it don't seem to matter,—an' besides my old Jacky says as how lots o' ladies do it in the cattle country! And 'ere they come an——Oh! blimey if it ain't a fair treat! Jest watch 'ow beautiful she 'andles him! There's hands for ye, there's a seat, there's knees—and no daylight!"

On came the great, black horse at stretching gallop until checked to rearing halt, eased to a graceful canter and reined to an unwilling stop.

Thus Samantha, flushed, bright-eyed and supremely assured, throned graciously upon her restive, four-legged splendour, looked down upon Tom in the dishevelment and grime of his labour who none the less saluted her with wide-armed flourish of shabby cap and deeply ceremonious bow, saying:

"Mr. Wade begs Miss Dudeney to know she is welcome to Trevore."

"Thanks," she answered, checking Bombshell's sudden desire to stand upon his hind legs. "I guess that means you've read my letter?"

"Mr. Wade has had that felicity."

"Well, what has he to say to it?"

"Mr. Wade ventures to congratulate Miss Dudeney upon the epistolary style no less than the singular restraint of her language."

"To which remark, Mr. Wade, Miss Dudeney begs to reply—shucks! Also, he will notice Miss Dudeney rides astraddle, but—in these doggone, curst divided-skirt doodads, not to shock yore Old England's hell-fired modesty too dam' much!" Here she dismounted, though her grace of action was somewhat marred by Bombshell,

who instantly reared, pranced, snorted and sidled until soothed by the hand and voice of his mistress:

"There—there! Does he object to this great, big man that looks like a thug but is only Mr. Wade, and not quite such a damawful roughneck as he seems, so easy, boy, easy now!"

"I think," said Tom, "perhaps Mr. Wade had better hold him for you."

Samantha merely glanced towards him, and then beckoned The Factotum, who had been eagerly awaiting this summons.

"Keep him moving, Goly," she said.

"Yes, ma'm, I'll walk him till 'e's cooled off. I'll look arter 'im for you, Miss Samantha." So saying he took the bridle, stroked, patted, chirruped and led the high-spirited animal away, and did it with such joyous confidence that Samantha exclaimed:

"Gee-whiz! That boy cert'nly has the Indian sign on horses, and they just naturally cotton to him! This is why I want him."

"Which," replied Tom, "makes things a trifle awkward, because though you want him—I need him."

"But not like I do, with four horses to groom. So what about it?"

"Well, you might get rid of one or two horses, advertise for a full-sized groom or act upon my Factotum's advice."

"How?"

"He suggests you might overcome the difficulty by wedding his master, and, thus espoused, husband and wife, and so forth, share him between us, make him a regular family affair and what not. Such is the idea, whereto Mr. Wade begs to say he now awaits Miss Dudeney's response."

"Re-ah-lly?" quoth Samantha, clenching whip in gauntleted fist and tapping her boot with it suggestively. "Now if this is Mr. Wade's method of proposing wedlock and what not, Miss Dudeney takes great pleasure to inform him there's nothing doing."

"Ex-actly!" sighed Tom. "Precisely as Mr. W. expected."

"So now what?" she demanded.

"Tea!" he murmured. "A soothing cup—or say a couple?"

"Hell—no!" she retorted, mouthing the word and making the very most of it. "Doggone it—not for me! But if you've gotten a shot of red-eye or Valley-tan or any real throat-tickler, I'll down it right smart."

"Alas, madam, I can offer you nothing stronger than tea."

Here, turning away, he gave all his attention to building a fire of sticks. Now,

presently, since he neither looked at her nor spoke, Samantha came to stand and watch him; and after somewhat protracted and eloquent silence, demanded:

"Has Miss Doodney shocked poor Mister Wade beyond speech?"

"Quite!" he answered, stooping to light his fire. "An apter word would be—disgusted."

"Christopher Co—lumbus!" she exclaimed. "And Mr. W. hasn't heard anything yet. How if I really cut loose? I guess he'd just languish and fade right away to the angels, wouldn't he?"

"Hardly!" answered Tom.

"Then what would he do?"

"Probably swing Miss Dudeney across his knee and administer the chastisement she deserves."

"Oh? And what should I be doing?"

"Squealing."

"That's what you say! But let me tell you, Mr. Caveman——"

"No," said Tom, turning suddenly to frown up at her. "I'll tell you of something that mystifies and troubles me very much . . . I mean the alteration in your manner. I don't know what's happened to you lately, Samantha, but you're quite changed, and not for the better, no—rather frightfully in fact!"

"Is—that—so!" she drawled, mockingly.

"It is indeed. Nature means you to be beautiful—why spoil yourself? You can be so very lovely and gentle, but——"

"Oh, sure—except when I feel ugly!"

"Why have such feelings?"

"Well, say now, can you tell me why you're such a slob, such an all-fired nit-wit and make me think of a piece of chewed string, can you?"

"No," he answered, "it all sounds extremely unpleasant."

"Well, now, I'll tell you—it's because you're just a tin-horn, a yellow, four-flushing, spineless quitter."

"Good Lord—am I? However, not having the vaguest notion of what you are driving at I'll take it all for granted and——"

"Oh, skidoo!" she exclaimed. "Pass it up and come down to cases,—what about the boy Goly? Am I to have him?"

"That depends."

"Are you going to let him go or are you not?"

"If you mean dismiss him from my service—certainly and ab-so-lutely not."

"Enough said!" she cried, angrily. "Now, d'you want to know just exactly what

sort of thing you are?"

"Thanks—no! I've a fairly sound idea already."

"However, I'm all set to tell you!" she retorted. "So yank forward yore ears, Mister Wade, and listen out for some real vivid cursing——"

His arms were close about her, his lips holding hers dumb, and so masterfully possessive that Samantha, thus helpless and silenced, unable to move or speak, submitted and surrendered herself to both . . .

So lips met lips in a long, fierce kiss ever to be remembered. . . .

When at last Tom freed her she closed her eyes lest they should betray her, and stood quick-breathing, with head bowed; while Tom, seeing how she trembled, and quite mistaking the reason, braced himself for what must ensue.

Awhile they remained silent and motionless, Tom with an ever-growing sense of guilt and dismay; Samantha endeavouring fiercely to check the wild, ecstatic shuddering of that lovely traitor, her body and, for this very reason, scheming how she might shame and hurt him most.

Thus at last, instead of the expected furious outburst, the tirade of vociferous indignation for which Tom was prepared, she uttered a deep, plaintive sigh, drew out a ridiculously small, richly-belaced handkerchief and therewith scrubbed her lips as if ridding them of something foully abhorrent, then dropping this dainty cambric like a thing now contaminated, ground it beneath the slim sole of her riding-boot.

This done, she swept Tom's shabby person with glance of contemptuous loathing and said in her most affected English tone and manner:

"How disgustingly like that odious Winby creature! He was thrashed for so affronting me,—to-day there is no one here to chastise you. So I leave you to your conscience, if you have one, and your own very hateful self. And you may keep your Goliath."

"Oh, but . . . I say, you know," Tom pleaded, "if you'll let me explain . . . what I mean is——"

"Nothing!" said she, cutting him short, "you never do, you never will! And nothing you can say or do will excuse you. So don't try,—not another word. We're through,—from now on." Then she turned, and stumbling in her haste, sped away while Tom, rendered helpless by the bitter knowledge that her reproaches were justified, stood (a woeful wretch) and watched her out of sight; then his dejected gaze was attracted by the fire which, now joyously ablaze, was crackling so merrily that with a savage kick he scattered it, then gazing down at the dying embers, he sighed mournfully: "Like my own confounded life! Ha,—what a perfectly dashed, hellish world it is!"

CHAPTER XXXV

IN WHICH IS MENTION OF AN EYEGLASS

MR. BATES, looking his most venerable self in newly-ironed smock-frock, was seated pensive before the 'Three Pilchards Inn' gazing down sadly into his nearly empty pint pot, when, chancing to look along the road, his keen, old eyes beheld a solitary wayfarer plodding wearily through the noonday heat and sunglare. A very dusty traveller this, who now paused to lean upon the stout ash stick he carried and to wipe perspiring brow until, espying the cosy inn set back from the road in pleasant shade of trees, he turned from the dusty highway and made towards this haven with quickened stride and such evident intent that Mr. Bates instantly gulped all that remained of his ale, and, setting down his empty pewter, watched the Traveller's approach with lively interest and hopeful expectancy. Thus hardly was the Traveller within speaking distance than Mr. Bates, seeing in him no more than dusty, perspiring fellow trudging afoot like the merest 'no account' person, hailed him with a cheery freedom of look, tone and gesture:

"Greetings, friend! Lordy, but you'm 'ot,—in a fair muck sweat you be, and arl wore out b'your looks! Your crool need is ale—ripe and nutty! In a cool pewter pot! Creamy wi' foam—like mine as was and now—ain't! Will I call John for to bring 'ee a pint,—arl bubblesome froth atop, sweet and nutty below,—like mine as was and ended too soon,—ar, gone 'twere afore I tasted it—purty nigh! Will I rap for John—and ale, friend?"

Sinking upon rustic bench hard by, the Traveller stretched out his dusty legs, sighed gratefully and answered:

"Pray do. And I think perhaps you may be persuaded to join me."

"Ay, Lord love ee, friend, wi'arl me old 'eart!" Saying which the aged man rapped with his ponderous stick, calling lustily:

"Ho, John—custom! Ale, Johnny me lad, two pints, and sharp be the word."

And when the ale had made its appearance, had been duly paid for, sipped and swallowed, Mr. Bates, pausing between sips, enquired:

"You be a stranger yereabouts, sure—ly?"

"These many years," replied the Traveller.

"Come fur, Mister?"

"Yes."

"Goin' fur?"

"No further than I must."

"Ho, and wheer be that, friend?"

"A place called Trevore. You will probably know it."

"Know it?" repeated the Aged One. "Oh, my soul,—I've knowed it ages and ages, and never no manner o' good of it neether—no!" Here he shook hoary head until his hat toppled.

"You mean it is haunted?"

"No, friend, I means worser nor that! Ar,—I do mean as theer be a bloodsome curse 'pon it! So tek doo warnin' and don't ee go anigh the gashly place, nowise and nowhen—it have been the death o' one young feller a'ready—or purty near, so —be warned!"

"Indeed?" enquired the Traveller. "What happened, and who was the man?"

"'Twere a fine, strappin', upstanding young feller, though oncommon 'eadstrong and fullish, for though I warned 'im repeated, did 'e 'eed me? Not 'im! And wot 'appened in consequence?"

"I should like to hear."

"Well, friend, this yere same wilful young feller as wouldn't nowise 'ark nor 'eed me warning, paid for it wi' his precious blood and life into the bargain—almost! Ar," continued the Aged One with very evident gusto, "this yere 'eadstrong young feller goes and gets hisself arl murderous beat up most brutageous and would now be a-moulderin' in 'is tumb, earth to earth, but for the care and dee-votion o' Mrs. Penhallo."

The Traveller, who had been listening in an attitude of careless languor, with eyes half-closed, now opened them suddenly wide, sat up swiftly and was leaning forward glaring on Mr. Bates through a flashing monocle; beholding which glittering object, the Aged One recoiled, and instinctively touched his hat, saying in very altered tones:

"No offence, sir, no offence! I be only a ancient party, Jole Bates, 'umbly at your good sarvice, sir, I'm sure."

The Traveller removed his eyeglass, took a draught of ale, sighed and enquired:

"And pray what was the name of this very headstrong young man?"

"Tom, sir, Tom Wade. Lives yere at the 'Pilchards', 'e do, when 'e ain't piggin' it like a gipsy in a tent downalong to that old Trevore or layin' sick abed over to Mrs. Pen'allo's cottage."

"Was he so badly injured, Mr. Bates?"

"Sir, 'cording to all as I 'ears, 'e were a reg'lar gory specktackle."

"How was he hurt—just how did it happen?"

"Nobody don't rightly seem to know, sir, but since you ax me I should tell ee

bold and plain as 'twere arl along and owin' to that theer bloodsome curse as 'ave blasted old Trevore these many years."

"And you tell me this lady . . . Mrs. Penhallo . . . nursed and tended him . . . saved his life?"

"Ar, she did so,—along wi' my two leddies from Penruan, specially Miss Samanthy. Ah, they nursed him so constant and careful that to-day, 'stead o' bein' a moulderin' corpse like 'e should ought and as were only to be expected, this yere Tom be all alive and kickin'!"

"Then he has quite recovered?"

"Sir, I can't nowise deny it. Tom Wade aren't no graveyard bones yet, not 'im, ho no! At this yere very moment o' time, Tom's up and at it again, busy wi' 'is saws and 'ammers at Trevore as'll be 'is final doom soon or late, sure as the grave,—as I warns 'im no later nor yesterday eve, a-settin' on this yere very selfsame i-dentical bench!"

The Traveller having finished his ale, removed his dusty hat, and thus bareheaded to the cool and gentle wind, sank back on the weather-worn settle, lost in profound thought. Noting this abstraction, Mr. Bates took the opportunity to survey him with sharply inquisitive old eyes from head to foot and feature by feature.

And indeed a man of strange contrasts was this Traveller, for the prideful arrogance of his handsome, aquiline face was contradicted by the dreamful sadness of his eyes, and mournful droop of clean-shaven mouth; his dusty garments were of rich material, well cut, and moulded a youthfully slim and still vigorous body, yet the shoulders were bowed and the thick, curling hair showed streaks of silver. All this Mr. Bates saw, but heeded only the two essentials,—that this dusty person was a 'somebody,' that he was much older than appeared at casual glance, and, since he was certainly one of 'The Quality,' must be 'treated according.'

Therefore, Mr. Bates touched his hat with a new deference and accosted the Traveller with an awful respect he ever accorded 'The Gentry.'

"Sir, if you please, might a aged, very old party, name o' Bates, 'umbly mek so bold as to offer ee a mite of advice like?"

Slowly the Traveller removed his gaze from the vague distance, and, turning towards the speaker, smiled so pleasantly that Mr. Bates made bold to smile also.

"Advice?" he repeated. "Most surely, for Age is privileged to counsel and advise. I shall be grateful."

"Then, sir, my 'umble advice is—don't! No, keep clear o' Trevore lest it work more 'arm, and bring black evil on ee—the evil o' death!"

"Death?" repeated the Traveller, his wistful gaze on the distance again. "Is death

so great an evil?"

"Ay, for sure, sir, for sartin sure, it be,—to all 'ealthy and 'earty folk, young or old, rich or poor."

"You think there is a . . . curse upon Trevore?"

"That I do, sir, a murderous curse as 'ave set its mark on this yere young Tom Wade, a scarry thing for all to see."

"Indeed? Precisely what sort of mark?"

"A death mark, sir, like Cain—i' the brow! Ar, 'tis a mark as no water on earth and no 'and may ever do away, for 'tis the curse of old Trevore."

The Traveller took up his hat, shook some of the dust from it, but in the act of putting it on, stood suddenly arrested, his gaze on vacancy again, and thus motionless, spoke in altered tone:

"You mentioned a . . . Mrs. Penhallo. . . . Do you happen to be acquainted with her?"

"Ar, years an' years, sir."

"What do you . . . know of her?"

"Nought but good, sir. A right gentle leddy, sir, kinder to all folk than to 'erself—specially the children, used for to teach 'em lessons, she did, till young Tom Wade got hisself murdered—very nigh. As for that theer old Trevore, if I 'ad my way it should be pulled down, stone b' stone and burnt t'ashes wi' good, clean fire."

"Or," sighed the Traveller, putting on hat and reaching for his stick, "or . . . better still . . . be made a home once more, with the sweet spirit of life to lift and banish the curse forever."

"Ay, but wot, sir, wot like might be this yere 'sperrit o' Life'?"

And turning to be gone, the Traveller answered:

"Love."

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW SAMANTHA DISCOVERED A FAIRY GODFATHER

HEAD bowed and slow-footed, the Traveller pursued his way, heedless now of dust or heat, for his mind was troubled by matters of far greater import—until these anxious meditations were disrupted by the wild beat of horse-hoofs approaching at such headlong, reckless speed that instinctively he stepped to the hedge, and, turning, espied a horseman bearing down upon him in a rolling cloud of

dust to sweep past him like a whirlwind; then, amid this cloud, he glimpsed hoofs that lashed the air as the rearing animal was reined up and about, and from this swirling mist a voice called in richly sweet apology:

"Oh, say, Mister Man, I shore hope we didn't scare you any?"

The dust-cloud subsiding, revealed the speaker,—a young woman, a beautiful young woman—but—a woman who sat her spirited, fretting horse astride! Wherefore the Traveller, instead of speaking, fixed his eyeglass, the better to observe this very unfeminine posture, and to look his profound and instant disapprobation; then, and before he could utter a word, the voice spoke again:

"Ho—ly smoke . . . you're the Earl!"

"And you," he retorted, "are Helena, Marchioness of Dorincourt! And, my lady, I strongly reprehend your method of riding, which, besides being a public menace, is extremely unbecoming both to your sex and rank."

"Well now, Earl, you're cert'nly some personal, I'll say so! Though it don't cut any ice with me, no siree! And if I am astraddle, I'm wearing these doggone, fool divided-skirt things just because this is your Old England instead of God's Own Country. If I was in my Texas I'd be in breeches and chaps, like a real, genu-ine American girl should. And now, if you'll please take that glittery thing out of your face and try to look more human, I'll get down and chew the rag with you."

"I—beg your pardon! Be good enough to explain that most repulsive idiom."

"Oh, well,—have a real, good, heart-to-heart talk."

So, while my lord the Earl of Wade-Orrington dropped his eyeglass and bowed, Helena Samantha, Marchioness of Dorincourt, slipped nimbly from her saddle and began to soothe and gentle her restive animal, saying as she did so:

"Will you look at him, lord? Get a real, good eyeful! Isn't he a jim-dandy, a regular, rip-snorting, dingbusted hellion,—now isn't he?"

"If you mean a handsome creature, he is. But pray, why couch your approbation in language so ill-befitting your new social status, why, Marchioness?"

"Just because," she answered, with sly, quick, side glance and furtive, roguish smile, "me being all real dyed-in-the-wool American, I guess it's expected of me, and besides,—it tickles me to death to shock you English aris-tocrats, and make you cross your fingers and curl yore toes."

"However, I am doing neither, madam. Instead, I ask you to remember you are indeed Marchioness of Dorincourt, a great English lady, and beg you will so comport yourself."

"My, my!" laughed Samantha. "You cert'nly tell me off like a dutch uncle! 'Comport myself' is English for 'behave', I guess. And you don't have to remind

me,—I know I'm a marchioness, whatever that may be,—that's just what gets my goat! Yessir, this is what's biting me,—because though I'm my dear English dad's daughter, I'm my sweet mother's daughter, too, and she was all American, and so ——" Here, for no apparent reason, Bombshell began to dance and sidle, to snort and rear, tossing his great head so violently that Samantha was swung from her feet; then, even as she clung, resolute though helpless, a long arm clasped and steadied her, a hand grasped the bridle, a hand so strong and compelling that after brief though fierce struggle, Bombshell, acknowledging its mastery, subsided.

"Thanks!" gasped Samantha, so flushed, breathless and unwontedly mortified that her companion remarked, in matter-of-fact tone:

"You are, of course, well used to horses, Marchioness."

"Why, yes," she replied, with quick, grateful look, "since I was knee-high to a tumble-bug,—soon as I could walk, almost, my dad had me straddling leather. You see he'd hoped for a boy, but when I turned out a girl he jest made the best of me, —taught me to ride and shoot and use a rope,—and called me 'Sam' for Samantha, —never Helena, because that was the dood side of the family, but Samantha was my mother's name. And this reminds me, I want to ask you, my lord, I want you to promise me——Oh, shucks!" She broke off as Bombshell manifested a sudden desire to stand on his head, "I guess I'll have to ride him home, it's only just round the bend there, and I'll be right back if you'll please to wait here. I want to have our talk, please, before you see Babs."

"Babs?" he enquired.

"Yes. Lady Oxted. I always call her 'Babs'."

"Do you indeed?"

"Sure! Barbara's such a mouthful,—though she nearly threw a fit the first time she heard me."

"And I can well believe it!"

"Yes. But though she's stiff from head to foot with ladylike dignity, underneath the cake-ice she's real womanly, and a dear. Now I'll hot-foot it to the stables—you'll wait for me right here, won't you?"

"With pleasure, Marchioness."

Watching her opportunity, Samantha swung nimbly to the saddle, whereat Bombshell instantly snorted joyously, reared playfully and was off at flying gallop.

Then, seated upon grassy bank in shade of the tall hedge, my lord of Wade-Orrington waited, his sombre gaze upon the distance again. But very soon he roused to the sound of quick, light feet, and beheld Samantha hurrying towards him; now as he watched her swift approach and she so vivid with young life and the joy of it, his

sensitive mouth curved to a smile that shone in his sad eyes as he rose to meet her, saying:

"You were not long."

"No, I met Jacky, my stableman. Now I'll take you where we can sit and talk, away from this dusty road,—let's go." Saying which, she slipped her hand within his ready arm and led him to that narrow, shady lane whence might be glimpsed the thatched roof of Mrs. Penhallo's cottage. Here seated, she turned to look at the Earl with her direct, blue-eyed gaze, and began thus:

"Now, my lord, first of all I'm going to ask you in my very best English and just as politely as I know how, to please cut all this Marchioness and Lady Helena stuff right out. So, what about it? Ah—no, please!" said she, laying gently-arresting finger on the hand that was feeling instinctively for his monocle. "Don't glare at me through that awful thing, just look at me and talk to me like the real nice man I begin to know you are in spite of being an earl and I don't know what all. Now, please talk."

"But, my dear Lady Helena——"

"And there you go! Can't you, won't you, please, try and call me 'Samantha'?"

"Very well, Samantha. And yet however I address you, nothing can alter the fact that Fortune, Nature or Providence has made you Helena, Marchioness of——"

"Shore! And, as I tell you, that's my trouble."

"Trouble?" he repeated.

"Just that!" she nodded. "To all the folks around here I'm just Samantha Doodney, and now I'm asking you to please remember this, and so long as I'm staying here you'll never—never call me anything else, will you, please?"

"Yes, Samantha, I promise. Though I fail to understand this strange repugnance to assuming your proper title, which, pray believe me, is a very proud, a very noble and ancient one. Your ancestors were——"

"You've said it, my lord,—they were! Which means they're not any more, they being all dead—like my dear father. And he preferred to be just plain Doodney, and so do I! My dad never had any use for titles, and didn't give a darn for ancestors, he lived and died a cattleman, and shore-enough American, and so will I. So please to remember this, and act up to it, my lord. So I want you to know I'm not going to do the English lady act, because it doesn't soot me, and I just can't. And, my lord, I'm not going to be presented to yore Queen, or, lastly——Ah, now you're frowning at me! Well, if you're getting real mad at me I can't help it any, because lastly I want you to get this, my lord,—I do—not—want for you or Babs to fix for me to marry any of yore lords or dooks, for I cert'nly don't intend ever to marry . . . and if I ever should it'll have to be some quite ordinary, everyday sort of man,—abso-lootly! And

I guess that's about all."

The Earl instinctively groped for his eyeglass again, raised it, dropped it to dangle on its cord, and looking into this very beautiful, extremely resolute young face so near his own, sighed and shook his head saying, in voice unexpectedly kind and gentle:

"You are indeed a most extraordinary young lady!"

"Oh no!" she replied, echoing his sigh, "not me. I'm just a simple, everyday American female!"

"Do you really believe that, Samantha?"

"Cert'nly I do!"

"Amazing!"

"Oh? What's so amazing, please?"

"You are. And I am glad, yes, inexpressibly glad, to have met you." And now in his voice and looks she was aware of a tenderness so wistful and appealing that mutely she responded, drawing nearer to him until her bright hair was touching his dusty coat sleeve.

"And you," she said, looking up into his mournful eyes. "You aren't a little bit what I thought. . . . I like you a whole lot better than I did in London."

"I'm glad," he answered simply.

"You see," she explained, slipping her hand into his, "in London you seemed so different, such a haw-haw aris-tocrat and frightfully English, so inhumanly dignified and grand I hardly dared utter as much as a peep, much less talk to yore lordship."

"Dear me,—what a ridiculous ogre I must have seemed, Samantha."

"Oh, you cert'nly did!" she sighed. "I thought you a most frightful stiff, a regular stuffed shirt."

"A . . . stuffed shirt!" repeated the Earl gravely, pondering the phrase, though his eyes twinkled.

"Not very polite, I'm afraid!" she said.

"Though highly expressive!" he murmured. "You evidently imagined me a perfectly odious person."

"Yes," she admitted. "Yes, I did—in London! Ah, but now!"—here she gave his arm an eloquent squeeze—"as I see you now, in yore nice, old clothes, so nice and dusty and swea—perspiration-y, you are so very ordinary and human and terribly nice I wonder how ever I could have thought you—otherwise."

"Thank you, my dear!" said he, pressing the cool, smooth hand that had insinuated itself into his firm clasp. "My own wonder is that you should have recognized me so readily—back there on the road."

"It was that glittery eyeglass thing—you looked all dust and dignity,—yes, and the way you carry yore head—as if you're ready to face anything on earth—or in heaven either,—as I guess you are!"

"I hope so," he answered, and with such wistful humility that Samantha, with comforting left hand, patted the slim, strong hand that still clasped her right so gently close. "Yes, dear child," he murmured, "it is my fervent hope that when I am called to front my Maker I may do so—unfearing."

"And that's shore—some thought!" she replied. "To live unafraid and die unfearing! And have you never done—I mean—is there nothing in yore past life to make you—just a mite afraid?"

The Earl's sinewy fingers closed upon the slender hand they held, with a grip almost painful ere loosing it suddenly, he replied:

"Yes, my dear, yes! For, as you say, I am only a very human person . . . a man little better or worse than other humans! And of all poor Humanity's griefs and sorrows, I think perhaps the most bitter is . . . remorse."

"And now," said she, "you look so very human and—dear, that I feel like . . . kissing you,—though that wouldn't be acting like a perfect lady, would it, my lord?"

"It would be sweetly womanly," he replied, gently, "and very—merciful!"

"Well then!" murmured Samantha, and kissed him with such sweet frankness as a loving daughter might have done. "I wonder now," said she, leaning back the better to look up at him, "does that make us real friends?"

"Indeed I hope so most truly, for you greatly resemble your father, Samantha."

"Oh . . . then," she questioned, suddenly breathless, "does this mean . . . you . . . Oh, did you . . . know him?"

"My dear, we were boys at school together, we were friends at college and after."

"Oh, glory!" she exclaimed, clasping her arms about him. "This makes us more . . . much more than just friends, and——Oh, doggone it! Why must I want to weep over you? I hate a weepy woman! And you've shaved off your mus-tache, and I like you a heap better without it, yes—a bald face soots your style! Oh, friend of my dear father—how glad I am to have found—you! And there's a fool tear tickling my nose."

"Ah, my dear," he murmured, "such tears of remembrance are precious!" And he brushed this glistening drop away with his lips.

"Oh, gee!" she exclaimed, between laughing and sobbing, "what a darn fool was I to think you only an earl all bloo blood and buried ancestors—and here I find you you!"

The Earl laughed almost boyishly, and demanded to know just what she had discovered him to be; and after a moment's thoughtful study of him, Samantha answered:

"A fairy godfather!"

"Excellent!" he nodded. "Your fairy godfather am I henceforth. Come now, let us adopt one another,—your hands in mine—so! Now, say after me: I, Gawain Wade-Orrington, do adopt thee, Samantha Dudeney, as my goddaughter in faery, to have and to hold, to serve and to cherish hereafter, unto the end of all things, Amen!"

Now when this troth had been duly plighted, Samantha drew his arm about herself and cuddling near, continued:

"And the wonderful thing is this, Godfather dear, you have come to me just when most needed,—like my Pen."

"And pray who and what is 'your Pen'?"

"She's the dearest, sweetest, loveliest, wisest thing that ever happened in this round earth! There's her cottage over there, you can see its roof peeking at us above the trees. Her name's Penelope, and she calls herself Penhallo, though I guess her right name's Wade. But she's had a miserable life, because she married a vile brute of a husband, a beast who stole her baby and left her desolate. . . . And yet—though he ruined her life, left her to suffer miseries that turned her pretty hair snow-white, yet just because she's a woman and women are such strange creatures,—I believes—yes, I know for shore and certain, she still loves him. And so, because I love her, I want for her to be happy at last, and to make her happy I want you to help me bring this husband and wife together again somehow, anyhow, so long as we do, and the sooner the better. There,—and that's shore some speech!"

The Earl, who had listened to all this with expression of grave interest, now enquired in his usual pleasantly modulated voice:

"You think this ill-used wife still loves her cruel husband?"

"Godfather, I don't think,—I know."

"How can you be so very positive?"

"Because she's a woman and I'm another, and use my head for other things than just tying bonnets on to it."

"Yes," said he, touching the head in question very tenderly. "Still, I should like to see it adorning a bonnet, someday."

"Say, that's a real pretty speech, Godfather, so just for that it shall adorn my cutest bonnet, one I bought in Parus,—I'll wear it just for yore sake if you'll go to church with me this next Sunday."

"Daughter of Faery," he exclaimed, "this is a promise."

"Well, but right now," said she, drawing his arm closer about her, "here's you and here's me, or should I say—here am I? and yonder in her cottage is my dear Pen,—so what about it?"

"Precisely, my child,—what is it all about? I received a most lurid account of blood and death and the 'curse of Trevore' from one I met on my way here, a reverend-seeming ancient in a smock-frock."

"With a pint pot,—at the 'Pilchards'!" she nodded. "That's old Joel Bates, our gardener, and he's gotten it all wrong, of course. What happened at Trevore wasn't a curse but a beast, a poison toad and two sidewinders."

"Samantha, I fear your meaning eludes me."

"But, Godfather, it's just plain American for a venomous varmint and two snakes. But there isn't any curse on Trevore, it's a lovely old place and lovelier now because of Tom's work on it. Old Bates just makes up the curse part, and takes it as a personal affront that Tom didn't cash in his checks,—that means die,—like he said he would if he didn't leave old Trevore alone. But I guess it'll take more than boots and bludgeons to kill Tom Wade,—the doctor said he'd gotten the thickest skull in creation, and he shore has, yessir, it's all solid bone—like I told him way back, just after he yanked me from a watery grave."

"Goddaughter mine," said the Earl, as she paused for breath, "suppose now you begin at the beginning and tell me all that has transpired?" Briefly, though graphically, Samantha did so; she told of her first meeting with Tom, of Sir Harry Winby's desperate attempt at her abduction, foiled so completely by Tom, Mark and The Factotum, of the later murderous attack at Trevore, of her rescue at the muzzles of Amanda's guns, and of Tom's ensuing illness; at which point the Earl interpolated:

"You nursed him, I believe?"

"Yes, I helped, so did Mandy, but it was my Pen kept death from him, I guess because she happens to be his mother."

"His . . . mother!" repeated the Earl, softly.

"Surest thing, Godfather! And they only found each other lately,—which is cert'nly some ro-mance! Well, while son Tom is an invalid in bed, all he can think of is how to bring his father and mother together again, says it's his dooty to see them happily reunited, to which I agree, and we begin to scheme out how best to set about it,—on the strict q.t., because it seems his mother doesn't exactly cotton to the idea, and no wonder! But Tom's all hot and burning for it—while he's a feeble invalid in bed! And now—here's what galls me to the quick,—no sooner is he up and about again than he gets cold feet! When I tell him to go after his old man with a letter, does he write a single line? No, sir, he does not! He just quits on me right

there, and lets the whole thing flop! So, I'm done with Tom Wade, I've cut him right out . . . and Mark's away. Ah, but—here are you, Godfather, just when most needed, like an answer to prayer! And you're such a great person, a grand personage with heaps of influence, a regular go-getter, and look like you could move mountains! So what about it? Will you help me, Godfather—dear?"

"First, my child, be good enough to allow me a question."

"Anything you will."

"Then, pray, are you so firmly resolved against marrying some fortunate man in your own station of life because you are already in love with one of humbler mark?"

"Why, no, cert'nly not. Abso-lootly! I mean to say I don't quite get yore meaning! Who would I be falling for, I'd like to know?"

"This Tom Wade fellow, perhaps."

"No!" she exclaimed, and so fiercely that the Earl's keen eyes twinkled again. "Tom Wade? Not likely! Never in a million years! He isn't even a 'has-been', he's a 'never-was'. He's just about the last thing I'd trouble to look at! He's no more than a——Oh, well, I guess you know now what I think of Mister Tom Wade!"

"Yes, Samantha, I believe I do."

"Oh?" she exclaimed, quick to heed the twinkle in his eyes. "Now just what d'you mean by that, Godfather dear, please?"

"Precisely what I say, most lovable of Goddaughters. Now enough of this Tom fellow,—pray tell me of his mother, your Mrs. Pen."

"Why, shore,—I could tell of her for hours, but say, I'll do better! I'll take you to meet her right now. I'm doo for tea with her, and any friend of mine is welcome, bless her! So let's go."

"Not now, Samantha. In my dust and grime I am no fit guest for any tea-table. My valet should be awaiting me at Penruan House, and I yearn for his ministrations."

"At Penruan? Then you're staying with us."

"Such is my intention."

"Glory be!"

"So, Goddaughter, *au revoir*." Taking her hand he bowed stately head and kissed it.

"Oh!" she murmured. "That's just like my dear father used to do sometimes, when he was very English, just to show me . . . and I thought it kind of old-fashioned and silly. . . . I know, now, that I was the silly! You see, I shore loved my dad best of anything in this world . . . and when he was killed all I wanted was to die, too."

"Instead of which, Samantha, here you stand, sweet with young life . . . and worthy of your noble parentage. How proud they must be of their child, this mother

and father of yours, at this moment of time."

"But . . . they are dead! Both dead and gone! So what d'you mean,—just what are you giving me?"

"Their message, perhaps, for, my dear child, I have seen so much of life . . . yes, and death also, that I am persuaded there is a greater, far nobler life than this we cling to and esteem so precious."

"Then you believe . . . the dead know of us?"

"Not only know, but watch over us, Samantha, shield us, guide and inspire us."

Hand in hand they went on slowly together until they had reached the end of this narrow, winding lane, whence they could see, bowered in trees, the roof of Mrs. Penhallo's cottage; and with her musing gaze on this, Samantha paused:

"Now if I could," said she. "If I only knew how, I'd like to tell you how much you have comforted me . . . and how grateful I am to know the real you of you at last, my lord and dear Godfather! Are you staying long at Penruan? I shore hope you are!"

"I'm . . . afraid . . . not!" he answered slowly, and in such tone that she glanced at him almost anxiously. "It will all . . . depend."

"Well, just for now," said Samantha, coaxingly, "I do wish you'd go along with me to my Pen, she wouldn't mind your dusty clothes, not she,—and I'm betting a bloo stack,—I mean I'm quite ab-so-lootly shore you'll fall for her the same as I did, and love her like I do,—and if ever you're in any trouble she'll comfort you just as you've comforted me. So what about it, Godfather, my dear?"

Once again the Earl's gaze was upon the vague distance, and in his eyes that same yearning wistfulness. And now Samantha (like old Mr. Bates) saw he was older than she had supposed, a man so very weary and sorrowful that, acting on sweet impulse, she clasped soft arms about him, and touched her lips to his haggard cheek, murmuring: "Come to my Pen and be comforted."

"Be you my comfort, Samantha," he replied, "for I am a lonely man, and fear I must remain so—always." Then, stooping, he touched his lips to a wayward tress of her bright hair, and with this farewell, turned and left her to gaze after him with expression as gentle and eyes now wistful as his own.

CHAPTER XXXVII

BRIEFLY DESCRIBES A LADY OF QUALITY

BARBARA, Lady Oxted, in floppy old hat, shapeless overall and large, thick gloves, was gardening,—that is to say she was doing things with a trowel in a haughty, dignified manner and, despite gloves, overall and hat, and the smudge of earth on her patrician nose, contriving to look and be (as Samantha would have said) a real 'perfect lady'.

After some close and vigorous work with the trowel, she rose from her knees and, by voice and imperious gesture of this same implement, summoned Mr. Bates, who was busied, at his leisure, among the vegetables.

"Look!" said her ladyship. "Three rows! I desire you will water them promptly and well."

Mr. Bates surveyed the result of her trowelling with professional, and therefore jaundiced eye, shook his head, vented a groaning sound and said, mournfully:

"Oh, well, me leddy, I don't s'pose as you've done much 'arm. Though them's beans as you've been a-plantin' of so free."

"I am aware of it, Bates. And I have a partiality for the bean."

"Ar, but, m'leddy, you'm a-plantin' on 'em too late, which is one thing, marm, and another thing is as you've planted of 'em atop o' my seedlin's for next——"

"Gracious!" exclaimed Lady Barbara. "There he is—actually!"

"Oo's wheer, me leddy?"

"The Earl . . . yonder . . . approaching along the drive . . . so much sooner than expected! And myself so garbed . . . so unbecomingly . . . and in such earthy state! Oh dear me!"

"Earl?" question Mr. Bates, watching the visitor's approach. "But, marm, 'e be most oncommon dusty for a nearl! A gen'leman mebbe, but tis 'ard to believe yon's a nearl, m'leddy."

"The Earl of Wade-Orrington, a very great, greatly famous and extremely wealthy peer, Bates."

"Lordy, m'leddy! And 'e drank a pint along o' me this yere very——" But my lady had swept out of earshot, and now, gracious in her grime, was advancing to meet the dusty Earl.

"Sir!" said she, curtseying, with superb gesture of earth-clogged trowel.

"Madame!" quoth he, bowing with sweep of dusty hat.

"My lord, I am happy to welcome you, though much before the hour your man gave me to expect, hence my somewhat grubby ensemble! But, my dear Gawain, you look so hot and tired!"

"I am indeed!" he sighed.

"Then before your Mr. Tracy tends your outer man, I will minister to your inner.

Oh, Bates, go you and bid the butler to me with bottles. Say my lord the Earl has arrived. Hurry! Meanwhile, Gawain, come to the shady arbour yonder, let us sit in our dust and soil and I will endeavour to tell you of—this Samantha."

"Pray do," said he, as they crossed the sunny garden. Thus presently, with bottles before him and a glass in his hand, the Earl listened while Lady Oxted held forth, thus:

"I commence with confession of my own utter futility. . . . I am a very positive failure, sir, for to cope adequately with Samantha is far, far beyond my strength. She is a quite hopeless case, Gawain, and quite hopelessly her own defiant, determined, perfectly-assured self. She has no poise, no polish, no least hint of dignified restraint or ladylike decorum! Samantha is too truly Nature's child ever to conform to any code of social politeness, rules of etiquette or the feminine graces I have so faithfully, earnestly and vainly attempted and striven to inculcate. She is a tameless creature of the wild, and, Gawain,—a perfect darling, loyal, loving, intensely and most outrageously honest and altogether impossible—yet utterly adorable!"

"Precisely!" said the Earl, and with such unusual vehemence that Lady Oxted very nearly gaped in speechless astonishment as the Earl continued: "You are exactly right, Barbara, and describe her perfectly in your admirable phrase: 'a tameless creature of the wild'—it is exceedingly apt and just. And I know this, because I met her on my way here, riding a four-legged fury. Yet she recognised me almost instantly, and—we talked, or, as she put it, 'chewed the rag'." His lordship paused, and amazed his hearer again by uttering a sound almost like a chuckle, then before Lady Oxted could find words, he went on: "Yes, our young Marchioness chewed rag with me to such effect that I was made aware how at our first meeting in London she deemed me a 'stiff', and a 'stuffed shirt'!"

"Heavens above!" exclaimed Lady Oxted, faint-voiced but shuddering violently. "How odiously indelicate! How deplorably——" Her ladyship stared, dumb struck, for the Earl was actually and positively laughing, softly and yet so heartily, that she gasped:

"You, Gawain! A——"

"A—stuffed—shirt!" he repeated, dwelling upon the words. "What a vivid word picture of Pompous Futility! . . . Yes, indeed, Samantha is like no one but herself! But that self is so deliciously refreshing, so inherently honest that I would not desire her altered now—even were it possible."

"Which it most certainly is not!" quoth her ladyship. "Now, talking of Samantha, what of the Viscount, your Justin? Have you seen him also?"

"Not yet. And may I suggest we use the name he has chosen and refer to him as

Tom Wade for the present?"

"Of course. Samantha will have told you of him, perhaps,—his injuries?"

"Very fully."

"How do you think matters are progressing in—that direction?"

"Better than expected. Samantha protests such extreme aversion for Tom Wade that he should be duly encouraged and hopeful as is his father. . . . I gather from Samantha that he is now fully recovered from his hurts—chiefly owing to the devoted care of a neighbour—Mrs. Penhallo. Are you acquainted with—this lady?"

"Oh no. I have glimpsed her once or twice—distantly. But I go abroad so rarely, being, as you know, a perfect recluse,—church on Sundays, of course, an occasional drive to Truro for the shops,—my needle, books and the garden, these are my relaxations. And hither comes your guardian angel, Mr. Tracy! With a pair of slippers! Upon a salver! How profoundly proper! But then Mr. Tracy always was!"

My lord's gentleman in question, a grave, most sedate person, here presented himself to say, and with two several bows:

"Hearing your lordship had arrived somewhat fatigued, I beg to inform your lordship all is prepared for your comfort within-doors, wherefore, I much desire to induct you my lord into the grateful ease of slippers, a warm bath and change of garments, if her ladyship will excuse——"

"My ladyship commends your care, Mr. Tracy," said Lady Oxted rising and wafting them house-wards with her trowel, "meanwhile I will get me back to my beans and cross-grained old gardener."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

IN WHICH THIS ROMANCE, LIKE TOM'S WORK ON OLD TREVORE, APPROACHES ITS END

THE work on Trevore was finished, this labour of love completed at last, and now Tom was standing back to survey the result of his efforts with keenly critical gaze, and the old house was beaming back on him with every latticed window twinkling in the early morning sunlight.

"Well, Old Thing," quoth Tom, apostrophizing it as he often did when alone, "good old Trevore, I fancy you'll do, so far as your outside is concerned,—your innards require a little more tinkering here and there, panelling to be oiled or waxed, one or two floor-boards to be stained,—and then,—what's to become of us, Old House? Must you be left empty and desolate again, to rot and rot? Anyhow, you're

good now for another long span of years. Ah, but what of me, what of my confounded self? Shall I get me back to London . . .? The dutiful son obedient to stern sire's decree . . . marry the marchioness,—what was her dashed name . . . Helen? Old House, the outlook for us both is anything but rosy! You to rot and I to wed . . . dev-lish depressing—in fact 'perfectly damawful' says you! Agreed! says I. Oh, well, I've had a grand time with you, Old Stoutheart,—here in your kindly shadow I found my long-lost mother, God bless her! And then, besides, you gave me . . . that other woman—she came to me, you'll remember, up from death . . . all dripping from the sea, shaped like Aphrodite, and as beautiful! You know, Old Thing, how I dreamed . . . and what. Ah, but . . . the dream is over, and I'm awake again, Old Friend, while you are stout and strong once more though you'll never come fully alive until . . . some happy couple make you 'home' again. So much for you . . . but as for me, there is, after all, such a thing as 'duty', dammit, filial piety, *noblesse oblige* and so forth, and—my Sire Superbus, with a Capital S! And since he is my father I am his son, and must act accordingly. So, I suppose it must be London and a life of——"

A patter of desperate, running feet,—a shrill, inarticulate cry of agonized distress and, starting about, Tom beheld a small, wild figure scampering towards him, eyes glaring and mouth agape in a face drawn and frightfully pale; on came his small Goliath, gasping for breath, stumbling with weariness to fall and lie prone, fetching his breath in great, painful sobs.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Tom, lifting the small, trembling form. "What on earth's up, now, my Totum?"

"Ho . . . Guv . . ." he panted, "I see something . . . so higeous 'orrible . . . I'm all of a . . . blinkin' shake. I am!"

"So I see, Goly. What's wrong?"

"A witch, Guv . . . in the wood . . . a-scrovelling in the bushes . . . 'orrid like."

"Eh, a witch . . . what sort?"

"A fee-male witch . . . all rags, scrags and—hair! A blinkin' awful witch, Guv, and . . . no blooming error!"

"Get your breath, old boy, then count five and let's hear."

And thus, so soon as speech was possible, Goliath told his story:

"Sir, as I comes froo the wood wiv the stooin' steak as I rammed in me pocket for fear o' losing, I sees summat crawlin' in the bushes, summat as looked like it was a woman—only I never see any woman the like of her, never in all me puff."

"What was she like? Describe her."

"Guvnor, she was that horrible to look at she fair chilled me blood, she did,

made me flesh creep and turned me stomach!"

"Good lord! Why?"

"Well, sir, 'twas the look of her, the way she sat all 'uddled up . . . it was the fearsome way she wispered and talked and laughed and sobbed and sang, too, she did, soft-like . . . and nobody to hear 'er 'cept me! And then, Guv, I see as she'd got summat all cuddled up in 'er arms, close agin 'er chest, and I thought at first as it was a baby, becos she kisses it so loving, and sings to it and wispers to it! And then she turned and I see as it wasn't no baby . . . no, sir! Cor blimey—when I see it proper, it nigh give me the blind staggers!"

"What was it, Goly?"

"Oh, sir, this thing as she was singin' to and kissing so loving was . . . a knife!"

"Was it, by Jingo!"

"Ar! A long un, sir, precious bright and sharp! Then she . . . spies me, and bounced up at me and runs at me wiv this knife . . . and squealin' awful, so I makes meself scarce—not 'arf! I cuts and runs and—'ere I h-am, sir."

"You thought she meant to stab you?"

"I dunno, sir, all as I remembers is she squeals and jumps at me—so I cuts and runs."

"Well now," said Tom, rising, "I think I'll take a stroll through the wood and ——"

"Oh, blimey, Guvnor—don't! Strike me pink, sir, she'll come a screamin' at ye—knife and all."

"I rather hope she will."

"Well, then, if you go, sir, I'll toddle along to look arter you, I will."

"Not so, my Totum! You will instantly set about that stewing steak. I hope you bought plenty?"

"Free pahnds, sir."

"Good! And lots of onions?"

"Yessir, an' carrots an' yarbs an' a pepper-corn or so; it'll be spicy, not 'arf."

"Well, get at it, my buck! And that's an order!"

"Very good, sir, only—'spose she jumps ye sudden and kills you?"

"Then I shant have to bother about anything any more."

Now it was in this same hour, by a happy coincidence, that Samantha went for an early morning stroll,—not to Trevore (most certainly not!) but in that direction, and, it was to be remarked, she was most becomingly gowned, no divided skirts or mannish riding-boots to-day! Thus, as she stepped gracefully into the shadowy

woodland, she was all deliciously feminine daintiness from shining head to light-treading, delicately-shod feet.

She walked with a leisured graciousness, for the day, though still early, was hot, also she was in pensive mood,—though her blue eyes quested the dense leafage all about her with a glance that was at once consciously furtive, keenly expectant and strangely shy. . . .

"Jumping snakes!" exclaimed Samantha, jumping herself and recoiling instinctively from the wild thing of rags and grime up-starting from the undergrowth almost at her feet.

"Say now," she demanded, indignantly, "what way is this to act? If you want money—here's a half-crown—if it isn't a two-shilling piece. Anyway, here it is, if ——"

The words died upon her lip, for this shape of wretchedness, this thing of utter misery was smiling,—that is to say, the writhen mouth was twisted and back-drawn from gleaming teeth in dreadful contrast to the wild glare of haggard eyes and twitching nostrils; then from between these sharp teeth came a foolish tittering, while one lean hand stole from sight, groping amid the ragged clothing. . . . Watching this slow, stealthy hand, Samantha drew cautiously back . . . and back . . . And then at last her eyes beheld the object they had sought,—a capless, straw-coloured head, a scarred brow.

It is a moot point, never to be answered, as to whether or no Samantha, this young amazon, was quite so terrified as undoubtedly appeared, but and however:

"Tom!" she screamed, and fled to him.

"Darling!" said he, and took her in his arms, folding her close, lifting her from earth to lie cradled upon his heart,—and all quite as a matter of course.

"Oh, Tom," she gasped, "did you . . . see?"

"Yes, you!" he answered. And now, gazing upon each other, they clean forgot all else. Then Tom kissed her, and did it properly, with no least flurry or haste. And this time Samantha made no effort to wipe off his kiss; instead she looked up into his plain, honest face, and, reading the worship there, enquired in small, soft voice:

"What was that you called me a while ago?"

"Darling!" he repeated. "My own darling."

"Are you . . . making love to me . . . at last, Tom Wade?"

And he answered, rather unsteadily:

"Yes, Samantha . . . yes, by God, I am! Yes, I'm doing my best to tell you . . . to show you . . ."

"What, Tom?" she enquired, barring his threatened kiss with one slim, very

gentle finger. "Just what are you trying to say?"

"That I love you . . . adore you . . . want you, and . . . can't get on without you. I mean to say . . . I always have, from the very first, and I always shall love you and . . . so . . . if you know what I mean, Samantha!"

"Yes," she murmured, removing the finger. "I guess I do at last, Tom." Here, of course, he kissed her again; after which he drew back, the better to look down into her eyes and ask more tenderly:

"The burning question is,—do you . . . will you . . . can you . . . manage to love me . . . a little?"

"No!" she replied, frowning. "Hell's bells, Tom, what a fool question!"

"Oh! Why?"

"Well, now, just think,—would I be lying like this in your arms without a struggle and not a single, solitary kick, if I loved you—only a little?"

"Which means?" he demanded.

"That I love you even better than I thought, and a whole lot more than I can ever tell even y——" There ensued a somewhat breathless interval, after which Tom allowed her to continue:

"Ever since I heard you whistle dad's call,—'British Grenadiers', and saw how nice and clean and English you were, yes, and—homely, Tom, because you're not a bit handsome, Tom Wade——"

"Yes," he nodded, "this queer thing I call a face is queerer than ever now, and well I know it."

"Oh, hush up!" she commanded, "because what you don't know is that yore face has something much better than handsomeness, and that's just why I love it more than any other face in this whole round wor——" Tom didn't allow her to finish, but kissed her again until, finding himself a little giddy, he backed to a tree and leaned there.

"Hadn't you better put me down now?" she suggested.

"No!" he replied decisively. "Rather not, what I mean to say is—no! You're now where you ought to have been weeks and ages ago. Agreed?"

"Yes, Tom. Why wasn't I?"

"Oh, because I'm such a confounded dashed idiotic——"

"Ah, Tom, you dearest beloved goof,—it's just because you never took me for granted that you're so exactly the one man I could ever love . . . and this is why I have to tell you I've seen—it!"

"You mean the witch creature?"

"No! The Eyeglass!"

"Eh? Eyeglass? You don't mean——"

"Yes, Tom, the Earl!"

Here Tom very nearly let her drop, whereat, of course, she clung to him all the closer, sighing:

"Put me down, my poor dear, I'm cert'nly no featherweight, I'm just a hunk of ——"

"Shapely sweetness!" he interpolated. "So lie still, you lovely thing . . . my own delicious property henceforth and forever? So lie where you are and tell me all about this—Eyeglass."

Meekly submissive, she obeyed, describing her meeting with the Earl, their talk, and how she had kissed him; whereat Tom exclaimed:

"Did you? By Jove and Jingo!"

"Yes, Tom, I sure did. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" he repeated. "I think it was heroic, my brave Loveliness!"

"Not brave, Tom, not a little bit, because I find he's about the dearest, kindest, sweetest thing really, although he is such a tremendous high-toned aris-tocrat and Earl . . . and this reminds me! Put me down, Tom dear."

"Certainly not!"

"Please, Tom—dearest! I've something I must tell you."

"Then tell it as you are."

"I can't, like this—all cuddled up in yore arms."

"Then don't tell me."

"But I simply must tell you. So put me down, Tom—I beg."

"Call me 'darling' then."

"You dear, great, strong, lovely—darling!" she whispered, kissing him.

So very reluctantly he obeyed.

Being afoot, Samantha shook down her frills and flounces, glanced at Tom, glanced away, took a deep breath and said in her most precise English:

"Tom Wade, I have a confession to make."

"Eh? Oh? Have you?" said he, looking extremely uncomfortable. "Well, you don't have to, Samantha."

"Oh, but I must."

"I don't want to hear——"

"Tom," said she, looking up at him beneath furrowed brow, "I'm a two-faced double-crosser!"

"Oh, are you?" said he, venturing to touch a wayward tress of her red-gold hair.

"Yes, Tom. I've been deceiving you right along from the word 'go'—this is why,

before you kiss me again, if you ever do, you've got to hear me confess."

"Dear, I'd rather not."

"Darling, you'll just have to."

"Dear love, I won't listen."

"Oh, but, why not?"

"Because if . . . if it's anything about that Winby fellow, you needn't tell me, because I——"

"Tom, you great lummox, it isn't about any fellow! No, it's all about me—just myself."

"Oh, good!"

"Ah, but, Tom! Oh, my dear,—I'm a—lady!"

"Which, Samantha, doesn't sound too altogether frightful,—besides, I know it."

"No you don't, Tom, because besides being just myself I'm lots besides. I'm rather terribly rich."

"Are you, b'George?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Well, for that matter, so am I."

"Oh, but there's even more to me than that, because though half of me is all genu-ine U.S.A., the other half is bloo-blooded, English aris-tocrat. Tom, I'm what's called in England—a marchioness, for besides being Samantha Doodney, I'm Helena, Marchioness of Dorincourt, as well."

Tom stepped back, gazing upon her in such speechless astonishment that she, mistaking the reason, reached out her hands to him, saying in pleading tones and with most un-Samantha-like humility:

"Oh, my dear . . . it isn't my fault! I can't help being a marchioness."

"No, of course, absolutely not," said Tom, clasping her hands, "because, you see, I can't help it either."

"Help what, Tom?"

"Being born a confounded viscount."

"You? A viscount—you?"

"Yes, dash it! I know I don't look the part, and I'm sure I don't like the part, but it's a dashed fact all the same . . . and . . . ye gods! By Jupiter and all the lot of them,—he's done it again—as usual!"

"Who's done what?"

"The Parent, the August Sire, my father, the Earl—stately person with The Eyeglass!"

"Oh, dear land of my fathers!" gasped Samantha. "You mean—he is yore father,

—the Earl?"

"Even so! I do! And he is! And b'Gad, as usual he's done it again!"

"Done what, for heaven's sake?"

"Worked the confounded oracle! Samantha,—Helena, Marchioness of Dorincourt is the wife he chose for me, and she is the reason why I cut London, came all this way into Cornwall, and instantly fell in love with Samantha Dudeney—exactly and precisely as he intended I should. *Quod erat demonstrandum*, and so forth!"

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"Become his very obedient son," answered Tom. "This funny-face, born Justin, Viscount Wade-Orrington, is longing to obey his father and wed Helena, Marchioness of Dorincourt, whenever she will stoop to so bless him. Samantha. . . . Oh, my dear—when?"

"Oh, Tom," she murmured, giving herself to his eager arms again, "not too soon, and yet . . . don't let it be . . . too long."

"There . . .! Oh, now," sighed she after an interval, "do let me think and figure it out! If you're the Earl's son . . . and my Pen's yore mother, then he must be . . . her husband! Christopher Columbus,—and he's here,—right on the spot! So what are we to do about it?"

"Nothing, sweetheart. We leave it all to him; he's about the ablest, brainiest person on two legs."

"But, Tom, isn't it all just perfectly ab-so-lootly wonderful and marvellous, isn't it?"

"Yes, Samantha, but what is most amazingly wonderful is that you can love me—you do love me still,—don't you?"

"Ah, my darling," she whispered. "I always shall, I always have—and you never guessed! I wonder why?"

"I dared not, Samantha; I never thought it could ever be possible."

"And that," said she, rather chokily, "is the reason why I love you so frightfully—you'll dare anything with men and nothing with women! Ah, Tom, I was beginning to scheme out how best to make love to you till I made you make love to me. And this is why I'm so grateful to that poor, ragged woman in the woods yonder; she did it for both of us, and so well that—here I am in yore arms again! Stoop, darling, and let me kiss that dear, lovely, scarred face. And another thing—never dare to call it 'funny-face' any more, because it's my face—from now on!"

"Oh . . . my Samantha!" he sighed, and stooped to meet the sweet passion of her embrace.

Meanwhile The Factotum was engaged upon his culinary duties, always a serious business with him, though to-day, being still haunted by memory of the witch and her long, sharp knife, he glanced up and around very frequently, in dire expectation of seeing her again. He had finished peeling the potatoes and was about to begin upon the carrots and onions when he started violently to a sound nearby, and glancing thitherward, great was his relief when instead of creeping, ragged shape of menace, he beheld (as he later thus described to his 'Old Jacky') "a tall gent, a reglar out-and-outer, all toff from titfer to toots, leanin' on a cane wiv a gold knob and a winder-pane in his eye-'ole."

This most impressive stranger was gazing up at the ancient house of Trevore with such profound interest and for so long that Goliath at last ventured to address him:

"Hex-cuse me, sir—is there anythink you want, or as I can do for you?"

Slowly this awesome stranger turned, let fall his eyeglass to dangle on its cord, and looked down upon his small questioner with expression so unexpectedly kind that Goliath rose from his stool to touch finger to eyebrow in his horsiest but most respectful manner, enquiring as he did so:

"Can I serve ye, sir and guvnor?"

"Yes,—you may, first tell me who you are."

"I'm General Faxstotum to Mr. Tom Wade, sir, but mostly his groom; 'osses is my meat,—and me name's Goliath, tho' Mr. Wade and Mr. Mark gen'rally calls me Go, Goly, or Totum, so you can take your ch'ice, sir, and I answers to all right prompt, I do."

"Then, Totum, I desire to see your master."

"'E's hout at present, sir, but I'm expectin' him any minute—if you'll please take a seat,—'arf a mo' sir——" And away scurried Goliath, to return as speedily with a camp chair. "There y'are, sir—siddown—hif you please." The Earl did so, saying:

"Pray accept my gratitude." Goliath blinked and, having saluted the speaker with his odd little ducking bow, perched himself on the stool and began to scrape a carrot.

"Have you been long in Mr. Wade's service?"

"Pretty fair, sir—long enought never to want no other, becos there never was no Guvnor like mine—nor never will be!"

"Evidently you think highly of your master."

"'Ighly, sir? Ar, that I do, and no error! 'Igher . . . h-igher than St. Paul's, the Monnyment and Nelson's Column one atop o' t'other! An' I can tell ye this—though

'e works 'ard as a blinkin' navvy, and don't mind dirt nor don't toff up in swell duds, 'e acts and talks and looks like he h'ought to be riding in 'is own kerrige and pair—in a silk 'at an' a norchis flower in 'is button-'ole! Which I mean to say as he's a gent, 'f I ever see one, and me blinkers in pretty sharp, sir—not 'arf, they ain't!"

"Indeed!" said his hearer, smiling, "you are, I perceive, a perspicacious Totum."

"I dunno abaht that, sir," said Goliath, tossing a very pink carrot into the large black pot suspended on three stout props above the small though bright fire. "But wot I do know is as the Guvnor is the sort o' master as a real faxstotum like me can't do enough for, and I do so much for 'im . . . h-im, sir, that I dunno wot 'e'd do wivout me,—that's why he's been makin' me a bit worried lately."

"May I ask why?"

"Well, sir, it's reether private like to talk of to a stranger—or are you a h-old friend of his—like Mr. Mark is?"

"Yes, boy. I think I may justly claim to be his oldest friend."

"Right-o, sir, then I can talk open and free, becos any friend of his must be all kiff! So now I'll tell ye—wot worrits me about the Guy is that 'e don't sing no more at 'is work, not as he's much of a songster, but 'e don't,—and no more 'e don't whistle like 'e used—so merry as a bird! And 'e don't tek his feed proper neether, nor yet 'is h-ale so 'earty, nor smoke 'is old pipe like 'e did,—lights it and lets it out,—puffs, finds it's gorn dead, and cusses it very bitter! And it hain't like my Guvnor to cuss,—leastways not at 'is old pipe, it ain't. And if you ask me what's all his trouble, sir, I'll tell you in one word—woman!"

"Indeed?"

"Yessir. I b'leeve 'is poor h-eart's a-breaking, an' he's pining away for love,—like Villekins for his Dinah in the song. And you, sir, being so old—or old-ish, knows, same as I knows, as women be contrairy creeturs, don't know their h-own minds, says no for yes and yes for no, and needs to be rode on a curb, a spade-bit or bridoon, some on 'em,—like our Miss Samanthy! She's all blood and fire and proud sperrit, a lovely looker, sweet in 'er talk but so contrairy in her ways she's got me poor Guvnor ditched and flummoxed com-plete,—not 'arf she ain't!"

"I am then to understand your master is hopelessly in love with this lady?"

"That's right, sir,—over his ears, up to his blinkers, fair mopin' for 'er he is, and no h-error. So I been wondering if I didn't ought to take her in 'and,—gentle 'er, manage 'er and break 'er in ready for double-'arness. Wot's your advice, sir, please?"

"That depends upon how you propose to make such attempt."

"Easy's kiss me 'and, sir. 'Miss,' I'd say, 'ho, Miss Samanthy, here's me Guvnor

saved your life, shed 'is blood for ye, and now going into a perishing pine for ye and dumb as a blinkin' oyster, miss! So me, being his faxstotum faithful and true, here's me to speak on 'is be'arf and arst you plain and p'inted,—'ow abaht it? Are you a-going to let Mister Tom git over at the knees and fair flounder till 'e's only fit for the knacker's yard—and all for want of an 'elping h-and? So if you love 'im like as I know you do, why not tip him the wink, Miss Samanthy?' I'd say."

"But, my boy," enquired the Earl, turning to glance towards the old house with eyes a-twinkle with merriment, "why are you so very sure?"

"Becos', sir, when we all thought as 'e was dying, she used to sigh and sob and weep 'eavens 'ard, hidden in the little summer-'ouse where me and Mr. Mark did our praying."

"Prayed for him, did you, Totum?"

"Ar, that we did, sir, and it worked, not 'arf! So one night when she was there all alone and sobbin' fit to break y'r 'eart, I goes to her and I says, 'Miss Samanthy,' I says, 'you love my Guv same as we all do—don'tcher, miss?' And, sir, she gives a big sob and 'Ah, Goly,' says she, 'more, I loves him far more than anybody, more than I ever knew till now that 'e's a-dying!' 'Miss Samanthy,' says I, 'Mr. Mark and me has prayed as 'e'll live, and 'e ain't dead yet, so you, miss 'stead o' sobbing, say some prayers, too, and he won't do no dying, not 'im, you can lay your shirt on it,' I says. Then I leaves her to it, sobbin' 'arder than ever. But arter a bit I goes back jest to see as she's all kiff—and there she is—on 'er knees—in the moonlight prayin' away like a lovely h-angel, sir. So that's 'ow I know! So now—wot abaht it, sir? Wot's your adv—Cor luv a duck—there she comes, and me Master Tom along of 'er!"

And there they were, indeed, walking very slowly and very, very close together, with eyes only for each other.

The Earl arose and fixed his eyeglass, and, leaning gracefully upon his cane, watched them approach.

Thus Tom suddenly espying the Earl's stately form, stood as instantly still and mute, gazing at the baleful glitter of that monocle that swept him from tousled, capless head to dusty shoes and up again to focus itself upon the livid scar that disfigured his none too handsome face—or so it seemed to Tom.

"My lord . . . Sir . . . Sir," he stammered.

"Godfather!" cried Samantha, joyfully, and sped to kiss and cling him in her arms and be as warmly embraced.

"So, my child," said he, "you bring me this Tom Wade fellow?"

"Yes,—so just what do you think of him?"

Once again the Earl surveyed his son much as if he had been the sorry offspring of someone else; perceiving which cold scrutiny Samantha demanded, flushing hotly:

"Well, my Lord Earl? And don't look at him like he was something the dog had brought in! So I'm asking you again,—what about him? Well?"

"My dear, I wonder! For this Wade person exhibits such a—rough-seeming he might be a common fo'c'sle-jack, a carpenter or groom—and I may add, a recently sorely-battered and discomfited bruiser."

"Say now," cried Samantha, "if it's my petting-mark you're meaning, just see what I think of it!" And speaking, with swift, lithe movement, she turned, pressed her lips to Tom's jagged scar, then drawing his ready arm about her waist, fronted the Earl, dimpled chin aloft, bright eyes wide and challenging as she demanded:

"So now, my Lord Earl, what d'you say?"

The gold-knobbed cane fell to lie unheeded as with a certain deliberation the Earl reached out a hand to each.

"Orrington," said he, "Justin . . . son Tom, I am proud of you—that notwithstanding your 'too evident paucity of charm'—this was the phrase, I believe, —and despite other handicaps and short-comings, you have contrived to win a treasure beyond all computation,—for yourself a beautiful wife and for me a daughter I can love and honour for her sweet frankness of mind and valiance of soul."

"Oh . . . you Blessedness!" murmured Samantha.

"Father!" said Tom.

So together they went to him, clasping those outstretched, appealing hands,—while The Factotum sat open-mouthed, a half-peeled onion in nerveless fist.

CHAPTER XXXIX

TELLS HOW THE EARL PLEADED, AND ALL IN VAIN

MRS. PENHALLO was tying on her bonnet with hands so tremulous that they made a fumbling business of it while her old servant, this Martha who had nursed and cherished her childish sorrows, strove to comfort her now:

"There, there, my dearie, never look so pale,—like a poor, pretty ghost you be, I declare! And what though your lord husband do be here-along, he can't do aught to trouble or hurt 'ee any more! So don't ee take on so, my precious, don't ee now!"

"Did John bring the trap, Martha?"

"Iss, iss,—waitin' to door it be."

"You put in my bag and the bundle?"

"Iss, my lamb, I did so,—all as you'll need till your old Martha can be along to ee. But 'tis fullish to be in such rare taking, because of your husband-earl."

"He is not my . . . husband! Oh, never, never again! So don't, don't say it, Martha!"

"Very well, my lovey. Only 'tisn't like you to run away from anything or anybody nowadays. Can't be as you'm afeerd of him?"

"No, Martha,—no—of course not! Only I will—not—see him! No, I couldn't bear it."

"And why not, lovey? 'Tisn't because,—it can't be as you—love him yet?"

"No, no! I hate him—the sight, the very sound of him! I detest even the mere—thought of him!"

"Doo ee now, my precious? And sometimes, now and again, I've thought—so different."

"Where are my driving gloves? Oh, here! Good-bye, Martha! Should my Tom, or Samantha—or anyone ask for me, say I'm away on a visit,—that you don't know when I shall return, and don't mention where I am—promise, Martha—and remember, oh, remember—not a word—to anyone!"

"Iss, iss, my dearie! And I'll be along to ee very soon."

"Then kiss me, Martha, and not a word—to anyone!"

"Nary a single one, my precious love! Now if you must and will go—off with ee to get there afore night ketches ee,—though you don't belong to go."

"I must, Martha. Oh, I must!"

"Then the dear Lord go with ee, now and ever." So saying, old Martha opened the cottage door and stood shaking her head to see with what nervous haste her loved mistress sped to the gate, there to pause glancing fearfully about before venturing another step.

"My poor, frighted lamb!" she sighed as, like terrified creature, her mistress climbed swiftly into the trap, snatched whip and reins, flicked old Robin to his best speed and rumbled away through the glowing sunset.

But scarcely was she on the open road beyond the village than out from shadowy hedge stepped a tall, commanding figure,—and there barring her way stood the man from whom she fled, whose mere sight checked her breath for the moment, robbing her of all strength so that she could neither speak nor move; and while she crouched there dumbly inert and helpless, he grasped old Robin's bridle.

And now ensued, for her at least, a long and dreadful moment; unable still to move or speak she watched him bare his head, saw his black hair streaked with silver, his leanly-handsome features lined and aged by more than years . . . So for a while they gazed upon each other, this husband and wife, and ever she crouched there, silent and motionless, waiting for, yet dreading to hear him speak.

"Janice . . . forgive . . . forgive me!"

His voice at last! And yet—could it be his, so ineffably gentle, so broken and dreadfully humble? She must not listen.

"Janice!"

"Let me—go!" she gasped, breaking the spell that had thralled her. "Let me go!"

"Not until you have allowed me to speak."

"No!" she panted. "No! I will not! Loose the bridle . . . stand away!"

"Not until you have heard me——"

"Must I . . . strike you?"

"If you will."

Blindly she smote, yet vainly—for he never moved, only he said in that same dreadfully humble voice:

"Now will you be merciful and in justice hear me plead?"

"Justice?" she cried. "No and no! It is I plead God's justice on you! Ah, you—that in your hateful, cold arrogance drove your girl-wife to flight—to suicide, and the murder of her unborn child."

"God in heaven!" he exclaimed, recoiling and raising both hands now as if to ward a blow. "What . . . what are you saying?"

"Truth, my lord, the shameful, ghastly truth! But for Sir Marcus, such would have been her miserable end—your lady wife, my lord! But Mark caught her on the very brink of destruction, his kind, strong arms lifted her from death and despair, his angel mother was her consolation. Then her child was born, her baby son, to be her only joy and comfort until—you stole him from her . . . her little son . . . her babe whose tiny fingers were round her heart. So when you took her baby . . . her heart went with him. . . . And now—you plead forgiveness! So she was desolate—never, ah never, again to feel the cling of her baby's little hands! Never to know the joy of cherishing his boyish hurts! Never to be blessed in comforting her big son's troubles! Never to find comfort and rest, at last, in the strength of his manhood—until, and such little while ago, I found him! And now you are driving me away to loneliness yet again! And in this same hour you dare plead my forgiveness! No, my lord, you ask the impossible! There can be no forgiveness for the cruelty that killed your too-young wife and left in her stead this embittered woman who detests my Lord Wade-

Orrington so fervently that the mere sight and sound of him is abhorrent. Now, be pleased to let me go."

"There is . . . no need!" he answered, brokenly, and with bowed head. "It is I . . . will go . . . in very little while . . . never to pain or trouble your sight again. As for . . . Justin . . . our son, I resign him to your love . . . he was always more your child than mine . . . and God forbid I should ever part you again. . . . Now go back I beg, return to your cottage with the assurance that you . . . have seen . . . the last of me!"

Taking the bridle again, he backed and turned old Robin to face the way home; which done, this husband and wife neither spoke nor looked at each other, then at last, he said:

"Because this must be our final parting, will you . . . can you . . . in mercy, spare me one kind word?"

Now could she only have known the blessed relief of tears, their warm gush might have melted her frost-bound heart; but the desolation of years had sealed this fount of mercy, and now stifled all generous impulse.

So the word of kindness remained unspoken; instead, she tightened her grasp upon the reins and said in voice bitter as her look:

"I leave you to the mercy of God."

And thus they parted.

CHAPTER XL

THE CURSE OF OLD TREVORE

LONG after old Robin had trundled out of sight and all sound of his going died away, the Earl stood motionless, his gaze once again upon the vague distance where the sun was sinking in a fiery splendour red as blood. So lost was he in grievous thought and painful memories that he saw and heard nothing of one who now came hastening towards him,—a man this, whose pale, drawn features were haggard with something far more than weariness:

"Gawain,—thank God I've found you!"

The Earl started, turned, then reached out both hands with an eagerness very strange in him; now looking into this deeply-troubled face, he set aside his own grief to enquire:

"Marcus, my dear fellow! Mark—what is it?"

"Tamsin . . . my poor, mad wife! There was a fire at the asylum, and in the

confusion she got away . . . and with a knife! And, Gawain, as you'll remember,—she is a . . . homicidal maniac! She escaped three weeks and two days ago, and has evaded all pursuit . . . she is a deadly menace wandering God only knows where. I've hardly slept . . . I've been upon the road day and night . . . on horseback, the railway and afoot. I've traversed half southern England, Gawain."

"My poor Mark!" he sighed, slipping comforting hand within his friend's arm.

"I seem to be in a waking nightmare, Gawain,—the thought of that knife! Ah, Gawain, in town and village, highroad and by-lane I've questioned all I met and—nothing,—no word of any such miserable wanderer until . . . nine days ago, in Winchester, I heard some vague tale of a woman vagrant who had stolen a loaf, been chased, but had escaped in the woods . . . Six days since, I had news of a wild gipsy woman who had terrified some village children, and Gawain—on the road this side of Exeter!"

"I see!" murmured the Earl. "If this is the same poor creature she is travelling westwards."

"And Tamsin is Cornish, Gawain, born at Veryan or Buryan . . . somewhere in this neighbourhood! So here am I hoping and praying I may meet her before she can use that knife."

"The poor, demented soul!" murmured the Earl. "She would naturally come wandering back to the scene of her happier youth. . . ."

Conversing thus, they had walked on, heedless of direction, until, at last, and as by common consent, they halted—for there, rising ghostly amid deepening gloom, was the aged House of Trevore.

"Strange!" sighed the Earl, standing to gaze. "And very strange!"

"How so, Gawain?"

"That by no volition of my own I should find myself here again,—here, Mark, where I knew my greatest happiness and . . . bitterest grief . . . except one! Come, let us go."

So on they strolled again, the Earl striving how best he might comfort this, his lifelong friend. Thus, haphazard, they went, until in a place of thickets that had once been a corner of wide, park-like gardens, they espied a fallen tree, and here they sat together.

"Now, Marcus," said the Earl, "dear old fellow, endeavour to forget your anxieties a while, this haunting trouble."

"But, Gawain, how, in God's name, may I?"

"By listening to mine! Mark, I journeyed into Cornwall with the fond . . . the desperate hope that I might find my wife."

"You knew that she was here then, Gawain?"

"Of course. This is why I sent Justin here to Trevore!"

"And of course you found her, as did he."

"No, Mark, no. I found—only Mrs. Penhallo."

"Yes, but she——"

"Mrs. Penhallo showed me how vain, how impossible, was any hope of reconciliation with my wife."

"Is it then quite hopeless, Gawain?"

"Yes, old friend. My future must be one of loneliness and—work."

"This," sighed Mark, "this grieves me bitterly, very bitterly, because I, too, had hoped this story would have . . . a happy ending."

"The Happy Ending!" repeated the Earl, wistfully. "Who is worthy such blessedness? Very few of us, Mark, I fear."

"Yet, Gawain, happiness is the birthright of every man."

"So I believe, Marcus, and yet how many of us, so believing, hazard this birthright for stern duty's sake, or ambition, or less worthy objects? However, as for me, I return to London very soon, to-morrow probably, and shall go abroad. So now, Mark, because this is our Farewell, you must be informed that I learned from Mrs. Penhallo how you saved my young countess . . . my poor, mistaken girl-wife from suicide and the . . . killing of her unborn child . . . my son and heir. By you, to-day, they live . . . because of you Justin is alive to carry on the name! Marcus, our long association, the dangers and difficulties we shared and surmounted, these made us friends long since. . . . To-day this news, this act of yours . . . makes us brothers. In my years of life to come, be they few or many, my love and gratitude will be yours . . . and . . ." here, with a certain deliberation, the Earl arose and made a long unhurried stride in front of Mark, saying as he did so, "to death, old friend, and beyond the mystery that——"

A sudden turmoil amid the leafage nearby, a wild, inhuman cry, a flicker of steel . . . and, grasping the knife that had pierced him, the Earl fell back a step.

"Poor soul . . . !" he murmured.

Then madness, in its misery and rags, turned and fled, screaming,—away through the shadows to mount the old sea-wall, stand there poised a moment, outlined against a sea glorious with sunset, then uttering another shrill, wailing cry, plunged over and down—to silence.

Now, drawing forth that murderous steel, the Earl loosed it from failing grasp, saying faintly as he did so:

"Is this . . . God's vengeance upon me, or . . . only . . . the Curse of Trevore?"

Then he reeled, and would have fallen—but the mighty arms of Friendship supported, lifted and bore him away.

CHAPTER XLI

HOW, AFTER GRIEVOUS NIGHT, CAME DAWN AND HOPE

"NO, Martha," said Mrs. Penhallo, walking restlessly to and fro in the dainty parlour of her cottage, "I cannot eat or drink—yet."

"Just this nice cup o' tea, now, dearie-love, it'll soothe ee."

"No, it would choke me. Oh, Martha, he was altered . . . so strangely humble . . . so gentle . . . he looked at me like a child in pain! And, oh, God forgive me, I—struck him!"

"And serve him right! So you belonged to, my lamb, for all he made you suffer."

"Yes, but that all seems so very long ago . . . an evil dream. . . . To-day he pleaded with me . . . and I would not listen! I refused to hear him . . . and now—— Oh, Martha!"

"Ay," murmured her old nurse, distressfully. "Now, my precious, 'tis as I've thought all these years, ah—and feared,—ee do love him. 'Spite of all, ee do love him—even yet!"

"No, no! God forbid—not that! It is only because to-day he appeared so changed . . . so very much as I've hoped and dreamed he might really be. . . . Yet I would not let him speak . . . I would not hear. . . . And . . . I struck him!"

"Well, never grieve, dearie—no! Sup this nice cup o'——"

"Hush, Martha! Oh—didn't you hear something?"

"Nay, what should I hear?"

"A cry . . . out there in the shadows! A voice! . . . calling from the lane . . . listen! There,—ah, don't you hear?"

"Why, yes, I fancy as I did."

"There it is again! It sounded like Mark's voice . . . but so hoarse and faint! And, besides, he is away." So saying she opened the door and stood peering fearfully into the ever-deepening shadows of night from which, even as she stood there gazing wide-eyed and shivering with dread of unimaginable evils, a breathless voice, nearer now, cried her name. . . .

"Oh, God in heaven!" she whispered.

"Ay! Ay!" gasped old Martha, "'tis him sure."

"Yes, Martha, it is Mark! Something dreadful has happened . . . he must be hurt! Go, put on the kettle." Out from candlelight into a fragrant dusk she stepped, and thus presently espied a tall form stooped beneath some heavy burden.

"Mark!" she cried. "Oh, Mark, is it you? What has happened . . . who is it, Mark—who?"

And his reply came to her in painful gasps:

"Gawain . . . stabbed . . . took the blow meant for me. Thought I should . . . never get here. Pray God I'm . . . in time. . . ."

Thus, panting and reeling with fatigue, Mark stumbled indoors, and laid his inert burden upon the couch, a silent, pallid, dreadfully be-dabbled shape, so like death that, sinking wearily upon his knees, he groaned, while old Martha wrung her hands and whimpered; Mrs. Penhallo did neither, but her ready hands were very gentle, very quick and deft in their ministry. . . .

In the ensuing direly-busy hours it was she who stood to aid the grave-faced doctor, forestalling his every want, alert of mind, swift of hand and foot, yet silent for the most part, and with never a tear.

Merrion church clock was chiming the hour when Doctor Chenoweth, having done all he might, stood beside the bed, looking down upon his scarce-breathing patient.

"A nasty business, Mrs. Penhallo!" said he, shaking his head. "I say quite tragic, ma'm!"

"Yes, doctor . . . Will he die?"

"Is he a friend of yours, ma'm?"

"Oh, no! A stranger—almost."

"Aha, you act the Good Samaritan—as usual."

"Must he die?" she enquired, and in the same toneless voice.

"Hard to say, ma'm. The knife, as I showed you, was deflected by the sternum, but in its oblique course, touched the lung, hence some small internal haemorrhage." Doctor Chenoweth pursed his lips and shook his head. "'Twill be touch and go, Mrs. Pen. Touch and go! Our patient is fairly well on in years though remarkably well preserved, vigorous and constitutionally sound, ma'm. Whether he lives or dies will depend largely upon himself."

"You mean his determination not to die—his will to live?"

"Precisely, ma'm! Mind can sometimes will Body to leap back from the very brink of dissolution, from death to life—or vice versa. Mind is ever the predominant factor, ha, yes! However, he will do for the present, we can do no more. Should he be alive at dawn, I think,—I say I firmly believe he may have great chance of

recovery. So you may expect me very early to-morrow morning, Mrs. Pen . . . Oh, by the way, it seems the miserable creature who struck the blow—is dead, ma'm. Thomas Penhaligon, who was fishing off Trevore, heard her scream, saw her plunge, rowed inshore and recovered the body. Which is perhaps as well for all concerned. All right, ma'm, I'll let myself out, bide you and watch for the dawn,—with this new day will come new life—or death."

When Doctor Chenoweth had gone, taking Mark with him, old Martha, hearing no sound of movement from the sick-chamber, stole upstairs and, peeping round the edge of silently-opened door, beheld her mistress standing motionless beside the bed, gazing down upon this stricken man with eyes whose wide, bright gaze no tear, it seemed, would ever soften; sighing, old Martha crept away, and in her sigh a prayer.

Merrion clock was striking the hour of midnight when once again old Martha ascended the stair to tap, open door and say in wheedling murmur:

"Come now, my precious, go lay you down a little while and leave me to watch, do ee now!"

"No, Martha, I must not leave him, for with the dawn he is to wake and live, or ——" The whispering voice broke to sudden agonized sob, the wide, bright eyes were misted and gentled by swift tears, a warm gush of selfless pity that melted icy pride at last and swept it utterly away.

"Oh, child," Martha whispered, "is it for him ee do weep—at last?"

"Yes . . . yes! For him. Oh, Martha, I . . . cannot bear to . . . lose him again!"

"Ah, then," sighed old Martha folding her hands reverently, "I'll leave him to your love and the dear Lord's mercy."

So all night long this gentle, anxious woman watched, talked to and prayed for this man who lay all unheeding, motionless, scarce breathing, in the very shadow of death; yet still she watched, murmuring words of love and comfort to ears that heard not, touching the dark head that stirred not, and praying to the merciful God in whom she confided. . . . Thus the long hours passed, until beyond the curtained, open lattice was a pale light, a growing radiance,—from dewy fragrance of the garden a bird chirped drowsily; and with the dawn of this new day came answer to her prayerful supplications,—the head upon its pillow stirred feebly, the eyes opened, and from between pallid lips stole a faint whisper:

"My . . . beloved . . . wife."

"Gawain!" she breathed. "Yes . . . yes, the wife who loves you . . . has loved you through . . . all the long years . . . and always must and will. So, dear husband, come back . . . to life and my undying love! Oh, now God of my belief, Almighty

Father . . . let him be truly mine at last! Gawain, dear husband, live . . . live for me. . .” The pale lips smiled, the faint voice answered breathlessly:

“By God . . . I . . . will.”

CHAPTER XLII

IN WHICH IS BRIEF MENTION OF ‘THE PIPING TIMES’

MEETING his mother in the garden, Tom slipped his arm about her to enquire in hushed accents and with anxious up-glance at a certain open window above them:

“How is he this morning?”

“Better,” she answered, with an added tenderness in voice and look, “so much better that he actually talks of getting up!”

“Then he is really and truly out of danger at last?”

“Yes, thank God! Every hour he grows stronger.”

“Splendid!” exclaimed Tom. “But, mother, my dear, this has been a dashed frightfully strenuous three weeks for you.”

“But . . . very wonderful also, Tom.”

“We should have had trained nurses, day and night, and so on, I ought to have insisted——”

“No, Tom, I couldn’t have endured strangers about him.”

“But I mean to say you must be fagged out.”

“Oh, no, dear. You see I was nursing your father—and my husband! Besides, there was Amanda to help me, bless her—she’s a grand woman, Tom! And of course our Samantha . . . Do I look fagged?” she enquired, turning from her husband’s window to smile up at her tall son. “Do I now?”

“No, by Jupiter, you certainly do not! A trifle slimmer, perhaps, but otherwise—marvellous parent, I swear by all that’s wonderful, you look—younger!”

“By all that’s wonderful!” she repeated softly. “Yes, it has been wonderful, Tom dear, more than I can ever tell . . . Through the mists of all the wasted years my love has come back to me, greater, nobler, gentler even than I hoped or dreamed.”

“Grand!” murmured Tom, with a reverent fervour, making this single, trite word so profoundly eloquent that his mother reached up her arms and drew him to her lips, saying:

“Dear son, you pleaded for him when I refused to hear! You found and gave me

his long-lost letter that I shall treasure to my dying day! You and Samantha schemed for our reunion,—yes, my darling, we know all about it, he and I. And so if through you we are to make our lives a—no—'the' happy ending, it will be the happier because of you who never lost faith in our love, and of Samantha, who schemed and plotted for it. My gracious, there's Merrion church clock striking eleven, and your dear father waiting to see you. Come!"

So indoors and upstairs they went where lay their invalid, pale, thin and feeble, yet whose aquiline features still held their old look of serenely-assured dominance, though tempered now by a yearning tenderness in the curve of shapely mouth, the beam of long-lashed eyes, more especially when those eyes rested upon the slender, white-haired woman who leaned to the close embrace of his son's long arm.

"Sir!" said Tom. "Father!"

"Yes, my son, let it be 'father,' this is the nobler word. To-day, Justin, you behold me no longer the helpless invalid but a sturdy convalescent, determined on a most rapid recovery and—a new life, thanks to the angel in your embrace!"

"This!" nodded Tom, tightening his clasp. "This mother of mine! This amazing parent who grows ever younger and more lovely."

"Tom!" exclaimed the angel, with rather shaky laugh. "How ridiculous!"

"Justin," said his father, "or should it be 'Tom'?"

"Well, sir, you'll notice she calls me Tom."

"Then 'Tom' it shall be," quoth the Earl, with his old air of grand finality. "And, Tom, my son, you are perfectly right, our angel is indeed younger and lovelier."

"And here, sir—and father," said Tom, "allow me to thank you most sincerely for blessing and honouring me with such a mother."

"Oh, good gracious!" she exclaimed. "If you are going to flatter me in such awful, stately manner I shall fly to my batter pudding—one I am making for your lordship's nobility. And there's your beef-tea—and . . . Oh, my word, I'm forgetting your medicine! Here now, Gawain, take it—this moment."

"Sweetheart . . . must I?"

"Beloved, you certainly must—and shall! So open your mouth, like an obedient lord and husband—come!" The Earl moaned, glanced up helplessly at smiling Tom, screwed up his eyes and obeyed . . . And then from the garden below the open lattice, rose a shrill, short hoot; at which sound the Earl smiled, saying:

"Amanda!"

"Yes, dear. She is going to show me how to—what she calls 'broil' a fowl à la Americaine." Kissing her hand to father and son, wife and mother sped lightly away.

"Tom," said the Earl, gravely, "the woman who gave you life is become the very

life of me! The steel of that poor, mad creature, instead of giving me death, has restored me to a fuller, truer living than I have ever known. . . . And now, Tom, of yourself—so, first I must say how blest I have been in the devotion of my nurses, for besides your wonderful mother there is Amanda, a strange, extremely lovable person, she and I are become great friends. And then, my son, you must know I have fallen in love with your Samantha."

"Cheers!" exclaimed Tom. "Glad to know it, father,—and small wonder, for she is herself, and nobody on earth like her!"

"Quite so, Tom. Hence you are an amazingly fortunate fellow and again I congratulate you upon winning so much beauty united to such strength of character."

"Thanks, father! And remembering how she was your choice I'm no end grateful that you selected such a wife for me, and, I mean to say,—bringing it off in spite of me,—what I mean is,—working the oracle and what not so dexterously—though you always do, of course. However, pray know I am deeply and most truly grateful."

"Have you discussed the approximate date of your wedding?"

"Frequently, sir. My idea is—just as soon as possible."

"And what says Samantha?"

"Rather inclined to jib, sir,—won't fix a date."

"Wise child! It must be deferred, of course, until I am up and about again. The wedding of my son must be a function!"

"Good lord, sir! Sounds somewhat frightful. I mean to say,—overwhelming, and so forth!"

"Ha! Does it, Justin?" demanded the Earl, groping feebly for his eyeglass. "This is the—would you say 'worst' of being son of mine. All London will be there, and possibly Royalty."

"Sir! Oh, I say!" gasped Tom, blenching. "This would be the ab-solute, dashed limit . . . quite awful!"

"Possibly to—Tom Wade," said the Earl, fixing his monocle and glaring up at his dismayed son. "But you are—my heir, Justin."

"But, sir! Oh, father, why not a registrar's office and——"

"Impossible, Justin! Not to be thought of for a moment."

"Well then, sir, why not a private affair,—just the family, and so on?"

"Because you are Viscount Wade-Orrington."

"But, father, surely a fellow's marriage is strictly a private business and——"

"For those differently circumstanced, perhaps, but not for us, who have and must observe certain obligations."

"Ah!" sighed Tom, wincing to the glitter of that eyeglass. "The old *noblesse oblige* business, sir?"

"Precisely, Justin!" The eyeglass dropped, and once again father smiled up at son, saying in quite altered tone: "And now, Tom, I have two missions for you, one in London and one in Sussex."

"Oh, really, sir?" sighed Tom, rather dismally.

"In London you will see Metcalf, my man of affairs, in regard to certain business matters of which I shall supply you with written information. You will act upon your own judgment and initiative, and I dare to think, wisely. Then, as you know, I am usually home in Sussex for the harvest to meet my tenantry; this year you must represent me."

"Do I have to make a speech, sir?"

"Of course, my son. You can make it short as you will, but—speak from your heart."

"I'll do my best, father. When must I go?"

"To-day or to-morrow."

"Very well, sir. I'll go to-day—the sooner I'm off, the sooner I shall return."

Thus it befell that in very few hours the train was bearing Tom Londonwards. Reaching the great town-house in due season, the first thing he did was to pen a long letter to Samantha, a moving, very appealing letter, written from his very heart, and therefore a letter that won her to such purpose as shall appear in the next and final chapter of this sentimental tale of less eventful, far less glorious though much happier world than this of ours, wherein death from the skies may smite us at any moment of the day or night, yet a world which, we hope and pray, shall roll on with us through the long night of brutal war, of suffering, blood and travail, out into an ever-brighter day and truer, deeper happiness than this old Earth has ever known.

Then, once again, instead of hateful battle-roar, shall be 'The Piping Times' of blessed peace.

CHAPTER XLIII

WHICH, BEING THE LAST, IS A CHAPTER OF PARTS

MISS AMANDA SHOLES had been busied all the morning concocting certain American dainties and delicacies warranted to tempt the feeble appetite of any invalid,—and more especially one so far advanced upon the highroad to recovery,—

thus it was afternoon when, bearing a capacious basket, she set out from Penruan House upon this errand of mercy; but in the garden was accosted by Mr. Bates, who, grasping a hoe in one hand, touched his hat with the other, saying:

"Arternoon, ma'm. I do 'ear tell as 'ow the Earl, pore gen'leman, ain't dead yet?"

"Eh? Dead? Now what gol-darned bug's biting you, Bates? I'll say he isn't dead,—nossir, not on yore life."

Mr. Bates shook his head ominously, and uttered sound like a groan.

"Why, then, ma'm," he sighed, "the curse ain't worked on him proper, not yet—but——"

"Jumping rattlers, man! What curse?"

"The black and bloodsome curse of old Trevore, ma'm! Ah, the death curse as I warned him agin the very first hower as we met."

"Bates, yuh're batty! I guess yuh've been chewing locoweed and it's shore got yore intellects all snarled up with yore blood and curses! Yessir! Let me tell yuh the Earl and his Coun-tess have gotten Old Man Death backed up into a corner and there's nothing doing in his department—nossir! I'm telling yuh the Earl's strength is riz and rising, his health growing hourly and by the minute, so yore doggone curses don't cut any ice with him, and that's whatever!"

"Ar, but—wait, ma'm, only wait! This yer curse takes time to work, it do. They was sayin' in village this morning as 'ow the Earl was up and out o' bed,—but I don't b'leeve it—no."

"Well now, Mister Killjoy, I'm telling yuh some more, so get this,—the Earl, thank our good Lord, is not only out of bed but—downstairs,—sitting in the garden. And what d'yuh say to that, I'd like to know?"

"Ma'm, I'd say as 'ow it—don't—seem—right!"

"My gracious, man! How not right?"

"Goin' agin natur' it be, ma'm, which do be like flyin' in the face o' Providence. So, I be hopin', ma'm, as you won't find the pore gen'leman is now a corpse, pale an' stiff in mortial death."

"S-snap out of it!" hissed Amanda, fiercely. "Joel Bates, yuh talk like the wrong end of a broken-winded burro, and yuh act like a gol-darned hoss-thieving, double-dealing, cross-eyed, snake-tongued, pizen-spitting——" But, staying for no more, Mr. Bates thumbed his hat, turned, and retreated in such unwonted haste that he quite forgot to hobble, leaving Amanda to glare after him ere she stalked upon her way.

At the gate of Mrs. Penhallo's cottage she paused to glance about expectantly,

but seeing no one, approached the wide-open lattice to call cheery greeting—then stood mute and still; for the invalid, this stricken man, risen so lately as by a miracle from the very threshold of death, was upon his knees embracing his nurse,—that is to say my lord the Earl was kissing his Countess.

"Ah, beloved!" sighed husband.

"My Gawain!" whispered wife . . .

"Well, well!" whispered Amanda, retiring hastily, and without a sound.

Smiling of face and silent of foot, she wandered into the pleasant garden where flowers bloomed, bees hummed and butterflies hovered; crossing trim lawn she was about to enter the bowery arbour (scene of The Factotum's and Mr. Mark's united prayers and Samantha's tears) when again she was arrested by murmur of voices, and through screening leafage her sharp eyes glimpsed two faces very close together, and therefore two very happy faces lit by eyes that saw only each other.

". . . But, Mark . . . Oh, my dearest, are you content with me . . . the long, weary years of waiting have made me so much . . . older! Oh, Mark, am I . . . all you hoped?"

"All and more, sweetheart! The years have but crowned your beauty, my Serena . . . yes, old Time has made you lovelier!"

The faces drew yet nearer, and as their lips met Amanda retired as before, with soundless precipitation whispering:

"My! My!"

Leaving her basket of dainties at the open front door, she stole to the gate, unlatched it silently, and wandered pensively down the winding, shady lane until, having turned a leafy corner, she halted suddenly for the third time, and caught her breath in sheer astonishment to behold a resplendent young gentleman, expensively attired from gleaming silk hat to glistening patent leather shoes, embracing a beautiful woman who, quite heedless of rich silks, dainty laces and feathered bonnet, was yielding herself to his fervent kisses with a whole-hearted though graceful abandonment.

"Oh, my dear," she was sighing, and rather breathlessly, "you won't ever . . . be tired of kissing me . . . will you, Tom?"

"Rather not!" he replied. "Not on your life . . . or in your life . . . or after life . . . or ever."

"I'll be gol-darned!" exclaimed Amanda, folding her long arms and surveying them beneath raised brows. "Kisses here, kisses there,—wherever I go—kisses!"

Samantha sat up and straightened her very coquettish bonnet, Tom removed his gleaming headgear with a flourish, and both smiled a glad welcome, yet before either

could speak——

"Dear land of my fathers!" quoth Amanda. "What's come to everybody?"

"Mandy!" cried Samantha, but with strange, new shyness. "Oh, Mandy!"

"Shore it's me, and I'm asking—is this a general, free-for-all kissing bee or what?"

"Yes, by Jingo!" laughed Tom, and in that instant was afoot, then the arms in his natty morning (or cutaway) coat had seized Amanda powerfully, lifted her tenderly, and he had kissed her heartily.

"Jee-hoshophat!" she gasped. "Tom, yuh are supposed to be in London, how come yuh're not?"

"Because I returned to-day, Mandy. . . . Where shall I put her, dearest?"

"Right here!" answered Samantha, patting the grass beside her with delicately gloved hand. "Sit her right here between us, Tom." And when he had so done: "Oh, Mandy darling!" she murmured, kissing her in turn. "Mandy, my own dear——"

"Hold on instanter, miss, and right there!" said Amanda, becoming more wild-western than usual. "I'm shore honing to get the hang o' things, and first off—why yuh're all dolled up like as if for some festa or weddin',—will ye tell me that, miss?"

"Oh, Mandy, that's just it,—I'm not!"

"Not what?"

"A miss."

"Eh,—then what in reason are ye?"

"A 'Mrs.' No, a viscountess."

"Say now, just what are yuh tellin' me?"

"The solemn truth, Mandy. Tom and I were married this morning."

"Special license and what not," Tom explained. "So, Amanda, please congratulate me . . . if you can. Will you?"

Miss Amanda opened her mouth, closed it firmly, untied the strings of her bonnet and cast it sky-wards, saying as she did so:

"Eu-reeka!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Samantha, kissing her nearest cheek. "Are you so glad of it?"

"Honeybunch," replied Amanda, accepting her bonnet from Tom, who had promptly retrieved it, "isn't this Tom the husband I'd hand-picked for yuh? Am I glad? I'll say I'm glad—and then some."

"Oh, joy!" murmured Samantha, cuddling to her. "And now you happen along just when we most need you."

"Is—that—so?" drawled Amanda, glancing from one radiant face to the other. "From the way yuh were acting when I done did happen along, I kinda suspicioned

all yuh wanted was each other."

"So we do, Mandy, that's why when Tom wrote from London, asking me—no, begging me——"

"And imploring!" added Tom.

"Asking, begging, beseeching and imploring me to let him marry me secretly and right soon—I wrote back 'yes' . . . and so . . . well, here we are, Mandy, man and wife, an old married couple."

"Since twelve o'clock this morning!" added Tom. "So now, Mandy, dear friend, be first to give us your blessing, if you feel you can. . . . Will you?"

"Why shore I can—and do, right here and now, with all my heart! May the kind Lord have yuh in His keeping to love and bless each other more and more—from now on. So, come, kiss me—the both of ye. . . . Jee-willikins, this shore is my kissing day—yes, siree! . . . And now, Tom, my lord vis-count, let me give yuh doo warning how yuh have taken to yore buzzom this two-laiged hunk o' worry called Samanthy. By Grab, she's rose my ha'r, and dander, too, many a time with her wild bullheadedness till I redooced her by open-handed treatment. But my spanking days are over, and she was getting beyond me! Howandever, you're a right he-male-man, a reg'lar feller, with a good big hand, which if used and applied when and where needed——"

"Say now, Mandy Sholes, just you cut that right out,—inflaming my . . . my husband against . . . his poor wife! He doesn't need any encouragement, no—ma'm! Instead, think mighty hard and get real busy to advise us, because when you came along, Tom and I were trying to figure out just how best to break the noos to the folks—especially the Earl!"

"By George and Jove, yes!" said Tom, hitching his chin nervously above the high, starched collar, rigid as iron, that prisoned his brawny throat. "You see, Mandy, he insisted our wedding must be a dashed function,—Royalty, nobs, bigwigs and what-nots,—a perfectly ghastly business,—he made an absolute point of it and . . . well . . . my respected sire is not a very comfortable sort of person to cross or disobey, Amanda. Oh, rather not!"

"And I can shore believe it!" she nodded. "And you certainly have. So what now?"

"You!" nodded Samantha. "Just you, Mandy! Here's where Tom and I sit back and leave him to you."

"Ho! And why me, wherefore pick on me?"

"Because you're Mandy, and have gotten the Earl so he's ready to eat out of yore hand,—that's why I'm asking you. So you will, Mandy, won't you, for Tom's

sake—and mine?"

Miss Amanda rose abruptly, tied her bonnet-strings with a series of fierce jerks and answered in her harshest accents:

"Oh, I guesso! On condition yuh meet me at the cottage in an hour—sharp, and when yuh do, act just like I tell yuh! Now cut out the gratitood and no more kissing—not yet, anyway. An hour sharp remember!" So saying, Miss Amanda turned and left them to each other.

ii

In sunny garden Mrs. Penhallo, or rather Janice, Countess of Wade-Orrington, was shelling peas. She was seated close beside an open lattice, through which she could watch over her Beloved Invalid who, meekly submissive, had allowed himself to be 'tucked up' on the couch for his afternoon doze; yet whenever she glanced at him, which was very often, it was to see him gazing at her with look of such ineffable yearning that her pale cheek flushed, her eyes became misted, and the pod in her fingers scattered its contents broadcast.

"Oh, Gawain," she murmured, "my dear, try to sleep . . . close your eyes."

"I had rather use them," he answered, "they have been so long starved for sight of you. It was your love called and raised me up from death . . . by you I am alive."

"And the kind mercy of God!" she added, gently.

"Yes," sighed the Earl, "and by His grace I pray that we together may know the happy ending, at last, Beloved."

"Together," she repeated softly, "in this life and the next! Now close your dear eyes, sleep and grow strong for me . . . husband."

Smiling, he obeyed, and presently began to breathe deeply, then to snore gently, and his lady, shelling peas with dexterous fingers, thought this very unromantic sound the most welcome she had ever heard. Thus, seeing her old Martha approach, she laid finger on lip, whispering:

"Hush, Martha, do you hear?"

"Ay, my precious, he be a-snoring and——"

"But how beautifully sweetly, Martha!"

"Well, my lamb, I can't 'ardly call it beautiful."

"But it means life, Martha! Each time my darling sleeps he grows stronger."

"Oh, well, then, yes, my dearie, beautiful it is, ay, and sweet . . . But yonder at the door is summat sour, summat proud and hard and stiff as a poker—with a lace

parasol and in feathered bonnet, my duck!"

"Martha, whoever——"

"Ay, 'tis her, dearie, as used you so cruel years ago, Lady Justinia—her! And asking for you, my precious."

"Oh!" murmured the Countess, frowning. "Well, bid her come to me here, and warn her to be very quiet."

"Ay, dearie, as she belongs to be, ay, I'll warn her!"

So presently into the pleasant garden swept this formidable lady, be-feathered, be-bustled and furbelowed, her tall form, rather more stiffly erect than usual, shaded by a be-laced, long-hafted parasol. Now so soon as their glances met, Lady Justinia halted, black brows knit above high-bridged nose, shapely lips compressed, pointed chin outthrust. Thus for a long moment they surveyed one another; then, because she was happy, the Countess smiled, and said in her gentlest voice:

"Welcome Justinia! Speak softly because our loved man is asleep yonder, listen how sweetly he snores, bless him!"

Down went the parasol, the feathered bonnet drooped,—then, with silken rustle, Lady Justinia came hasting to sink upon her knees and look up at her welcomer with eyes whose fierceness was quenched by sudden tears.

"Oh, Janice," she whispered brokenly, "last time we met I hated . . . I cursed you . . . and now——?"

"Now all the world is changed, Justinia."

"Then . . . can you . . . will you . . . kiss me . . . to show me and . . . prove I am forgiven?"

The Countess leaned forward, scattering peas far and wide, and clasped this tearful, strangely-humble suppliant in the comfort of her arms, murmuring as she did so:

"Justinia! Oh, my dear, I was hoping for this . . . to win your affection—no—your love—at last, perhaps."

"You have . . . I do"—gasped Justinia as they clung together—"indeed I do love you."

"Naturally and of course!" said a drowsy voice, and out through the open window came the Earl's stately, though rather tousled head,—which Justinia instantly kissed and smoothed with caressing hands, whereto her brother submitted patiently, as he continued:

"Everyone loves my countess, especially her husband . . . but good Heavens, Justinia, see what you've done to our peas—all over the place!"

"Yes, my fault, Gawain. To weep so is so unusual with me . . . and so agitates

me . . . I'll pick them all up . . . every single one!"

"Then I'll come and help," said the Earl.

"No, Gawain,—no!" said his wife. "You are not to stoop on any account, not yet,—the doctor was most emphatic!"

"Very well, sweetheart, then I'll sit and read Justinia the latest letter from our Tom."

"From—whom?" demanded Justinia, dropping the peas she had just collected. "What and which Tom, pray? Gawain . . . brother . . . you do not, you cannot mean —Justin?"

"Justinia," replied the Earl, smiling, "sister, I do indeed."

"But, Gawain . . . Good gracious . . . such vulgar name! So extremely common, so dreadfully——"

"Justinia, help my wife to pick up all those peas and listen to our Tom's latest epistle, he writes rather well, and with an engaging originality of——" At this moment the wicket-gate clicked and towards them stalked Amanda at her grimmest, and therefore much like a figure of doom; but despite this forbidding aspect, the Earl hailed her gladly:

"Amanda, my dear soul,—come and meet my sister,—Justinia, behold our very good friend and one who helped your brother back to life. Come, Amanda!" So saying he would have risen to welcome her, but she stayed him with a gesture, and lifting one long and somewhat bony finger, said in hollow tone:

"Set yuh still, Gawain my lord, and—listen!"

Ensued a moment of hushed surprise, then from somewhere near by rose a shrilly dismal wailing, the tinny squeal of a whistle blown gustily and played by fumbling, uncertain fingers.

"What . . . in the world?" exclaimed the Earl. "Amanda, for mercy's sake,—what is it? That frightful noise!"

"It don't," she answered, shaking her head, "no, it don't sound so good, I'll allow, and he hasn't gotten the toon right neether, but he's doing his best."

"Who is?"

"The boy Goliath."

"But why?" enquired the Earl, smiling. "And what on earth is he trying to play?"

"All as I could remember of Mendelssohn's Wedding March, on a tin whistle. I had to sing it over to him, and me not remembering much of it, like I'm telling yuh, the boy can't be expected to play so accurate or soulful as young Or-phee-us when he tootled his lady friend out of Hades, can he?"

"No,—no, indeed!" laughed the Earl. "But, my dear Amanda, why—the

Wedding March?"

"To dooly honour blushing bride and happy groom."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Earl, groping instinctively for his eyeglass. "Pray, what do you mean to insinuate? What are you suggesting, Amanda?"

"Earl," she answered, fronting him, eye to eye, and with an added grimness, "I am preparing yuh to greet, to welcome and bless two as are one, being this day u-nited in the rosy bonds of holy wedlock and now awaiting yore bene-diction."

"Where?" demanded the Earl, glancing up and about with quick frown. "Where are they?"

"Here, sir!" answered Tom, appearing as he spoke, and saluting the company with bravado flourish of his glossy silk hat.

"Yes, here's both of us!" cried Samantha, presenting her lovely self as suddenly, to slip daintily gloved hand within her young husband's ready arm, and front all eyes, flushed of cheek but with dimpled chin uplift and resolute. "We married each other this morning in a register office . . . such a nice, old gentleman did it for us . . . in specs and a fuzzy beard. So now, Fairy-godfather, we've made you my father-in-law as well, and all we want is yore blessing."

"A . . . register office!" breathed Lady Justinia. "Odious! So sordid!"

"Yet perfectly effective, my sweet precious!" sighed her twin, Lady Serena, who, with Mark, now joined them. "Many quite nice, respectable people wed in such places, don't they, Mark?"

"They do," he answered, with ghost of a smile.

Slowly the Earl arose (and with a quite awful stateliness, thought Tom), for being afoot, my lord groped for, found, fixed his monocle and turned its baleful glitter upon his tall son and heir, who quailed instinctively, yet squared broad shoulders to meet the expected tirade and dreaded, soft-spoken reprimand; but in this fateful moment Samantha leapt to his rescue . . . swift and lithe of movement she was upon the Earl, with soft arms to clasp and softer lips beneath whose tender pressure—the eyeglass fell, to dangle ineffectually and wholly unregarded.

"Father," she murmured, "yore daughter's kissing you—there—and there! So, please won't you kiss her back, and speak a blessing upon yore own son and my ownest, dear husband . . . and his wife who loves you for being his father,—won't you, please?"

"Samantha!" said the Earl, with choking laugh. "Oh, Samantha . . . sweet witch! Tom—rascal, who can resist her? How possibly withstand such slyly—delicious, warm-hearted, truly feminine appeal?"

"Sir," replied Tom, "nothing human ever possibly could."

"And I," sighed his father, "I am ridiculously, preposterously human. So, Justin, disobedient son, while your wife honours and blesses me with her lips, do you take my hand, Tom rascal, and with it my blessing upon you both."

"Glory be!" exclaimed Amanda.

"Indeed," said the Earl, "I am becoming the perfect sentimentalist, Amanda."

"And why not?" she demanded. "Sentiment is the gen'ral u-niversal sweetener, like jam in a doughnut, it shore is!"

"Oh, but—a registrar's office!" snorted Lady Justinia, turning fiercely upon her placid-smiling twin sister. "I suppose you'll be stealing off to matrimony next?"

"Oh no, my sweet, fierce pet," answered Serena gently, "Mark and I were married a week since!"

"Gee—no!" quoth Amanda, and laughed—so unexpectedly and with such joyousness that others joined in her merriment.

iii

Tea,—that most English and pleasantest of meals (and more especially upon this day of days),—was a glad memory; and now the Earl, seated in the little, bowery arbour between his son and daughter-in-law, glanced from one radiant face to the other and enquired, casually:

"Well, Viscount, where do you and your lady propose to spend your honeymoon?"

"Why, sir," replied Tom, with air as casual and as matter of fact, "there's my place in Kent, Twyford Manor, we rather think of driving there by easy stages."

"Yes, my son, but what of to-night?"

"Eh? T-to-night, sir?" stammered Tom. "Oh, well . . . I mean to say——Ah, I see what you mean! To-night we shall stay . . . probably in Truro, it's not too far hence, I mean to say, pretty near and——"

"Trevore is nearer, Tom!"

"Sir, but . . . but Trevore——"

"Was a dismal ruin, Tom, saved by my son's hard work and loving care from complete and final destruction for sake of his then unknown mother. So to-day, Tom, it is the house she and I have had furnished in your absence, and which we, she and I, now make over to you, and the—hum—heirs of your body to have and hold in perpetuity."

"Sir . . .! Father . . .!" said Tom, and choked.

"We also, Tom, your mother and I, engaged a staff of servants, but they will not take up their duties until Monday next. Thus, should you decide to stay at Trevore, you will be alone . . . except for the man Jacky whom, with your lady wife's permission, we have placed in charge, together with your small though indefatigable, extremely general factotum—and yonder he comes with look of heavy portent and a woolly shawl, by which I deduce that your blessed mother commands me indoors before the sun sets. Aha, Tom, there is infinite joy in being reasonably bullied, tenderly henpecked, and constantly mothered by one's wife,—wait you and see." By this time The Factotum, resplendent as to hat, buttons and boots, had reached the arbour, but ere he might speak, the Earl demanded sternly, though with a twinkle in his eyes:

"Well, my lad, pray what do you want?"

The boy saluted smartly, swallowed hard, blinked and replied instantly:

"You, m'lord, sir."

"Oh, indeed?"

"Yessir, m'lord. Ye see, Mrs. Pen, her ladyship, says as how I'm to get your lordship into this yere shawl and bring y'r lordship along o' me to her ladyship afore your lordship ketches cold."

"Boy, do you think you can?"

"Ho yes, m'lord, very h-easy, sir. Y'see I'm used to h-handling an' h-harnessing h-horses, I ham, and that's why."

"So you would treat me like a horse?"

"Yessir, jess-so, m'lord,—you ducks your 'ead, I slips the shawl h-over, like an 'oss-collar, and there y'are, your lordship."

"Like this?" said the Earl, stooping.

"Yessir," answered the boy, folding the shawl about him very dexterously.

"Ha!" quoth the Earl, rising. "Goliath, you are, I believe, an efficient factotum, but—an extremely bad flute-player."

"Not a flute, m'lord, a tin-wissel. And, sir, I can do better than wot you h-heard me."

"However, my boy, no whistle was ever played to better effect! And now, Tom, Samantha," sighed the Earl, taking an arm of each, "dear my children, take me to—our mother."

Goliath had driven Pepper stablewards, and now his lord and lady stood together before the old house that was to be their home.

Evening had fallen, but the placid sea, still radiant with the after-glow of sunset, made a glory all about them while Samantha looked up at the ancient house and Tom gazed at Samantha who, with gaze still intent, spoke in her richly-soft voice:

"Oh, Tom, it all seems lovelier than ever! You remember how when I first saw the dear old place I said what a beautiful old home it was, you remember?"

"Of course," he answered, speaking softly also, "and I told you, my beloved American, that it was merely a house, and could never be a home until it had been lived and loved in."

"You didn't say 'loved in' then, my darling Englishman."

"Well, I do now, Samantha. And so, because we are going to live and love in it, don't you think you might begin by . . . kissing your husband?"

"Oh, my dear," she murmured, glancing at him with a sweet, new shyness, "not here, and not—yet. Let's wait and remember things,—like how when I was going to let the sea take me, I heard you whistling 'The British Grenadiers'—and just as my dear father used to . . . so I came up to life and—you, my Tom."

"Over the wall there!" he added, "rising from the sea, like goddess Venus."

"No, Tom, just a very unhappy girl and miserably wet."

"Dripping!" he nodded. "In clinging vesture that betrayed the perfect goddess, all the adorable shapli——"

"Oh, shucks!" said the Viscountess, though very tenderly, closing his lips with two slim fingers which he held there and kissed, of course, saying thereafter:

"In Scotland, Samantha, a husband sometimes carries his bride over the threshold of their new home, so——"

"But we're not in Scotland," said she, rather breathlessly; "besides here's Goly back again!"

"'S right, m'lady, 's me!" said their sharp young servitor. "Come f'your orders, I 'ave, m'lord."

"What orders, Go?"

"Meals, m'lord, 'specially breakfus. Wot time shall I bring you and your lady your morning teas t'morrow morning, m'lord, eight o'clock, ar past, or nine?"

"Nine will do, Goly."

"Yessir. And, please, I gotter tell you as 'e give me a fiver! Cor luv a duck, Guv —your Earl father tips me a . . . a fi'-pun note, 'e do! Cor strike a light—and another for my old Jacky!"

"Oh?" said Tom. "And where is Jacky?"

"In the kitchen, m'lord, 'ard at it a-cooking summat for your supper, and smells precious savoury, it do, sir."

"Well, cut along and tell him to take his time, we're in no hurry,—off with you."

"Yessir, immediate, m'lord, only first, hif you please lemme say as how, now as you're married at last and all's serene, I want to say as I hope you'll make each other as h-happy as wot you've made me and my old Jacky, and that's more than I know how to say. . . . Oh, blimey, not 'arf, it ain't! Only, Guv, I 'ope to remain your faxstotum for ever and ever—amen!" Having said which, Goliath touched his hat, turned from them suddenly and sped away.

"Now bless his heart!" said Samantha looking after the small, hurrying figure. "There were tears in his eyes! He's a dear, faithful, little fellow!"

"He certainly is," said Tom. "But now——"

"So is Old Jacky."

"Yes!" said Tom. "But——"

"And both of them marvellous with horses."

"They are," replied Tom. "But as I was saying—in Scotland, a newly-married husband——"

"But we are in our dear old England."

"Yes, God bless it!" said Tom. "However——"

But swift, supple of movement, she eluded his outstretched arms, sprang away, and with back-thrown glance and challenging laugh, fled from him across the lawn, through open doorway, along echoing hall and up the wide, old stair, and whither she fled, Tom followed.

"No, Tom—ah, no!"

"Yes, Samantha!"

And now the ancient walls echoed to the sound of light feet speeding apace with feet as swift though heavier that followed close and ever nearer. . . . Yes, at last once more this ancient house was all astir with life and the joy of it,—breathless laughter, stifled to sighs and tender murmurs:

"Ah, Tom . . . my own darling!"

"Samantha . . . beloved!"

Thus old Trevore became again that most sacred of all places upon this earth, a home,—part and parcel of our Old England, this small though glorious isle whose hearths have bred a race faithful to tradition, ever resolute in danger, ever willing to suffer and die for their creed, and therefore assuredly worthy to endure, or so pray we.

With which prayer and reverent belief here ends this Sentimental Romance of the

“Piping Times of Peace” written amid the grimly constant perils and horrors of a frightful war that yet has served to prove this generation worthy of their long, much-enduring and valiant ancestry.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected.

Inconsistencies in punctuation have been maintained. The use of hyphenated words is dependent on character speaking.

[The end of *The 'Piping Times'* by John Jeffery Farnol]