WESTOVER OF WANALAH

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HER RESCUER KNEW NOT WHETHER SHE LIVED.—*Page 8.*

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WESTOVER OF WANALAH

A STORY OF LOVE AND LIFE IN OLD VIRGINIA

BY

GEORGE CARY EGGLESTON

ILLUSTRATED BY EMIL POLLAK OTTENDORFF

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WESTOVER OF WANALAH

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Westover of Wanalah

I
PERIL AND PASSION

One midsummer morning in the late eighteen-fifties, Boyd Westover of Wanalah was riding along a Virginia plantation road, accompanied by half a dozen hounds, for whose discipline and restraint he carried a long, flexible black-snake whip. The weapon played the part of sceptre rather than that of sword. The young man had no intention of striking the dogs with it, but whenever their exuberance broke bounds he cracked the lash in air, making a report like that of a pistol shot, and the reminder of

his authority was quite sufficient for purposes of canine discipline.

He was not hunting. He was merely riding to a distant part of the plantation he controlled, to inspect the work of the negroes there and to give directions for its proper doing. But he liked the company of his dogs and enjoyed their mad relish of the morning.

The glory of it gladdened his own spirit in spite of the vexing problems that were never quite absent from his mind.

Boyd Westover, a young man of not more than twenty-three or twenty-four years, had never known a serious care until the spring of that year. Then a burden of responsibility had fallen upon him that threatened to bend even his broad shoulders beneath its weight.

His father had died suddenly in the early spring, leaving a widow and this one son who in the ordinary course of affairs became administrator of the estate and master of the plantation.

Then it was that the burden fell upon him. The plantation was an unusually large one, and its late owner had been accounted the richest man in all the region round about, just as his forbears for generations past had been. Wanalah, the ancestral seat of the family, had been for two hundred years the home of a hospitable, high living, high mettled race of men and women, but during the reign of Boyd Westover's father the hospitality of Wanalah had outdone itself in lavishness. There were always guests in numbers there, and a multitude of servants were withheld from profitable industry to minister to their comfort.

There were thoroughbred horses enough in the stables to mount half a company of cavalry, and a like profusion was apparent in the case of every other provision for enjoyment and the unstinted entertainment of guests. In brief the late master of Wanalah had kept open house for all gentlemanly comers.

But when Boyd Westover took his degree at the University in early June and returned to Wanalah to assume his duties as administrator, he learned for the first time that the plantation had not been earning the cost of all this high living. There was not only the hereditary debt upon the place—a debt that so great a plantation, wisely conducted, might have borne comfortably—but added to it was a confused mass of fresh debts accumulated during his father's lifetime and in consequence of his extravagance.

The entertainment of pleasure-seeking guests was suspended now, of course, during the period of mourning, and in view of the ill health into which his mother had fallen since the shock of his father's sudden death, the suspension seemed likely to endure for a long period to come.

In the meantime Boyd Westover was both perplexed and appalled by the magnitude of the problem he was set to solve. For a time he doubted even the solvency of the estate, but later reckonings had shown him that this fear was not justified, though the fact brought small relief to his mind, for peculiar reasons connected with the character of the property itself. If he might have sold out everything, he could have paid off all the debts, leaving a small but sufficient competency for his mother's support. As for himself, he gave no thought for the future. He was young, strong and fit to meet fate unarmed.

But he could not sell the property without unpardonable offence to his own soul and to the sentiment of the community which was to him the world. For by far the greater part of that property and altogether the most salable part of it consisted of the negroes, every one of whom had been born on Wanalah plantation as their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents had been before them. Among the high class Virginians—the class to which Boyd Westover belonged by immemorial inheritance—it was held to be a shamefully impossible thing to sell a negro except for incorrigible crime, or for the purpose of bringing a man and wife together, on one plantation.

"I simply will not sell the servants," the young man said to himself when matters seemed at their worst. "Rather than do that, I'll run them all off north, set them free and let the estate fall into bankruptcy."

Since that time the young man's close study of the situation had convinced him that neither of these courses was necessary. By cutting down the force of house servants to the measure of his own and his mother's modest needs, and putting every able-bodied negro at profitable work in the crops, he was confident that he could make the plantation carry its load of debt and slowly reduce it.

That was now his task, and in spite of the glory of the midsummer morning his mind was busy planning ways and means, when suddenly a combined baying from the hounds arrested his attention. Looking up he saw a young woman on horseback in a pasture not far ahead—a young woman in difficulty and sore danger.

Streamers of flaming red—the reason for which he could in no wise guess—were flying from her shoulders and a maddened bull of huge bulk was charging her with the fury of a bovine demon.

Instantly the young man plunged the rowels into the flanks of his horse. An eight-rail fence lay in his way, but there was no time in which to throw off even one of its rails. Without a thought of pause he urged his horse toward it at the top of his speed, determined to force him over it or through it as the case might be. The weight of the steed and the speed at which he was moving would be sufficient, Boyd Westover thought, to crush a way through the barrier. It was likely to cost the beautiful animal his life, but what of that? There was another life at stake, in rescue of which the young man was ready to sacrifice even his own—for the life in peril was that of the woman he loved, the woman who had awakened all the passion, all the tenderness, all the chivalry of his brave young soul. To save her he would have doomed any and every other living thing to cruel death.

The horse he rode seemed to realize the perilous choice his rider was forcing upon him and to choose the safer but far more difficult course. Putting forth all his superb strength in utmost endeavor, he cleared the barrier at a flying leap.

As he did so his rider saw to his horror that the young woman's mount had faltered in her frightened flight, and in the next instant the beautiful mare was lifted bodily from the ground, impaled upon the sharp horns of the bull and evidently done to death by the goring. As the animal fell the young woman was hurled forward half a dozen yards, and before the wrath-blinded bull could gather himself together for a charge upon her

prostrate form, Boyd Westover forced his own horse between the bull and his victim and with three or four rapid swishes of the cruel black-snake whip across the animal's face and eyes, sent him staggering back.

The delay, as the young man knew, would be but for a few seconds, but these proved sufficient for his purpose. Turning his horse toward the unconscious girl, he hooked his left knee around the cantle of his saddle and, hanging almost head downwards, seized her about the waist. Recovering his position, he placed her across the horse's withers. The bull was almost upon him now, but a sharp touch of the spurs caused the horse to spring forward at a full run in time to save himself and his riders, though the escape was so narrow that one of the bull's horns tore an ugly gash in the calf of Boyd Westover's leg.

The body of the girl hung limp across the withers, so that her rescuer knew not whether she lived or had been killed by her fall. Until his horse cleared the fence again—this time scattering the upper rails as he did so—there was no time for inquiry. But once out of the field, the young man reined in the frantic creature, and lifting the girl's head to his shoulder, felt her fluttering breath upon his cheek.

"Thank God she lives!" he exclaimed with reverent fervor, but his efforts to rouse her to consciousness were unavailing.

"It may be only a faint," he thought, but such fainting as he had seen among women had been far less enduring than this, and the memory of that fact greatly alarmed him.

He reflected that in any case the shock produced by the

dashing of water into the face is desirable at such times, and turning his horse's head he rode down a slope into a shaded, grass-carpeted dell, where a bubbling spring arose. Gently laying the girl on the greensward, but resting her head in his lap, he dashed handfuls of water into her face, with the result of arousing her almost at once. When she opened her eyes they were vacant and dreamy, like those of one only half awakened from sleep, but a few moments later the light came back into them, and she spoke.

"Is it you, Boyd? Then you're not dead, as I dreamed you were."

"Oh, no, I'm not hurt," he replied—ignoring his lacerated leg—"but you mustn't talk yet. Lie still till you feel better." And with that he gently passed his hand over her eyes, closing them.

She lay quiet for a minute or two seemingly asleep, and he, moved by a sudden impulse—whether of passion or pity he knew not—bent over and pressed his lips to hers—gently uttering her name—"Margaret."

Instantly he repented, as she opened her eyes and with a flushing face tried to raise herself to a sitting posture, saying as she made the effort.

"I reckon you mustn't do that."

But the effort to rise was futile. Sharp pain caused her to grow pale again and she sank back as she had been.

"Where are you hurt, Margaret?" Boyd asked in sympathetic distress.

"I don't know; all over I reckon."

"Are any of your bones broken? Feel of them and see."

"I reckon not. I can't tell. The pains are all over me—mostly inside. I reckon I'm going to faint."

Boyd Westover was now seriously alarmed. He vaguely remembered hearing of persons dying of "internal injuries," though externally showing no hurt. Instantly he lifted the girl again and, mounting with her in his arms, set off at a gallop toward the great house at Wanalah.

The sharp prick of a pin, as he adjusted his burden on the withers, attracted his attention to the two flaming red bandana kerchiefs, pinned by their corners to Margaret's shoulders, and in the midst of his apprehensions for her life he found time to wonder why she had decorated herself in that extraordinary way. He was too full of anxious concern to question her on so trivial a matter, but she, recovering herself, volunteered an explanation, after asking him to reduce the horse's gait to a walk.

"I reckon I was right foolish," she said, laughing in spite of her pain. "You see this is one of old Aunt Sally's birthdays. She has one every three or four months now, and she's rapidly adding to her ninety years—a year at each birthday. She was my Mammy you know, and so I always take her a present on her birthdays."

The girl paused in her speech as some sharp twinge of pain changed her smile into a grimace. It was only for a moment, and she continued:

"On her last birthday, two or three months ago, she told me I would some day be an angel with red wings, and so when I set out this morning to take her these two turban kerchiefs, the foolish whim came to me to pin them to my shoulders and make red wings of them."

Again an access of severe pain silenced speech and she closed her eyes while her lips grew pale. Evidently the effort to chatter had been too much for her, and Boyd rightly guessed that she had been forcing herself to talk of her little prank by way of preventing him from saying more serious things which she did not wish just then to hear.

He in his turn resolved to say those more serious things at the earliest opportunity. He felt that in caressing her as he had done, down there by the spring, he had placed himself under a binding obligation to explain at the first possible opportunity, and the explanation could take but one form—a full and free declaration of his yet unspoken passion. This, he felt, he had no right to delay one moment longer than he must, but as she lay still with closed eyes, her head upon his shoulder and his arm about her, he realized that his present and very pressing task was to place her as soon as possible in the tender care of his mother and her maids.

The rest must wait.

II

A SONG WITHOUT WORDS

The physician for whom Boyd Westover sent a young negro at breakneck speed, while his mother's maids were getting Margaret Conway to bed, reported that she had "sustained painful contusions" and was additionally "suffering from shock," but that no bones were broken and, so far as he could determine, no serious internal injuries had befallen. He directed that she should remain in bed for a few days, and then stay quietly at Wanalah, without attempting a homeward journey until he should himself give permission.

"Above all," he said to Boyd, "she must not be excited in any way—pleasurably or the reverse—lest hysteria supervene."

Boyd smiled a little over the medical man's stilted diction, and rejoiced in the assurance of Margaret's safety which the ponderous phraseology gave him. But upon reflection he chafed a good deal over the restraint the doctor's instructions required him to put upon himself. He was impatient now to put into words the declaration of love which his caresses had implied and promised. He was still more impatient for her reply to that declaration, for, like the modest young lover that he was, he gravely feared his fate and was annoyed by the necessity of waiting before putting it to the test.

Her words, spoken half consciously when she had received or repelled his embraces—for he could not determine in his own mind whether she had meant to do the one or the other—in no wise encouraged his self-confidence. He recalled those words:—"I reckon you mustn't do that"—and questioned them closely as to their significance, but no satisfactory answer came.

The utterance might mean anything or nothing. And what did the suddenly flushing face that accompanied it suggest? Was it joy or sorrow, pleasure or resentment that had sent the blood to her cheeks in that way, and prompted her attempt to escape him by rising? Wonder as he might he could not tell, and as he paced the colonnaded porch that night after all the house was asleep, he succeeded only in working himself into a passionate fury of impatience and maddening perplexity.

He tried to reason with himself, only to find himself utterly unreasonable. Doubtless Margaret would be enjoying the air in the porch within a few days, resting and perhaps interestingly helpless still. The attentions he must lavish upon her in that case promised abundant opportunity for a tenderness of care which would open the way for his passionate declaration. At that point in his planning another and a very annoying thought obtruded itself.

"Confound it!" he muttered, "Colonel Conway is a stickler for all the conventions of our artificial social life. He will insist upon the idiotic rule that a young man mustn't address a girl in his own house or at any time when she is under his protection. What utter nonsense it is, anyhow! But I suppose I must obey it or bring down Colonel Conway's wrath upon my head. I must let all my opportunities slip away, and restrain my impulses during all the time she's here, making myself seem to her a cold-blooded brute who has taken advantage of her helplessness to force caresses upon her and then doesn't think enough of her dignity to explain himself."

Perhaps Boyd Westover's mood was playing tricks with his logical faculties. It is certain that if he had been asked at any

ordinary time his opinion of the social requirement which he now scorned as an idiotic convention, he would have answered that it was eminently right and reasonable, that it was imperatively necessary indeed, for the protection of the young woman in the case against the embarrassment of having to accept hospitality or escort or favor of other kind from a man whose proffer of love she has just rejected.

But who expects an impatient lover to be reasonable—who that has ever been himself a lover? Reasonable or unreasonable, Boyd Westover felt himself bound to observe the rule that imposed so annoying a restraint upon him. He might fret and fume in revolt against it, but he must bend to the custom. He resolved to wait with what grace he could until Margaret's return to her own home. He worked out in his mind all the situations that were likely to occur during her convalescence at Wanalah, and framed all the conversations to fit the embarrassing circumstances.

Of course the situations that actually arose were totally different from those he had imagined, and the dialogues he had rehearsed proved to be as unfit for use as the text of a Greek tragedy would be on a modern comedy stage.

Colonel Conway, who happened to be in Richmond when his daughter's mishap occurred, returned at once and, after learning the details, delivered his thanks and commendations in a way that overwhelmed her rescuer with embarrassment. It was in vain that Boyd protested, disclaimed any right or title to the Colonel's extravagant eulogies of his conduct, and declared that he had done no more than any other man would have done under like circumstances. Colonel Conway would not have it so.

"You gravely imperilled your own life, sir," he replied in his peremptory way. "You went to the rescue of a damsel in distress as only a gallant knight would do, with reckless disregard of all consequences to yourself. That's what I call heroism, sir, heroism worthy of the name you bear and the proud race from which you are sprung. Now don't protest, don't contradict, don't argue, don't answer. It is only your modesty that shrinks from the recognition of your gallantry"—and so on with what Boyd felt to be "damnable iteration."

But when the old gentleman had gone back to Richmond, leaving his daughter to the care of Boyd Westover's mother, the young man reflected that the Colonel's enthusiasm would probably stand him in good stead if ever Margaret should smile upon his suit and give him leave to ask her father for her hand.

Thus in meditations sometimes hopeful and joyous, sometimes perplexed and desponding, Boyd Westover worried through the days until the glad morning came when Margaret Conway rebelled against her physician's orders and made her appearance in the porch. She was still weak enough and enough distressed by her bruises to be treated as a convalescent to whom solicitous attention was due, and of course Boyd elected himself her "gentleman in waiting."

These two, brought up on adjoining plantations, had known each other from their earliest childhood, but in later years they had seen little of each other. Boyd had been away, first at boarding-school and afterwards at the University, while the motherless girl had been slowly and awkwardly growing to womanhood, under care of her aunt and the tutelage of an accomplished governess. It was only during vacations that the

two had met, and during the last two summers they had not met at all, for the reason that Margaret, with her father, had been travelling in the North and Canada and in what was then the great West during both those seasons.

It was with surprise, therefore, not unmixed with the awe of strangeness, that on his return from the University this year he had found his little playmate grown into a beautiful and very dignified womanhood. She presided now at The Oaks, her father's plantation, with all the gracious ease that enabled Virginia women of that time to make of plantation houses delightful centres of unruffled hospitality, where the coming and going of guests was in no way a matter of previous arrangement and where neither the coming nor the going created the smallest ripple in the placid self-composure of the well-ordered life of the mansion.

So great was the change in her, or so great did it seem to Boyd, that at first he hesitated and faltered over the old familiar form of address. It did not seem possible to him to call this dignified and almost stately young woman "Margaret" as he had always called the little girl that she had been. He could not address her as "Miss Conway" but he thought he might compromise on the form "Miss Margaret." The first time he addressed her in that fashion was the only time. She looked at him in dignified surprise for a moment; then with a rippling little laugh that seemed to him singularly charming, she said:

"If we have become such strangers, Boyd, that you must put a handle to my name, I'll give you all your honors and address you as 'Boyd Westover, Esq., M. A., University of Virginia.' You are to call me just 'Margaret,' please, as you've always done, if you

wish to be just 'Boyd' to me."

As she spoke the words all the winsomeness he remembered in the girl came back again, but it did not dissipate the stately dignity that had grown upon her with her ripening womanhood. It was perhaps at that moment that he fell in love with her. Of that he could never be sure, but he knew now that his love for her was the one supreme passion of his life. That knowledge had come to him at the moment when he first realized her danger out there in the pasture. He recalled now the impulse that had prompted him in his half mad determination to let no obstacle stand in the way of his reaching her in time for rescue. He remembered the horror that had rended his very soul as he saw the maddened bull lift the mare and her rider and fling them from his gory horns. He knew now that he had done and dared in those maddening moments, not with the humane impulse to save an imperilled life that must come to every man with blood in his veins, but actuated by his passionate love's instinct of self-preservation.

As he ministered to her after her return to the porch, all these memories were awakened in him by a certain change that had come over her, a shyness that was not quite reserve, but yet resembled it. He was too little acquainted with the ways of women to understand this or to estimate it aright. It did not occur to him that the revelation he had made to her by his passionate caress as she lay half conscious in his arms might explain her impulse of reserve. He was too scantily versed in the impulses of womanhood to understand that after such a manifestation of his love womanly modesty must stand upon its defence until such time as he should see fit to give more formal and definite expression to his purpose.

Yet to that caress he attributed the change. It was only that he misinterpreted its meaning. The thought came to him that he had mortally offended her, that she resented his act in the only way possible to her so long as she must remain a guest in his mother's house, and that upon her release from that restraint she would banish him forever from her presence and her acquaintance.

So severely did all this torture him that on the second day of her convalescence the impulse to make an end of suspense overcame him, banishing for the moment all considerations of prudence and all regard for conventionalities. He had read to her for an hour, and when the book was finished, he observed a certain restlessness on her part, for which he suggested one or two remedies, only to have his suggestions negatived. Presently she said:

"It is only that I need exercise, I reckon. I think I'll try to walk a little, up and down the porch." She rose with some difficulty, he taking her hand in assistance. But no sooner was she on her feet than she relaxed her grasp upon his hand, and, as he did not relax his own so readily, she seemed to shake it off. The act was not an impatient one, but he mistook it for such. Instantly he faced her, asking:

"Why did you do that, Margaret? Why have you tried in every way to show me that my presence is disagreeable to you? What have I done to offend you? Tell me, and I'll quit the plantation at once and stay away so long as you remain. I have a right to know. Tell me!"

For answer the young woman looked at him in silence but

with tear drops glistening in her eyes. At last she said:

"You have done nothing that you ought not, I reckon—nothing to offend me. Oh, Boyd, I'm not angry with you—I can never feel that way. I owe my life to you, but that isn't it. I don't know what it is. May be it's just because I'm weak—or may be just because."

With that the tears released themselves and trickled down her cheeks. She could not restrain them and she made no effort to hide them. She simply stood there facing him and letting the honest tears flow unrestrained.

There was no need of second sight to foretell the result. Nothing in all the world so unseats a man's resolution as the vision of the woman he loves in tears. Boyd Westover was a full-blooded young man and he acted after his kind. He took the unresisting girl in his arms and passionately embraced her. Words on either side were unnecessary. Love is quick to understand. But the words came also, after a space—words of love beyond recalling, words of the kind that make or mar human lives and set Destiny its tasks.

III
A WOMAN'S WORD

Those were halcyon days that followed, while Margaret lingered at Wanalah. The barriers were broken down now

between these two; the vexing suspense was over and the most precious certainty that human kind can know had taken its place.

And there was not the embarrassment of others' knowing. No word of their awakened love had been spoken, or could be spoken until Margaret's return to The Oaks should impose upon her lover the duty of announcing their understanding to her father and invoking his sanction of their troth. Until that time should come they were not "engaged" and might pass their days and nights under one roof without offending even Virginian propriety. Convention had no claim to control over them in those blissful intervening days.

But the shadow of it fell on the morning of the day when Margaret was to journey homewards in company with her maid.

"I will visit Colonel Conway at The Oaks to-morrow," Boyd promised as the pair strolled through the garden during the morning hours that alone remained to them now.

"I wonder how he will receive the news—our news, Margaret?"

"How he will receive it? Why, of course he—"

"He's rather rigid, you know, in his views of propriety, and I've sinned against light in that respect. You see I addressed you in my own home, and not only so, but at a time when you were not able to run away."

Margaret laughed half below her breath.

"That was very terrible of course," she said in an amused

tone. "But I see a way out of it, Boyd."

"Of course you do. That's feminine instinct. But tell me about it."

"Why, it's simple enough. If Father finds fault with that, you can take it all back and say it all over again at The Oaks."

Boyd smiled over the conceit, but he was not reassured by it. The case was one in which the least shadow of uncertainty seemed more than he could endure.

"Oh I forgot," the girl went on, teasingly; "perhaps it wouldn't be agreeable to you to rehearse the scene."

Boyd said not a word in reply, but he managed in another way to convince her that her doubt on that point was unfounded. When she had readjusted the "flat" that she wore as headgear—it had somehow become disarranged—she put jest aside, saying:

"I think we needn't fear anything of that sort, Boyd. My father is apt to make distinctions, just as other people are. If he disliked you or disapproved of you, he would make trouble of course; but as it is I reckon he will brush the thing aside and scold about the idiocy that makes such silly rules."

She paused in her speech for a space. Then she added, in a tone which the young man afterwards recalled in doubt and distress:

"At any rate it makes no difference. Nothing can make any difference—now."

"Tell me, please," he said gently, "just what you mean by that."

"I am not a women to love lightly, or lightly to forget. Love seems to me a holy thing and to trifle with it is blasphemy. I have given you my love, Boyd, and there is no power in all the universe that can make me take it back. Even you could not do that. Nothing you might do—even if it were crime itself—could alter the fact that my love is all yours, now and forever."

He drew her to him in a tender embrace, but spoke no word in reply. Speech in such a case must be an impertinence. Presently she went on:

"That is what I meant, Boyd. I have promised to be your wife. I shall keep that promise if the stars fall. I have no doubt my father will cordially give his consent; but if it should be otherwise, it will make no difference—I shall keep my promise."

How those words came back in after time to Boyd Westover! And how he pondered them in amazement and bitterness of soul!

IV
THE BEST LAID PLANS

Margaret was right in her anticipations regarding Colonel Conway's attitude. He highly approved of the young man upon

whose gallantry in rescue he had enthusiastically and incessantly descanted in all companies. He was in no mood to find fault with the slight lapse of Boyd Westover from conventional propriety. He liked the way in which Boyd presented his case, neither justifying his conduct by argument nor offering excuses for it, but treating it as a matter of manhood necessity.

"I suppose I should not have addressed Margaret when I did," he said in manly fashion; "I ought to have waited, but under the circumstances I couldn't help myself. Hang it, Colonel, there are times when a man must do things he ought not."

"Right, my boy, altogether right, absolutely right, eternally right," was the enthusiastic response. "It's blood that flows in your veins—hot blood—and not tepid milk and water. Why, sir, I courted Margaret's mother as we hung to the gunwale of a capsized sailboat, and I've been proud of it all my life, sir. A mollycoddle would have waited for her to comb her hair and put on dry clothes while he was making up pretty speeches for the occasion. That's the mollycoddle's way. The man's way is to tell the girl he loves her, whenever the right moment comes, and leave the dry clothes and the pretty speeches for another time. So don't apologize, don't fret, don't give the thing another thought. You shall have Margaret's hand with her father's blessing whenever you and she choose to fix upon the day. I'll pack The Oaks with the best of good company; there shall be feasting and—oh, by the way, there's one little formality I suppose you'll have to go through. There's Margaret's aunt,—my sister Betsy, you know. It'll be best all around if you treat her with distinguished consideration. She's apt to stand upon her dignity, and I've always found it best to recognize the fact,

gracefully. It ministers to peace and comfort. I think you and Margaret had better present yourselves to her together, and do the thing up with all the formalities. It will not be necessary to mention to her the little slip you've been confessing to me. She'd probably take it seriously. It's a way she has. You can just let her think the thing occurred here to-day. You and Margaret can go out into the garden after dinner, and when you return present yourselves to Betsy and tell her about it as if it had just happened."

With the reassurance of the solemn words Margaret had spoken the day before, Boyd Westover had no great fear of anything "Aunt Betsy" might say, but he was disposed to humor Colonel Conway, and besides he foresaw that life at The Oaks might be pleasanter for Margaret with the old lady's approval than without it. So the little diplomatic stratagem was carried out so successfully that Aunt Betsy—always chary in the bestowal of praise—said to Margaret that night:

"If you must marry,—and I suppose you must,—I'm glad you're to marry a young gentleman who observes the courtesies of life and knows how to treat his elders with proper respect. I rather approve of Mr. Boyd Westover."

"Thank you, Aunt Betsy," Margaret answered, concealing a smile. "You don't often say so much in praise of a young man."

"Of course not. In these days it's not easy to find young gentlemen who deserve any praise at all. Manners are so dreadfully lax nowadays. Even you shock and distress me frequently, in spite of the pains I've taken to train you properly."

"Why, Aunt Betsy, what have I been doing now? Is it something dreadful?"

"From my point of view it is. You spoke of Mr. Boyd Westover just now, by implication at least, as a 'young man.' A young lady doesn't associate with 'young men'; those whom she recognizes are young *gentlemen*."

"If you'd seen him encounter that bull and snatch me from under his horns, Aunt Betsy, I reckon you'd have thought him a good deal of a man."

"No—a good deal of a gentleman rather. The distinction is important, my dear, though I can't make you see it. And besides he's so polite to his elders, especially ladies. I was never more respectfully treated in my life. He's just like the young gentlemen of my time. Of course when he addressed you he sank upon his knees—"

"He certainly did nothing of the kind," Margaret answered hotly. "If he had I should have spurned him with contempt. No man who respects himself would bend his knee to any woman."

"I wish you would say 'gentleman' and 'lady'—and especially wouldn't call yourself a 'woman,' Margaret. It's positively shocking. But it's so with everybody in these degenerate days—even well-bred young girls, and Heaven is my witness that I've tried hard, to raise you well. When did he address you the first time?"

"There was only this one time," Margaret answered, dreamily, as she recalled the scene on the porch.

"Do you mean, Margaret, that you accepted him the first time he asked you?"

"Yes, Aunt Betsy, why not? I loved him."

"Margaret, you shock me; worse than that, your conduct grieves and afflicts me. Haven't I told you a thousand times that no lady ever forgets her dignity so far as that?"

"I haven't counted the times, Aunt Betsy, but probably your estimate of a thousand isn't far wrong. It is more than five hundred at any rate."

"Margaret, you trifle, and I'm not accustomed to be trifled with."

"I beg your pardon, Aunt Betsy. I didn't mean to trifle. Listen to me seriously now. I hold the love of a man and a woman to be the holiest thing on earth. I regard all trifling with it as blasphemy, and I think all your rules and conventionalities concerning it silly and sinful nonsense. If there is ever a time when a woman should be honest and truthful it is when the man she loves tells her of his love and asks for hers in return. There, I have shocked you dreadfully, I know, but you forced me to do it. I have spoken the truth as my soul sees it."

Without another word the high-strung girl quitted the room. It was the first time in her life that she had "broken bounds" with her aunt, and her self-assertion astonished even herself. But she did not and would not repent of it. Love had brought to her a new dignity of womanhood, that was all.

During the week that followed Boyd Westover found himself

a busier man than he had ever been before. He was up at dawn to set going the day's work in the crops, and not long after sunrise he was apt to appear at The Oaks where Margaret awaited his coming for their early morning ride. After breakfast with her he returned to his fields, but by four o'clock he was at The Oaks again for dinner. His evenings were spent in his own chamber, where he toiled over papers until far into the night, in an effort to master every detail of the financial condition of the Wanalah estate.

When he had done so, he asked for a conference with Colonel Conway, to whom he explained his plans.

"I find that the interest charged on nearly all the notes my father gave is higher than it ought to be; on some it is positively extortionate. My father was an optimist, I suppose, and he seems to have fallen among thieves—money lenders, I should say."

"One and the same thing," said the elder man. "I know their kind. I'm myself a victim. Go on."

"Well, as I figure it out, the excessive interest the estate is paying—I mean the amount of interest in excess of a reasonable rate—eats up about half the tobacco crop every year, and I've decided to stop it, just as we stop the depredations of the worms and grasshoppers."

"Good! But how?"

"Why, I'm going to Richmond, and perhaps to the North if necessary, to find some one who will take a single mortgage loan for the whole amount of the estate's debts, a loan carrying a reasonable rate of interest. With the proceeds I'll cancel all the

present debts, and thereafter the estate will have but one creditor, pay a moderate interest and devote every dollar of surplus earnings to a steady reduction of the principal. I've figured the whole thing out, and with ordinarily fair crops and a reasonable style of living, I can extinguish the entire debt in ten years or less."

The two went together over the figures, and the older man, who was both shrewd and experienced, pronounced the plan entirely sound and feasible. It remained only to find the bank, insurance company, or other financial institution that would make the loan.

In search of that, Boyd Westover set off almost at once for Richmond. As he rode away after parting with Margaret he turned in his saddle and gaily waved her a last adieu, quite as if the parting were expected to be for months or years instead of for the brief tale of days the youth assigned to it.

V
PLEASANT DREAMS AND AN UGLY AWAKENING

Boyd Westover sat in his hotel room about nine o'clock in the evening. Papers, mostly memoranda, lay scattered about upon his table, while some large sheets were spread out before him. On these he was making calculations.

He was a thorough-going person by nature and habit, and he was making careful estimates of the several offers he had secured for the making of the desired loan on Wanalah plantation, in an effort to determine which of them he might most wisely accept.

Finally he said to himself:

"The Milhauser offer is the best, or will be if I can persuade the agent to accept a mortgage instead of the deed of trust he wants. Perhaps I can. He didn't make the condition peremptory, and he clearly wants to secure the loan as an investment. I'll see him in the morning. No, by the way, he said I'd find him at home this evening if I should want to see him. I'll walk out to his house now."

Turning to the table he took up one of the memorandum sheets and read at top the number of the agent's house in far upper Broad Street.

"It's almost out of town," he muttered. "Must be out beyond Richmond College. But the walk will do me good, and I'll sleep better if I can get the thing settled to-night."

He put an extinguisher over the camphene lamp, and set out without overcoat or wrap of any kind. It was a warm, cloudy summer night, and the Virginians rarely wore overcoats even in winter. They were horsemen, all of them, and even the lightest overcoat is a burden and a nuisance to one riding on horseback.

As he walked up Grace Street beneath the spreading shade trees, it began to rain, not heavily but steadily. Westover was too well accustomed to the out of door life to think of turning

back because of a drizzle, but as the rain increased he turned up the collar of his coat and drew his soft felt hat down over his eyes. Presently he stopped under a street lamp and consulted a paper which he drew from his pocket. Some detail of the negotiation had escaped his mind and he stopped thus to refresh his memory.

As he stood there under the lamp with his back turned away from the sidewalk Sam Anderson, an acquaintance of his own, passed, and recognizing him called out:

"Hello, Boyd! Reading a love letter by the light of a street lamp in a soaking rain? You'd better go indoors somewhere unless you want to imagine tear drops punctuating the tender missive."

Boyd turned and made some careless reply. The two separated—Boyd going on up Grace Street and turning north to Broad, while Anderson hurried down town.

The incident was utterly trifling in itself, but it was destined to exercise a baleful influence upon Boyd Westover's life.

It was nearly an hour after midnight when the young man presented himself again at the hotel office and asked for his key. The night clerk observed that he was soaked and dripping, for the rain was falling in torrents now, and suggested the need of a little fire in Boyd's room. The fire was ordered, as the night had grown chill in spite of the season, and by the time he had got himself into dry clothes, the blaze of the soft coal had made the room so cheerful that the young man decided to write letters before going to bed. One of them was addressed to Colonel

Conway, and in it Boyd announced his success in arranging the loan, setting forth the terms secured and going minutely into detail. In the other, which was addressed to Colonel Conway's daughter, he told again of his success, giving no details at all, but setting forth his rosy anticipations of the coming time—now not far away—when she should be "my lady of Wanalah."

The letter to Colonel Conway was a long one of necessity; that to Margaret was much longer without any necessity at all. But even the longest letter must come to an end sometime, and at last, about four o'clock in the morning, Boyd Westover crept into bed, a man altogether happy in the present and confidently hopeful of the future. And why not? Fortune was bringing him its richest gifts. Love was already his and the future held out to him an assured promise of happiness and peace in the plantation life he loved. Now that he had succeeded in arranging his financial affairs to his liking, he had no vexing problems to wrestle with, no cause of anxiety of any kind. With Margaret for his wife, with an ample sufficiency of this world's goods, he had only to conduct his plantation affairs, to entertain his friends, and to keep company with his books.

It was of all this he dreamed when he sank to sleep.

When he awoke a constable stood by his bedside, with two of his assistants a few feet farther away.

"Sorry, sir," said the constable. "I don't like to wake a gentleman, sir, and still less in a case like this. If it was only a common criminal, sir, I shouldn't mind, but with a young gentleman, my duty ain't no ways a pleasant job."

"What do you mean, you ruffian?" angrily asked Westover springing out of bed. "Why do you presume to—"

"'Taint presumin' I reckon," answered the constable, "when I've got this fer my authority. Read it, sir, and see."

Boyd hastily glanced at the paper. It was a warrant for his arrest on a charge of burglary.

He laughed a little, as he proceeded to dress, saying:

"Of course this is a ludicrous mistake, but you are not to blame for it. Those who are will have to answer for their blundering. I'm ready. Take me to the magistrate."

"He don't git up this soon in the mornin', sir. He was woke up to 'tend to this thing, an' he wa'n't in no pleasant frame o' mind 'bout it nuther. I reckon he'll lay abed late this mornin' to make up his lost sleep, like. I don't reckon he'll show hisself in court till 'long 'bout noon."

"Where will you take me, then?"

"I reckon it'll have to be the lock-up, sir."

"The lock-up? You mean a jail?"

"Well jail's the straightaway name fer it, but we mostly calls it lock-up. Seems softer like."

"Now my man, listen to me. You have no right to put me in jail. Your warrant merely directs you to arrest me and bring me to court. It says nothing about locking me up in jail. I tell you

there's some absurd mistake about this thing, and when I'm brought before the magistrate it will all be cleared up. You can detain me until then without putting a jail indignity upon me. Stay here at the hotel with me. Go with me to breakfast, leaving your men on guard outside. When the time comes take me before the magistrate. In the meanwhile I'll send for my lawyer and find out what's to be done."

The constable ran his eye over the muscular young man, and shook his head.

"Can't be did," he replied. "You mout make up your mind to break away, and I don't brag o' stren'th enough to handle a limber twig like you."

"Well then, you can bring your men with you into the dining room and keep them with you."

"See here, Mr. Westover," interrupted the bailiff, "this here ain't noways a pleasant job fer me, an' ef you'll give me your word of honor as a gentleman that you won't git me into no trouble by givin' me the slip or tryin' to break bounds, I'll take the chances on you. I won't go to breakfast with you, 'cause it 'ud make talk ef folks saw a gentleman like you a entertainin' a feller like me that a ways. I'll jest set down furder down the table like, an' leave my men outside. Is it a go?"

"Yes, and thank you for your consideration. I give you my word of honor as a gentleman that I will make no attempt to escape, either during breakfast or at any other time, and that when you wish me to go to the court with you I'll go without a word. Is that sufficient?"

"Yes, sir, that's enough. A gentleman may do things that gits him into trouble with the courts, but I ain't never knowed a gentleman to break his word of honor."

The constable was by no means an over-confiding person, but the dictum he announced was based upon the facts of a social system with which he had been familiar all his life. It would have been accepted without question by any other man of his class in the commonwealth. Thanks to it, Boyd Westover was left free to go and come at will within the precincts of the hotel. He hurriedly summoned his friend and attorney, Jack Towns, and remained in conference with him throughout the morning.

Neither could frame any plausible conjecture as to the meaning of the arrest. There was nothing in any of the morning newspapers to give even a hint toward the solution of the mystery. It was not the practice of the Richmond newspapers at that time to print news, except such as related to politics. If by chance they recorded any local happening, it was by mere mention, in small type in some out of the way corner of columns which were mainly devoted to ponderous editorial essays on affairs of state, and to a reprint of the proceedings of Congress on the day before.

It was not until the two friends, lawyer and client, were escorted by the bailiff to a magistrate's court that they learned aught of the charge against the accused man. What they learned there was very little, but it furnished a basis for further inquiry on their part. As this is not a detective story, all that they learned in court and by subsequent inquiry may best be related directly, in another chapter.

VI
OUT OF A CLEAR SKY

On a corner of Grace Street in that part of it which Westover had twice traversed on the evening before, stood a very spacious dwelling house, used at that time as a "Select Educational Establishment for Young Ladies." That was what the proprietor, Monsieur Le Voiser, called it in his circulars and the like; everybody else called it "Le Voiser's School."

There young women, mostly the daughters of the well to do planters, were "finished" after the most approved fashion. The training they had received at the hands of their governesses and tutors was supplemented by certain refinements of education which were deemed necessary to the perfection of their minds and manners. They had already learned to strum on the piano; here they were taught how to do so with ease and grace and with the air of accomplished *pianistes*. Instead of Stephen C. Foster's melodious but idiotically sentimental songs, which they loved, they were trained to screech "Hear me Norma," and other "operatic pieces," which they loathed. More important than all, they were taught French until they could dream in that language —bad dreams probably, if they were in harmony with the French in which they were cast.

Boyd Westover was acquainted with a dozen or more of Monsieur Le Voiser's pupils, they being the daughters of his neighbors and friends. He knew the place also, having delivered

a brief course of lectures there during the preceding year.

About half past twelve o'clock on the night on which he had stopped under a street lamp to read a paper in the rain, there was an alarm in Le Voiser's school. There were shriekings that might have been heard a block away; there were a few faintings, and there was a general muster of scantily robed young women headed by the matron of the establishment, who was madly bent upon marching them into the garden in spite of the pouring rain.

The alarm had gone forth that there was "a man in the house." One girl had imprudently asked, "Is it a burglar?" only to bring down the matron's wrath upon her head.

"What does that matter to you, Mademoiselle? As a properly brought up young lady it is enough for you to know that he's a man. You should be ashamed to need more than that to alarm you."

It was Monsieur Le Voiser's proud boast that "French is the language of the establishment, and no young lady attending it is permitted to employ any other tongue." It is perhaps an illustration of the untrustworthiness of educational veneering, that in this time of excitement nobody spoke a word of French, until the intruder, who had been hiding behind a door, slipped from his place of concealment and made a dash for the verandah through the French window by which he had entered. As he did so the light of three or four bedroom candles held high in air fell full upon him, and half a dozen of the girls shouted in chorus:

"*Regardez* him! It's Mr. Boyd Westover!"

The consternation which fell upon the excited group at this

announcement seemed to afford a sufficient occasion for several interesting attacks of hysteria, in the execution of which one damsel made the startling announcement:

"He came to kidnap me!" repeating it several times. When she grew a little calmer so that she might be questioned as to her meaning she declared that Boyd Westover was madly in love with her. Then, having set the inventive machinery of her creative imagination going, she told a romantic story interesting to hear and perfectly delicious to tell.

In it she figured as a heroine of romance, beset by the passionate entreaties of a lover to whom she found it impossible to give her love in return, and so forth to the end of as pretty a story of love and coldness, persuasion and pleading, as any that Mrs. Caroline Lee Hentz or Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth ever manufactured for the delectation of languishing Lydias.

The girl's ambition to win interest in her own behalf somewhat overreached itself. The other girls were jealous of her romantic distinction and, when they grew calm while she got herself carried to bed, they flatly refused to believe her story.

But there was no room for doubt that the intruder was Boyd Westover, or that he had forced the fastenings of a bolted window in gaining entrance. One girl, whose father was a lawyer, explained that this forcing of fastenings, however frail they might have been, constituted the crime of burglary.

Then somebody remembered that the intruder had escaped and some one else ventured the suggestion that steps ought to be taken to apprehend him. To that end Monsieur Le Voiser was

summoned from his private residence in the next street. After all the girls who personally knew Boyd Westover, and all those who had attended his course of lectures had borne witness that the intruder was unmistakably he, Monsieur proceeded to set the machinery of the law in motion, with the results already set forth.

When Boyd, with Jack Towns as his counsel, presented himself before the magistrate, there was a group of Monsieur Le Voiser's pupils there, whom Jack Towns, borrowing his text from the circus posters, called "A bevy of beauty and galaxy of grace." They were there under command of their matron to testify to the facts of the burglary and the identity of the burglar, which they one and all did with so much confidence that Jack Towns found it impossible to shake their beliefs in the smallest degree.

Sam Anderson was there too, very reluctantly indeed and under compulsion of a subpœna. The Commonwealth's Attorney had somehow learned of his encounter with Westover near the scene of the burglary under what appeared to be suspicious circumstances. The hotel clerk was present to testify concerning the hour and circumstances of Westover's return to the hotel on the night before.

To meet all this array of testimony, Boyd Westover had no single witness of any kind. And if there had been any such Jack Towns would not have put him on the stand. It was clear that the accused young man must be committed in any case to await the action of the Grand Jury, and Jack Towns was much too shrewd a lawyer to waste strength—if he had had any strength—in this preliminary hearing. He devoted himself instead to the task of

getting the bail fixed at as low a sum as possible. When he pleaded that his client was well known to be a gentleman of the best family connections and the most scrupulous honor, a man to whom the commission of such a crime was utterly impossible, the magistrate reminded him that the witnesses were young gentlewomen of equally good families, in whom perjury was not even conceivable; that their number was too great and their testimony too positive to leave room for the theory of possible mistake; and finally that the very fact of Boyd Westover's high place in life rendered any crime on his part especially heinous. He felt bound, he said, to fix bail at five thousand dollars—a very great sum in those days.

Within the hour, however, Boyd's friends and those who had been friends of his father, rallied about him, ready and eager to furnish bonds for any amount. Not one of them knew aught of the merits of the case, and not one of them asked a question concerning it. They simply did not believe that Boyd Westover had broken by night into a girls' school for any purpose whatever, and they were determined that he should not go to jail while awaiting indictment and trial on so absurd a charge.

"Now come with me," said Jack Towns as soon as the matter of the bail bonds was settled. "We'll go to my house, not to my office, to avoid interruptions. I must get at the very marrow of this matter before a word is said about it. Come."

When the two were seated in an untidy room of Jack Towns's untidy bachelor establishment, and Jack had locked the front door for the first time within his recollection, he turned to his friend, saying:

"I want you to tell me every thing you did last night—the unimportant things even more than the important. Don't be afraid of boring me with details, and relate everything in the order in which it occurred. Then I'll cross-examine you as rigidly as if you were a witness concealing something. Perhaps we may discover something to shed light upon what seems the most perplexing mystery I ever knew. Go on."

Boyd told the story in minute detail, ending it by saying:

"I can make oath to all that and swear that nothing else of any kind occurred."

"No, you can't," said Jack Towns. "The court won't let you swear to any of it."

"Can I not make a statement of facts in a case that involves my liberty, my reputation, and everything else that I care for?"

"No. The law of Virginia does not permit an accused person to testify in his own behalf. That is the Common Law rule, and Virginia is under the Common Law. Don't tell me the thing is absurd, unjust, cruel, barbaric, and all that; for I know it already. It is the law, and you and I cannot change it. Let us go on with our inquiry instead. Do you know approximately at what hour you passed Le Voiser's school on your return from your visit to Milhauser?"

"I know exactly. It was precisely half-past twelve. I saw lights carried about in the school and, wondering at the fact, looked at my watch to see the hour."

"And you left Milhauser's house at what time?"

"Half-past ten."

"Why did it take you so long to get back to the hotel?"

"Milhauser's house, as you know, is away out of town—beyond Richmond College. There's a horse car which runs at irregular intervals between the college and the Broad Street end of the Fredericksburg Railroad, using the track of that railroad when no train is due. When I got to the college gate it was raining heavily and I took shelter under a sort of shed opposite the gates to wait for the car. It didn't come, and at last I decided to walk on."

"Why did you turn south and into Grace Street, instead of coming on down Broad?"

"Because it was raining and muddy, and the sidewalks are better in Grace Street. Besides, as my hotel is in Main Street I had to turn south at some point on the journey."

"Yes, of course."

After a period of silent thinking to no purpose, Jack Towns said:

"It's a queer case. All those girls swear you were in the school a little after twelve. Milhauser, if questioned, would have to swear that you left his house at half-past ten. You saw nobody else after that, who could even suggest an alibi. You got to the hotel drenched and dripping, at precisely the time you would have got there if you had been chased out of the school at the time the intruder was. You admit that you passed the school at the time of the disturbance. The case is so clearly made out

against you, both by the positive testimony of eyewitnesses, and by all the circumstances, that any jury ever empanelled would have to convict you. Why, I'd feel bound to convict you myself —"

"Do you mean that you have the remotest shadow of doubt as to my innocence of this charge?" sternly demanded Westover, rising.

"Certainly not. Don't be an idiot. Sit down. But as the case stands we haven't a straw to cling to. We can't impeach the testimony of a dozen high-bred young women, every one of whom swears positively that she knows you well and that she saw you make your escape from the invaded precincts. There is no way in which we can so much as cast a doubt upon your guilt. With the case presented as it stands, any juror who should hesitate to pronounce you guilty would be a perjurer. The only hope is that we may find some way out before the case comes to trial."

"When will that be?" asked Boyd Westover, in a tone so stoically calm that Jack Towns looked at him to see what had happened to him.

"Are you ill?" he asked.

"No, not at all. It is only that I see the utter hopelessness of the case. I am a man condemned to worse than death. But I am a *man* and must face even such calamity without flinching. When the trial is over, I shall be a convicted felon. It will do no good to assert my innocence. Nobody will believe it—nobody can, in face of the testimony. My life is ruined, my reputation blasted,

my doom sealed. But I shall neither whine nor whimper. Now tell me when the blow is to fall? When will the trial occur?"

"The court is in session now. The indictment will be found to-morrow, but I shall secure a postponement of the trial until the next term."

"Do nothing of the kind. Let the trial come on at once—the sooner the better. Delay will do no sort of good. I believe every accused person is entitled to 'a speedy trial.' Demand that for me, and secure it."

Towns argued and pleaded, but to no purpose. He could offer no suggestion of advantage in delay, except by saying:

"I have always found it worth while to trust to the unexpected. If we have time, something may happen that we don't anticipate."

"And I, in the meantime?" answered Boyd. "No. Bring the thing to a head at once. How soon can you make it?"

"Within forty-eight hours," answered the lawyer. "I advise against it, but—"

"I quite understand. The responsibility rests upon me. Go on and make an end of the horrible thing."

VII

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

It was the chivalric custom of the Virginians to protect their woman-kind in all circumstances, at all costs and at all hazards, not only against wrong and danger, but equally against annoyance and especially the annoyance of publicity. Women in Virginia were proudly feminine; men intensely and bravely masculine.

Accordingly the news of Boyd Westover's case had only begun to spread abroad when all the male relatives of all the girls in Le Voiser's school set themselves to hurry their daughters, sisters and nieces into secure hiding, so that they might be spared the annoyance of appearing in court as witnesses in a criminal case.

Short as the time was, the officers sent to serve summonses upon such as were wanted found the school well nigh deserted. Some even of those on whom they succeeded in serving their subpœnas were protectingly abducted before the day of the trial by relatives who braved the penalties of contempt of court in rescue of delicately nurtured maidens dear to them.

Nevertheless there were one or two of the girls present in court when Boyd Westover was called to the bar. These had been in hiding, but their places of concealment had been discovered and the girls themselves brought by force to the court. Then too the matron was there prepared to bear unhesitating witness to Boyd's identity with the offender.

A good deal of time was consumed in securing a jury. The first man called declared:

"I would not believe this charge against Boyd Westover even if I had been present, seeing him with my own eyes." Others expressed their incredulity in different forms of words but with equal positiveness, and of course all such were rejected. It thus happened that the jury was not completed till a late hour in the day. But on the other hand it took very little time for the Commonwealth's witnesses to give their testimony, and after one or two fruitless attempts to secure from them an admission of doubt or possible mistake, Jack Towns forbore to cross examine them.

He had no witnesses to offer in his client's behalf. He had nothing to depend upon indeed except a certain persuasive eloquence which had often served him well, and this he brought to bear with all his passionate nature to stimulate it. He spoke for an hour. He argued, pleaded, persuaded. He set forth the character of his client and of the distinguished family from which he was sprung. He dwelt upon the utter improbability of the commission of such a crime by such a man. He pointed out and emphasized the fact that a girls' school was not the place that any housebreaker in his senses would think of entering in search of booty. He ended with an impassioned setting forth of the ruin and disgrace that must fall upon this high-charactered young man as the result of an adverse verdict. So eloquently and so pathetically did he present the pitiful aspect of the matter that tears ran down scores of cheeks, and the Judge himself bowed his head upon the desk in front of the bench, as if to conceal an emotion he could not control.

The Commonwealth's Attorney—the prosecuting officer—rose, but instead of making the usual speech, simply said, in a voice choked with sobs:

"The testimony is before you, gentlemen of the jury. I have nothing to add to it."

There was but one result possible. Ten minutes after the jury retired, it filed into court again bearing a verdict of "Guilty."

Boyd Westover was a convicted felon. The sun of his fair young life had gone down amid clouds of black disgrace, and it could know no rising. Worse than death a thousand fold, worse than the cruelest torture was this to a proudly sensitive nature, nurtured in traditions of honor that held every slightest character stain to be an indelible blot.

Yet it was with head erect, with dry eyes, with unshaken nerves and unflinching spirit that he met this decree of doom. It was the tradition of his race to meet Fate without faltering, to fight while the possibility of fighting lasted, and when it failed, to shroud an undaunted soul in the chain mail of unconquerable courage.

When the verdict was rendered, the young man turned to his friend and counsellor, and in an entirely unemotional voice, said:

"I thank you sincerely for all you have done and tried to do. I have need of a little time in which to arrange my affairs. Can you do me a final favor by securing it for me?"

The matter was easily arranged. The Judge, full of compassion for the ruined youth, and in spite of reason, testimony, and everything else, still not believing in Boyd Westover's guilt, asked if ten days would suffice. Then without renewing the bail bonds that had expired with the beginning of

the trial, he appointed the tenth day thereafter for sentence. It was the Commonwealth's Attorney's business to move for the renewal of the bonds, without which the condemned man was in fact under no restraint whatever, but he made no motion of the kind. When asked by Jack Towns some time afterwards why he had not done his duty in that respect, he replied:

"I simply couldn't. Boyd Westover and I were schoolmates, you know, and I lived for many months in his father's house. I *knew* he wouldn't run away. Who ever heard of a Westover flinching? Why should I subject him to an indignity?"

Thus, in Virginia, did character—personal and inherited—count. There were some things that a gentleman could not do. He might commit a crime of violence, but he could not do a cowardly or treacherous act. The bailiff who had trusted Boyd Westover's word of honor, knew that and risked the loss of his place upon his confidence in it. The Commonwealth's Attorney knew it and took the chance of impeachment upon it.

The net result was that on the day of his conviction Boyd Westover walked out of court an absolutely free man except in so far as he was bound by his own sense of honor and by the traditions of the race from which he was sprung. These bound him to appear in court for sentence at the end of the ten days allowed to him, and as everybody knew, the bond was amply sufficient.

Jack Towns took him in the meanwhile to his own house.

"You'll be my guest," he said, "and I'll see that we aren't interrupted."

"You still don't mind that?" Boyd asked.

For response he got an earnest look in the eyes, and the verbal answer:

"Don't be a fool, Boyd."

After a minute, Boyd asked, reflectively:

"How is it, Jack, that you and some others seem still to believe in me? In view of the evidence—"

"Hang the evidence," interrupted the lawyer. "Don't you know that character is the most important and the most trustworthy fact in life? You don't suppose for a moment that I have a doubt in your case, do you? If you do, you grievously wrong my friendship."

"How then do you account for the facts as set forth in the testimony against me?"

"What do you mean, Boyd? Are you trying to convince me that you are guilty of a crime that I know to be utterly impossible to you?"

"No. I am only trying to find out the grounds of your confidence in me, so that I may know how far to impose on them in making my arrangements for the future. That's the purport of my question, which, by the way, you haven't answered yet."

"Oh well, as to that, you're the victim of some hideous mistake. If you had let me stave off your trial for six months the chances are we should have found out what the mistake is. As it

is—"

"As it is, I couldn't have lived for six months in such suspense as that. Neither could you, in like case. We're the sort of men who say to the lightning, 'Strike if you will, but don't prolong your threats.' Besides, I cannot see how this thing could have been bettered by delay. Those girls honestly believe they recognized me as an intruder in the school. They would believe that quite as firmly six months hence as now."

"Perhaps so. But six months hence not one of them would have been in Virginia to testify against you. Their friends would have taken care of that."

"Yes, I know. And I should have been suspected of securing my acquittal by spiriting away the witnesses against me. I couldn't live under so black a shadow as that."

"I understand. But all this is profitless. We have much to do to get your affairs in order. Let us address ourselves to that. First of all I've had all your mail sent up here from the hotel. Suppose you read it now, and after supper we'll set to work."

VIII
THE SHADOWS FALL

When the shadows begin to fall upon a human life, they fall quickly and darkly.

In Boyd Westover's mail was a letter from the agent who had arranged the mortgage loan upon Wanalah plantation, threatening to abandon the arrangement on the ground that young Westover's conviction impaired the security. This sorely troubled Boyd Westover—for if he was to go to prison his mother's financial ease was a matter of primary concern to him. It didn't trouble Jack Towns in the least.

"Leave that to me for answer," the lawyer said, taking possession of the letter. "The man ought to seek employment as an oyster-opener at Rockett's. That's about his size. That mortgage is completely executed. I've seen to it, pending—other things. That will stand, and, as the property is amply good for it, the fellow's an idiot to want to fly his bargain."

There was news in the next mail that could not be so lightly dismissed. The family physician wrote that Boyd's mother, already in feeble and precarious health, had been shocked by the tidings of her son's calamity into a condition that threatened the worst. This calamity was one which even Boyd Westover's stoicism could not face without flinching. From childhood his affection for his mother had been a dominant passion, and since his father's death it had become fatherly as well as filial. He had jealously guarded that "little mother," as he called her, against every shock, every care, every breath of an adverse wind as it were. He had made a veritable pet of her, and while never for a moment laying aside his chivalric respect and reverence, he had added to them a certain big brotherly manner in which she had found joy untellable. If she wearied while walking with him in the house grounds, he would pick her up, as he might have done with any child, and in spite of her laughing protests, carry her into the porch and deposit her in a hammock. If a light shone

disagreeably in her eyes he discovered it and shut it off before she became conscious of its glare. If she went to her room to rest he quietly stationed a maid at the foot of the stairs with orders to permit no noise and no passing up or down.

Now that news came of this dearly loved little mother's serious illness, the young man was made to suffer agonies by the consciousness that her affliction was on his account, so that it required all of Jack Towns's eloquence to convince him that he was himself in nowise to blame for it. By way of emphasizing that, the young lawyer had to put the matter into brutally plain phrase.

"If you were guilty of the crime of which you have been convicted, and for which you will have to serve a term in state's prison, you would do well to scourge your soul with a whip of scorpions for your sin against the mother who bore you. As you are innocent of that and of all other crimes you have no right to hold yourself responsible for the consequences of other people's mistakes."

"Am I free to go to my mother while she yet lives?" Boyd asked in an agony of apprehension.

Then Jack Towns lied—like the generous gentleman he was.

"No," he said. "Legally you are free to go anywhere you please—to Mozambique or the dominions of Mumbo Jumbo if you choose. But you are free only because of the generous confidence of the Judge and the Commonwealth's Attorney in your honor as a gentleman. You are bound by that honor not to leave Richmond during the days granted you."

As a matter of fact Jack Towns had in his possession a letter addressed to him by the Westover family physician in which were written these words:

"Whatever else happens, for heaven's sake don't let Boyd come home now. The shock of seeing him would kill his mother out of hand."

But Jack Towns was a lawyer and he found a better way of putting the matter by way of accomplishing his purpose.

Still another thing darkened the young man's way. It was not because of news, but because of no news at all.

There was no line in any of his mails from Margaret Conway, the woman he loved with all his soul, the woman who had plighted her troth to him in the impassioned words he so well remembered:

"I am not a woman to love lightly or lightly to forget. Love seems to me a holy thing, and to trifle with it a blasphemy. I have given you my love, Boyd, and there is no power in all the universe that can make me take it back. Even you could not do that. Nothing you might do—even if it were crime itself—could alter the fact that my love is all yours, now and forever."

Upon reflection, he absolved Margaret from blame, and with good reason. Upon his first accusation he had not written to her at all in supplement to the love letter of that night. He had regarded the whole matter as a thing preposterous, which a hearing in the magistrate's court would promptly dissipate into thin air, and it had been his kindly thought not to tell her of the absurd accusation until he could tell her also of the ridiculous

end made of it at a court hearing. When at last the matter had assumed a serious aspect he had written her a letter in which he had asserted his innocence but without protesting it in any impassioned way. To that he had added:

"Of course if I am a man of honor I am bound to offer you a release from the engagement between us, while if I am not an honorable man but the criminal I am accused of being, you are free to take your release without permission from me."

A calculation showed that if that letter had reached its destination when it should, and if an answer had been sent by the first returning mail, he should now have the reply. But mails were slow and uncertain in those days and The Oaks lay far up near the Blue Ridge and seven miles from the post office. It might easily have happened that his letter to Margaret had not reached her as soon as it should; or that the shock of it might have unfitted her to reply immediately; or that her answer might have been delayed in transmission. All these were possibilities, and they comforted the young man.

But as the days went by and still no letter came from Margaret the comfort became less and less, until at last he despaired and summoned his stoicism to his relief.

"Why should I have expected her to write to me?" he asked himself. "What obligation can she owe to a convicted criminal? I was a fool to look for a letter. I must bear my burden alone. I must meet my fate with a calm mind."

Then another thought came to him.

"I am living in a fool's paradise. Jack Towns professes still to

believe in me, and perhaps he does. But how can I expect anybody else to do so? In view of the testimony against me, there is no room or reason for doubt of my guilt in any sane mind. I must recognize that and face it with what courage I can. I am a convicted criminal, and I must expect everybody to regard me as such. I must go through my life with that brand upon my brow. There is an end of hope for me. I must simply endure."

It was characteristic of him that in all this melancholy meditation, no thought of suicide entered his mind. He had from his youth up held his life in readiness for sacrifice in any worthy behalf. There was never a time when he would not have given it as a forfeit in behalf of those he loved, never a time when he would not have laid it down gladly in answer to any call of duty. But the cowardly thought of destroying it by way of himself escaping from intolerable sufferings did not suggest itself to his brave young soul. It is a man's part to endure what comes to a man, and Boyd Westover was altogether a man.

He remembered Margaret's impassioned promise, and he doubted not the sincerity of her soul in giving it. But he absolved her now and accepted the result as part and parcel of the strangely bewildering Fate that had overtaken him.

To that effect he wrote to her on the night before the day appointed for his sentencing. On that day had come to him the crushing news of his mother's death, and very bitterly he had felt the cruelty of a fate that forbade him even to go home to bury his dead.

He wrote to Margaret:

"I find that I have been expecting some letter from you in reply to my late one. I realize that I had neither right nor reason to expect anything of the kind. I am a convicted criminal, convicted upon testimony so conclusive that no sane person can doubt its truth. To-morrow morning I shall be sentenced. You can have no relations with me. You can bear me no duty of any kind. It is only to say this that I write to you now, to say that I hold you absolved from any and all obligations toward me, and that I shall live and die cherishing in full measure my faith in your loyalty and truth. You are never to let a doubt of that vex your mind."

With that he finally banished all thought of his past life, its joys, its sorrows, its aspirations and its apprehensions, from his mind.

"How long a sentence will they give me, Jack?" he asked his lawyer.

"I don't know. The shortest, probably, or very nearly the shortest that the law allows; not over two years at any rate."

"Of course it doesn't matter," Boyd answered. "Two minutes or two years of shame are all one to a sensitive man, and as for the 'hard labor,' I'm strong and well. I probably shall not find it interesting to grind stove lids or do whatever else the prison authorities set me at, but at any rate the work will occupy the time and prevent me from thinking too deeply. It will tire me, too, so that I shall sleep of nights."

Jack Towns found nothing to say by way of reply, and he said nothing. Presently Boyd drew a package of papers from his

pocket and passed it over to the man he regarded as the one friend left him in all the world now.

"Perhaps you'd better look into that," he said. "It may help Wanalah out of difficulty. I don't know. The thing came in my mail a week ago, but it didn't interest me then and I slipped it into my pocket and forgot all about it. No, don't bother with it now. Read it later. Just now I have something else to talk to you about. You've promised to look after my affairs while I'm in prison, and there's one thing I want to ask you. Don't let the overseer at Wanalah work the servants too hard. There is no need. With only ordinary crops the plantation can easily carry its load now, and I don't want the people there overworked. See to it please. Now if you don't mind, I'm going to bed. To-morrow night I'll lie in a cell."

With that the young man withdrew, and after half an hour of sad gazing at the moonlight that streamed in through the window, Jack Towns turned up the gas and set to work reading the papers that had failed to interest their owner. They interested Jack Towns amazingly, and he had no sooner finished the reading of them than he hurried unceremoniously into Boyd's room, and shaking him said:

"Here, get up. This thing must be attended to immediately. There are papers to be drawn and executed at once. So hustle into some clothes quick."

IX
THE COURAGE OF WOMANHOOD

When rumors came to The Oaks of Boyd Westover's trouble, Margaret Conway's first impulse was to drive over to Wanalah and comfort Boyd's mother with assurances that there could be no truth in the reports. Margaret had always cherished a very tender affection for Mrs. Westover, and during the brief time since her love had been pledged to Boyd, she had found that affection rapidly taking upon itself the character of a girl's tenderness for her mother. Having never known a mother of her own, the girl was quick to make herself a daughter in affection where she was presently to become a daughter in law and in fact. She drove every day to Wanalah and spent loving hours there with the gentle invalid who had so warmly welcomed her daughterly love.

But when the evil news of Boyd's conviction came and Margaret planned to go earlier than usual to Wanalah, Colonel Conway objected.

"You will only distress yourself and afflict her," he said. "This thing will be your only topic of conversation, and what can either of you say that will bring comfort to the other?"

"I can tell her I love her and that I loyally believe in Boyd," answered the girl with all the pride of her race in her voice and attitude.

"But how can you say that, daughter, in face of the evidence?"

"It isn't evidence—it's merely testimony. The evidence lies in

Boyd Westover's character and it flatly contradicts the testimony. The testimony is false; the evidence is subject to no possible question. I'm sorry you don't see it so, Father."

The old man paced the floor for a space and then answered:

"Perhaps I do see it so. I'd like to, at any rate; I'm strongly disposed to give the young man the benefit of the doubt, but—"

"There isn't any doubt," interjected the passionate girl with vehemence. "There isn't any doubt, and I shall quarrel even with you, Father, if you suggest such a thing."

"Be calm, my child," pleaded the old man placatively. "Perhaps you are right. I'm disposed to take your view—strongly so. But there's your Aunt Betsy, you know."

"Yes, I know. She's the only human being you were ever afraid of, Father. But you're afraid of her as everybody else is—everybody but me. I don't know why."

"But your Aunt Betsy presents the matter in a way that must be considered. She says—"

"Oh, I know what she says," interrupted the overwrought girl. "She has said it all to me, over and over again. She urges the conventions—the cowardly shams and falsities of our artificial life. She talks of 'what people will say,' as if it made any difference what people say when we know we are doing right. You *know* that Boyd Westover is an honorable man, just as I know it. If you hadn't been afraid of Aunt Betsy, you'd have done your duty like a man; you'd have gone to Boyd's side. You'd have stood by him in his hour of need—"

"But, Margaret, what good would that have done in face of the evidence or the testimony, for I agree with you that there's a difference?"

"It would have strengthened and encouraged him with the assurance that one brave man at least knew his character and was ready to face calumny with an assertion of his confidence. But you were afraid of Aunt Betsy. It is the only cowardice I ever knew you to be guilty of. She talks of placing 'blots on our escutcheon'—as if we had an escutcheon, whatever that sort of thing may be; I tell you the worst blot of all was made by your failure to go to Richmond and stand by Boyd in his undeserved trouble. You played the part of a coward there. Pardon me if my words are harsh. I feel them and mean them. Now I am going to Wanalah. I, at least, will do my part as a descendant of a brave race, if all the demons of perdition stand in the way."

With that the girl moved proudly out of the house, mounted the horse that a negro held waiting for her, and rode away.

She did not return until after the funeral at Wanalah, which her father and her aunt attended, and when she returned, her attitude was one of stately reserve which appalled her father and "grieved" her aunt.

In the meanwhile she had written every day a loyal letter to Boyd Westover.

Not one of those letters ever reached him. Nor did any of his letters come to her. Aunt Betsy had deemed it her "duty to the family" to see to that, and Aunt Betsy prided herself upon doing her duty, no matter how disagreeable it might be—to others.

But the failure of the missives left Margaret in sorely distressing perplexity. Why did not Boyd write to her? Why did he not take her into his confidence? Especially why did he not respond, in some way, to her repeated avowals of splendid loyalty and confidence?

She could not understand. She could not even inquire. She could only mourn.

X
THE PACKET OF PAPERS

Jack Towns was accustomed to have about him whatever there was that could make his hard-working life comfortable, if any reasonable expenditure of money could secure it. And he interpreted the words "reasonable expenditure," in that connection, rather liberally. His income was large and he had nobody anywhere dependent upon him. Accordingly he was one of the two or three self-indulgent men in Richmond at that time, who possessed a set bath tub with water taps running into it and a showering apparatus above.

When he roused his friend that night, after hurriedly running through the packet of papers, he was full of an eagerness and enthusiasm which the other did not seem to share. Boyd Westover was sleepy, and worse still, in his present case, he was indifferent. What good could a packet of papers or anything else bring to a man disgraced, condemned, doomed to a life of

lost repute? He heartily wished that Jack had kept the papers and done whatever he pleased with them after the closing of the prison doors behind himself on the approaching day. But in response to Jack's insistence, he arose, drew on a light dressing gown and slippers, and offered his dully uninterested presence in Jack's dining room. 4 Promptly recognizing his condition of mind, Jack took matters into his own hands, after a masterful habit he had. He seized Boyd by the elbow and led him into the bath room.

"There," he said; "lay off your gown and pull your toes out of those slippers. Hop into the tub and I'll wake you up."

At the next instant the cold shower descended upon the young man's head and person, and Jack continued his chatter.

"Now you're awake, rub yourself down and come into the dining room. I've got to have you awake and you and I are going to work all night. I've sent Dick for half a hundred oysters and a dozen bottles of cold ale, and later he'll make black coffee for us. Hurry up now, and 'do try to be interested' as a bashful friend of mine said to a girl when he was about to propose to her."

As he left the bath room abruptly, Boyd made no reply until he joined the lawyer in the dining room where the papers from the packet lay spread out in the order in which they were to be taken up for consideration. Then he said:

"I will try to be interested, Jack; for your sake I'll do my best. But what interest can a man in my position feel in anything?"

"Now listen to me, Boyd!" Jack Towns said commandingly, and rising to his feet to say it. "Listen to me. You are morbid.

You need calomel or something. You're the victim of some mistake and you're in sore trouble. But you are not disgraced. Nobody can disgrace a man but the man himself. You are conscious of your own honor; what matters it what others think? Besides, no honest man in Virginia believes that you are guilty of a sneaking crime or capable of it. The jury that convicted you didn't believe it and not one of them believes it now. The Judge who will sentence you doesn't believe it. If the envious and malignant falsely pretend to believe it, why should you care for the despicable pretense of people so utterly unworthy? If cowards fight shy of your acquaintance, lest recognition of you should compromise themselves, why should you care for the acquaintance of such poltroons? You are Westover of Wanalah —inheritor of an honorable name. You will be that so long as you shall live. It behoves you to bear that name with head erect and with contempt alone for those who do not recognize your worthiness to bear it. This affair is an unfortunate incident. It will soon be over, and you will have a lifetime before you in which to teach men the falsity of the accusation against you. There. My lecture is done. Let us get to these papers. They hold great news for you."

When the two were seated, Jack took up a letter, which was first of the papers in the order of consideration.

"This is from a firm of lawyers, Dodge, Denslow and Deming of Denver—charmingly alliterative throughout—do you happen to know who they are?"

"Yes, in a way. There was a memorandum among my father's papers, that mentioned them."

"Well, go on. What did it say, or reveal, or suggest? This is business, Boyd. Put your thinking machine on it."

"I will,—to oblige you, Jack. The memorandum catalogued a long list of mining lands and mining claims somewhere up in the Rocky Mountains or in some side issue of a range—you'll find the paper in my desk at home—lands and claims which my father had bought during one of his journeys out that way and had placed in my name, as a provision for me in case of accident."

"That accounts for these papers being in your name and not your father's," interrupted Jack. "I was puzzled by that. But go on. I want to hear all about it."

"Well, you know my father was an optimist—a dreamer almost—and he was possessed of an idea, reflected in the memorandum, that these things would make the future Westover of Wanalah—myself or my son if I should have one—enormously rich. As nearly as I could make out, the multitudinous lands and mining claims he bought in my name covered a large area of entirely untillable and not very accessible land somewhere up in the high mountains, where grub-staked miners scratched the surface for silver ore, with now and then a little find of gold. They worked on shares somehow, and this law firm collected my share from time to time and remitted it. It was so small a part of the assets of the estate that I've forgotten how much it was. That's all I know of Dodge, Denslow & Deming."

"You're likely to know a good deal more about them hereafter," said Jack, "if I can awaken in your mind a reasonable

interest in a matter that promises to make you the richest man in Virginia, twice or thrice over."

"Cui bono?" responded Boyd. "When my prison term ends I shall have enough, without that, to feed me, and I've nobody else to feed."

"Boyd Westover, if you go on in that mood, I'll chuck you into the bath tub again and set the shower going without giving you a chance to shed your clothes. Can't you see that when you—when—well, when present difficulties are over, this thing will give you an interest in life, something to occupy your mind, something to manage and—oh, I forgot, you don't know the facts yet. It appears from these papers—we won't bother now to read them in detail—that the mining lands your father bought in your name, have proved to be about the richest in the world. They cover practically all of one of the richest deposits of gold, silver, lead, and quicksilver, ever discovered. Listen. This is the way Jake Greenfield puts it in a letter. Jake seems to be a shrewd Yankee whom your lawyers have established on the lands to watch operations and prevent trespass. He writes to the lawyers:

"'I don't s'pose Mr. Westover nor you neither's got a krect idee of what he's got up here. It's like an injun's blanket, with fringes all round it. He's got the blanket an' these fellers what's opened up mines north an' south of him has got the fringes. Nachurly they's a tryin' to git in under the blanket, but I'm a watchin' out an' they're a doin' no trespassin'. They's got the fence corners an' Mr. Weststover's got the field. They's plannin'

to buy him out an' they's got experts an' engineers an' lawyers enuff here to run a ship or an orphan asylum. My say to Mr. West Stover is don't bargain with 'em till you know for yourself. That used to be our way in Varmont, whare I come from. This is my wink to a blind hoss, an' a nod with it.'

"The lawyers seem to have taken Jake Greenfield's counsel seriously, so far at least as to send experts of their own to study the situation, and these seem to confirm Jake's judgment. So do these other letters, from the mining men who want to buy you out. I'll read them."

"Can't you summarize them in your own words, Jack?" interrupted Boyd. "The thing doesn't greatly interest me, and—"

"Well, listen then, and perhaps I can awaken your interest. These people it appears are amply backed by New York and Boston bankers. In fact the bankers really constitute the company, and they seem to know their own minds. They have spent some hundreds of thousands in setting up machinery and all that sort of thing, and they say their mining operations are paying heavy dividends—twenty-five or thirty per cent. on their investment. But the richest leads or lodes or veins or whatever they are called, lie beneath your land. You've got the blanket and they only the fringe, as Jake picturesquely puts it. They want to buy the blanket, or get in under it somehow, and they're prepared to pay for what they want. They propose to organize a new company to work the whole thing; they to put in their plant, their costly machinery, their mining privileges and all their other assets, and you to put in your mineral lands. They make you a

flat offer of nine hundred thousand dollars in money, and thirty-nine per cent. of the stock of the new company, if you will join them in this project by ceding your lands, mining rights, etc., to the joint concern. Perhaps they can be induced to do better even than that, as they seem very eager, but that is what they offer to begin with. It means fabulous wealth to you if their hopes as to the profits of the new company are measurably fulfilled, and even if they are not fulfilled at all it means that you can wear Wanalah plantation as a watch charm for all your life to come. Isn't that a fine prospect?"

Jack was disappointed in Boyd's reply. He had hoped that this startling happening might awaken his friend to a new interest in life and life's affairs, but, after swallowing two oysters and slowly sipping half a glass of ale, the unfortunate young man said, in a melancholy tone:

"I suppose the thing ought to be looked into. If I were a free man again, I'd make my way out into those wilds and see what could be done. As it is—"

"As it is," broke in Jack Towns, "you're going to execute a sweeping power of attorney authorizing me to act for you, and I'm going out there. When you—well, I mean later,—you'll take hold of the thing yourself, and those hustling fellows out there will wake you up, if I can't. Go to bed now, if you feel like it. I'll prepare the power of attorney and you can execute it at breakfast time. I must say you're uncommonly bad company."

"I suppose I am," said Boyd as he shuffled off to his bedroom.

XI
THE EVENTS OF A MORNING

It was with a firm step and with head erect, and, more significant still, with eyes that looked straight into other eyes without a suggestion of flinching, that Boyd Westover entered the court room on the morning appointed for the pronouncement of sentence upon him. Jack Towns, who accompanied him, thought he had never seen so superb an exhibition of stoicism as that which Boyd had given throughout this affair.

"But this caps the climax," he said to the Commonwealth's Attorney, whose drawn features showed clearly the distress he felt in view of the duty he had to do in moving that sentence be pronounced upon his old schoolmate, his boyhood's comrade, whom he had been compelled to prosecute and convict of an infamous crime.

"Just look at him," Jack whispered. "For all that his appearance or his manner could mean you'd think he had come here to deliver an oration on some distinguished occasion. It's simply magnificent!"

"It is simply horrible—my part of it, I mean," answered the other with a suppressed groan.

There was no further time for conversation. The moment had come when Boyd Westover must be called to the bar to receive

the sentence of the court. The Commonwealth's Attorney made the necessary motion in a voice that could hardly be heard because of his lack of control over his organs of speech. The Judge tried hard to deliver the little address he had carefully prepared as a means of suggesting what he could not say—that in spite of everything he could not personally regard Boyd Westover as a man actually guilty of crime. His voice behaved so badly that after a futile attempt he gave up the effort to say anything, except the formal words that condemned the prisoner to serve a term at hard labor in the State prison.

The term fixed by the sentence was the shortest that the law allowed, but what comfort was there in that to a sensitive man like Boyd Westover, to whom disgrace for half a minute meant the same thing as disgrace for all time? It is doubtful that he even grasped the meaning of the words used in limiting the sentence to the briefest time allowed.

As there were papers to be made out and signed, Jack Towns and his client sat for a brief while waiting. Presently there was a little commotion in the outer corridor and a moment later a bailiff hurriedly entered and made his way to the Commonwealth's Attorney, to whom he whispered excitedly. That officer asked a brief question or two under his breath. Then he turned to the court and said, while all listened with the greatest interest:

"If your honor please, something has happened—something out of the ordinary, something important, something which if I am correctly informed vitally concerns business now before the court. I ask to be excused for a few minutes in order that I may learn the facts and report them to the court."

With that, receiving a nod of approval from the Judge, he withdrew.

When he had gone the Judge said:

"We may as well save what we can of the time of waiting. Mr. Clerk, if you have the papers ready in the Westover case I'll sign them."

They were passed to him and, after he had signed them, handed over to the sheriff, thus completing that matter at once.

A moment later, the Commonwealth's Attorney returned, pale to the lips, trembling like one in an ague fit, and with the muscles about his mouth twitching in a way that was positively painful to all who looked at him.

In a voice that was hard, metallic, and obviously controlled only by a supreme effort of the will, he addressed the court.

"There has been a terrible mistake made," he said with none of the formalities of speech usual in addressing a tribunal,—"a disastrous, cruel, irreparable mistake, for my share in which I hide my head in shame as I ask God and man to pardon me. In convicting and sentencing Boyd Westover, we have convicted and sentenced an innocent man. The real culprit is now in a jury room adjoining this apartment. He has been caught in a repetition of the act for which Boyd Westover has been convicted and sentenced. He has confessed that he was the offender on the former occasion, and the committing magistrate before whom he was brought this morning has brought him hither to repeat his confession and to let your honor look upon him. It is the most phenomenal case of mistaken identity I ever

knew or heard of. Even fiction, with its limitless license of invention, offers no parallel that I ever heard of. The resemblance between this man and Boyd Westover is so perfect, so startling in its completeness that I could never have believed it upon any testimony other than that of my own eyes. I ask permission to bring the prisoner into court."

By this time the court room was packed with all sorts and conditions of men, for the news of what had happened during the night before had spread like wildfire over the city.

A minute later the prisoner, who gave his name as "Dolly Andrews," but admitted that "Dolly" was short for Adolphus, was brought to the bar. At the Commonwealth's Attorney's request, Boyd Westover moved forward and stood by his side.

The two men were precisely alike in size, form and feature, but strangely unlike in expression. As Jack Towns put the matter: "Boyd Westover, being a gentleman, looks into your eyes when he speaks to you or you to him; the other fellow looks anywhere but at you. In the one face there is intelligence,—in the other a low cunning; in the one an alert outlook, in the other a look of morbid introspection. Still the two men are absolutely alike in all physical respects—more alike than I supposed that even twins could be. I could myself easily mistake one for the other, and I don't wonder that a lot of excited school girls, routed out of bed in the middle of the night and with only bedroom candles to see by, made the terrible mistake they did."

The problem now was what to do. Fortunately the committing magistrate was a man of wise discretion. He presented himself in court and said to the Judge:

"I have not yet committed this man, though he was caught in the act and has made full confession, both as to his present offence and as to the former crime, of which another has been mistakenly convicted. I have thought it better to bring him before your honor and ask you to sit as committing magistrate in the case, in order that you may yourself hear his confession. It has seemed to me that this course was best in aid of justice in another case."

After an exchange of dignified compliments, the Judge, sitting as a committing magistrate, heard the case. During the preceding night there had been an alarm of "burglars" in Le Voiser's school. As before, the matron marshalled her charges for retreat, but this time there were two stalwart men on the premises and awaiting call. Monsieur Le Voiser had looked out for that, by ordering his furnace man and his steward to sleep in a room within convenient call, and when the intruder attempted to escape they were there to seize and hold him by physical force.

They testified to the facts.

Then the culprit repeated the confession he had already made. He seemed in no way ashamed, and he did not hesitate. He declared that it was he, and not Boyd Westover, who had invaded the school on the former occasion, and when asked what his motive was, he disclaimed all purposes of robbery and sought to justify himself by the solemn declaration:

"On both occasions I went there under the command of the Supreme Being."

"Just what do you mean by that?" asked the Judge, testily.

"I am divinely commissioned to marry Miss—"

"Stop!" commanded the Judge. "Don't mention the young lady's name. Just say 'a certain young lady.' We won't have her name dragged into the case."

"Very well," said the culprit. "It is only that I am acting under a divine commission and have nothing to conceal. I must marry the young lady in question. I met her in the street once, and talked to her on the subject. She mistook me for Boyd Westover, and I thought it best to use that name in my dealings with her. You see, Judge, when one is divinely commissioned to achieve a purpose, details make no difference."

"Go on," said the Judge; "omit explanations and arguments, and tell what happened."

"The young lady rejected my addresses. I was not discouraged by that. I had been divinely warned to expect it. I wrote her many notes, but she did not reply to them. Then I saw my duty clearly. I decided to use gentle force and carry her away with me, leaving the divine influence to chasten her proud spirit and teach her the duty of loving me. I have been twice defeated in my endeavors. I shall succeed when the appointed time is ripe. I must be patient and faithful, that is all."

"After all," whispered Jack Towns to the Commonwealth's Attorney, "that hysterical girl who said he had come to abduct her was right, except in her identification of the man."

"Yes, but the exception is one of disastrous consequences. Help me, Towns, to right this wrong! I'll never do the like again. I'll never prosecute another case so long as I live. I've already

sent in my resignation from office."

"You're a sublimated idiot," said Jack. "Listen. The Judge is speaking."

"I will commit this man to await the action of the Grand Jury," the Judge said. "In the meanwhile the Court suggests to the Commonwealth's Attorney the propriety of asking for a commission in lunacy to inquire into this man's sanity."

Thus spurred out of the lethargic collapse into which he had fallen, the official prosecutor made the necessary motion and the court promptly appointed the commission.

Then Jack Towns arose to ask:

"What is to be done to right the wrong in the case of my client? And more especially, what is to be done to prevent the aggravation of that wrong? I call attention to the fact that the papers committing this obviously innocent man to the penitentiary are already in the hands of the sheriff, who has no right to exercise discretion in the case. In the ordinary course of events my client, innocent of offence as he obviously is, must pass the portals of the prison within the hour. I ask the court to prevent this crowning wrong in a case in which enough and too much of wrong has been done already."

The Judge was in full sympathy, but for order's sake he asked if the Commonwealth's Attorney desired to be heard in opposition to the request of the counsel.

"Not in opposition," said the official, "but in full and hearty sympathy. I feel that a great wrong has been done; I feel this so

strongly that I have sent to the proper authority my resignation of the office I hold, in order that I may never again have part or lot in a wrong so grievous. I earnestly second the request of the counsel for the prisoner that everything shall be done which the law permits, to prevent further wrong and to right the wrong already done."

"Very well," said the Judge. "The sheriff is ordered to return to the clerk the papers in his possession. The prisoner is paroled in the custody of his counsel, to await further proceedings. Unfortunately the court knows of no process of law by which the fact of this innocent man's conviction and sentence can be undone. It is not within the power of man to make that not to be which has been. The court cannot undo the proceedings that have been had in this case. It can only make an earnest effort to prevent the wrongful results of those proceedings. To that end I purpose to go in person before the Governor of the State to ask for the fullest reparation that can be made, namely, a pardon—pardon for a crime that has not been committed. It seems almost a mockery, but it is the best that is possible under the law. In order to give all the emphasis I can to the proceedings, I shall adjourn court for a time, and ask the Commonwealth's Attorney to accompany me on this mission of justice. Further than that, I direct him to summon the members of the jury that convicted Boyd Westover of a crime of which he is not guilty, to go with us before the Governor and join us in our request. So far as the securing of a pardon is concerned, no effort of this kind is necessary; but the court deems it proper in this case to make this united appeal of judge, jury, and prosecutor by way of emphasizing our recognition of the injustice done. The court stands adjourned until four o'clock this afternoon, at which hour Mr. Boyd Westover"—the Judge no longer spoke of him as "the

prisoner"—"will present himself here and the court will itself deliver to him—as it is fitting that the court should do in such a case—the papers relieving him, so far as it is possible now to relieve him, of all the consequences of a clearly erroneous accusation and conviction."

When the Judge ceased speaking, Boyd Westover made a profound bow to him, saying simply: "I thank you." Then turning to Towns he said:

"Come, Jack! I'm faint and hungry. Let's go to Tom Griffin's and get something to eat."

Tom Griffin's was a place well known in the Richmond of that old time. Tom himself was a negro slave who enjoyed vastly more liberty than any free man of color ever did in Virginia. Every gentleman in Richmond was his personal friend; so was every aristocratic planter east of the Blue Ridge. Any one of them would have drawn his check in payment for Tom's liberty, if Tom had desired to be free. But Tom Griffin wanted nothing of the kind. He was happy and he knew when he was well off. If his freedom had been bought, he must, under the law, have left his native state, whose people were his friends and whose associations meant to him all that life could mean.

He knew all there was to know of catering and of cookery. Better still, as he phrased it, he "instincted just how to make things good to eat." He had genius, in short, and the fact was recognized and celebrated by every man in Virginia who had a palate and the price—and who enjoyed Tom Griffin's favor. For Tom Griffin's place was no ordinary restaurant. Men of the common herd were not welcomed there. Only those whom he

recognized as his friends—and his friendships were rigidly restricted to the aristocratic class—were privileged to sit at Tom's polished old mahogany table, and enjoy sora, or canvas backs or terrapin in perfection. Only such were served with his glorified chine and spare-ribs, his roast turkey or his forequarters of spring lamb. And those who were so privileged could never be persuaded to believe that anybody else in all the world could even by accident serve any viand in such perfection as that in which every viand came from Tom Griffin's expert hands.

Tom probably knew who his master was, but nobody else ever asked. Tom probably paid his master a liberal compensation for his time; he could well afford to do so. For Tom Griffin was rich—so rich that many a young Virginian whose frequent rash expenditures threatened to involve him in argument with his father, found relief in a loan from Tom Griffin's hand, concerning which no papers were passed. These loans were certain to be repaid. They were debts of honor, seeing that as a suitor Tom Griffin—a negro slave—would have had no standing in court.

Tom Griffin had waiters in adequate force, but he never permitted them to serve a gentleman without his personal superintendence. If a gentleman wanted a glass of water during his meal—as even Virginia gentlemen sometimes did—Tom regarded his waiter as a person competent to serve it. The waiter could clear away the used crockery, too, and see to it that lighted wax candles were in place for cigar-lighting purposes. There were other minor offices that Tom permitted to his waiters. But when it came to serving a dish, Tom took the function upon himself.

"You see," he once explained, "the boys is so stupid. If I've laid myself out to have a dish just right, I ain't a goin' to spile all my work by lettin' a clumsy nigger slap-bang it on the table, like as if he was a sellin' fish in the market."

In accordance with his custom, therefore, Tom personally served a dinner that Boyd Westover had not ordered. There were soft crabs to begin with. There was a whole fore-quarter of genuine spring lamb for Boyd to carve at will. There were the earliest peas of the season, secured by Tom Griffin's "System," which consisted in letting all the market gardeners know that he paid higher prices than anybody else for the first and best of every garden's product, and, more important still, that any gardener failing to give him first choice would be cut off his list, a proscription too serious to be faced with composure. There were the first tomatoes of the season, too, and there was everything else that was possible, including a *meringe a la créme*, black coffee and cigars at the end.

Boyd Westover had ordered nothing of the sort, but Tom Griffin served it all quite as if he had done so, and when it came upon the table Tom busied himself and a corkscrew in opening a dusty, cobwebbed bottle of antique Madeira, saying as he did so:

"Dis is Ann Maria wine, Mas' Boyd, an' dere ain't much of it left in Old Virginia, I reckon. Will you 'scuse me ef I say I ain't paid no attention to your order in gittin' your dinner ready, an' I ain't asked what sort o' wine you wanted? De explanation is dat Tom Griffin is a furnishin' this here dinner an' this here Ann Maria Madeira, as his contribution to de joyful occasion. Gentlemen, I trust your appetites is good."

With that Tom withdrew too hastily for protest or remonstrance. As he went he snatched a napkin from a vacant table, with which to dry his dusky cheeks of the tears that were streaming down them in spite of all his efforts at self-control.

Tom had learned from his customers to speak fairly correct English, and his lapse into the negro dialect of his boyhood on this occasion was the "outward and visible sign of the inward" emotional disturbance that Boyd Westover's experience had wrought in his all-affectionate soul.

XII
AFTER THE STORM

Hungry as Boyd Westover had declared himself to be, and tempting as was the dinner that Tom Griffin served, the young man ate with scant appetite, and when the meal was over his friend was anxiously worried.

"See here, Boyd!" he said. "In view of all the circumstances you ought to be the jolliest fellow in Richmond to-day. You've borne up astonishingly during the real stress of this affair. Why should you flunk now that it's all over and you're a victor?"

"I'm not flunking. I'll never flunk, but stoicism costs," answered Westover.

"Just how do you mean?"

"I mean that my determination to bear a bold and unflinching front as it becomes a Westover to do when the penitentiary doors were yawning for me, with lifelong disgrace as my portion, has taken more out of me than you can easily believe. To a man raised in our traditions, the prospect of disgrace and shame is a fearful thing to face. A score of agonizing deaths by torture would have been to me as nothing in comparison with what I have suffered in contemplation of this horror. I have faced the thing as bravely as I could. That much I owed to my name, my caste, my lineage—call it what you will. But my bank account of endurance is running low now. My drafts upon it have been heavy and—well, there have been no deposits to strengthen it."

He was thinking bitterly of Margaret Conway's defection.

"Don't let us talk of that. I'm as nearly on the verge of collapse as a healthy man can be, that's all."

"But you are vindicated, and when your pardon comes this afternoon—"

"Pardon? Yes. For a crime I did not commit. Think of it, Jack. From this hour forth I shall be a man accused, convicted and sentenced for a crime of infamous character, and graciously pardoned for it. It couldn't be worse—except to my own soul—if I were guilty. The pardon undoes nothing but the punishment. It doesn't wipe out the stain. It doesn't—oh, well, you understand. I am free, but my life is ruined. If I were called as a witness in court, the opposing attorney would be free to ask me if I had not been convicted of a felony and sentenced, and I should have to answer yes. Then he could forbid me to explain.

The thing is horrible. The law as it stands is infamously unjust. Why should I be a pardoned criminal when I have committed no crime? Why should not the court that convicted me and sentenced me under a mistake have power to undo the wrong by another trial or procedure of some kind? Why should I not be acquitted of a false accusation instead of being 'pardoned' for an offence never committed? No, don't bother to answer. I know the answer already. Such cases are too rare for the law to have provided for them, though it is the law's boast that there is no wrong for which it doesn't provide a remedy. However, let's talk of something else. I'm going off for rest. I suppose this Rocky Mountain matter ought to be looked after. Will you go out there as my representative, under your blanket power of attorney, and do whatever you think best about it? There seems to be money enough in it to pay you all you want in the way of fees, according to your representation."

"I'll go, of course. But I wish you would go instead, or go with me. It would divert your mind, and, believe me, Boyd, you need such diversion more than anything else. Why can't you go?"

"Because I must rest, and because—well, because of many things. Never mind. I'm not going and you are. I'm going a fishing. Draw up all the necessary papers and I'll execute them. Can you get them ready to-night? I want to go away to-morrow morning and forget."

"Where will you go? To Wanalah?"

"No; except for brief preparations. To the mountains. You know I own three or four high mountain tops up in the Blue Ridge, with the swales, called valleys, that lie between. The

land is worthless, but the woods up there are full of game and the brooks alive with trout. My grandfather bought the vast tract as an indulgence and my father kept it with a like purpose. There's a shack of some sort up there I believe. If not, I can build one in a half day, and it will interest me to chink and daub it."

Jack Towns sat silent for a time. Then he said:

"I heartily disapprove of your plan. It means solitude, and you need association with men to cure you of morbid and unwholesome feelings."

"But I can associate with men only upon sufferance. You've heard of the person who said: 'The more I see of men, the better I like dogs.' I'm not quite of his mind, but anyhow I'm going up into the high mountains with my dogs, my guns and my fishing tackle. So get all the papers ready, Jack, and let me get away as soon as possible."

Again, Jack Towns sat silent and troubled. After awhile he said:

"Of course you'll go to my house to-night and be my guest so long as you remain in Richmond?"

"Thank you, I will if you'll see to it that no visitors get at me. I want to go to sleep as soon as this thing's over and I'd like to stay asleep forever."

"You're all wrong, but of course as a guest in my house you'll be protected from everything that is reasonably or unreasonably disagreeable to you. But really, Boyd, the people who are sure

to call to-night—"

"Yes, I know. They will call to offer congratulations which are in fact commiserations and condolences. I don't care to attend my own funeral in the capacity of chief mourner, just yet. I shouldn't mind the funeral, with myself for the corpse, but I'm not prepared to play the part of chief mourner."

"You're morbid, Boyd."

"Perhaps so, but I'm going to become healthy again. Now listen. I'm going off into the mountains to match my wits with those of the wiliest trout, the shyest deer, the most experienced wild turkey gobblers, and now and then perhaps to try conclusions with a sly old bear. By the time I return to civilization, I'll have decided upon my career. I'm going to do something—I don't know what. But by that time I'll know."

"Good! That's the way to look at things. After all, the strain your stoicism has put upon you hasn't robbed you of your robust manhood, and that is what I feared."

"My dear Jack, I couldn't lose that and go on living. It is only that I must have a little time in which to pull myself together and see what I can do. If your mission to the Rocky Mountains proves that those fellows out there are right, and that a great wealth is ready to my hand, I may turn philanthropist, or I may enter upon great business undertakings which by their employment of multitudes of men at good wages are perhaps the most philanthropic of all endeavors. I don't know. I can't think till I sleep and rest. At any rate while I am recovering tone up in the high mountains of the Blue Ridge, you will find out what

monetary tools I have to work with. Theology teaches us that the primal curse was a condemnation to work. It was the primal blessing instead. That's an aside. I have good friends up in the mountains, chief among whom is Judy Peters."

"The Queen of the mountains? I've heard of her. She's an erratic political factor with whom every candidate must reckon, I'm told."

"She's all that. She controls the mountain vote in her district as absolutely as the Superintendent of the Penitentiary was to have controlled me—"

"Now, my dear Boyd, I beg you to put aside that sort of brooding. It's morbid, it's hurtful to your character, it's—"

"Yes, I know. But I'm not pardoned yet, you know, and naturally—never mind. I was speaking of Judy. She doesn't abuse her political power. In many elections she doesn't use it at all. She says to her subjects: 'I ain't choosed 'twixt them two candidates. Choose for yourselves.' But when she does choose and intimates her choice the men of the mountain all vote her way, and their vote makes an end of all uncertainty as to the result of that election. But it isn't only in politics that she rules. A Baptist preacher went up that way once and became pastor of a church. For a while he 'cut a wide swath,' as Judy said. But he made the mistake of offending her majesty by some indiscreet criticism of her. She manifested no displeasure, but on the next Sunday and the next he found a meeting house full of empty benches to preach to. Then he quit, as Judy afterwards explained, 'because his usefulness was at its end.' It's the same way with everything else. Ordinarily she does not interfere, but

when she does her interference is instantly effective. It's a common saying up there that 'ef you want to stay in the mountings comfortable like, you don't want to git yourself into Judy Peters's bad books.'"

"On what does her extraordinary influence rest?"

"It would be hard to say. Partly I should say upon her extraordinary sagacity, especially in her judgment of men and her penetration of their motives. My father used to say she had second sight of the Scottish sort. It is certain that no man ever deceives her for long, no false pretense ever endures her scrutiny, and she never falters in her judgments. She is as relentless as Fate itself and as merciless in her dealings with what she adjudges to be wrong. As she doesn't know what fear means, she is equally resolute in her active support of all causes that enlist her sympathy. She is ignorant, as we reckon such things, but her sagacity is well nigh supernatural, and she keeps herself informed on all matters that interest her, with an accuracy that a detective bureau might envy. She is kindly, but not courteous. She hates shams with an elemental intensity. If you are a guest in her house she fulfils every obligation of hospitality, but she tells you no lies either in word or deed. She will lay herself out to serve you with sublime fried chicken and glorified waffles, but if she catches you in a falsehood she'll tell you you are a liar even while she presses the apple butter or the maple syrup upon your acceptance. In brief, Judy Peters is altogether a natural human being, whose elemental passions have never been curbed by convention, whose courage is of the kind that never shrinks from the recognition of truth or from its telling in plain words. If she likes you she will say so. If she dislikes you she will tell you the fact in equally plain words. If

she is in doubt about you, she will tell you she 'ain't choosed yit' as to you. That's Judy. Still my description utterly lacks something, I don't know what—personality perhaps. You must know Judy personally if you would understand her. Her malignity, in cases that seem to her to call for it, is well nigh beyond conception in its devilish ingenuity and persistence; her loyalty, on the other hand, stops at nothing that may serve its fortunate beneficiary. She was my father's friend, in her odd way, and she is mine. My father once rendered her a service; I don't know what it was, and she won't tell me. He always said it was a trifle of no consequence; she always answers my inquiries about it by saying:

""'Tain't none o' your business, Boyd, what he done for me, but ef I could 'a' turned these here mountings upside down an' he'd 'a' give the word as how he wanted it done, over the mountings would 'a' gone, you kin bet your bottom dollar on that proposition.'

"She is my friend on my father's account and nothing can change that. If I should try to deceive her she'd denounce me to my face as a liar, but she'd make the mountains too hot to hold anybody else who should suggest such a thing, and she'd go on doing her mightiest in my interest, in spite of my fault. In her way she is a wholesome sort of person for me to meet just now, and I'm going to spend a few days with her, just for the bracing up she'll give me. After that I'll go on up into the high mountains."

So ended the dinner and the conversation. Next morning Westover set out for Wanalah, where he intended to spend a few days giving necessary directions and equipping himself with

supplies for his sojourn in the mountains. These consisted of books, mainly, with a bag of corn meal, a ham or two, a few sides of bacon, guns, ammunition, fishing tackle and rough clothing, all of which were loaded into an ox cart, which a negro boy was to drive in leisurely fashion to Judy Peters's. Beyond that, in the climb up the mountainside, oxen would be of less use than bother, and Westover depended upon the long legs and strong arms of mountaineers to manage the further transportation.

XIII
"AUNT BETSY" TAKES THE HELM

It would have been a dangerous thing for any man to accuse Colonel Conway of cowardice. Personal courage was his in full measure. Three times during the Mexican war he had been promoted—rising from lieutenant to colonel—and each time in special recognition of "conspicuous gallantry in action." He was afraid of no man and no company of men. He did and dared throughout his life with absolute disregard of danger.

But Colonel Conway was mightily afraid of his sister Betsy, as his daughter had said. Why, he could not have told, but the fact remained that he was afraid of that elderly little woman, encased as she was in an armor of conventionalities, gentle but resolute, and mercilessly insistent upon what she decreed to be "proper" conduct.

When the negro boy who daily brought the letter bag from the post office to The Oaks reported that Mr. Boyd Westover had come up from Richmond and was to stay only for a day or two at Wanalah, Colonel Conway promptly announced his purpose to ride over and congratulate him. The family were at the breakfast table at the time and the Colonel observed that his daughter paled at the mention of his purpose, though she said nothing in reply to his declaration. His sister, "Aunt Betsy," also said nothing. It was her habit to say nothing till the time was ripe.

Immediately after breakfast Margaret sought speech with her father.

"You are right, father, and what you purpose is the part of an honorable man. You ought to go to Boyd and take his hand, and make him feel that men of your kind and his kind understand. But —" She paused uncertainly.

"'But' what, daughter?" asked the Colonel, eagerly scanning her face.

"Nothing. I was only going to say that perhaps it will be just as well not to mention me—unless he does so first."

There was that in her hesitating utterance which awakened the Colonel's attention and curiosity.

"But why not, Margaret?" he questioned. "Surely it is about you he will be most eager to hear."

"If so he will ask. If he doesn't, I beg of you—"

"Why, surely you've heard from him frequently during this trouble—and you've written to him?"

"I've written to him, yes."

"And he has written to you, of course?"

The girl stood silent, while she plucked honeysuckles from the vines that shrouded the porch in which they stood, and nervously pulled them to pieces.

"Answer me, child," the Colonel said in a tone of command. "Hasn't Boyd Westover written to you during all this trouble?"

"I have received no letter from him," she answered hesitatingly.

"Do you mean that he hasn't written to you of his arrest, trial and all the rest of it, of his vindication and—"

"I have had no letter from him," she repeated.

"Hasn't he even offered you a release from your engagement?"

"I have had no letter from him," she said again, but this time she lost her self control and blurted out the thought that had troubled her for many days.

"Oh Father," she said, seizing his arm as if to detain him, "there has been some cruel mistake, some miscarriage, something, I don't know what. I only know that Boyd Westover is a gentleman and would never have neglected such a duty."

"As he *has* neglected it, he is unworthy of a gentleman's recognition, Margaret. I shall not go near him."

"You are judging him unheard," she promptly and passionately answered; "and oh, Father, that isn't like you, because it is unworthy, and nothing unworthy or unjust is like you. I beg of you, give him a chance. You need do nothing but make a call. The explanation will follow—if there is an explanation. If there isn't—well, we shall know."

"I'll go, daughter, of course. It is my duty. But I'll force the explanation. I have a right to ask him why, being engaged to marry my daughter, he has sent her no release, in view of the circumstances. That will bring out all there is to say on the subject."

At that point in their conversation the father and daughter were interrupted by the advent of "Aunt Betsy," who passed from the house into the porch quite casually, and said to Margaret:

"When you have leisure, dear, you'd better see Janet. She has come to say that Diana is much worse this morning and that the doctor, who was in a hurry, left some important written directions out at the quarters."

Quick to respond to duty, especially where the sick of the plantation were concerned, Margaret was in the saddle a minute later and galloping toward the "quarters," as the negro village was called in plantation nomenclature.

No sooner had her sorrel palfry's white tail flashed its signal of departure through the outer grove, than "Aunt Betsy" turned to

her brother, saying:

"Of course you forgot yourself, brother, when you impulsively declared your purpose to visit Mr. Boyd Westover to-day. The one serious fault in your nature is impulsiveness. You are too chivalric, too trusting, too confident of others, too apt to think of them as men like yourself."

"What is it you want to say, Betsy?" asked the Colonel as he sank limply into one of the porch chairs.

"Only that upon reflection you must see that it won't do for you to call upon Mr. Westover."

"But why not?"

"There are a dozen reasons. He's a man under a cloud you know. He has been regularly convicted of a crime, and sentenced for it, and—"

"But he has been fully vindicated and pardoned," interrupted the Colonel.

"Yes, of course. Fully vindicated by the confession of a demented man who may or may not know what he is saying. It may be—well, anything may be, you know, and opinions in this community are likely to be divided as to the matter of Mr. Boyd Westover's guilt. So long as that remains unsettled the Master of The Oaks cannot afford to take sides by visiting Wanalah."

"You mean that I, Colonel Robert Conway, of The Oaks, am not free to do as I damn please just because a lot of pestilent old gossips think to say me nay?"

"You misunderstand me, Robert, and you grieve me to the heart by the violence of your language."

"Did I swear? If so I beg pardon, but sometimes oaths will slip out. It's a bad habit I acquired in the army."

"You utterly fail to understand me," said "Aunt Betsy." "I am not concerned about myself or you, or the family name, though that is dearer to me than all else in the world. I'm concerned for Margaret. You are a man, of course, but even a man ought to see that for Margaret's father to visit Westover of Wanalah, under existing circumstances, would be everywhere interpreted as throwing Margaret at his head, challenging him to fulfil his engagement with her. In brief it would be almost the equivalent of that vulgar impossibility in Virginia, a breach of promise suit."

"Aunt Betsy" saw in Colonel Conway's face that she had carried her point, and she did not imperil the result by further speech. She suddenly applied her handkerchief to her eyes instead, and hastily retreated to her room, confident that on that day at least her brother would not ride over to Wanalah.

XIV
WESTOVER AT WANALAH

But if Colonel Conway did not visit Westover during his brief stay at Wanalah, some others did. In the main they were elderly

men of his own social class, whose purpose was sincere to express their pleasure in his escape from an embarrassing perplexity. But their very sincerity proved to be the undoing of their purpose. They hardly knew how to approach the subject of his trouble without offence and yet it seemed necessary to speak of it. It isn't easy to tell a man of high place in the world that you are pleased with his accidental escape from a term of penal servitude in the penitentiary. As a result of this embarrassment the congratulations of these gentlemen, which were meant to be cordial, seemed to Westover to be coldly commiserative instead. Meant to be comradely, they seemed to him condescending almost to the point of offensiveness. To make matters worse, Westover's visitors were as sorely embarrassed as he was, and by way of escape, every one of them, upon one pretext or another, declined his invitation to stay to dinner which, under ordinary circumstances, every one of them would have accepted quite as a matter of course. To him this suggested avoidance of intimacy.

Perhaps all this was emphasized to his mind by his experience with the earliest of his visitors on that day. This was William Wilberforce Webb, a young lawyer who as representative of the county in the House of Delegates—the legislature of Virginia—regarded himself as "a rising young statesman, in the direct line of promotion."

Mr. Webb was not a man in Westover's class, and in visiting Wanalah at all he was guilty of something approaching presumption, under the rules of the social régime of that time and country. Still, as the representative of the county in the legislature, he had a right perhaps to regard himself as privileged to that extent.

However that might be, Westover welcomed him cordially as the first of his neighbors to call. He extended the customary hospitalities of the house, which the other accepted. Then the two fell into conversation upon general topics, drifting into more personal themes by natural processes. Lacking the tact that comes of good breeding, the voluble and self appreciative lawyer presently sought to exalt his own condescension in promptly calling upon Westover.

"You see I have no hidebound prejudices, Westover, and in my position, as the representative of the people, the promptitude of my visit may encourage others to recognize you, in spite of what has happened."

Pale to the lips with passion, Westover rose as the man spoke, moved to the edge of the porch in which they had been sitting, and, calling to a negro boy, said:

"Bring this gentleman's horse to the door at once; do you hear? He has imperative business elsewhere than at Wanalah."

There was no mistaking the meaning of this, and Webb was quick to comprehend it. Rising angrily he asked:

"What do you mean, sir?"

"You heard my instruction to the boy," answered Westover in an even, unexcited voice. "You can infer my meaning from that. By the way, the boy has obeyed promptly and your horse is waiting for you."

The man was unaccustomed to such deliberation and self control in the speech of an angry person, but he sought to imitate

it as he had sought before to copy the manners of those whose social position he envied. He suppressed the impulse of intemperate speech and, assuming the dignity that he thought belonged to him in right of his "position," said:

"You will hear from me, promptly, Mr. Westover."

"At your pleasure, sir," answered Westover. "I shall remain at Wanalah for four days, after to-day. After that I shall be absent for a time, but should your message to me be delayed so long, which I can hardly conceive to be possible, you can communicate with me later through my overseer, with whom I shall leave an address to be used only in emergencies. Should you leave any message with him he will have instructions to forward it to me by a special courier who will lose no time in its delivery."

This was a crowning affront to a man of Webb's extraction, and perhaps Westover meant it to be such. The overseer class in Virginia was the most inferior of all, and the very suggestion of one gentleman that he would communicate with another through his overseer would have implied insult. If Westover had been speaking to one whom he regarded as an equal he would have said:

"My address for a time will be uncertain, but my overseer will have it and I'll instruct him to keep my lawyer informed of it from time to time."

To make matters worse, it was the bitterest drop of gall in Webb's cup that he was himself descended from a race of overseers. His father, indeed, had never served in that capacity,

for the reason that the grandfather had left him enough money to buy a little plantation of his own and struggle for recognition as a member of the planter class. But Webb had learned by experience that there was vitality in the Virginian dogma that "it takes three generations to make a gentleman."

The suggestion, therefore, that he might, if necessary, communicate with Westover through the Wanalah overseer, was peculiarly offensive to Webb. Whether Westover had intended it to be so or not, there is no means of finding out. He was angry enough to intend anything.

But this encounter spoiled Westover's capacity to enjoy the visits of his later coming friends. It set his sensitiveness on edge, as it were, and prompted his mind to misinterpretation, so that when he was left to dine alone at Wanalah that day the very spaciousness of the dining room seemed to mock his solitude, while the polished furniture that had witnessed so much of joyous festivity in that great banquet hall seemed to have put on mourning for its master.

About sunset, however, relief came to Westover's spirit in the person of Dr. Carley Farnsworth. His real name was Don Carlos Farnsworth, and he was a physician, but to Westover as to every other friend he had ever had, he was known as "Carley." Carley was in many ways peculiar. He was cynical at times and always disposed to take a whimsical view of things. His sense of humor was alert and keen, though he never in his life made a joke and very rarely laughed. His most whimsical interpretations of events and situations were delivered in solemn, philosophical fervor, and with a seriousness that well nigh undid the humor of them.

He arrived at Wanalah about sunset, and greeted his old friend cordially, and quite as if his visit had been an ordinary one with no "circumstances" of any kind behind it. Carley Farnsworth was a gentleman, that was all. He had tact and *nous*, and above all a sympathy so abounding that trespass upon another's sensibilities was impossible to him. Even in examining patients, it was said of him that he asked all his questions in a way that made them seem a matter of course.

After the first greetings were over he said:

"I've been rather impatiently waiting for your return to Wanalah, Boyd, because I've been wanting to floor you with half a dozen authorities that agree with me as to the construction of *ut* with the subjunctive in that passage we came so near fighting about. I've devoted all my time lately to the task of accumulating ammunition and after supper I'm going to blow you clear out of the arena. But supper first, of course. I'm a hungry hygienist and I know the flavor of the Wanalah hams. By the way, you and I are alone; why shouldn't we be dissolute? If you'll tell your cook to serve us some roasted black-eyed peas, such as you and I ate here a year ago,—roasted in the pod you know, and served with the hot ashes on them,—I'll promise to be happy for a whole year to come. Of course there'll be broiled tomatoes as an adjunct to the cold ham, and paper thin wafer biscuit to keep our digestions in order, and after supper we'll discuss '*ut* with the subjunctive' as far into the night as you please."

"Thank you," said Westover, smiling for the first time that day. "I'm ready for the contest, though really I don't think either of us is Latin scholar enough to be entitled to 'views' on the subject."

"There you annoyingly agree with the authorities," answered Dr. Farnsworth. "You see I wrote to Professor Anthon on the subject, submitting my contentions, and he replied most courteously, suggesting that if I would supplement my obviously rudimentary Latin studies with a more considerable reading of Latin texts,—he mentioned fifteen hundred or so that he thought I might profitably run through in my leisure moments,—I would gain some slight insight into the grammatical problem I had undertaken to settle out of my own inner consciousness and Bullion's Latin Grammar. The thing put me on my mettle, so I wrote to our own University professor, Dr. Gessner Harrison. What do you think? He replied: 'My dear Dr. Farnsworth: You're a sublimated idiot and a good many different kinds of a donkey.' Those weren't his exact words, you understand, but the paraphrase fairly interprets the spirit of his reply. However, we'll leave all that till after supper."

So he chattered on, after his habit, and he succeeded not only in preventing talk of depressing things, but in amusing his host so far as to awaken something like jollity in him.

But an occurrence during supper threatened to spoil all. A missive arrived from Webb, borne not by a friend commissioned to "act for him," but by a negro servant.

Westover tore the envelope open and read the few lines written upon the sheet within. They ran as follows:

"Mr. Webb intimated to Mr. Westover today that he would presently send him a hostile note. Upon reflection Mr. Webb has decided that he cannot afford to send anything of the kind. It seems to him and to such friends as he has had time to consult

that recent events affecting Mr. Westover's status in society—events which need not be specified in detail—have rendered it unnecessary and unbecoming for any gentleman to pay attention to anything that Mr. Westover may say or do."

Having read the insolent message with no sign of anger that would have been observed by anybody, Westover turned to his dining-room servant and said, quite indifferently:

"Send the boy who brought that note to me. I wish to speak to him."

When the negro messenger entered, Westover asked:

"Do you belong to Mr. Webb?"

"No, sir. Laws a Massy, Mas' Boyd, he don't own no folks er nothin' else. He jes' hires me to fetch and carry for him sometimes."

"I thought so. How much did he pay you to bring this note to me?"

"Eighteen pence, sir."

"Well, now I want you to carry it back to him and I'll give you two and threepence for the service. I'll make it half a dollar, if you'll tell him just what I say."

In old Virginia "eighteen pence" meant a quarter of a dollar, and "two and threepence" meant thirty-seven and a half cents, the shilling then being sixteen and two-thirds cents, as the result of some ancient debasement of coin in England.

"Suttenly, sir. Ef what you wants me to say is so superfluous like as to make him mad, I reckon I kin run faster'n he kin."

"Very well then. I want you to hand him back his letter and say:

"'Mas' Boyd Westover says he hasn't time just now to ride seven miles to the Court House to pull your nose or slap your jaws, but he'll attend to the matter at the first convenient opportunity.' Can you say that?"

"No," interrupted Carley Farnsworth. "Why should you want him to? It wouldn't add a cubit to the stature of your dignity and it wouldn't be any worse affront to Webb than you can put upon him by sending his note back without a word. He would rejoice in a quarrel with you—a safe one at arm's length I mean. It would exalt him in the eyes of others, and as he's a member of the legislature sure of his reelection, you can't challenge him or he you. You may hold any view you please as to '*ut*' with the subjunctive, but on this matter you simply mustn't obey the impulses of temporary anger. Send the letter back without a word, and to-morrow you'll thank me for bringing philosophy and common sense to the restraint of an impulse that has its root in the dormant but still potential savagery of your nature."

Westover laughed at the solemn ponderousness of his friend's utterance, and the laughter was good for him.

"You're right, of course," he said. "Here, Sam, just take this letter back to Mr. Webb and tell him I sent no message of any kind. And here's your half dollar."

Then, as the negro left the room the young man said:

"After all, my time hasn't come yet, and meanwhile I must preserve my dignity. You see, Carley, I am still Westover of Wanalah, and I mean to prove it to all men by doing things. I don't know yet what things they are to be, but they must be worthy of the name I bear. I'm going off to rest and think for a while, and when I come back to Wanalah Jack Towns will tell me what tools I have to work with. Meanwhile brawling with an underbred fellow like Webb would be most unbecoming."

"I'm glad to see that you have lucid intervals, Boyd," answered his friend. "I reckon we won't bother with Latin Grammar to-night. Let's play backgammon instead. But in the meantime let me give you a professional opinion and some professional advice. You are neurasthenic and you've got to get over it. Your mountain trip will be good for you, but it would be better still if you could get up a fight of some sort. I'll try to stir up something of the kind for you, when you get back. Anyhow, you've got to *quit thinking about yourself*. Let me assure you that there are thousands of more interesting topics to think about. There's lettuce, for example, and there is music, to say nothing of onions and roe herrings and the Missouri Compromise, and the relations of agriculture to national wealth, and 'possum hunting, and black-eyed peas and the Dred Scott decision and the morality of flipping quarters at crack loo. Oh, here's the backgammon board. Let's get to work."

XV
UP AT JUDY'S

Robust as he was, Boyd Westover felt himself somewhat weary and footsore when he put one hand on the top rail of Judy Peters's gateless fence and sprang over it to greet his hostess.

She was waiting for him of course. She had caught sight of him far down the mountain, at one of the many turns of the road which were conveniently visible from her door or her other points of observation. It was not Judy's habit to be surprised by any arrival. She had had no warning of Westover's intended visit, but she was keen of vision, and had had no difficulty in recognizing the wayfarer four miles away, if measured by the tortuosities of the road, and perhaps a mile away as the crow flies.

That had been two or three hours before the time of his actual arrival, but Judy had not wondered at the delay. She knew Boyd's ways and she had made out that he had fishing tackle with him.

"Sapphiry," she had asked her daughter, "how many chickens has you got picked an' fixed in the spring house."

"Four," answered Sapphira. "Why, Mammy?"

"Never you mind why." Then relenting toward the girl's curiosity she said:

"Boyd Westover's a comin', an' he'll be mighty hungry fer supper. He's afoot an' it's more'n twenty mile from his place here. Besides that he's got four big branches to fish afore he gits here an' that'll take a heap o' walkin' to say nothin' o' the len'th o' the road. So you jes' go on with your ironin' till I tell you to set about gittin' supper."

"May be he won't fish the branches," suggested the girl.

"Yes, an' may be the moon'll rise in the west to-night an' run wrong way 'crost the firmament. It's the same sort of a may be, an' that sort never happens."

"What you reckon he's a comin' fer, Mammy?" asked Sapphira as she held up a stiffly starched garment to inspect her work.

"Dunno, an' it don't make no difference neither, as the feller says. Boyd Westover's father always found a welcome a waitin' at the fence when he come to Judy Peters's house, an' I's got the same sort o' welcome a holdin' out both han's for Boyd when he comes." Then by way of a more direct though conjectural answer to her daughter's question she added:

"Reckon he wants to git away from them stuckups down his way. I hear they's a been a botherin' of him o' late. Coffey, William, son to Jesse, was a tellin' me all about it."

The form "Coffey, William, son to Jesse," was one in familiar use in the mountains as a means of identifying one among a multitude of men bearing the same name. There were several families whose membership was so all pervasive of that region that some such method of identification on the polling lists and elsewhere was a necessity, and the polling list nomenclature had been very generally adopted into ordinary use.

"What was 't all 'bout, Mammy?"

"I dunno, only, whatever 'twas, another feller done it."

With that lucid explanation Judy set her flatiron on a trivet in front of the fire and went to one of her points of vantage to scan the road below. On her return she took Sapphira's flatiron from her hand, saying:

"I'll finish up the ironin'. They ain't but three or four pieces. You run over to the furdest 'tater patch an' gravel a pan o' potaters. Git a plenty of 'em, kase they's mighty good with fish."

To "gravel" potatoes is to dig into the "hill" in which the vines grow, from its side remove the larger potatoes from the rootlets, close up the opening and leave the vines to bring the remaining tubers to perfection. It is a process that yields new potatoes before their time and without destroying the growths. The potatoes secured in that way are very small, very unwholesome, but altogether delicious.

"May be he didn't git no fish," said Sapphira doubtingly.

"Well, you jes' look after the potater maybes. That's your job. The fish'll git here all right kase I seen him a cleanin' of 'em on the rocks down 'long Samson's branch. He won't fish no more this evenin' an' he'll be here in less 'n an hour. So mosey along an' git them potaters. Soon's I git through with this petticoat, I'll sif' some meal fer batter bread, git out a crock o' apple butter, an' cut up some tomatuses. Boyd Westover's hungry an' he's a goin' to have a good supper ef Judy Peters knows her business, an' she thinks she do."

When Boyd nimbly swung himself over the fence, all preliminary preparations for the evening meal were completely made, and Judy stood ready to welcome him. In his honor she

had changed the limp, hot weather gown that had served her during her ironing, for a stiffly starched calico in the violently high colors of which her barbaric soul mightily rejoiced.

For greeting Judy said:

"You's come up to shake off the stuck-ups, Boyd, an' git among natural folks I s'pose. Anyhow you're welcome. Them's beauties," looking into Boyd's fish basket, "an' they's a flat-back an' two catfish among 'em. I'd ruther eat a catfish or a flat-back any time than a trout. Trout's sort o' stuck up fish, even ef they does live up here in the mountings. But I ain't forgot how to make trout good with the sauce your pappy learnt me how to make—sauce All on Days he called it,—an' I'll make you some fer supper."

Presumably Judy meant sauce Hollandaise. At any rate the sauce she served with the trout that night was a glorified example of the dressing that *chefs* call by that name, improved by the gastronomic genius of the late Westover of Wanalah, and made by Judy Peters, whose instinct was infallible in the manufacture of things delectable to the palate.

Suddenly Judy observed something in Boyd Westover's face, —a look of utter weariness that she was sagacious enough to interpret aright, though she made no mention of her interpretation.

"He's got things on his mind," she reflected; "an' they's more tiresome like than all the trampin' a feller can do. His legs is good fer twice the walkin' he's done to-day. Never mind. We'll fix that up afore we're through."

Then turning to Westover she said:

"You is awful tired, Boyd, even ef you did clear the fence like a yearlin' colt. Now you's a goin' to rest. Never min' tellin' me nothin' 'bout what you're here for nor none o' the rest of it. You's a-goin' to have a nap. It'll be a hour or may be two hour afore supper's ready, 'cause I's got that sauce All on Days to make, an' it's a slow job. It's awful hot this evenin'"—Judy meant afternoon, but like the more aristocratic Virginians she called everything between noon and nightfall "evening" and everything after dusk "night," as in very fact it was.

"It's awful hot this evenin', but they's a good breeze a blowin' through the passage, an' they's a broad sofy there, three foot wide an' seven foot long, an' there you's a goin' to spen' the time twix this an' supper. They's pillers a plenty, an' you ain't got nothin' to do only to lay down an' git a good rest. Come on in."

Five minutes later Boyd Westover was comfortably asleep, with the assurance that there were no shams or false pretenses in the hospitality he was enjoying, and it was more than two hours later before Judy permitted him to be waked. She was accustomed to dominate everything in her own household, suppers included, and this particular supper she had "sot back" by a full hour in order that her guest might have his nap out. Even then she forbade a rude awakening. She simply parsed two or three times through the broad passageway between the two log houses that constituted her home, until the swish of her starched calico skirts awakened him "drop by drop like," as she explained to Sapphira and those of her long-legged sons who had "turned up" for supper in the maternal home. Those boys, Webster, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson and Theonidas—heaven

only knows where Judy got that name—were always uncertain quantities in the household. Each was a law unto himself. They came and went at their own free will, giving no account of themselves. Home was home to them. They appeared there, sure of a welcome, whenever it suited their convenience to do so. Sometimes all four would be there; sometimes not one of them would appear for months at a time. In either case no questions were asked and no accounts given. The boys were strong of limb, alert, industrious, independent. They made their own living by doing any sort of work that fell in their way, and they envied no man his lot or his possessions. They were types of a robust citizenship of which the Trusts and the Trades Unions—conspiracies both in restraint alike of trade and of liberty—have left us small trace in this modern world.

Their ages varied from thirteen to nineteen years; their height from five feet ten to six feet three; their muscularity and their sturdy self reliance not at all.

XVI
JUDY PETERS'S DIAGNOSIS

"Now come out here, Boyd," said Judy when the supper was over. "They's a full moon or purty nigh onto it, an' it's a raisin', an' the weather's good an' hot,—good fer growin' corn, an' not bad fer apples an' pertaters. You an' me is a goin' to have a good long talk. Take that there rockin' chair an' make yourself comfortable, like, 'cause I want to hear all about it."

"Now come out here, Boyd."—*Page 161.*

NOW COME OUT HERE, BOYD.—*Page 161.*

The rocking chairs sat upon a broad porch or platform, for it had no roof over it, and the rising moon flooded the place with light.

"Now tell me all about it," said Judy when the two were seated.

It is to be said that Judy knew "all about it" already, at least all about what had happened up to a very few days before. It was her habit to keep herself fully informed on all subjects that interested her, and she was mightily interested in everything that concerned any Westover.

Her loyalty to the Westovers had its own reasons for being. These she never explained. She rarely explained anything personal to herself. But that loyalty was barbaric in its intensity of devotion, savage in its vindictiveness toward whatever and whomsoever antagonized the Westovers, and recklessly relentless in its manifestations.

As soon as Boyd Westover fell into difficulties in Richmond, she sent one of her henchmen there with instructions to employ a lawyer to keep her informed. When Boyd returned to Wanalah she sent Edgar Coffey to the county seat to report happenings and conditions. She said to him:

"Edgar, I has choosed you fer this job, bekase o' several pints in your character. You is slick an' sly, an' you ain't got no principles to stand in your way, an' you seems to be stupid, so's nobody'll suspect you or keep silent when you's about. You kin lie so natural like that nobody but me'd ever suspect you was a

lyin' at all. What you's got to do is to go down there to the Court House on some sort o' made up business like, an' hang 'round an' listen, an' find out how the stuck-ups is a treatin' Boyd Westover. Then you come back here an' tell me 'bout it. Ef them stuckups treats him fa'r an' squa'r like, it'll be all right. Ef they don't, I'll make some of 'em wisht they hadn't never 'a' been borned." This last utterance was addressed only to herself.

Edgar Coffey had returned on the evening before Westover's arrival and his report had included some account of Webb's boasting that he had "declined to consider Boyd Westover as a man entitled to the attention of a gentleman."

"Now wait, Edgar," Judy said, when Coffey reported this; "don't let your loose tongue git away with you. Did you hear him say that hisself—the durned little two-cent postage?"

"Yes, Judy, sure an' certain; an' everybody down that way's a laughin' in their sleeves 'bout it. They says, says they, 'Why, ef Boyd Westover was to git a real mad on him, that feller wouldn't make a mouthful fer him.'"

"No more would he," said Judy, addressing herself.

So Judy knew in advance the whole story that she asked Westover to tell her; but she wanted to hear his version of it and find out his mood of mind concerning it, and so she gave no sign of knowing anything. That was Judy's way.

Just as the two comfortably seated themselves Theonidas—the thirteen year old son of the house—emerged from within bearing a tray on which were a stone jug, a vase-like glass, containing honey in the comb, two tumblers and a little array of

spoons.

"Now wait a minute, Boyd," said Judy as she directed the placing of the tray on a table that stood between her and Westover. "You's got a lot o' durned temperance nonsense mixed up with your good sense, but this is a 'ceptional occasion; I ain't yit had a chanst to drink to the new 'Westover of Wanalah,' nor yit to congratulate you; an' besides that, they ain't no harm in a glass o' peach an' honey when I raised the honey an' made the peach myself, an' specially when the peach is thirteen year ole in the bar'l. So you an' me is a goin' to have a glass o' peach an' honey together, sich as folks don't often taste these days. They was three bar'ls o' that there peach brandy, when my husband, Marcellus, an' me made it, thirteen year ago, an' that jug's got the last drop that's left of it. An' the best of it is they ain't never anybody but the best been let to let it trickle down their throats. When it were five year old I sold one bar'l of it to Tom Griffin in Richmond, 'cause he never would let anybody but the best have any of it. When it were ten year old I give one bar'l of it to your pappy, 'cause I jes' know'd what sort o' folks he'd let drink it. You see the peaches that year—thirteen year ago—was extra superfine, an' I picked out the very best of 'em for them three bar'ls o' brandy, an' they ain't been no peach like it ever made in these here mountings. So now you an' me's a goin' to have a glass o' peach an' honey, an' sip it slow like, while we talk, so's that we kin git the taste in our throats an' all the way down. You see, Boyd, they's tricks in makin' peach jes' as they is in politics an' religion an' school teachin' and gittin' married. They wa'n't no trick when I got married, mind. I don't mean that. Marcellus Peters was as good a man as these here mountings ever raised, an' now he's been dead more'n a dozen years I ain't got no complaint to make 'bout him. Only he hadn't much 'git there' in

him. It didn't make much difference, 'cause I could ten' to that part o' the business myself. But he did know how to make peach an' apple brandy. You see, Boyd, they's tricks in makin' peach, as I was a sayin', an' Marcellus he know'd all of 'em. I ain't a sayin' he didn't work 'em off on folks as didn't know nor care. He'd git a order fer peach when he hadn't no peach, an' he'd fill the order. He'd take ten pound or so o' dried peaches an' set 'em to stew fer an hour or so. Then he'd put 'em through the bung hole of a bar'l o' apple brandy, an' let 'em 'sociate with the brandy like, fer three or four days, rollin' the bar'l now an' then to shake it up, like. Then he'd draw that brandy off into another bar'l, an' it was fine old peach. Same with cherry brandy, or blackberry, an' the stuck-ups didn't know the difference. But this here peach is differenter. It was made of peaches, good peaches, such as you'd smile to eat, an' Tom Griffin was glad to pay me seven dollars a gallon for the bar'l of it he got. I reckon he'd pay twice that ef he could git another bar'l of it now."

Judy Peters was not talking without a definite purpose. She never did that. Even when her conversation rambled as it did on this occasion, it rambled of set purpose and with deliberate intent. This time her purpose was to induce a like rambling impulse on Boyd Westover's part, so that she might not only hear from his lips the whole story of his tribulations, but gather, by the wayside of his conversation as it were, a clear impression of his present mood and attitude of mind, something which could not be gained by direct questioning.

In all this the shrewdly wise old woman succeeded, and when Boyd Westover bade her good night as the clock struck twelve, she knew all she wanted to know about him. After he had gone to bed she lighted her pipe anew and summed up her

conclusions in the case of the young man beneath her roof in reflections to the following effect:

"He's a feelin' it more'n's good fer him.

"He's wrong in his mind or his liver or his lights, an' the fust needfulness is to set 'em right.

"He's a doin' the right thing in a goin' off up into the high mountings. It'll straighten out the liver an' lights an' I'll make Theonidas go with him, jes' to take the rough off, an' to keep him in company like. That'll be healthier fer him.

"They's somethin' about a gal in the case, but jes' naturally I couldn't git at that. Men is sech fools 'bout women anyhow! A young feller will pick one purty gal out'n a dozen, all on 'em jes' as purty an' jes' as smart as she is, an' ef she gives him the mitten he'll go mournin' about, jes' as ef she was the onliest tadpole in the puddle, while all the rest o' the dozen purty gals is a standin' ready to make as big a fool out'n him as ever she could 'a' done. It's cur'ous but 'tain't to be helped no way, I reckon.

"Howsomever the thing to do is to git him interested in somethin', an' I kin manage that. He'll git healthy like, up thar' in the high mountings, an' by the time he comes back I'll git somethin' ready fer him to do."

Boyd was already better in spirits when he greeted the sun the next morning from the top of a hill near Judy's place. The air of the mountains had been good for him. Better still had been Judy's cordiality and her naturalness. After all his depression had been rooted in the artificialities of human association, and in Judy Peters's company there was no such artificiality. She had

not hesitated to interrupt his narrative of events at various points to tell him that in this or that particular he had been a "darned fool," or a "frosted potater vine," or a "dod dasted idjit," or something else of the sort that she thought helpful to her endeavor to bring him back to a healthy mental condition.

Her main reliance for his restoration to normality, however, was in getting something strenuous for him to do. "Hard work's the calomel he needs, an' a good hard fight's his quinine. It'll cure his chills, an' I'll git it ready fer him."

With that determination fixed in her mind, Judy knocked the ashes out of her pipe, covered up the kitchen fire, set some roe herrings to soak, and went to bed. Sleep was to her healthy soul a matter of course.

XVII
JUDY INFORMS HERSELF AND MAKES PLANS

It was well past midsummer when Westover after a stay of three days went from Judy Peters's place up into the higher and more desolate parts of the mountain region. He was accompanied by Theonidas, whose instructions from his mother were minute and explicit.

"B'ar in mind, Theonidas," she said to him in an intimate conversation, "as how your duty's to keep him busy with things

outsiden' hisself. He's got too many books 'long with him, but they's good ef he don't git to readin' of 'em by daylight. You's got to look out fer that. Ef you find him a readin' an' a broodin' by daylight, you jes' find out somethin' 'bout a b'ar or a catamount hangin' round, an' git him to lookin' fer that. An' ef he gits to readin' too late o' nights, showin' as how his min's oneasy like, you kin git up a night hunt or somethin' like that, or ef that don't work you kin go out an' yell like a painter till he gits his gun."

A "painter," in mountain parlance, meant a panther, or more properly the mountain lion, a catlike, predatory beast between whom and the mountaineers there was eternal war.

"Anyhow, Theonidas," concluded Judy, "you ain't no fool, an' now as you knows my intentions, you's to carry 'em out. Keep him a goin'. Keep him busy. Keep him so durned tired that he can't help sleepin' o' nights. That's your cawntract. Ef he gits contrary an' won't git sleepy an' you can't think o' nothin' else to do, jes' you set down an' tell him a lot o' your yarns. He's too perlite not to let you talk on, an' I ain't never knowed nothin' as would put a feller to sleep quicker'n one o' your yarns, Theonidas."

In the event there proved to be no need of the soporific influence of Theonidas's yarns. Westover had gone into the mountains to distract his mind with sport, and he pursued that purpose ceaselessly by day and by night. He would hunt deer, bears, turkeys, squirrels, pheasants and every other species of game as it came into the advancing season, throughout the day, and at night after a campfire dinner which he cooked for himself, he and Theonidas would go eagerly in quest of night prowlers—'coons, 'possums, and painters. Now and then he

would send Theonidas down the mountain with a present of game for Judy, while he himself exercised his wits in controversy with a certain wily old trout that was accustomed to jeer at him from one or another pool of the stream that flowed by the cabin door. Sometimes he sent a haunch of venison, a half dozen pheasants or a brace of young wild turkey gobblers, with a request that Judy should arrange for their delivery to Carley Farnsworth, a commission he knew she would execute to the letter.

In brief, young Westover was growing healthy of mind and body again, while the books he had brought with him to serve as a means of killing time lay unopened in the log cabin where he slept for long hours at such times as physical weariness forbade him further to follow the sports of the glorious out of doors.

In the meanwhile Judy Peters was maturing her plans. She kept Edgar Coffey most of the time in the plantation part of the county, with instructions to find out how the people down there felt toward Westover, and who among them might be trusted to aid her in a project she had formed, when the time should be ripe for its execution. As a result of Edgar's mousing inquiries and her own shrewd skill in discriminating between truth and falsehood in his periodical reports, Judy Peters knew more about sentiment in the piedmont region than anybody there did, not excepting William Wilberforce Webb, whose personal concern it was to inform himself accurately as to that. She knew, as Webb did not, that the great majority of the men of Westover's own class—the men of assured social position—were strongly disposed to regard his misfortune with generous sympathy, while those of less well assured standing were disposed to shrug shoulders and give hints of doubt.

She learned one thing, however, that troubled her a good deal. Among those of Westover's own class there was a vague, undefined but none the less hurtful suspicion that he had somehow failed of manly chivalry in his treatment of Margaret Conway. The suspicion had its origin in the fact that Colonel Conway would in no way discuss Westover's case or express any opinion concerning him or his conduct. On the other hand it lacked definiteness for the same reason. If there were no truth in it, people argued, Colonel Conway would certainly plant a heavy heel upon the rumor as an act of simple justice to a falsely accused young man; if there were truth in it, it was difficult to understand why Colonel Conway did not call the young man to account in some way.

Of all these conditions Judy was fully informed and when the autumn came, with the general election in prospect, she directed Edgar Coffey to find out definitely concerning the prospective "enominations," as she and all the rest of the mountain folk called them.

"Is that there fadey calico feller, Webb, a goin' to be enominated fer State senator from our distric'," she asked of her emissary when he returned from his mission.

"No, he's a strikin' higher like. He's a goin' to be enominated fer State senator from this distric'; in fac' he's enominated a'ready, an' he's mighty proud like over it."

"Yes, well, what's he a sayin' 'bout it?"

"He says as he's got the reg'lar Whig enomination, an' as this is a strong Whig distric', he's got the 'lection sure."

Judy sat silent for awhile. Then she asked:

"Is he a standin' on one leg while he's a waitin' fer it, Edgar? 'Case ef he is he's a goin' to git mighty tired 'fore he gits the other foot down. You tramp over to Marcellus McGrath's this evenin' an' tell him I want to see him to-morrer mornin', sure. Tell him I've got a job fer him, an' don't fergit to say he's to do it with his head. Ef he thought 'twas work, he would forgit to come. Git along now. Time's money you know, though you can't never git nobody to give you silver change fer it."

Marcellus McGrath was the mountain schoolmaster, who read everything from quack medicine almanacs to patent office reports, remembered everything he read to the last detail, and never in his life made the smallest use of the information with which the lumber room he called his mind was packed full. Facts were everything to him; the significance of facts had never occurred to him as a thing worthy of consideration.

He came promptly in response to Judy's summons, and he brought with him his big, shaggy headful of unrelated facts and figures, more securely lodged in his memory than in any book of reference or any table of statistics.

Judy "tapped him," as she described the process, as soon as he had lighted his pipe after a barbaric feast of fried chicken, jowl and greens, pot cheese, green corn, batter bread, cold ham, tomatoes, souse, roast venison from Westover's camp, cucumbers, onions, apple butter, rice pudding, apple dumplings, and ice cream.

By way of explanation to Sapphira, while the meal was in

process of preparation, she had said:

"Mark McGrath don't git none too much to eat at home, I reckon, an' I'm a goin' to pump enough facts an' figgers out'n him to leave room for the other things."

But she did not begin the pumping process until McGrath's pipe was comfortably lighted, and then she did so gently at first. She had placed a slate and pencil on a table by his side, so that he might "figger out" anything she wanted elucidated.

"How many voters is they in this here senate distric'?" she asked him to begin with; and he gave the figures promptly.

"Set that down on the slate," she directed, and the order was obeyed.

"'Bout how many o' them is planters' votes—countin' in the overseers an' the rest o' them as always votes the way the planters tells 'em to?"

McGrath thought for a brief while and then gave his estimate.

"How many of 'em is Democratic votes?"

"Oh, the district is almost solidly Whig. The Democratic vote is really a negligible quantity," the schoolmaster, beginning to feel his importance, replied.

"I ain't a fishin' fer big words, Mark. I's a huntin' fer facts. Don't you make no mistake about that. Now, tell me, how many Democratic votes was they in the last election?"

So she went on with her catechism, making her interlocutor set down on the slate such figures as she wished to use in her calculations. With these as factors she made the schoolmaster do a deal of abstruse reckoning, the purport and purpose of which he could not at all conjecture, but the results of which seemed to satisfy her, as she said at the end of it all:

"It kin be did, an' by the Hokey Pokey Fenokey it's a goin' to be did. That little worm-eaten, blossom-blasted chestnut of a Webb'll wish he hadn't never let go of his hold on the tree when Judy Peters gits through with him. Say, Mark, what does William Wilberforce mean?"

"It's a name," McGrath began.

"Yes, I know that. But what does it mean? Whose name was it fust off? An' what was it he done? An' how'd that miserable little bob-tailed rooster Webb git a hold onto it?"

Judy's antagonisms were implacable, and they were apt to find expression in her epithets and her metaphors. She knew next to nothing of Webb, and she had permitted her mountaineers to vote for him at the last preceding election. But now that she recognized in him an enemy of Boyd Westover, she hated him with an intensity and an unreason possible only to a nature such as hers, in which the primal passions of humanity had yielded themselves to no chastening of circumstance or civilization.

McGrath, to whom no hint of Judy's purposes had been given, answered her questions as if reading from a cyclopædia:

"William Wilberforce was an Englishman, celebrated as a philanthropist and especially distinguished by his work for the

abolition of negro slavery. He was known in England as 'the great abolitionist.'"

"That's all right," said Judy with a grunt of satisfaction. "I ain't got no way o' findin' out how that bow-legged hoppergrass, Webb, got a holt'n the name, but he'll wish't he hadn't 'fore I git through with him. Now, Mark, I want you to write down jes' what you's tole me—no more an' no less—'bout that there abolitionist Wilberforce. Jest write it down on paper an' leave it."

"What are you up to, Judy, anyhow?" McGrath ventured to ask.

"That's what the queen bee axed the b'ar when he clum' the bee tree, an' the b'ar says: 'I'm up to the hole that's got the honey in it'."

And Judy vouchsafed no further explanation of her purposes.

Next day she sent for Edgar Coffey and questioned him.

"Who's this here Don Carlos Farnsworth that Westover's always a sendin' game to? Do you know him?"

"Yes. He's a white man."

In the parlance of Virginia at that time there was no phrase that meant so much as that. To say of one that he was "a white man" was to say that he was honest, upright, true and loyal to the tips of his fingers. Judy perfectly understood and so far was satisfied.

"Kin he talk?" she asked.

"Well I reckon. I ain't never seed him when he was a doin' anything else. Words streams out'n him like water out'n a spoutin' spring, an' they's the sort o' words that wallops you all up an' don't leave you no chanst to argify."

"You go down thar to-morrow, Edgar, an' tell him please to come up here jes' as quick as he kin, an' have dinner an' a night's lodgin' like. Tell him I want to see him 'bout Boyd Westover, an' ef he backs an' pulls on the halter like, you tell him I say Boyd's in a bad way in certain respec's. Remember to say 'in certain respec's.' Ef you don't you'll mislead him."

"Why not write him a letter, Judy, an' let me carry it? Then you'd be sure."

"I ain't a writin' no letters. You see's long as you jes' send word like, they ain't nothin' for anybody to git a hold on. Nobody kin be sure you said jest them words, and nobody kin prove you didn't say 'em jes' a little differenter. But ef you put yourself down in writin' they's got you. No, I ain't a writin' nothin', partic'lar when I's got a hen on the nest fer some feller. So you jes' go down there to-morrow an' tell Don Carlos Farnsworth I'm a invitin' him up here on Boyd Westover's account. Ef he says he'll come, you hain't got no need to say no more. But ef he backs in the traces like, you jes' tell him what I tole you about Boyd a bein' in a bad way in certain respec's. Remember them words an' say 'em right—'*in certain respec's*.'"

XVIII
JUDY PLANS A CAMPAIGN

Judy's summons brought Carley Farnsworth up into the mountains within the fewest possible hours after she gave it to her emissary to deliver. For Carley Farnsworth was Westover's friend, and in Virginia at that time friendship meant a readiness to serve at any cost or hazard.

It was nearing supper time when Farnsworth appeared at Judy's hospitable door and introduced himself.

"This is Mrs. Peters, I suppose?" he said as she confronted him.

"Judy Peters is my name," she answered in that spirit of mountain democracy which scorns titles and distinctions and shams of every other sort.

Farnsworth was quick to catch the underlying significance of her correction and both diplomacy and humor prompted him to play the game as she wanted it played.

"That's what I hoped for," he responded quickly; "for Judy Peters is the very person I most want to see in all the world just now. I am Carley Farnsworth, Judy. Of course Boyd has written the name 'Don Carlos' every time he has sent me game through you, and so you don't know me as 'Carley,' but that's what I am to all my friends, and I count you as one of the best of them because you're a friend of Boyd Westover, just as I am."

"Now that's spoke up like a real, natural young feller, an' not like a drasted stuck-up," responded Judy, shaking hands and bestowing him in a porch chair where a minute later she pressed a toddy of apple brandy upon his acceptance, as a sure cure for the weariness he must feel after his trapes up the mountain.

As he sipped the seductive beverage he and she talked. But neither alluded even in the most distant way to the occasion for his visit or to Judy's summons, or to anything else relating to Boyd Westover. They were both fencing for position. Each wanted to "size up" the other, before approaching matters of confidence and consequence. But by the time Judy's generous supper was at an end these two understood each other and each trusted the other. Judy had told him how many "hawgs" she sent down the mountain every year to be sold to planters, to be corn fed for three weeks, and converted into hams, bacon, souse, and all the rest of the good things in which Virginian appetites revelled. She had told him how many "bar'ls" of apple brandy she made "in a average year," how much cider, how much vinegar, and where her market was for all these things. Incidentally she had given him her picturesque opinions upon many questions of human character, life and conduct, and he in his turn had told her everything he could think of, concerning himself.

"Now you an' me's acquainted," Judy said when she thought the time ripe for the revelation of her plans. "You's the sort o' feller to git acquainted with, easy an' natural like, 'case you ain't got nothin' to keep up your sleeve, an' you ain't got up in a lot o' shams an' frills. You is straight goods, Carley, all wool, a yard wide an' dyed in the hanks. May be it's 'cause you's a real 'ristocrat what don't need to keep on tellin' 'bout it."

"Thank you for the compliment, Judy," said Farnsworth, interrupting.

"They ain't no compliment to thank anybody for," she replied. "They ain't never no compliments a flyin' about when Judy Peters is mixed up in the talk; or ef they is they's purty apt to git holes punched in 'em. Ef I thought you was a palaverin' liar, Carley, I'd tell you so straight out. Ef I thought you was a feller what would say one thing an' do another, you'd hear that opinion from Judy Peters's lips, an' what's more you wouldn't hear none o' the things I axed you to come up here to hear about. Now le's git down to business, as the feller said when the sheriff was slow about a hangin' of him. You see, Carley, Boyd Westover's had a shakin' up, an' he ain't right in his sperits. He's got a notion into his head that folks is down on him an' all that. S'long as he's up there a huntin' an' fishin' an' listenin' to Theonidas's yarns an' sleepin' tight he's all right. But that notion 'bout folks a bein' down on him is still a stickin' in his mind, like mutton gravy sticks in the roof of your mouth, an' you an' me's got to cure him of it. I's already laid out plans, an' ef you're game to help me, we'll rub that thing off'n his slate."

"I'm game to help you, Judy, in any way you like. You may bet all the apple brandy you've got on that."

"Is that a hint, like? Does you want another nip? 'Cause ef you do, it'll be here quicker'n lightnin'."

"No, Judy. I don't want another dram, and I never indulge in hints, especially with a straightforward person like you. If I wanted a drink I'd tell you so, but in fact I hardly ever taste liquor of any sort, and that toddy you gave me was the first I've

sipped in a year or more."

"Yes, it's curious, but they's a good many young men nowadays as don't take to their drams natural like. I s'pose it's all right, but I don't understand it. Anyhow, that's no matter. As I was a sayin', Boyd Westover's got that notion in his head 'bout folks a bein' down on him, an' it'll come back to him when the snow drives him down out'n the mountings. Now the way to cure him of it's to git him 'lected to somethin', an' I's got the somethin' picked out. When he fin's as folks has voted for him agin t'other feller, he jes' naturally can't go on a thinkin' folks is down on him. See?"

"Yes, I see that, and your idea is a good one, Judy, if we can get him to run for some office."

"Git him to run? We won't ax him. We'll jes' run him ourselves, an' we'll 'lect him too, ef the big figgers tops the little ones as I's always seed 'em do in a 'lection count."

Judy was apt to be confident in her predictions, chiefly for the reason that she never made a prediction till she knew all the facts that might bear in any way upon its fulfilment.

"That's what I wanted to see you about, Carley. This is the way of it. You kin help, an' I'm a bettin' my fingers agin fishhooks you'll do it."

"It's a good bet, Judy," he interrupted. "I'd do anything imaginable for Westover, and, now that I know you, I'd do even more than that for you. Go on. What's your plan?"

"Well, you see that measly little soap-locked sap-head,

William Wilberforce Webb—they's more name to the man than man to the name—has gone an' got hisself enominated fer the Senate. That suits me down to the ground. You an' me is a goin' to beat him out'n his boots, an' 'lect Westover in his stid. That's the game an' the way the wind blows, an' the lay o' the land."

"But, Judy, can we do it? You see Webb has secured the regular Whig nomination, and this is a strong Whig district."

"That's all right," answered Judy, confident of the "figgerin'" she had made Marcellus McGrath do on her slate. "You see it's this a'way. The Democrats ain't got no chanst to 'lect a man o' their own, but they're a layin' low to rip the righteousness out'n the reg'lar Whig candidate ef they git the chanst, an' you an' me's a goin' to give 'em the chanst. We'll enominate Westover as a 'Independent Whig candidate' an' every Democrat in the distric' 'll vote for him. They won't be no Democrat candidate."

"Are you sure of that, Judy? With two Whigs running they might think they had a chance to slip a Democrat in."

"They mout, of course, but they won't," answered Judy, confidently. "I's seen to that. You don't s'pose Judy Peters was borned day before yesterday, do you, Carley?" Then, without waiting for him to protest a greater respect for her age and experience, she continued:

"Shouldn't wonder ef the Democrats got some local offices this year. You see the mounting vote is uncertain. Anyhow, they won't enominate anybody for the Senate; or, yes they will. They's a makin' the enomination to-day. But after you an' me has got Westover a goin' their candidate will withdraw hisself an'

urge all Democrats to vote fer Westover an' 'lect him. You see the Democrat vote is a leetle more'n twenty-five per cent. in this Senate distric'. I got Marcellus McGrath to figger that out. An' twenty-five per cent. is a quarter, Mark says, an' he knows. Now the vote up here in the mountings is more'n half o' the whole, 'cause us folks up here raises more children than the planter people does. They ain't no profit in boastin', but I kin tell you jes' confidential like, that ef Judy Peters lets her tongue git too loose an' the secret slips out that she wants Boyd Westover 'lected, you could count on your fingers an' toes the votes the other feller'd git up here in the mountings. Seems to me like a sure thing, Carley."

With that Judy chuckled in satisfaction.

"But you've hearn talk o' 'moral effec',' haven't you, Carley?"

Farnsworth intimated that he had some small perception of the meaning of the terms, and Judy went on:

"Well, what you an' me's a playin' for is moral effec' on Boyd Westover. As fer 'lectin' him, they won't be no trouble 'bout that. But ef the moral effec' is to be strong, we mus' git the biggest vote we kin for him down among the plantation people. Fust off, then, he's got to be enominated by that sort o' folks, without no hint o' Judy Peters or the mountings in it. That's your fust job. You go down there, sayin nothin' 'bout Judy Peters or the mountings, an' git a lot o' the stuck-ups to jine you in enominatin' him."

In those days the "Reformers" who plead for independence in politics had not yet invented their ingenious devices for

compelling the voter to make a choice of evils in deciding for whom he would vote. There were no such things as "official ballots" limiting the choice of the voter to men formally nominated. Every man was free, as every man everywhere ought to be, to vote for whomsoever he pleased without consulting an "Australian" ballot sheet to find out what men he was permitted to vote for. And any man who aspired to office was at liberty to announce his candidacy in person or through friends as an appeal to his fellow citizens for their free suffrages, without asking permission of any caucus or boss or primary or convention, and without the necessity of spending money corruptly in order to secure the privilege of being voted for if his fellow citizens wished to vote for him.

Judy continued:

"When you git all the big-bug signatures you kin, jest send a nigger round to post up the enomination papers everywhere. Have 'em printed, Carley, 'cause print sort o' carries weight, an' printin' don't cost much, an' even ef it did, 'twouldn't make no difference, 'cause I'd pay the bill."

"You can't do that, Judy. Westover's friends down there'll attend to that. I'll have twenty or twenty-five signatures to the paper, and I'll have five or six hundred printed, so as to post one on every gate post and every tree that anybody's likely to look at. How many do you want, for use in the mountains?"

"None at all! Not one!" answered Judy, emphatically. "They won't be needed up here, 'cause I'm a takin' care o' the mounting vote, an' I ain't a sayin' nothin'. Let 'em keep a guessin' 'bout how the mountings is a goin' till they hears the answer to the riddle

when the polls is closed. You see ef they find out the mountings is agin 'em they'll try to do somethin' up here, an' ef they's uncertain they won't care to stir up things. But besides all that, there's the drymatic climax to think of. Tom Hardaway tole me all about that wunst, so I know what a drymatic climax is, an' I mean to have one this time, jest for the sake o' that banty rooster, William Wilberforce Webb, who'll find all his tail feathers pulled out by the roots when the 'lection's over."

It will perhaps be inferred from Judy's utterances that her hatreds were implacable as her likings were limitless. For explanation it is only necessary to remember that Judy Peters was an entirely natural person, unaffected by any of the agencies of civilization. To her, in sentiment and emotion, compromises were as impossible as concessions; qualifications as unthinkable as cowardice itself—and there was no cowardice in Judy. Toward those whose conduct had aroused neither animosity nor affection in her soul, she was always fair with a frankness that had no hypocrisy and no reserve in it; toward those whom she cherished as friends her loyalty was of a sort that knew no bounds and asked no questions; toward those whom she recognized as her enemies, and still more toward those who were the enemies of her friends, she cherished a malevolence that knew no mercy and that stopped at nothing in the accomplishment of its malignant purposes.

Such was Judy—a typical representative of the human animal in his untamed and natural state.

"Then they's another thing, Carley, an' it's fust an' foremost in my thinkin'."

"What is it, Judy?"

"Well, it's this aways. You see you an' me's a workin' an' a plannin' to bring Westover round all right again. Now the 'lection '11 do a mighty sight that way, but 'twon't do it all. What Boyd needs is a good, hard fight, an' that's what you an' me's got to give him. He ain't to know nothin' 'bout the way the 'lection's a goin' when he hears of his enomination. He ain't to know as how Judy Peters had anything to do with it. He's jest to be told as how a lot o' you stuck-ups has enominated him, and how nobody knows where he's a been, an' how they's a sayin' an' a insinuatin' all sorts o' things, an' specially that he's afeard to face his constituents. That'll stir up all the fightin' blood they is in him, an' they's apt to be a lot o' that sort o' blood in a Westover. It'll set him hot when he gits down your way, an' from then tell the 'lection's over he'll fight like a catamount when a dozen hounds gits him cornered. That's what he needs, an' when the thing's over, an' he fin's himself 'lected by a large majority, an' sees that water-soaked piece o' cheap soap that calls hisself William Wilberforce Webb a slinkin' off into his hole like a drownded rat, he won't git to thinkin' agin' that folks is down on him."

Judy's metaphors were a trifle mixed perhaps, but her rhetoric had behind it an intensity and a sincerity of purpose that left her auditor in no doubt as to her meaning.

"Judy, you're a brick!" exclaimed Carley Farnsworth rising and grasping her hand. "You've got blood in your veins, and sand in your gizzard, and a headpiece on your shoulders. I'm with you, all over and clear through. I'm going back down the mountain to-morrow morning. I'll get the nomination papers out,

and I'll speak three times a day for Westover. I never made a speech in my life, but I can do it now, and all between the speeches I'll talk. The words'll flow out of me like water through a mill-tail. And one thing more, Judy; I'm a little fellow, as you know. I don't weigh a hundred and ten pounds, I'm only five feet three in my shoes, but I can pull a trigger. I'll see to it that nobody says anything shameful about Boyd Westover without being called to an interview with me at ten paces."

So was the compact made. Judy went inside and brewed a bowl of hot apple toddy which she insisted that Carley should share with her "jes' to bind the bargain," she said, and Carley, unused as he was to such indulgence, took the risk of a next morning's headache by drinking fair with her.

XIX
THE BEGINNING OF A CAMPAIGN

Carley Farnsworth never did anything by halves. His methods were those of one engaged in killing snakes. When he undertook the accomplishment of a purpose he tirelessly left nothing undone that might in the smallest degree assist in that accomplishment.

In this case he appealed personally and quietly to all the planters in the district to aid in the choice of a man of their own class to represent them in the upper house of the Legislature, instead of a shifty lawyer of "insecure antecedents, unripened

position, and as yet unproved character." That was the careful phrase he had framed for use while trudging down the mountain, and he used it so effectively that he soon had a score of the most influential names in all that region appended to his announcement of Boyd Westover's candidacy.

But he was not satisfied with that. He reminded the two store keepers at the Court House that Westover's constituency represented in a large degree the purchasing capacity of the region, and the two store keepers, alert to conserve their own interests, not only signed the nomination announcement, but secured a number of other and humbler signatures, and made of their stores a species of campaigning centres in Westover's interest, thus giving a needed flavor of democracy to the aristocratic appeal to the planters to "choose for their senator a man whose character, attainments and social position render him fitly representative of the district and its people."

Carley Farnsworth was a doctor in large practice. As such he was versed in what he called "the gospel of keeping the mouth shut." Accordingly he made his preliminary canvas silently, secretly and with so little ostentation that neither Webb nor any of his friends dreamed of what was going on. Their first intimation of it was the discovery one morning that the nominating placards were posted on the court house doors, all over the fronts of all the blacksmiths' and wheelrights' shops, on all the school houses, on the posts of every gate that was licensed to obstruct a public road, and upon every conspicuous tree in the piedmont part of the Senate district.

For Carley Farnsworth had adopted Judy Peters's view of "drymatic effect," and had had all his placards posted between

midnight and morning of a single day.

The dramatic effect was instantly apparent. All tongues were set wagging and before another night came everybody in the region round about knew that Boyd Westover was a candidate for the Senate, nominated in his absence and supported by many of the most influential men in the community.

What it meant, nobody knew, and everybody asked everybody else. Those who asked Carley Farnsworth got for reply:

"Oh, it is only that some of us think we ought to have a fitter man than Webb to represent us in the Senate, and we've nominated Westover without his knowledge or consent."

"But where is he?" was sure to be the next question. "Is he afraid to face the public?"

"No," Carley answered in every case. "If you get it into your head that Boyd Westover is afraid of anything or anybody, you'll be as badly mistaken as if you'd burnt your boots. He's away on a hunting and fishing expedition, just now, and he knows nothing of his nomination. When we notify him of it he'll be here to face anything or anybody, and in the meanwhile there are some others of us who are prepared to do any 'facing' that may be necessary."

This last utterance was intended to check unfavorable references to Boyd Westover's unfortunate experience, and it was in the main effective. For Carley Farnsworth, small as he was, had a reputation as a fighting force of no mean pretensions. Three times he had met antagonists on the duelling field. On one of those occasions he had seriously wounded his foe, and then

had tenderly cared for him, nursing him back to health in his own house. On the two other occasions his antagonists had apologized. In still another case Carley had shown a loftier courage. After accepting a challenge he had said to his seconds:

"I am satisfied that I'm in the wrong in this matter. I was entirely sincere in making the charge for which I am challenged, but I made it upon misinformation, and I am prepared to withdraw and apologize for it. Communicate that decision to my antagonist. If he still wants a shot at me, he can have it of course."

Such was Carley Farnsworth, and in view of the veiled warning his words gave, it was felt that an extreme discretion in discussing matters pertaining to Westover's candidacy was, to say the least, desirable.

Yet Webb and his friends felt that something must be done to stem the tide created by the Westover nomination. The names appended to it were those of such men that their support of any candidacy in opposition, seriously imperilled Webb's chance of election, which until then had been regarded as a foregone conclusion that needed no looking after.

"Something must be done," and the fact that Colonel Conway's signature was conspicuously absent from the nomination paper, suggested the nature of that "something." It was known that The Oaks and Wanalah were adjoining plantations; that the Conways and the Westovers had been the closest intimates for generations; that Colonel Conway had wearied all ears with his eulogiums of Westover's gallantry in rescuing his daughter in time of peril. Why then was Colonel

Conway's name absent from a list that it should naturally have headed? Was it that he believed in Westover's guilt in spite of the revealed facts, as some others professed to do? Or was there truth in the rumor, which was vaguely floating about, that Westover had jilted Colonel Conway's daughter?

That last suggestion was quickly negatived in all well ordered minds by the certain knowledge that if Westover or any other man on earth had been guilty of such offence toward a daughter of the house of Conway, the head of that house would have horse-whipped the offender in public and at the point of a pistol.

Nevertheless there remained the fact that Colonel Conway's name did not appear among those nominating Boyd Westover, and that fact greatly encouraged Webb and his adherents when they found that they must fight tooth and nail for an election which they had deemed secure beyond the necessity of endeavor of any sort. They set to work, not so much to find out the reason for Colonel Conway's refusal of his name, as to insinuate conjectural solutions of that riddle that might be hurtfully whispered into doubting ears.

"There must be something wrong in that quarter."

"It isn't easy to explain."

"Of course Colonel Conway has his reasons, even if he doesn't give them."

"If there wasn't something wrong, why didn't Colonel Conway put his name first on the list?"

These, and like things could be said without incurring a challenge from Carley Farnsworth's wrath, and they were diligently and hurtfully said; hurtfully because in that community the least suspicion that a man had been other than chivalrous in his treatment of a woman was damning beyond the possibility of forgiving.

This thing troubled Carley Farnsworth more than he liked to admit even to himself. A good many signatures had been denied to his nominating paper on the sole ground that Colonel Conway had refused to sign it, and the absence of his signature was the one effective plea of Webb and his followers.

When Carley Farnsworth had gone to Colonel Conway to ask his aid, the sturdy old planter had replied:

"I have reasons of my own for not signing your paper, Dr. Farnsworth. Please do not ask me what they are."

To that there was no possible response. The request with which the Colonel concluded his reply made a peremptory end of the conversation so far as that subject was concerned, and so Carley Farnsworth talked of crops and the curing of hams instead.

But Carley Farnsworth felt that this doubt, this question, this suspicion, was a seriously undermining influence in his campaign for his friend, which there was no means of meeting in Boyd Westover's absence. For, in whispers and by questions that could not be challenged as assertions, Webb and his followers were suggesting that Colonel Conway was only waiting for Westover's return before making public the reasons

that impelled him to withhold his approval of his neighbor's candidacy, and that the fear of Colonel Conway's wrath was the real reason for Boyd Westover's continued absence.

Carley's first impulse was to write to Judy Peters, telling her that Boyd's presence was necessary and giving her the reasons. But upon reflection he decided that this was a case in which Judy's objection to "puttin' things down in writin'" was peculiarly applicable and valid. So he sought converse with Edgar Coffey, who, under Judy's instructions, was "a hangin' round" the lower parts of the district, and confided to him the urgent and explanatory message he wished Judy to receive.

On receipt of the message, Judy acted promptly, but in her own way. To Edgar Coffey she said:

"You go home now, an' look after things there. You's got nine good hogs to kill this fall an' your wife's a feedin' 'em on apples. Your wife's purty, Edgar, an' her ways is pleasin', but she ain't got the sense she was borned with. She mixes the strippin's with the milk jes' as ef strippin's wa'n't purty nigh the same as cream, an' she hitches a horse to the body of a tree, 'stead of a swingin' limb, so's the beast can break the halter an' go home, leavin' her to walk. She done that at church only two weeks ago come nex' Sunday. An' now she's a feedin' hogs on apples when she orter be a givin' 'em corn to harden the meat fer killin' time. So you better go home an' fix things. I'll ten' to the rest."

Edgar was grievously disappointed. He had confidently hoped to be himself Judy's messenger to Boyd Westover, but Judy was much too sagacious to permit that.

"Boyd'll ax questions," she reflected, "'cause he'll be full o' wonderment 'bout this here thing, an' Edgar mout let the right answers slip out. Theonidas can't do that, 'cause he don't know nothin' 'bout the answers."

She expected Theonidas to visit her that evening to secure a bag of corn meal that she knew he and Boyd sorely needed. She would send her message by Theonidas, therefore, and would leave the message to take the place of the meal.

It was supper time when Theonidas arrived, bringing a wild turkey gobbler and a dozen squirrels on his back.

"Them's all right," said Judy, feeling of the game. "Tell Boyd he'd orter 'a' saved 'em to take to Wanalah to-morrow. He'll be a entertainin' folks there an' it 'ud 'a' been handy to have some game in the house."

"He ain't a thinkin' o' comin' down the mounting yit," replied the boy in open eyed wonder.

"I know he ain't," Judy replied. "But when you git back up there to-night—an' you's a goin' to start back soon's you git yer supper—he'll *be* a thinkin' about it, an' 'twon't take much thinkin' to set them legs o' his'n a movin'. You come an' git your supper, an' then mosey up the mounting as fast as yer feet kin foller one another. An' you're to tell Boyd that they's the devil to pay an' no funds, down Wanalah way. Tell him I says he's got to git down thar' quick an' face the music."

"What's it all about, Mammy?" asked Theonidas with not unnatural curiosity.

"That ain't none o' your business," Judy replied, "an' ef you don't know nothin' you can't git it wrong in tellin' it. You jes' say what I's tole you to say, an' by midnight he'll be a stumblin' down the mounting to find out what's the matter. But tell him—now *mind*, Theonidas, an' listen to what I's a sayin'—" for the boy was reaching across the table for a second helping of some dish he specially relished, and Judy feared that he was not attending to her instructions—"listen to what I's a sayin'—"

"I's *is* a listenin', Mammy," the boy replied. "I's heard every word."

"Is you? Then what was it I said last?" she demanded.

"You said as how that by midnight he'd be a stumblin' down the mounting to find out what's the matter."

"Right you is!" said Judy approvingly. "Now that's business, an' so is what I'm a goin' to say. You is to tell him *not to come near Judy Peters's place*. Tell him they's reasons. Tell him to go down t'other road Arricktown way. It's shorter an' quicker, but tell him they's reasons besides the shortness an' quickness. An' when you's tole him all that tell him your Mammy says he kin count on her tell death! That'll cheer him up, like."

XX
THE SATISFACTION OF W. W. WEBB

When William Wilberforce Webb found that he had to fight for an election which he had supposed to be securely his by virtue of his regular nomination as the candidate of the dominant party, he hastily called his friends and advisers together for consultation.

In the course of the discussion it was decided that the weak spot in Webb's campaign lay in his neglect to do anything to secure the mountain vote.

"We'll divide about even down here," said the shrewdest politician among Webb's following. "You see the whole Democratic vote is just so much withdrawn from Westover's strength among the planters, and the Democrats seem to be in earnest this year. That leaves us with a small but secure majority in this part of the district. The decision will rest with the mountain vote, and so far as I can see we've done nothing to secure that."

"I haven't thought it necessary," answered Webb, "until now. You see the mountain people have seemed entirely indifferent, and they seem so now. As they gave me a big majority at the last election, I have reckoned upon party lines to give me a like majority this time."

"Have you seen Judy Peters?" asked one of the advisers.

"No. I have taken the mountain vote for granted, as about three-fourths Whig and one-fourth Democratic. You see none of us expected this intrusion of Boyd Westover into the campaign."

"No, none of us expected it," answered another, "but we've run up against the unexpected, and we've got to meet it. Webb,

you've got to go up and see Judy Peters. If you please her she'll settle the election out of hand, but if you offend her, then God save us, for no lesser power can!"

"I'll go," answered Webb, "but I really don't think it necessary. I had a talk with Edgar Coffey the other day—in fact I had him dine with me at the hotel—and he assured me that Judy Peters was taking no interest in the campaign. He said Judy cares so little about it that even he hadn't heard an expression of opinion from her lips. So I have taken the normal Whig majority in the mountains for granted."

Thereupon "Foggy"—he had some other name but nobody ever remembered it—arose and walked twice across the floor before speaking. He was barkeeper, constable, jailor, livery man, faro dealer, hound-master, money lender, note shaver, and pretty nearly everything else that was disreputable, whether official or unofficial, at the county seat, and in his various capacities he was rightly supposed to know politics and men as nobody else in the county did. At last he turned to Webb and asked:

"Was it yesterday or the day before, that you were born? Because if it was longer ago than yesterday there really can be no excuse for your faith in Edgar Coffey. Don't you know he was never caught telling the truth but once in his life, and that time he was talking in his sleep after too heavy a load of apple jack, and took it all back as soon as he waked up? Now my advice to you is to get your walking boots on as quick as ever you can, and go up to Judy Peters's for a consultation as to the mountain vote. And you want to mind your eye with Judy, for if you offend her your goose is cooked and your cake's dough."

In accordance with this suggestion, Webb prepared himself for a journey up the mountain road, but as he had a speaking engagement to keep, he could not make the proposed visit until a day later. In the meanwhile, and by way of placation, he sent a messenger with a note to Judy, in which he wrote:

"I feel that I have neglected my duty in not visiting you before, but I have had my days and nights so full of work that it has really seemed impossible until now. I am going up to-morrow to enjoy one of your matchless suppers and have a talk with you about whatever interests you. As for my campaign for the Senate, I know your loyalty too well to doubt that it has your approval; and now that the intrusion of a third candidate has rendered the result somewhat insecure in the piedmont part of the district, I hope to interest you so far that you will help me stir up a rousing vote in the mountains."

Judy's sole comment on the letter was:

"They'll be a rousin' vote in the mountings sure enough."

Then she turned to Sapphira and with a relish in her tone, said:

"Say, Sapphiry, you an' me's got to lay ourselves out on tomorry night's supper. They's a candidate a comin'."

"Is he one you's a goin' to 'lect?"

"Yes—to stay at home. But may be you's noticed, Sapphiry, that whenever I picks out a shoat to be turned into victuals next day, I always gives that shoat fust chanst at the buttermilk, an' see to it as how he kin jes' lay down all night, 'longside o' more

corn 'n he could eat in a week. They ain't much difference 'twix' candidates an' shoats I reckon,—leastways some candidates. So you an' me's jes' got to git up a supper fer to-morry night sich as the candidate never seen in his life before. You go to the smoke house an' git the ham that hangs wrong end up on the third row o' hooks, three hams from the left end. Wash it an' put it on to bile right away so's that it'll have time to git firm cold. They's half a shoat in the spring house, an' we'll wring the necks o' some fryin'-size chickens to-night so's to have 'em ready. To-morry's the reg'lar twice a week churnin' day, so's that they'll be fresh butter an' plenty o' buttermilk ef the candidate happens to like buttermilk. I'll set a bakin' o' bread to-morry mornin' so's we kin have a hot loaf fer supper. As fer beat biscuit an' batter bread, we kin make 'em when the time comes. Say, Sapphiry, le's surprise the candidate!"

Judy uttered that sentence with enthusiasm and with a smile on her face. A happy thought had come to her.

"Tain't hog-killin' time yit, nor yit 'twon't be fer more'n a month to come, an' so nobody ain't seen no sassage sence last winter. Le's make some, out'n the trimmin's o' that half a shoat! You an' me kin chop it an' season it to-night an' it'll be extry superfine by supper time to-morrow."

"Well, you certainly is a layin' yourself out fer that there candidate, Mammy," said Sapphira in admiration of her mother's enthusiasm. "Is you a goin' to give him a chanst at your old peach and honey?"

"What! peach an' honey fer that miserable wild mustard patch of a candidate? Well, not ef I see it fust. Apple jack he'll drink,

an' it'll come out o' that there bar'l as was made out o' last year's windfalls an' cullin's, at that. They ain't no fine flavor to that slop, but it'll make drunk come just the same, an' I reckon that's all a half breed like Webb's got any call to expect o' liquor. The best o' victuals ain't none too good fer anybody as sets down to Judy Peters's table, but politeness an' liquor goes by favor, an' I ain't got no favor to spare fer that doggoned counterfeit-copper cuss, Webb."

When Webb appeared, he found Judy arrayed in colors that the lilies of the field never dared assume and that Solomon in all his glory did not dream of. She had even put on her bracelets and her breast pin of green glass, simulating a setting of emeralds. She had borrowed Sapphira's earrings—great golden hoops that had cost a dollar and a quarter—and was wearing them in honor of the occasion.

Her gorgeousness of adornment and the barbaric lavishness of the supper she served him, convinced Webb at the outset that her favor was altogether his, that the mountain vote was secure, and that in spite of all alarms his triumphant election was as certain as any human event could be. Perhaps Judy had intended to create that impression on his mind. Certainly she did nothing to correct or remove it, and by the time supper was over Webb was so well satisfied with things as they were that he did not hesitate to indulge freely in the apple jack that Judy set out for his consumption.

When she had got his tongue "loosened up" to her liking, and not till then, she brought the conversation around to subjects connected with the political campaign. Webb had not ventured to introduce those subjects earlier. His instinct was keen enough

to realize that in Judy Peters's house Judy Peters was herself the director of the conversation, and he had heard, till the fact was deeply impressed on his mind, that the person who forced the talk into channels of his own choosing was pretty sure to find himself snubbed and snuffed out by some caustic and high-flavored utterance of her majesty the Queen of the Mountains.

"Tell me 'bout your campaign, William Wilberforce Webb," she said after he had had a third or fourth helping of apple jack. Then she changed her mind—or perhaps the change had been in her mind all the while—and said: "No, don't bother 'bout that yit. Tell me, instid o' that, what you's a luggin' all that name around for. I s'pose when you was a boy they called you jes' Billy Webb. Why ain't that a good 'nough name for you now? You see us folks up here in the mountings ain't got much respec' nor patience like with names bigger'n the men what wears 'em. They was wunst a feller come up here what called hisself James Augustus de Forrest Hyde, an' we run him out'n the mountings. He come back arter a while a callin' hisself plain Jim Hyde, an' he's been a breedin' mules successful, like, ever since. You see when he fust come he brought more name along than he could tote, an' that's jest what you's a doin' with your William Wilberforce Webb. It sounds well down 'mong the stuck ups, but 'tain't no go up here in the mountings. Us folks likes somethin' plainer—somethin' like Boyd Westover."

"Of course you're right, Judy," answered Webb flinching a little at the name of his antagonist, "but when a man's parents have given him a long name what's he to do but wear it? A man's name's a part of him."

"Yes, an' it's that part us folks up here in the mountings don't

like. It's the fool part. Why ain't 'W. W. Webb' a good enough name fer a one-horse vehicle like you?"

It was the epithet rather than the question that staggered Webb, but that it did stagger him was indicated to Judy's shrewd observation by the fact that he took three deep draughts of the apple brandy before answering. At last he said:

"Well, you see, Judy—"

"No, I don't see," she interrupted, "an' you ain't a goin' to make me see sense in a thing what ain't got no sense in it."

"I was going to say—" he began again.

"Yes, I know you was. Never mind a sayin' it. Listen to me. Ef I'm to help you in your canvass up here in the mountings, you's got to shorten your name somehow. Mind I don't say I's a goin' to help you,"—Judy's sturdy love of truth in the abstract prompted this qualification of what was essentially a lie in the concrete—"but *ef* I'm to help you, you's got to give me a shorter name 'n William Wilberforce Webb to call you by. You see every time I try to say anything 'bout you my mouth gits so choked up, like, with that durned worm fence of a name that the rest o' the words won't come out nohow."

"I'm sorry, Judy, awfully sorry that my name offends you. Just call me Billy hereafter."

"That's all right for me," answered Judy, "but you was enominated by the name of William Wilberforce Webb, an that's the way it'll be wrote on the pollin' books. How's the folks up here in the mountings to know as how Billy Webb an' William

Wilberforce Webb is the same feller? The two don't sound much alike. Howsomever we'll try an' manage that. Now tell me 'bout how things is a goin' down plantation ways."

In the embarrassment created by Judy's critical reflections upon his name, Webb had filled his large tumbler again with the insidious intoxicant, forgetting to add water, and had taken several swigs of the "reverend spirits," which is what Virginians always called undiluted brandy or whiskey. Judy had observed the fact but had not discouraged it. Her son, Daniel Webster, was at home that night to put Webb to bed if need be, and meanwhile she wanted to find out from Webb's indiscretion what she had no hope of learning in any other way, namely, "all about the gal that's mixed up in the matter."

To that end she interrupted Webb many times, checking his tendency to indulge in generalities and holding him down to facts. He told her how greatly Boyd Westover's intrusive nomination had disturbed what had promised to be a "walk-over campaign"; how the refusal of Colonel Conway to sign Boyd's nomination paper was exciting suspicion, and much else of interest to which Judy paid no heed. She harked back instead to the Conway matter.

"What was the matter with Conway?" she asked. "Has him an' young Westover had any fallin' out?"

Webb had attained that condition of alcoholic indiscretion in which the impulse is to be confidential and to say things far better left unsaid. He unbosomed himself.

"Well, you see, Judy," he said, "there are some things we

don't mention, but you're a friend of mine, Judy, and you're entitled to my confidence. You see it's this way. The talk is that Boyd Westover and Colonel Conway's daughter Margaret were engaged to be married, when Westover committed—or was accused of committing the crime of which he was convicted and for which he was sentenced to the penitentiary. Some say she stood by him and he threw her over; some suggest that he couldn't explain things to her satisfaction—that she asked him questions he couldn't answer; some say he went back to Wanalah eager to marry the girl, and she threw him over because she didn't believe in his innocence. You see, Judy, he is, after all's said and done, only a pardoned criminal, and his pardon was based only on the confession of a poor demented fellow who has since been sent to Staunton as a lunatic. Anyhow it's plain that Colonel Conway believes Boyd Westover to be guilty, just as I do and as a good many other folks down our way do. If he isn't guilty, why's he hiding himself? Why don't he come into the district and face the music, instead of leaving that little monkey, Carley Farnsworth, to do everything for him? You never saw Carley Farnsworth, did you, Judy? Of course you didn't. Well, he's a little jackanapes of a doctor that's equally ready to give his blue pills by the mouth or at the point of a pistol. Boyd Westover has put him forward to overawe and intimidate everybody; but the Democrats will hold their vote this year and with your help, Judy, we'll make this election memorable."

"I don't know jest what that last word means, Billy, but after what you's been a tellin' me you kin bet your next winter's meat I'll have a hand in this here 'lection."

Judy never made promises that she did not fulfil. But if a candidate misinterpreted the phrases she used in making

promises, she stoutly held that the fault was his and not hers.

"My words is good for what they call fer," she was accustomed to say, "but good money don't stand fer no counterfeits."

When she had got all she wanted out of Webb, she sent that worthy to bed, satisfied in his soul with things as they were, and as confident of the mountain vote in his behalf as of the excellence of Judy's cookery and the exhilaration that resided in her apple jack.

XXI
FLAGS FLYING

Judy was right in her reckoning as to the effect of her blind message upon the mood and movements of Boyd Westover. It was not far from midnight when Theonidas reported what his mother had said, and although the night was one of extreme darkness and a drizzling rain was falling, Boyd Westover set out at once to stumble down the precipitous mountain path to the scarcely less precipitous mountain road three miles away, and thence down, down, down, to whatever level the road might ultimately reach.

As he had never journeyed over that road before, and as its perils by night were very real and very great, Theonidas besought him to postpone the start until the dawn, but he refused

to heed, and bidding the boy transfer the camp equipments to Judy Peters's house, to await orders, set off with the energy of a madman. Yet he had never been saner in all his life or in better condition to meet difficulty.

The delphic character of Judy's message left him, of course, in doubt as to the occasion of the talk about himself and to his detriment in his own neighborhood, but from the first he had not a shadow of doubt as to the substance and subject of that talk. He knew without telling that his fellow men had found some occasion—he could not guess what—for discussing his character and conduct and for recalling to his disadvantage his conviction of crime, his pardon and all the rest of it.

But he faced this sort of thing now in very different mood from that which had been his a few weeks before. Where before his impulse had been to shrink away from the horror, his mood now was to seek it out, to dare it, to defy it, to fight it with all the determination of a vigorous manhood aroused to self defence and not averse to vengeance. Where before he had instinctively sought solitude as a refuge, his impulse now was to seek the haunts of his fellow men, to challenge the criticism that had before so appalled him, to face the world with head erect and dare Fate to meet him hand to hand, foot to foot, eye to eye in combat.

The simple fact was that he had ceased to be morbid. In his life up there among the mountain tops he had regained his health of mind and body. In his contests with Nature's forces and his triumph over them in a thousand petty ways, he had become normal again. He was no longer the introspective, morbidly self-conscious victim of adverse circumstance that Judy Peters

had found him to be, but a strong man rejoicing in his strength, a Westover of Wanalah who shrank from no danger and blanched in no foe's presence. He tramped down the mountain through six or seven hours of darkness in eager quest of those malignities from which he had before sought escape in a refuge of solitude. He wanted now to hear and combat the criticism from the very thought of which he had before been moved to flee in something like terror.

It was in this mood that he encountered the first news of what had happened. It presented itself in the shape of one of Carley Farnsworth's nominating placards, tacked to the great hewn log posts of a gate that spanned the road, and Westover, after nearly twenty miles of tramping, came upon it about sunrise. He could not imagine what to make of it, and after a minute's consideration he dismissed it as somebody's practical joke—a part perhaps of that "devil to pay" in his own neighborhood of which Judy Peters had sent him warning.

But as he continued his journey he found the thing repeated on every gatepost, on every conspicuous tree by the roadside, and all over the front of a blacksmith's shop which he had to pass.

There was nobody in the shop to answer questions at that early hour, but at that point the road forked, one arm of it leading to Wanalah and the other to Chinquapin Knob, the home of Carley Farnsworth. It was only three miles from that point to Wanalah, and it was full five miles to Chinquapin Knob, but, weary as his legs ought to have been and were not, after his twenty odd miles of tramping over rough roads, he turned his face not toward Wanalah but in the opposite direction, resolving to take breakfast with Carley Farnsworth at Chinquapin Knob.

He quickened his pace too, after a glance at his watch.

"It's half-past six," he said to himself, "and Carley has the barbaric habit of breakfasting at eight. I must do the five miles in an hour and a half, if I don't want a breakfast of leftovers, and this morning I don't."

As he trudged on up a glutinous red clay hill road, it began to rain again in dismal fashion, but the fact did not depress him.

"It'll make the clay road soapy," he reflected, "so I must put a little more vim into my leg motions if I'm to do the trick on time."

With that he added ten or a dozen steps per minute to his pace and thought no more about the matter.

Boyd Westover was himself again. That was all.

Tree after tree, as he passed on, confronted him with a repetition of the announcement that "We the undersigned, deeming it desirable that," etc., etc., "hereby nominate Boyd Westover, Esq., of Wanalah, for election as the representative of this Senate district in the upper house of the Legislature, and we appeal to the pride and patriotism of our friends, fellow citizens and neighbors," and so on to the end of the chapter of Carley Farnsworth's free flowing rhetoric. Westover did not pause to look at any of them. There was no need. He had already learned what the placards proclaimed, and he had already observed the conspicuous absence of Colonel Conway's name from the list of those who thus urged his election. He could no more guess the meaning of its absence than others had been able to do, but he was not surprised by the fact. In view of Colonel Conway's

failure to call upon him during the days of his late stay at Wanalah, he would have been astonished if that gentleman's name had appeared on the paper. But his mood was not now what it had been before. He was no longer disposed to be submissive even to Fate, or to reconcile himself to its unjust decrees. As he strode onward at the pace he had set himself he reflected:

"Of course Colonel Conway was under no obligation to call upon me, except the obligation of old friendship, and that he was free to regard as cancelled, if he chose. And of course he was under no obligation to sign that nominating paper, if he did not wish. But he knew that his failure to call upon me was a conspicuous neglect to which others would attach importance, and he knew that his refusal to sign the paper would be everywhere interpreted as an accusation that must put shame upon me. I have a right to demand a greater explicitness of accusation, and I will. His silence does me a greater hurt than any other man's utterance could. I have a right to challenge it on the ground of its injustice. I have a right to insist that he shall speak, and I will make that demand and enforce it."

Obviously Boyd Westover had recovered his vigor and was again fit to call himself by the name his forebears had borne for generations past—Westover of Wanalah—a name which in that community had always stood for virility, courage and uncompromising honor; a name that had meant secure peace to those who deserved peace and quick war to those who were hostilely disposed; a name that had always represented what is best in manhood, both in its tenderly forbearing gentleness of impulse and its relentless strength of purpose.

As he approached Chinquapin Knob the evidences of his candidacy rapidly multiplied. The outer gate of Carley Farnsworth's plantation was plastered all over with the nomination placards, and as the house came into view Boyd saw a great flagstaff there carrying in the breeze three long tailed streamers on which, as he presently made out, were inscribed the legends:

"For Senator—Boyd Westover!"

"Vote for a Gentleman!"

"Westover of Wanalah!"

"I don't understand it," Westover reflected as he climbed the last hill and saw by a glance at his watch that he was a quarter of an hour ahead of his scheduled time, "I don't understand it, but obviously I'm a candidate for Senator and with equal obviousness I'm in for a fight if I am to win. So much the better. I don't care a fig about the Senatorship, but I'll enjoy the fight. I'm in the mood for it. And besides I like to win the game, whatever the stake may be. I'll fight for this election as I never fought for anything before in my life. I wonder who the other fellow is, anyhow—my opponent?"

Clearly his twenty-five mile walk, made between midnight and breakfast time, had not robbed Boyd Westover of any of the vigor of mind and temper that were his by inheritance and that the mountains had given back to him.

"I'm almost famished," he said to himself. "It suddenly occurs to me that I was out after a catamount last night and forgot all about my supper. I wonder if Carley has a roe herring for my

breakfast. Anyhow he'll have a lot of other good things."

As he finished his wondering he entered the house grounds at Chinquapin Knob, and Carley Farnsworth, who was smoking his before-breakfast pipe in the porch, caught sight of him.

Their greetings and questions were like shots from a rapid fire gun, an implement of slaughter which had not then been invented by the devilish ingenuity of greed in the service of murder.

Out of the cross fire Carley Farnsworth managed to extract the information that his friend had been tramping since midnight with a stomach empty since noon of the preceding day.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Excellent! You're altogether fit. You're in shape or you never could have done that. But I won't answer any question you can conceivably ask"—for Boyd had already begun a clamorous catechism as to what it all meant —"until we've had breakfast and a pipe. Enos!" addressing a negro boy, "go to the kitchen and tell Elsie there'll be a lot of trouble at Chinquapin Knob if breakfast isn't on the table in five minutes,—do you hear?"

"Now tell me, Carley, what all this means," pleaded Westover.

"I'll do nothing of the kind until after breakfast," answered the other. "I'm a doctor you know, and I have the honor to be the family physician at Wanalah. By the way, Boyd, you've got three cases of typhoid in your lower quarters, and as I suspected the well I've ordered it filled up, and the negroes down there are carrying their water half a mile or so. That isn't what I wanted to

talk about. As your family physician I have your health in charge. You're in superb condition now, and it's my business to keep you so. You've made a long tramp on an empty stomach—a very unwise thing to do, but as a doctor I'm used to that sort of thing. There wouldn't be any serious work for us doctors to do, if people generally were wise. But you've made a tremendous draft upon your bank account of vigor, and it is time for you to make a deposit to keep the account good. You need breakfast, before you burden your mind even with anything I have to say. And by the way, Johnny is bringing in the breakfast two whole minutes before the time. There's the loaf of hot light bread, and the roe herrings and the biscuits and the batter bread. There's a cold ham on the dresser and the batter cakes or waffles or something of that kind will come in later. Kizzy, my housekeeper, is making the coffee; she always does that the last thing in order that it may be fresh. She frequently utters the dictum, 'Coffee ain't no good ef you don't drink it while the aromatics is in it.' I don't know where she got that word, but there is always a supply of delicious 'aromatics' in Kizzy's coffee. Come. Here's a cold jowl if you care for it, and there's sausage before you, and liver and chidlings—you see I killed half my hogs the other day. Eat your breakfast and make it a good one. If you don't I'll refuse to tell you any of the interesting things you're so anxious to hear about."

XXII
AN UNMISTAKABLE CURE

When the breakfast was over and, with long-stemmed pipes alight, the two friends foregathered in front of a blazing fire—for the drizzling autumn day was chill—Westover again demanded to know "what all this thing means."

"You must have seen some of the placards?"

"*Some* of them? It seems to me that all the woods have been papered with them. But what does it mean?"

"Oh, that's obvious enough. It means that a goodly number of your neighbors and friends have nominated you for Senator, moved thereto by a conviction that the intelligence and character of the district deserve a better representative than William Wilberforce Webb."

Farnsworth was careful not to suggest Judy Peters's initiative or interest in the matter. That was a secret between him and her.

The mention of Webb's name as that of his opponent, started Westover out of his chair, and as he stood upon the hearth he said, in tones that were kept in subjection by sheer force of a resolute will:

"Oh, then it is Webb I'm running against. That puts a new face on the affair. I like that. Against him I'll make a whirlwind campaign. But how on earth did that fellow manage to secure a nomination by so respectable a party as the Whigs?"

"Chiefly by general neglect. He worked for the nomination and all the rest of us let it go to him by default. That's the substance of the story."

"Well," answered Westover, "the news that he is my opponent gives me a new and eager interest in the campaign. We'll get up squirrel stews and barbecues, late as the season is, and militia musters and every other kind of thing that draws men together, and I'll make my little, red hot speech at all of them. Is there anything in sight?"

"Nothing available, so far as your presence is concerned. This is Court day, of course, and I'm going to make a speech—"

"So am I," interjected Westover.

"But how can you? You've tramped all night and I've ordered a bath and a bed for you."

"Thank you sincerely. I'll enjoy the bath and the bed some other time. To-day I'm going to the Court House with you. I'll ride one of your plugs, if you don't mind, and may be you'll send a boy over to Wanalah with a note to my overseer. I want him to send a horse to the Court House to meet me—a real horse that I'll have a fight with every time I come to a gate."

Carley Farnsworth did not answer immediately. Instead he walked into the dining room under pretence of refilling his pipe—really for the sake of a good chuckle over his friend's condition.

"He's as fit as a fiddle," he said to himself. "He's full of vigor and full of fight. He's Westover of Wanalah again, and that's what I've been working for. That mountain air, and the hunting and fishing and rough tramping have done more for him than all the calomel, quinine and strychnine I've got in my saddle bags could do. It's great! And we'll crown the cure—Judy and I—by

making him Senator. Really Judy is a great diagnostician in her way. It was she who found out what was the matter with Boyd and prescribed the remedy. I used to think she had only one medicine, that apple jack was her panacea. I know better now."

Then, with his pipe refilled, he returned to the parlor only to find it empty. Going to the porch he saw Westover astride a three-year-old filly that had been turned loose to graze in the house grounds. Without saddle or bridle the young man was gaily cavorting on the spirited mare's back and rapidly reconciling her to control of his will.

"Well, certainly he's fit," muttered the little doctor. "There aren't many men in Virginia who would prefer that sort of thing to a comfortable bed after an all night's tramp down a mountain side, over the roughest roads that adverse natural conditions, supplemented by the evil ingenuity of road supervisors, ever managed to create. Houp la! I'll dismiss him as cured. But we'll go on and elect him."

Then, as the negro boy for whom he had sent appeared, Farnsworth called out:

"I say, Boyd, I've a boy waiting for you here. Come and give him instructions."

And when Westover reached the steps, his host added:

"Sam may as well bring your horse to the Court House himself. It is hardly at all out of his way in coming back. So give him your instructions."

"Very well. Go to my overseer, Sam, and tell him to send Rob

Roy to me by you. And mind you, you are to lead him. If you try to ride him he'll pitch you head first into the deepest mud puddle he can find, and then he'll go galloping home again. Tell the overseer to put the double-bitted snaffle and curb bridle on him and the lightest flat saddle in the stables. And mind, Sam, keep the stirrups crossed over the saddle. If you don't, Rob Roy will mount himself and ride away heaven knows where."

"Yes, sir," answered Sam. "I hear, an' I'll be keerful. I prides myself on ridin' anything they is short'n a hurricane, but I's contumaciously opposed to gittin' on the back o' that there Rob Roy o' yourn. He's wuss'n a hurricane an' a' earthquake an' a 'clipse o' de moon all put togedder. Dat's my jedgment o' his pussonal character generally. He's wuss now, o' course."

"Why, Sam?"

"'Cause he's done been stabled up fer free or four months, now, 'thout no exercise 'ceptin' bein' led to de branch fer water."

"Do you know that, Sam? Have they kept that horse—"

"Yes, sir, I knows it. Yo' see dey ain't nobody on Wanalah plantation dat dares git on dat dar hoss's back, an' 'taint much fun to exercise a hoss by leadin' of him. 'Sides dat—"

Sam faltered, and his master interposed:

"Go on—'sides what."

"Well, 'taint nothin', sir."

"All right. I like to hear about nothings. Who is she, Sam?"

"Who's who, Mastah?"

"Why, the girl you've been courting over at Wanalah? Of course I know you've been stealing a mule out of the stables and riding over there every night for a month without asking my permission. But I don't know who the girl is or whether she's worthy of you, Sam."

"'Fore de Lawd, Mastah, I ain't—"

"Don't forswear yourself, Sam. I know all about it. I visit my stables every night, and I've missed you and the mule. I don't mind, only, if you had asked me, I'd have let you have a better mule and a saddle. Never mind that now. Take the mare Medora, and get away from here. Bring your Mas' Boyd's horse to the Court House, and mind you, don't stop at Wanalah to sweetheart with Patty Jane—for you see after all I know all about this thing."

"And Sam, tell my body servant to send me some clothes by you," added Westover.

When the boy had gone, in some confusion over what seemed to him his master's supernatural knowledge of things he had carefully guarded against discovery, Farnsworth explained to his companion:

"I always take pains to know what goes on on the plantation, and I never mention it except in sensational ways, calculated to impress the African mind with the conviction that as a doctor I am possessed of strange, occult powers of discovery against which it is useless to practise the ordinary arts of concealment. It's a handy way to keep things in order on a plantation, the

master of which has to attend to a medical practice. Now we must be off. Here are our horses. I've assigned to your use the maddest piece of horseflesh I possess. It's a mare that broke my overseer's arm a year ago, and when harnessed to a vehicle for purposes of subjugation and discipline kicked the vehicle into kindling wood and scrap iron and then kept on kicking till there was nothing left on her but a collar. She'd have kicked that off too, I reckon, if it had been behind her shoulders. She has been a good deal tamed since then, but she still has spirit enough to satisfy any reasonable rider. You, of course, are unreasonable. What's your fancy anyhow, Boyd, for riding cataclysms and cyclones instead of serious-minded animals that know their business and do it docilely?"

"Oh I don't know. I like struggle, contest, and all that. I like to match my wits against brute strength. I like—well I suppose I like a fight."

As he spoke the two mounted.

"There's no trace of neurasthenia in him, anyhow," thought Farnsworth. Aloud he said:

"All that is very fortunate, for just now you've got all the fight ahead of you that any reasonable person of fighting temperament could desire."

"Tell me all about it, Carley. I've been trying to worm the facts out of you ever since I got to Chinquapin Knob."

"Oh, the thing's simple enough. You see Webb hates you of course, and he's afraid of you. When he secured the regular nomination he thought he had his fox by the tail. There was only

the Democratic candidate, Sam Butler, opposing him, and of course in so strong a Whig district as this is, that candidacy didn't count. But when we nominated you as an independent Whig, things began to cloud up in Webb's sky. He got ugly, but—well, he was made to understand that there were limits to what it would be safe to say about you."

"I understand, Carley," said Boyd, grasping his hand warmly; "I understand, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for a friendship that has no bottom so far as plummet line can discover. But all that's my job now. Go on, I want to hear."

"Well, he hasn't dared say a thing in any open fashion, but there are a lot of his followers whom no gentleman can afford to honor by slapping their jaws or kicking them off the steps of a barroom, and through them Webb has managed to circulate insinuations."

"Of what sort?" asked Westover quickly.

"It isn't easy to pin them down to a definition. They have mainly taken the form of questions. 'Where is Boyd Westover, anyhow? Why doesn't he present himself to the people he asks to vote for him? What's he afraid of? Why didn't his oldest and best friend Colonel Conway sign the paper nominating him? Does Colonel Conway doubt his innocence after all? Isn't he satisfied with the other fellow's confession? Or does he think the confession of a lunatic insufficient?' These are some of the questions set afloat, nobody knows how or by whom."

"What are the others?" demanded Westover with set teeth and a jaw that seemed to have added to its massiveness by reason of

the determination of the mind behind it. "Go on. Tell me the whole story. I want to know just what I have got to fight."

"That's right, and I'll be with you in the fight. We'll run these questions down till we make it unsafe to ask them. I've already made a good many people quit asking them by notifying them that I should treat any repetition of the questions as an assertion for which the questioner could be and should be and would be held responsible; confound that grammar rule about can and will and could and should and would, I never could remember it, but I've given notice to all and singular that I recognize no distinction between insinuation and assertion in such a case as this, and that—oh, well, you know what a notice of that kind suggests."

"Oh, yes, I know, and I thank you. But you're evading my question, Carley. What is the other insinuation? I quite understand that you shrink from mentioning it, but you must. I have a right to demand that much from a friendship so loyal as yours has proved itself to be. Go on. Tell me the worst."

"I will. But the thing has been so subtilely put forth that I've found it impossible even to find anybody who has asked the question. Indeed everybody who has helped to circulate the slander has done so not by asking if there was truth in it but by declaring his utter disbelief in it. I never knew anything so cleverly managed in my life, or anything so malignant."

"You haven't yet told me what the scandal was," said Boyd, with lips so tightly compressed that the purple had all gone out of them.

"In substance it amounted to this, that you had in some way treated Colonel Conway's daughter with unchivalrous disrespect —that you had put some unforgivable slight upon her—nobody suggests what. In fact the thing is so vague and shadowy and unsubstantial that it is difficult even to define it. But Colonel Conway's refusal to join with us in nominating you has lent a sort of color to it, and this thing, utterly unsubstantial as it is, has done more than all else to embarrass our campaign. In your absence it has been impossible to meet it and throttle it, for nobody but you could have a shadow of authority to question Colonel Conway on such a subject."

"I understand," answered Boyd; "I'll deal with that matter in a way that will satisfy myself at any rate, and possibly my friends also. Thank you for all. I know the situation now, and knowing it, I think I know how to meet it."

As he said this the pair were entering the Court House village, and their road took them within a few feet of the house and law office of Sam Butler, the Democratic candidate for Senator. As they passed, Butler stepped out into the porch accompanied by Edgar Coffey, and engaged in the earnest end of a conversation. They could not avoid hearing Coffey say:

"Well, that's what Judy tole me to tell you, an' ef you do as she says, she'll take keer o' the rest."

Neither Westover nor Farnsworth said a word until they had passed well beyond hearing. Then Westover exclaimed:

"I wonder what on earth that means! Surely Judy Peters isn't going to throw the mountain vote for him."

"Very certainly not," answered Farnsworth, but he said nothing of his visit to the Queen of the Mountains or of her initiative in Boyd Westover's nomination.

"No," answered Westover, recalling Judy's last message to himself, "that isn't even one of the possibilities." But he did not explain the grounds of his confidence.

After a little, as the two rode into the stable yard of the hotel to put up their horses, Westover said:

"Nevertheless I'd give something handsome to know what that meant."

"So would I," answered Farnsworth.

They were destined to find out, before the campaign ended, but not yet.

XXIII
COURT DAY

Court Day in old Virginia was an institution. It happened once a month and it served all the purposes of club, exchange, political assemblage, muster, and social meeting time. Pretty nearly the whole adult male population of the county was sure to be present at the county seat on that day, so that the Virginian who wanted to see anybody, whether to collect a note or give

one, to make a contract or to cancel one, to arrange a religious meeting or a barbecue, to trade horses or to exchange views concerning the latest philosophy, to make speeches or to listen to them, was sure to find present the people who were in any way related to the matter he had in hand. Those leisurely folk never thought of bothering themselves to visit anybody on business. Whatever the business was, it could wait until Court Day, and it did.

Sometimes there was political speaking or the like on Court Day, but not always. The orators had need of an audience, and if there was anything of interest going on in Court, everybody was sure to be there and the orators had nobody to address.

It was so on this occasion. It was a quarterly Court—a grand jury term of the County Court—and there was a murder trial of sensational character in progress. As a result everybody who could find a square foot of space within the Court room, in which to bestow his person, sought place there the moment the Court opened, and held it tenaciously throughout the session. The struggle for place was all the greater because Jack Towns, just returned from his Rocky Mountain trip, was present as attorney and counsellor for the accused man, and Jack Towns's eloquence was something that everybody wanted to hear. Besides that, his skill in confusing a witness and reducing him to pulp was something that nobody wanted to miss. Jack was a lawyer whose equipment lacked little of perfection. His learning was adequate, his sagacity almost preternatural, and when he had a case to conduct the Commonwealth's Attorney was in a tremor of blue funk from the beginning, the Judge was alertly mindful lest his judgment should be unduly swayed by persuasive eloquence, and the populace was in the humor that

possesses an audience when a great star and a great company are to present a great drama or tragedy or comedy as the case may be.

Jack was too deeply engaged with "the work of saving a human life," as he said, to talk for more than half a minute with Westover, when the two met at the stables of the inn.

"I'm going to Wanalah for the night," he said. "Then and there we can talk. At present I have only time to tell you that you are, three times over, the richest man in Virginia and that your wealth includes a practically limitless supply of ready money. I haven't time now to tell you more, but I tell you this in the interest of your campaign. Give all the jamborees you think of; let the money flow like water, and I'll take care of the results."

"But, Jack, I'm not buying my election, and—"

"Of course not. I understand all that. I only want you to know that for legitimate expense your bank account is ample. Now I must go. I've a human life in my hands. I'll be with you at Wanalah to-night. Go home when you get ready. I'll be there when I can. So long."[1]

[1] The expression "so long," as here used, is not an anachronism. It was in use in Virginia, and in well nigh universal use in South Carolina before the war. Its adoption at the North came much later, I believe. Mr. James Russell Lowell once suggested to me that it might be a corruption of "salaam."—AUTHOR.]

In Virginia in those old, sunny days, hospitality was taken for granted in that confident fashion, and the welcome always justified the assumption.

But before the court was opened, and during its noon recess, which was shortened to three-quarters of an hour because of the importance of the case at bar, Boyd Westover found it difficult to move about, because of the besetting eagerness of his friends to greet him. In answer to questions he frequently repeated a little impromptu speech.

"I was in utter ignorance of my nomination until I saw placards this morning. I haven't even yet found out what it means, and I really care nothing for the place. I'd far rather stay at Wanalah and look after my affairs. But as my friends have nominated me I'm a candidate and I shall stay in the race till the polls close on election day. I learn that some persons—I don't know who—have been suggesting things to my detriment. I am here to ask about that, to challenge every insinuation against my character and every criticism of my conduct. I stand ready to answer. I ask only that those who seek to injure me shall come out into the open, make themselves known and put their accusations into definite form so that they may be met and either refuted or established. I don't relish attacks in the dark or from behind masks, and I am going to make known my opinion of the sneaks and cowards who make such attacks. I'm going to attend every gathering of my fellow citizens between now and election day, and at every one of them I'm going to challenge any and every body as I do now, who has aught to say against my character or my conduct to say it openly like a man. If any one does that, I shall reply in such fashion as I think appropriate in each case. I stand before the community as Westover of

Wanalah, a man conscious of his own rectitude and prepared to vindicate the honor of the name he bears at all times, against all comers and at all hazards. That is all I have to say, and it ought to be enough to satisfy honorable men and to silence sneaks and slanderers."

So far as the men of honest mind who were gathered together that day were concerned, this challenge seemed abundantly satisfying. Many who had entertained doubts because of the candidate's absence, abandoned their doubts and frankly declared their purpose to support Westover at the election. As for Webb and his friends, they found themselves sorely embarrassed. Their opportunity had lain in Westover's unexplained absence. His appearance now, and his frank and manly challenge, robbed them of their weapons and their ammunition. They dared not say aught that might be construed into an accusation, and if any of them insinuated aught to Westover's discredit he was sure of a peremptory challenge to say just what he meant.

It was obvious to Webb and his supporters that something must be done to meet and neutralize the effect of Boyd Westover's presence and defiance. They still had "regularity" behind them. Webb was the regularly nominated candidate of the Whig party, strongly dominant in that region, and presumably he would receive the regular party vote. Then, too, as he explained to his partisans, most of the Democrats, who would of course support their own party candidate, were men friendly to Westover, whose votes were so many subtracted from the support that would otherwise be his.

"I regard Sam Butler's candidacy as a thing altogether in my

interest," he said confidently, "and then," he jubilantly added, "I have satisfactory assurance that the whole mountain vote will be mine, and so I regard my election as a foregone conclusion, a triumphant assurance of a future that holds human affairs securely within its grasp."

That was a phrase dear to Webb's soul. He had spent half a night in concocting it and committing it to memory. "You know I've been up in the mountains, and I've been royally entertained by Her Majesty the Queen."

"Has she definitely promised you the mountain vote?" asked one who had a passion for exactitude.

"Practically, yes. You know Judy Peters talks in parables and never commits herself; but a wink is as good as a nod to a blind horse, and her parting words to me left nothing of assurance to be desired. Now what I want to say is this: My election is secure, but I want my constituency to include as large a proportion of the planters, men of my own class, as possible, and so I have accepted Sam Butler's challenge to meet him and divide time at the Barbecue he's going to give over at Fighting Creek, the day after to-morrow. I suppose Westover will be there by Sam's invitation, and between Sam and me he won't be left a leg to stand on."

"Well, may be so," muttered Foggy, whose experience in politics had bred chronic scepticism in his mind; "but Boyd Westover has been talkin' right out in meetin' to-day, an' besides —"

"What is it, Foggy?"

"Well, Jack Towns is here, you know, an' if he happens to make a speech over there he'll tangle you up like a fish-line after you've caught an eel on it."

"I'm not afraid of him," answered Webb, confidently.

"So much the worse," muttered Foggy. "Maybe he wouldn't do you up so badly if you were properly afraid of him. However, we must take things as we find 'em, and candidates likewise, and I'll be over at Fighting Creek with a lot o' fellows to shout for you, Webb."

When Court opened and everybody made a rush for places in the court house, Boyd strolled over to the inn whose proprietor insisted upon calling it a hotel, and, going to the room he had taken there for the day, threw himself upon the bed for a sleep of two or three hours. At the end of that time he arose refreshed, took a cold sponge bath, and proceeded to change his rough mountain costume for the more conventional garments his body servant had sent him from Wanalah. After the fashion of the time and country, these consisted of a "pleated bosom" shirt, a damask silk vest, a long tailed broadcloth coat, a pair of "doe-skin" trousers, white socks with silken clocks, and a pair of "low quarter" shoes with broad silken ties. It was certain that before mounting his horse again for the journey to Wanalah, Boyd Westover would shed the shoes at any rate and don his high-topped boots instead, but for the present he felt a social obligation upon him to dress conventionally; for he had found at the hotel a note from Major Magister, the leader of the bar, saying:

"Of course you'll dine with me at four o'clock, Westover. The

Judge will be present, and I hope Jack Towns and the Commonwealth's Attorney also, prepared to reconcile the differences created by this trial, and become friends again. But none of these is what I mean when I say 'of course' you'll dine with me. The 'of course' takes the much more pleasing form of a charming young gentlewoman from Boston,—Miss Millicent Danvers,—to whom we all want to show every possible attention, and especially to introduce you as a typical young gentleman of Virginia. She is with us only for the day. So don't send any excuses, but come in your own proper person."

Remembering that Boyd Westover was a gallant, hot-blooded young Virginian, and that it had been many moons since he had enjoyed association with young women of his class and caste, it is easy to understand the eagerness with which he welcomed this opportunity to "get himself civilized again," as he framed the thought in his mind.

"From Boston?" he reflected. "I suppose she'll have gold-rimmed spectacles and talk philosophy. I never met a Boston girl, so this will be a new experience. After all, I suppose women are very much alike, no matter where they come from. Doubtless this one has pulses, just as other girls have, and perhaps I shall be able to put my finger on them. At any rate it will interest me to try. My opportunities promise to be good. Major Magister and the Judge and Jack Towns and the Commonwealth's Attorney are sure to fall foul of each other over abstruse law points that the rest of us know nothing about, and that will leave mine hostess and the Boston maid to me."

It was in this mood of pleasurable but by no means enthusiastic anticipation that Westover entered the home of his

host, half an hour after the jury had returned a verdict of "not guilty," in the case of Jack Towns's client—a verdict that was based rather upon the absence of evidence that Jack Towns had succeeded in excluding than upon the evidence actually presented at the trial.

XXIV
A PERFECT WOMAN—AND A MAN

When his hostess presented him to Millicent Danvers, Westover could scarcely believe that this was the young woman he had been invited to meet. He had constructed a portrait of her in his imagination and she did not satisfy any of the details of the picture. He had expected to find her tall, bony, Roman-nosed, and sallow. She was instead of moderate height, plump, with delicately moulded Grecian features, and a complexion of pink and white that had no suggestion of sallowness in it. He had expected spectacles; instead he found a pair of gray-blue eyes that looked into his own with candor and fearless trustfulness, like those of a child of four or five years of age, and yet with the confidence and courage that come only of good breeding allied to perfect innocence. He had prepared himself to meet an aggressive, self assertive manner; instead he found all the shyness of young girlhood, all the modesty of maiden inexperience, allied with a frank, self-respecting truthfulness that was fearless because of its confidence of right intent.

They talked, of course, about the young woman's impressions

of Virginia.

"It is lovely," she said. "You know it is all a surprise, an astonishment to me."

"How so? Would you mind explaining that?"

"I cannot exactly explain it. You see it's like a pleasant dream. You know it made you happy while you were dreaming it, and you know it makes you happy after you're awake, but you can't tell just what it was you dreamed or just why it made you happy. It is so elusive that you can't grasp it and put it into words. I'm still dreaming Virginia, and I know I shall never be able to tell anybody why the dream is so delicious. I try to think it out sometimes, but I can't. Whenever I make up my mind that it is because of this thing or that, I say 'No, that isn't it.' I suppose it's a thousand little things put together. But tell me about this election of yours. I'm talking too much about myself and my thoughts."

"No, you are not. The election doesn't interest me, and what you've been saying does. Go on, please. You had more in your mind."

"How can you know that?" she asked in genuine surprise.

"Because you spoke of 'a thousand little things.' I wish you would tell me about a dozen of them, or even half a dozen."

With a world of childlike seriousness in her wide open eyes the girl responded:

"I suppose I ought not to have said a thousand. That was an

exaggeration, and exaggeration is as bad as any other kind of fibbing, isn't it?"

"In some cases, yes—in some, no. Certainly it was not so in this case. Your phrase carried to my mind precisely the thought you had in your own, and so it was perfectly truthful."

"I'm glad you think so. I try always to tell the truth."

"So I should imagine. Now will you not go on and tell me some of the things that please you in our Virginia life? Is it so different from your life up North? You see I have never been North."

"Oh, yes, so different! I think most of us up North are good people, just as I suppose most people are everywhere. But there's a difference—a something, I don't know just what. Yes, I do, too, in part at least, though I'm not sure I can put it into words. We live within ourselves, and you don't. We love our friends and are kind to them, but we aren't close to them, as people down here are. It is because we are shy, I suppose. Our attitude toward money values is different. I don't know that our people care more about money than you do, but—well, we take it into account as you do not. But that isn't what I mean. There is a certain graciousness in your ways of living, a warmth, a color—I don't know what to call it—that fascinates me. We are scrupulously polite to each other; you are cordially courteous instead. I suppose that too is because we are shyer than you are. We shrink from self revelation as you do not. I think we are really as warm-hearted as you Virginians are, but we are more reserved."

"You are doubtless right. I've observed that temperamental peculiarity in the Northern men I've met. At the University there was a young man from Boston who became my chum under rather peculiar circumstances, and I studied him closely. Because of a certain delicacy of constitution which rendered your Boston winters dangerous to his health, he was sent to the University of Virginia instead of Harvard. He didn't know our ways, and as a 'Yankee'—you know how unjustly that word has come to have evil significance with us—he was a good deal shunned, and things were said, and—well, it so came about that he and I became chums and occupied a room together on the lawn."

"Yes, I know," she answered dreamily, as if recalling a story. "But you are suppressing the truth, Mr. Westover."

In an astonishment that well nigh made him spring from his chair, he asked:

"How do you know that?"

"Our hostess is rising," she replied with a calm dignity that was fascinating to the young man. "We ladies must leave you gentlemen to your wine and cigars."

"I do not take wine," he replied, "and as for cigars I shall gladly give them up in favor of a further conversation with you. If you permit, I will quit the table with you."

"There!" she exclaimed. "That's one of the 'thousand' things I spoke of. In Virginia you gentlemen manifest a certain deference toward women that I have seen nowhere else. It is gallantly protective, respectfully, not servilely submissive, a tribute of

strength to weakness which carries with it no reflection upon the weakness, and to women it is the most fascinating thing imaginable. I've expressed it lamely, but—" and with that she took a handful of cigars from the passing box and added:

"At any rate your courtesy to me shall not cost you your smoke. We won't go into the drawing room, but into the porch. The day is mild, and I want to tell you that story."

"Tell me first," he said as they passed into the porch, "how you happen to know anything about it."

"It is simple enough. I've heard my brother tell the story with enthusiasm many, many times."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. Holmes Wentworth is my elder brother. My mother was married twice, you know."

"I see. I didn't know. If I had known—"

"If you had known you wouldn't have spoken of the matter at all. And as it was, you were suppressing all the interesting facts. Now I'm going to relate them according to the gospel of Holmes Wentworth. In a debating society one night he expressed some opinions that gave offence to certain of the students, and some proposal of censure was made and hotly advocated. You opposed it, declaring that debate without absolute free speech must be a mockery. Your impassioned utterance won approval, and the resolution was voted down with only three or four men voting for it. They were not Virginians and—"

"They were the sons of negro traders, every man of them," interrupted Westover; "and for the negro trader and his belongings Virginia gentlemen have neither recognition nor tolerance. They are the vilest—"

He paused in search of a more effective epithet, and she spoke.

"I know all about that," she said, "and you needn't bite an inch off your next cigar by way of expressing yourself. Let me go on with the story. Those 'lewd fellows of the baser sort' went down into Charlottesville and organized a crew of ruffians to drive Holmes Wentworth out of the University and out of Virginia. You heard of the thing, and arming yourself with all the Colt's revolvers you could borrow, you hurried into the town. There you found Holmes sorely beset by a dozen armed ruffians and a crowd of other jeering dissolutes. You pushed him up into a corner, thrust a pair of the pistols into his hands, and took your place beside him, saying: 'If they rush us, shoot with both hands, and *shoot to kill*; there's no good in wasting ammunition.' Then you called out to the mob: 'Now do your worst, you cowards! But the first man that crosses that curbstone dies the death of the dog that he is, and we'll send some others to—' really you used some dreadful language, Mr. Westover, which I can't repeat, though I know it all by heart. And a little later, after the mob had quailed before you, you swore worse than ever, ordering them to disperse or you'd fire into them and send some of them to the place you had already mentioned. Oh, it was glorious! But the sheriff came and drove the crowd away. You see I know the whole story. Do you wonder that I find things to like in Virginia? Then you took Holmes to live in the same room with you, and after you learned to understand him as well as he already

understood you, he and you became bosom friends."

"Thank you," he replied, throwing away a cigar that he had forgotten to light; "but really Holmes's imagination is creative and he has made too much of a trifle."

"He hasn't any imagination at all," she replied; "he's the most prosaic, literal, realistic fact mongerer imaginable, as you very well know. But now I'm going to turn woman again and talk about myself."

Westover thought that about the most tactful turning of a conversation that he had ever known. But she gave him no time to wonder over it.

"I'm staying at The Oaks, you know, with Margaret Conway. She's the very sweetest, truest, loveliest girl I ever knew. She's fit to be the wife of the noblest man in Virginia."

Westover winced, and the girl observed the fact without recognizing it in any way. Instead she went on:

"You see she was my guest for six weeks a year ago, and I'm returning her visit and incidentally enjoying life better than I ever dreamed that one could do. By the way, there's to be a dance at Dr. Carver's over at Fighting Creek, wherever that is, to-morrow night—no, it's the next night, and as there is to be some sort of public meeting near there that day, I suppose I shall see you at the party."

At that moment there was a double irruption from the dining room on the one side and the drawing room on the other, into the porch to see an autumn sunset of peculiar gorgeousness. A little

later Boyd Westover took his leave, and bidding Jack Towns follow at his convenience, set out for Wanalah.

As he went he found himself thinking of Millicent Danvers with far more admiration and greatly tenderer sentiment than he had believed himself capable of feeling toward any woman since Margaret had been lost to him.

"She is certainly charming," he said to himself; then correcting his thought he said, "No, that is not the word; it is commonplace, conventional, cheap, and nothing commonplace, conventional or cheap can describe Millicent Danvers. She is all woman—that's it, and I can't imagine anything better as belonging to this world or the next. She is honest, truthful, genuine, but those are ordinary virtues, and her virtues are not confined to the ordinary. She is sympathetic with all things that are essentially right and of good report. Still, that is not the secret of her charm, for many women—perhaps most women—are all that. She has high ideals and she is loyal to them. She's the sort of woman Jephtha's daughter is supposed to have been, and at the same time she has all the qualities that make the story of Ruth the greatest masterpiece of all literature. Heroism is hers, and gentleness not less. She is a Joan of Arc and she is the most trusting child that was ever gently dandled on one's knee. I have it! She has faith; she believes; she trusts, and in her belief she dares and honors daring. Heroism is to her an object of worship; devotion a divine inspiration; truth an inborn characteristic. It is just as I said before—she is all woman, and in all God's work he created nothing else so good or so great as that."

As he reached this point in his meditations he was passing the

outer gates of The Oaks plantation, and suddenly his thought reverted to Margaret.

"She, too, is a woman of that type," he reflected. "I do not understand her silence, but I should be unworthy of any woman's love if I doubted her truth. I will not doubt her. I will let no other take her place in my heart so long as I live. She is all that Millicent Danvers is, and to me she is more and always must be. She is the woman who gave me love for love, and even in an estrangement that can now never be undone, I cannot forget the troth we plighted before Fate interposed to spoil my life. I shall not attend the dance at Dr. Carver's."

XXV
THE GREAT RENUNCIATION

The drizzling rain that had marred the day had ceased during the afternoon. The late October sun had set in a golden glory while yet Westover lingered by the side of Millicent Danvers in the porch of the Magister homestead. The evening that followed was irresistibly tempting to lovers of the out of doors.

Two men sat in converse in the porch at Wanalah.

Two women sat in converse in the porch at The Oaks.

The two men were Boyd Westover and Jack Towns.

The two women were Margaret Conway and Millicent Danvers.

The conversations in the two porches were utterly unlike in substance, in tone and in effect. Nevertheless they were not unrelated—in part at least.

Jack Towns had come to give an account of his stewardship, but Westover, with his habitual indifference to petty details, insisted upon it that the report should be broadly general.

"When a man has arranged a matter," he said, "involving nine seven times over, I like him to say sixty-three at the outset, instead of seven times nine. I hate to multiply and divide and add and subtract."

"Why the deuce are you doing it, then?" demanded Jack.

"As how?"

"Why by making the wholly needless and utterly idle computation that seven times nine is sixty-three. Why didn't you just say you liked totals rather than the factors producing them?"

"I suppose it is because I never studied law and therefore haven't a well ordered mind."

"And I don't suppose anything of the sort. I suppose it's because your mind is fascinated with some other subject—and by the way she really is charming—so that it wearies you to think of anything else. Perhaps you'll feel otherwise when you hear what I have to tell you. Are you ready to listen?"

"Yes, certainly. Go on."

"Very well then. That father of yours was never so wise in all his life as when he bought all that mining land up in the Rocky Mountains. I don't know and I can't even guess how he found out the value of what he was buying."

"Perhaps he didn't," said Boyd. "May be he was simply coppering on the ace and taking the chances."

"I had thought of that. It's the most probable solution. However that may be, he managed to buy Golconda and Ophir and California and Australia and the mint and the assay office all in one when he disbursed a few thousand dollars for about the most desolate spot on earth, a place where you not only can't raise a potato but can't even boil one because of the altitude. It takes half an hour up there to produce a soft-boiled egg. You can boil water in two minutes, and as it boils it is so cool you can bathe in it half a minute later. I have some counterfeit continental currency in a cabinet at my house, and upon my word, if anybody had offered me all the land your father bought for you up there in exchange for one of those old and doubly discredited shin-plasters, I wouldn't have made the trade."

"Then the whole thing—"

"Nothing of the kind. I didn't say that or suggest it. I've put your land and mining rights into a new company that already has machinery and management and technical skill and brains established there. The stock of that company will pay heaven only knows how many hundred per cent. per annum in the way of dividends, and thirty-nine per cent. of it is yours. By way of

boot, as horse traders call it, I brought away nine hundred and fifty thousand dollars in sight drafts on New York and Boston. I tried hard to force them to make it a million just for the name of the thing, but I couldn't because they are men of affairs with no sense of the picturesque. And after all—"

"What on earth am I to do with all that money?" asked Boyd in a tone of distressed perplexity.

"Oh, you'll manage that easily enough after you get used to having it. And if you don't want to bother yourself about it, you needn't. I've already invested it for you, acting under my blanket power of attorney, so that the interest is all you'll have to look out for."

"What have you done with it, Jack?"

"In view of the disturbed condition of politics in this country and the rumors of possible war, I have had something more than half of it sent to the Barings in London to be invested in British consols and French rentes. The rest is invested in Virginia sixes and other good, interest paying bonds, and is in the vaults of August Belmont & Co. in New York. By way of providing you with pocket money, I've placed twenty-five thousand dollars to your credit in the Farmers' Bank of Virginia. There. There isn't a seven times nine problem in that whole story for you to wrestle with. You've got only your sixty-three to consider, and when you grow quite sane again you can go over the detailed statements that I shall leave with you. Now tell me, what does it mean—Colonel Conway's attitude I refer to of course."

"Frankly, I don't know."

"Tell me all you do know, and perhaps I can figure out the rest. You see it doesn't appall me to have a seven to multiply by a nine."

"As I said before, I don't know. Colonel Conway's attitude is a puzzle to me. Either he thinks I've done something to offend, or he doesn't. If he thinks so, it isn't conceivable that he should sulk. It is his habit in such cases to make an open issue of the matter. He's a fighter, you know, and not a moody, secretive hater. If he doesn't think I have done anything that should offend him, I cannot understand why he does not call upon me, and especially I don't understand why he avoided meeting me by staying away from the Court House to-day, where I happen to know he had important business. I shall challenge his attitude pretty soon and force some sort of explanation."

"Yes, and by way of preparation for that, you are falling in love with the girl from Boston. That will complicate matters charmingly. Really, Boyd, for a man of brains, education, culture and all that, you now and then make the most elaborately embroidered idiot of yourself I ever knew."

"But I'm not in love with Miss Danvers; I never saw her until to-day."

"I quite understand that. Nevertheless after you have met her three or four times more, you'll make the mistake of thinking yourself in love with her, and you'll court her and she will accept you—for she's positively daffy about you, as I easily found out after you left this evening. Then you'll awake to the fact that after all a man's affections are not so easily transferred as shares of stock are. You've never told me so, but I know,

nevertheless, that the one love of your life is for Margaret Conway, and if you permit yourself to attempt a transfer of that passion, you'll repent it in sackcloth and ashes so long as you live. No, don't interrupt me. I'm in desperate earnest, and I'm going to say my say out, even if it results in your ordering my horse and bidding me be gone from Wanalah forever. Now listen to me. I once had a case of quarrelling heirs to deal with. If they had been left to their own devices, the whole estate they were fighting for would have been dissipated in chancery proceedings. I went to each of them separately and compelled each to tell me his side of the story. I found that the whole trouble lay in a lot of mutual misunderstandings, as most quarrels do. I multiplied seven by nine and found it made sixty-three, and after a little I got all of them to accept sixty-three as the product of the factors. In other words, I settled the whole affair, merely by finding out both sides of the facts.

"Now in this case of yours, I am satisfied that the entire trouble arises from a mutual misunderstanding. I insist that you shall tell me all the facts as you understand them. I shall find means of discovering just what the facts are as the other side understands them. It is impertinent in an extreme degree for me to inquire into the matter at all. But in the practice of the law it is my function and duty to be impertinent. Go on, then, and tell me the facts as you understand them."

When Jack began his speech, Westover foresaw what was coming, and was resentfully determined to permit no trespass of such sort upon his privacy. But before Jack had finished, the old dream of life and love, with Margaret for its saint and sovereign, had revived in his mind. What if, after all, Jack Towns should be able to unravel the mystery of Margaret's

silence and open a way for him? In that moment all the love he had cherished for Margaret surged back upon his soul in an overwhelming flood that made all other women objects of courteous but complete indifference. He saw clearly that no woman on earth could ever take the place in his heart that this one woman had made her own. He could not even conjecture how the result could be brought about, but the very dream of it so far fascinated him that he was ready to put aside all reserve and respond in perfect candor to Jack Towns's impertinence.

"I hardly know how to tell the story, Jack," he responded, "but I'll tell it somehow, if you'll give me time. Margaret and I were brought up together. Never mind that; it is unimportant. The time came when I loved her and she loved me, and we told each other so. With her father's enthusiastic consent we became engaged, and it was planned that the marriage should take place during the late summer—as soon as I should get the affairs of Wanalah adjusted. With that in view I went to Richmond. You know what happened there. I wrote to Margaret many times. I got no word of reply. I hoped for her sympathy; I had silence instead. I expected Colonel Conway to come to my side during my trouble, and to lend me at least the encouragement of belief in me. He neither came nor sent a line of sympathy in support of my courage. Even the death of my mother—the cruellest blow that fate had ever dealt me—brought no word or line from him or from Margaret. When my name was cleared of stigma by the confession of the real culprit, I came back here to Wanalah with the avowed purpose of making necessary preparations for my sojourn in the mountains. In point of fact, as I know now—my purpose was to open the way for some communication between Wanalah and The Oaks. No such communication came. Colonel Conway did not call upon me, and Margaret sent me no line.

Since then Colonel Conway has emphasized his disapproval of me in other ways, as you are aware."

"Yes, well? You believe yourself possessed of ordinary common sense, I suppose?" asked Jack Towns in the tone he was in the habit of using when cross examining a witness whom he intended to discomfit.

"Yes, of course."

"Are you acquainted with Margaret Conway?"

"Why, of course you know—"

"I know nothing. I'm trying to find out. Answer the question. Are you acquainted with Margaret Conway?"

"Yes. I've known her ever since she was born."

"Is she the sort of woman who would or could do what she appears to have done in this case? Is it conceivable that she has left you in a crisis like that which you have gone through, without a word of reply to letters received from you? Is it probable? Is it even possible? Is it thinkable?"

"Apparently—"

"Oh, hang 'apparently.' Apparently the sun circles round the earth, but we know better. Apparently the moon is made of green cheese, but it isn't. Apparently you are a crass idiot, but in the ultimate analysis you are nothing of the kind. Now answer my question: Is it probable or even conceivably possible that under the circumstances of your trouble in Richmond, Margaret

Conway, pledged as she was to be your wife, and possessed as she is of an exalted conception of womanly truth and honor, and saturated as she is with the courage of a proud race, the courage that does duty and dares consequences—is it conceivably possible that she has under such circumstances sat still and left unanswered letters received from you in your travail?"

"It seems unaccountable—" began Boyd, and his companion interrupted him:

"Nobody has asked you to account for that which could not have happened. I am asking you to search your own soul and say whether or not this thing can be true. If anybody should tell me that Boyd Westover had set up a counterfeiting plant in one of his barns and was busily 'shoving the queer,' would you expect me to go bothering about how such a thing could have come about? Would you not expect rather that I should give the story the lie without further ado? This is a like case. If you know Margaret Conway, you know she has not been guilty of this stupendous wrong. You have no right to go on acting as if she had been."

"You are right of course," Boyd replied, "so far at least as the principle is concerned. But how do you account for the facts?"

"It isn't my business to account for the facts. I know and you know that under the circumstances which arose in this case, Margaret Conway *did not leave unanswered any letter she received from you*. Either she did not receive your letters, or you did not receive her replies, or, more probably, both things happened."

"But how could that be? I—"

"I don't know. I'm not the proper person to ask. I'm going up to bed now, if you don't mind. I've said all I had in mind to say."

The conversation in the other porch was not like this, and yet in its way it was not unlike it.

"I hope you enjoyed yourself at the Magisters' to-day, Millicent," said Margaret as the two seated themselves in the porch. "I'm sorry I couldn't be with you, but you see old Judy was very low, and I really had to stay with her."

"Of course. Only it's all an astonishment to me—I mean the way in which you look after negroes who are ill."

"Why, of course we must do that—"

"Yes, I understand now, but I didn't. I thought you treated them as so many cattle. Of course I knew you looked after your own maids and other personal serving women, but I thought field negroes—"

"I know, dear. The whole system, is bad and I wish we were rid of it. But people up North always imagine that its worst possibilities are the daily facts, and we naturally resent that. We aren't angels by any means, but at least we are human beings. Never mind that now. Tell me about the dinner and the company."

"Well, I didn't see much of the company. The Judge and Mr.

Towns, and the Judge's wife and the Commonwealth's Attorney talked hotly about law things that I didn't at all understand, so I talked mainly with Mr. Boyd Westover. Margaret, I'd like to spend my whole life listening to him talk. You see he's so big and strong, and yet so gentle and chivalric. He makes you feel that you ought to think yourself worth while, because he respects you so, and is so deferential to you. Why, even my poor little thinkings seemed to me of some account because of the way in which he listened to me and treated my utterances. I tell you, Margaret, he is the most perfect type of the gentleman I ever saw or dreamed of."

The night was starlit, but there was no moon as yet, for it was far past the full, and the porch was dark. Margaret Conway was grateful for the shadow. It hid her countenance and prevented self-revelation of a kind that must have filled her soul with humiliation and shame. It gave her time in which to recover her self-control. Presently she forced herself to say:

"Mr. Westover is certainly a good example of our best type of gentleman. You'll like him more as you become better acquainted with him, and fortunately you'll meet him again almost immediately. He's sure to be at the dance at Dr. Carver's over at Fighting Creek."

"Yes, he's to speak over there. Oh, Margaret, I wonder if I might hear his speech? Do they let women attend? You see he is so big and brave and manly and *so* handsome. He's sure to make a speech worth listening to. Do you think I might get a chance to hear it?"

"Yes, dear, certainly," responded Margaret in a voice that in

spite of her had something of hardness in it. "I will arrange that. You'll sit in a carriage on the outskirts of the crowd, and you can hear every word, unless—"

"Unless what, Margaret?"

"Oh, I was only thinking out loud. You see your carriage will be surrounded by half a dozen young men, all in love with you, all madly jealous, and all eager to win and hold your attention. If you can suppress them, you'll hear the whole speech."

"Tell me, Margaret, have you known him a long time?"

"Yes, all my life."

"I see," she answered. What she had in her mind was that the intimacy between these two was perhaps too close and too familiar to permit a softer feeling to grow up between them. "Otherwise," she reflected, "they would have been lovers of course. How could either of them help that?"

But she gave no utterance to the thought. She only subconsciously rejoiced that matters were as she supposed them to be.

"I don't think I can be with you over at Fighting Creek, Millicent," said Margaret after she had mastered herself and formed a plan.

"But why not? I shall not go if you can't," answered the girl with emphasis.

"Oh, yes, you will. I wish you to be there. You'll meet

everybody in this whole region who is worth meeting. I wouldn't have you miss that on any account. Besides, I should get up a very unlovely reputation for selfishness, if I suffered you to miss such a festivity merely because I can't enjoy it with you."

"But why can't you, Margaret?"

"There are several reasons. For one thing my father is laid up with an attack of the gout, you know. That's why he turned back after he had started to Court to-day. He doesn't seem to be suffering much, but gout is treacherous, and I must be within call of him. Then again there are two or three cases of fever at the far quarters."

Then, as if fearing to have the sufficiency of her excuses too closely questioned, she hurriedly added:

"I've planned it all beautifully, Millicent. I'll send you over to Fighting Creek in The Oaks carriage. My maid shall go with you as escort, and I'll send for Carter Barksdale to go on horseback as your gallant outrider. You see Carter is only seventeen years of age, and he reads Byron and Shelley and Scott till he's saturated with romance. He's perfectly charming, and you'll enjoy his escort all the more because he's just old enough to fall madly in love with you at first sight, and just young enough to be afraid to tell you so. He's a Virginia type that I want you to meet. That sort of boy is at his best when he's seventeen and takes himself so seriously that he shrinks from the open declaration of the fancies he mistakes for passions. He will revel in a silent, unspoken, unrequited love for one as far removed from his approach as the northern star, 'of whose true, fixed, and resting

quality' he will quote, 'there is no fellow in the firmament.' Of course, after he has thoroughly enjoyed the unspeakable wretchedness of a blighted passion, he will fall in love with the next young woman several years older than himself who comes in his way, and have the romance all over again."

"Margaret," said Millicent seriously and tenderly, "you are not happy to-night. You are cynical. Something has disturbed you. Don't you feel that you can tell me what it is and let me share your sorrow as freely as you let me share your more joyful moods?"

Margaret Conway was too inherently truthful to protest that she had no cause of unhappiness when she had. But, with an instinctive flinching from self-revelation, which every sensitive soul experiences at such a time, she carefully framed her speech for purposes of avoidance.

"I don't think I'm cynical, Millicent. I don't feel so. I meant only to be amusing in talking of something that always amuses me. It has always seemed to me funny that young men should be so desperately afraid of us young women even when we are trembling in holy awe of them. I've seen so much of that sort of thing. Sometimes it becomes tragical and spoils lives that do not deserve to be spoiled. I knew one case in which it was saved from doing that only by the impertinent interference of a very peculiar young woman."

"Oh, it's a story," exclaimed Millicent, "and a love story at that. Tell it please."

"It isn't much of a story, but I'll tell it. I had a governess

whom I loved dearly and with reason. She taught me all I know, and—"

"She must have been a woman of wonderful acquirements then."

"She was and is, but such culture as I possess is not an adequate indication of her learning or of her capacity to teach. I owe her all I ever learned; I owe to my own indifference all the defects in my education."

There was something in Margaret's tone as she said this, that attracted Millicent's attention.

"She is certainly cynical, self-accusative, unsatisfied," she reflected. "She isn't happy, and it behooves you, Millicent Danvers, to find out the cause and remedy the condition if you can."

Without uttering that thought, she said:

"You aren't telling me the love story, Margaret, and I'm eager to hear that before I let Carter Barksdale fall in love with me. You see I'm young and wholly inexperienced, and I naturally want to learn how such things are conducted."

Margaret laughed lowly, as she thought: "A girl like you doesn't need lessons in the conduct of love affairs. To such as you, love,—like 'to write and read, comes by nature.'"

Then she resumed her story:

"Apart from her learning, Miss Jane was an altogether

admirable woman, and very naturally our neighbor, Mr. Skipwith, fell in love with her. He came over here to see her every day for more than a year. He sent her flowers from his garden, and when the frosts put an end to that he built a green house, in order that he might keep on sending her flowers. But somehow he never could get up courage enough to ask for her hand, until one day Harriet Middleton brought about a crisis. Harriet was an English girl of peculiarly good family whose father had migrated to Virginia in search of health. Harriet was almost an old maid, though not quite. She was blunt and aggressive in manner, though as gentle and good as anybody could be when you came really to know her. She was quick and shrewd of observation, and it did not take her long to find out how matters stood between Mr. Skipwith and Miss Jane. But the days and weeks went on and still there were no results. One evening when the moon shone dreamily through a soft haze, Mr. Skipwith and Miss Jane sat here in the porch, while Harriet and I walked away through the orchard, by way of leaving them alone, and picking up some good apples. When we returned, the pair were sitting precisely as we had left them, at a respectful distance from each other, and both their attitude and their manner bore convincing witness that even the hazy moonlight had failed to bring about a crisis.

"Harriet's patience gave way. She stalked into the porch, with that horse-like tread that Englishwomen use for a walk, and, taking her stand between the two, said:

"'You two people love each other. You want to tell each other about it but you don't dare; so I'm telling you instead. Now that I've introduced the subject, perhaps you'll talk it out.'

"With that she passed on into the house, and a few weeks later Mr. Skipwith and Miss Jane were married."

"And have they lived happily ever afterwards?"

"Indeed they have. They are well to do and very hospitable, and a pleasanter place to visit than the Skipwith plantation doesn't exist in Virginia."

"And Miss Middleton?"

"She's enjoying herself, bossing an insane asylum. She's only a patient there, but she believes she's the superintendent, and they let her give all the orders she thinks fit. Matilda," addressing a maid who at that moment appeared with some lemonade, "send for the carriage please, and send word that I want old Michael to drive me. Johnny is apt to go to sleep."

"But where on earth are you going to drive at eleven o'clock at night?" asked Millicent in wonder.

"Why, you know I have some fever patients out at the far quarters."

She was at pains not to say that she was going to visit them, though she half intended to do so. Her desire—imperative and passionate—was to separate herself from human companionship and think out the problems that beset her soul.

"But mayn't I go with you?"

"No, no, no. You might get the fever, and besides, you must get your beauty sleep. After you are married to—to some

Virginia gentleman, and become the mistress of a plantation, you will of course look after your sick servants. Just now it is your duty to go to bed. There's an old novel 'Dunallan' on the dressing case in my room. Go in there and get it. It's the very sleepiest thing I ever saw in my life. Read half a dozen pages of it and you'll be sound asleep. Good night. I won't speak to you when I come back, lest I disturb your slumbers. Oh, by the way, tell Diana to put three candles on my candle stand and place it close to my bed. And tell her please to go to bed as soon as she gets things ready in our rooms. I shall not want her to-night, and she has had a hard day."

As she finished speaking the carriage drove up, with the white-haired old coachman Michael on the box. He had long ago ceased to have active duties of any kind to do, but when his "young missus" asked for him to drive her anywhere, at any time and under any circumstances, the loyal old servitor was ready and eager in response. He had driven Margaret's mother on her wedding journey to the mountain resorts. He had driven Margaret herself to her christening. He had grown old but never lax in the service, and now in his old age, when he was excused from all service, it was his chief joy to drive his "young missus" whenever she honored him by asking that he should do so.

On this occasion he saw clearly enough that Margaret was distraught, and when she entered the carriage he forbore to distress her with questions. He simply picked out the best roads and followed them. After awhile she spoke to him.

"I reckon you'd better drive to the far quarters, Uncle Michael. I ought to see the sick ones."

"Dey ain't sick, Miss Margaret. Leastways dey ain't sick enough for you to go botherin' 'bout 'em. Dey's jes' a sufferin' dere own calamities. Dey stole a shoat night before last an' gorged on it all night. 'Course dey had a fever yestiddy an' to-day. Don't you go a botherin' 'bout dem no 'count niggas, Miss Margaret. Jes' you let ole Michael pick out de roads fer you and drive you 'bout, comfortable like."

With this reassuring release from obligation, the girl sank back among the cushions as the late rising, gibbous moon came up from the horizon, and abandoned herself to thought.

She was a woman, young, strong, passionate; she cherished still that dream of love which had so recently inspired and illumined her life. She could not understand why or how it had been snatched away by circumstance. It was hard for her to believe that all she had hoped for and held dear had been banished from her life by a final, arbitrary, inexplicable decree of fate.

"And yet," she reflected, "it is so. Between Boyd and me there is a great gulf fixed, and nothing can furnish a bridge across it."

Then another thought occurred to her.

"Suppose I should write to Boyd and ask him for an explanation?

"No, I could not do that without sacrificing that pride of womanhood without which a woman is nothing and worse than nothing. No, that can never be. I wonder why he does not himself offer an explanation and seek a restoration of old

relations? No, that can never be. It would involve such a sacrifice of manhood as is inconceivable. There is never any explanation possible, never any solution to this riddle, never anything."

She sat still for awhile, not thinking at all. Suddenly she reflected:

"After all it is his happiness that I care for. My own is of no consequence. He is a man, and it will be easy for him to transfer his affections. Men are not like women in that way. Millicent will make a fitter wife for him than I ever could. He will be happy with her, and as for me—well, it doesn't matter. I have my duties and my occupations. The rest is of no consequence. He shall love Millicent and marry her, and may be, when I'm an old, old woman, he and I will come to understand each other again, at least so far that neither shall accuse the other of treachery."

With a mind attuned to the great renunciation, she called to Michael and bade him drive back to The Oaks.

XXVI
MOONLIGHT RESOLUTIONS

Millicent Danvers was a frank, open-minded young woman, almost childlike in her simplicity of soul in every case where candor was met with equal candor. But her childlikeness included a child's subtle instinct as to the moods and motives of

others, and where affection prompted her scrutiny she was not often at fault in her judgments of human conduct.

When Margaret, refusing her company, drove away that night Millicent knew perfectly that her friend's spirit was disturbed in some unusual way, for until then these two had been comrades in every such expedition, and Margaret had been the one most insistent that they should be so.

"I want you to see every phase of our Virginia life," she had many times said, "so that when you go back to Boston you may know what there is in it to approve, what to admire, what to condemn, and what merely to laugh at. For I'm sure there is much in it that must strike Northern people as ludicrous. Anyhow I want you to see it all and understand all of it. Then I'm not afraid to trust our life and our ways and our impulses to your hands for explanation and exposition to people who are ignorant of them or know them only by prejudiced hearsay."

The events of this day, and especially Margaret's own conduct had been so different from all this as to awaken curiosity and compel attention. Both the curiosity and the attention had a deep and sincere affection for their prompting.

When Margaret drove away and the late rising, gibbous moon appeared above the tree tops and shone softly through the windows of Millicent's southeast room, the girl sat down there by a casement to wonder, to conjecture, to "guess," and, better still, to "think this thing out to the end."

"There is something wrong with Margaret," was her first thought. "She is disturbed and distressed, and she isn't the kind

of person to be disturbed and distressed without adequate reason. Why didn't she go over to the Court House with me this morning and dine at the Magisters'? She intended to do so. She and I had planned it all out, and she had accepted Mrs. Magister's invitation. It was only at the last moment that she decided to stay and nurse her father's purely mythical gout. It was only five minutes before that that a note had come from Mrs. Magister, saying that Mr. Boyd Westover had come down out of the mountains and that she should 'compel' him to be one of her dinner guests. I wonder if that news brought on the attack of gout, and decided Margaret to stay at the Oaks and nurse it?

"Then again it is clear that Margaret does not expect Mr. Westover to visit her in the near future. I wonder why? His plantation adjoins this, and everybody says the two families have been intimate for generations. There must be some special reason. In fact there is. Somebody told me to-day that Colonel Conway had refused to join in the nomination of Mr. Westover, and that the fact is injuring Mr. Westover's canvass. I wonder what it means? Naturally Mr. Westover and Margaret should be sweethearts, and after a while they should marry each other. I wonder why things haven't gone that way? May be they have been too intimate in their childhood. No, that isn't the solution. It doesn't explain Margaret's care to avoid Mr. Westover. It doesn't explain her plan to send me to Fighting Creek without her. It doesn't explain her drive to-night. It doesn't explain anything. If they were mere intimates, too intimate to think of love, Mr. Westover would be a frequent guest at The Oaks and the relations of the two would be comradely."

She paused for a while in the formulation of her thinking into orderly phrases. Then she reflected:

"When I mentioned Margaret to him at dinner to-day he distinctly winced. Every time I have mentioned him to her to-night, she has turned the conversation to other subjects."

There was another long pause in the formulation of her thought. At last her common sense asserted itself and she said to herself:

"Millicent Danvers, you are treading upon dangerous ground, and you must get off it as quickly as possible. There has been a love affair between Margaret and Westover. You can't shut your eyes to that fact or pretend not to see it. Some break has come, but such breaks may be repaired, and it is your function to repair this one."

A wave of melancholy swept over her soul as she thought of this. She mightily admired Boyd Westover, and she had even dreamed a little dream with regard to him. She was a proud maiden in her way and as she searched her heart there in the moonlight, she decided that she had not suffered herself to fall in love with Westover.

"How could I?" she challenged herself to answer. "I have met him but once. The thing is absurd. Besides, no self-respecting young woman gives her love to any man until he asks for it. No, of course I'm not in love with Mr. Westover. It is nothing but admiration that I feel for him."

Then, as she looked out into the tree-studded house grounds, where all nature seemed to sleep in the soft haze of the moonlight, she added to her thought:

"But it would be easy for such a man to change a woman's

admiration into love by a phrase, a word, a look into her eyes. Thank God he has not yet looked into my eyes in that way, and, God being my helper, he never shall. After all,—well, after all there are only a few men in the world that—well, anyhow, it isn't so terrible a thing to be an old maid, and I'll do my duty in this case if the stars start from their courses, as a consequence." Then she laughed under her breath, and jeered in mocking fashion at the absurdity of her thought:

"Of course the stars will do nothing of the kind. That was a bit of heroics, and I'm not a heroine of romance. I'm only a simple, honest, Boston girl. I love Margaret dearly, and I'm resolved to do all I can to bring about a reconciliation between her and Mr. Westover, for I'm satisfied there is need for something of the sort. That's sane and sensible at any rate, and the stars have nothing to do with it."

She had been reading an essay entitled, "The Great Renunciation," and she was full of its spirit, almost a devotee to the impulses it sought to inspire. But as she recalled it she laughed.

"That had to do with the great religions of the world. It didn't refer to the case of a sensible girl who finds herself particularly attracted by a young man at a first meeting and decides that she will not let him fall in love with her because she realizes that the best loved friend of her life is, or has been or ought to be his affianced wife. Millicent, I'm ashamed of you. After all the instruction you've had as to the conduct of life and the behavior of young women, this thing is ridiculous."

Nevertheless there was sadness in that inexperienced heart of

hers, as she saw the carriage reënter the house grounds, and herself hastened to bed lest her friend should discover her vigil. But if hers had not been the great renunciation, at least it had been a resolution of loyalty and good faith, and perhaps in the eyes of the angels the two things are very nearly the same. Her exacting New England conscience at any rate was satisfied, so that it let her sleep, just as Margaret's Virginia conscience—different in kind but equally exigent in its demands—permitted slumber, sweet and refreshing, to come to her.

When the morning came these two met, each intently resolved to render to the other the supreme service of sacrifice, and neither dreaming of the other's thought. But in all human affairs circumstance has its part to play, and while it cannot alter purposes it often plays havoc with results. It was so in this case. Things happened, and the happening was more decisive than the moonlight meditations of a pair of maidens could possibly be.

XXVII
THE PHILOSOPHY OF JACK TOWNS

Boyd Westover had the excellent mental habit of attending carefully to more than one thing at a time.

Just now he had the election on his hands, and with it some problems of personal dignity and repute that required his closest attention. But he also had Wanalah plantation to look after, and in view of his long absence he felt that home affairs were

pressing.

Accordingly he was up before the dawn, on the morning after his arrival, and for half an hour after dawn he waited, not at all patiently, for the coming of his overseer, to whom he had sent a summons over night to be with him "at the crack of day." Then instead of waiting longer, he mounted his horse and rode away on a tour of inspection.

It was well after sunrise when he returned to find the overseer hitching his horse to the rack.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Wilkinson," he said; "I had hoped to see you this morning."

"I'm sorry, sir, but Î was very tired last night."

"So was I. I had walked all through the night before. Never mind that now. I wanted to see you at dawn. The sun is now half an hour high. That means that you have wasted an hour and a half of my time, and my time is just now precious."

"I'm very sorry, sir—"

"Don't bother to apologize. I can't waste any further time listening to excuses. Why are you seeding the Gaston field in wheat? I directed otherwise, you know."

"Well, sir, the fall has given us good weather, and we can get in that two hundred acres as well as not."

"But how about harvesting it?"

"Oh, I'll manage that."

"Yes, by making the negroes work by moonlight, as you did last summer to the everlasting shame of Wanalah plantation, and just as you made too many hogsheads of tobacco and too many barrels of corn to the hand. I have told you before and I tell you now that I will not have the hands over-worked. Is the Gaston field seeded?"

"No, sir. We begin on that to-day."

"Don't seed it. Let it lie fallow."

"But my gracious, Mr. Westover,—"

"Never mind about your gracious. I tell you not to seed that field. And another thing: You planted seven hundred thousand hills of tobacco last year. I want you to write it up in your hat that four hundred thousand is Wanalah's limit. I want you to understand that this plantation is not run for money. If it supports itself, giving a decent living to the whites and blacks on it, I shall be satisfied. If it doesn't quite do that, I'll find a way in which to make up the deficiency. Now I want you to give all the negroes on the plantation a whole holiday to-morrow. I understand there's to be a big picnic with all-day preaching over at Mount Moriah church, and I want everybody on the plantation to attend it. By the way, Bob!" calling to a passing negro, "go at once and tell old Joe I want him to kill two sheep—good fat ones—three shoats and four turkeys this morning; tell him to hang 'em in the ice house as soon as they're dressed, and send them over to Mount Moriah early to-morrow morning. Do you hear?"

"Yassir!" responded Bob, his mouth already watering for the share he expected to eat of the good things thus promised.

"And, Bob, tell Uncle Joe to take them over there himself and say that Mas' Boyd Westover hopes the folks will have a good time and get as much religion as they need."

"But, Boyd," said Jack Towns, who had sleepily strolled into the porch, "don't you think—"

"No, decidedly not, Jack. You see Wanalah is the plantation nearest to Mount Moriah, and it's the natural base of supplies for a meeting there. If I don't furnish the provender they'll steal it out of my pasture, my pig pen and my turkey yard. I very much prefer that they should get the things honestly, and it costs me no more."

Then, returning to business, he said to the overseer:

"You understand the general spirit of my instructions, Mr. Wilkinson, and I beg you to bear it in mind. I'll give more specific orders from time to time, as they are needed."

"But what about me?" answered the overseer. "I've got a reputation for makin' more tobacco to the hand an' more wheat to the acre an' more corn on top o' that than any other man as oversees a plantation anywheres for forty mile around here."

"Well, what of it?"

"Well, it's this a ways. I ain't a-goin' to lose a reputation I prides myself on. Ef you don't want your niggers worked fer all they's worth, perhaps you'd better look out fer another

overseer."

Westover flushed angrily, more at the tone than at the words, and answered instantly:

"Perhaps I had. At any rate I will. I shall not renew my contract with you for another year."

The Virginians were very tolerant of insolence on the part of a negro. Usually they treated it as badinage, quite harmlessly and humorously meant. But insolence on the part of an overseer was always taken seriously and instantly resented. The overseers constituted a pariah class, for whom there was tolerance only so long as they "minded their manners."

As the overseer lingered in hope of some modification of the sentence he had brought upon himself, Westover impatiently turned upon him, saying:

"I think I have nothing more to say to you, Mr. Wilkinson, and I wish to talk with Mr. Towns. You may go now."

As the man walked down the road that led to the outer gates, he muttered:

"I'll git back at him for that. He's a sneak-in' abolitionist. I'll be over at Fighting Creek to-morrow, seein's he's made it a holiday here."

"Now I want to talk with you, Jack," said Westover when the man was well out of earshot.

"So I understood you to say to Mr. Wilkinson; and you may go

on and talk to me till the cows come home, if it amuses you to do so, but if you expect me to talk back in any rational way, you've simply got to wait till after breakfast. When I've had two cups of coffee, the best part of a roe herring, three or four slices of cold ham, a wedge or two of hot light bread, some beaten biscuit, and one of your belated cantaloupes, I shall begin to appreciate the fact that I have a brain. Till then I decline to consider myself a rational being. Go on and talk, if you want to."

"I will," answered Westover, passing into the house. To one of the dining-room servants he said:

"Serve a pot of coffee to Mr. Towns immediately, do you hear? Is it ready?"

Half a minute later Cilla appeared in the porch bearing a tray with coffee and its accessories daintily arranged upon a napkin. The servants at Wanalah had not yet lost their memory of the training they had received in youth.

"There," said Westover, "saturate your soul and stimulate your system with coffee. And by the way, there's a frost-bitten tomato sliced up to deceive your eyes and your appetite. How long before breakfast, Cilla?"

"It's a-bein' brung in now," answered the serving girl, "all but the hot buckwheat cakes, an' them'll come a little later."

It was the custom of the Virginians to talk freely at table, paying no heed whatever to the presence of their servitors. Accordingly, as soon as Jack Towns began to discover his brains again, under the influence of a breakfast that might have

made a chatterer of the Sphinx itself, the two talked of plans.

"My first endeavor," said Westover, "will be to compel Colonel Conway to declare himself. To that end, as soon as breakfast is done, I shall send him a letter that will require a response of some sort. You see, Jack, his attitude is far more hurtful to me than the most aggressive antagonism on his part could be. Everybody knows that the Westovers and the Conways have been the most intimate friends possible throughout generations past. If he and I had had a quarrel, everybody would understand. But we have had no quarrel, and so nobody understands and everybody wonders. If he believes I was guilty down there in Richmond—"

"He can't think that, unless he's an idiot of extraordinary capacity for the lunatic misinterpretation of facts," interrupted Towns.

"Perhaps not. Still, I remember hearing a 'Pennsylvania Dutch' magistrate declare from the bench that 'Nodings is possible mit Gott,' and so it may be that, he believes that. If so he has a perfect right to express his belief. All I ask is that he shall say what it is he has against me."

"Stuff and nonsense! Rot and rubbish! Scammony and gamboge! Moonlight, music, love and flowers! Transcendentalism and green cheese!" exclaimed Jack Towns, multiplying words as a man of oratorical habit is apt to do. "You know perfectly well that he believes nothing of the sort. Recall our conversation of last night."

"I remember it perfectly, and that is why I'm going to write to

Colonel Conway this morning. It may open the way to an explanation."

"It may, of course. But if I were in your place I'd write to Margaret instead."

"How can I? I have written to her again and again, and she has not answered. Self-respect forbids me—"

"I quite understand. It was self-respect that caused a cat to lose an eye in a scrimmage rather than explain to the other cat that the fence he was sitting on was the personal property of his own master. Never mind. If you won't write to Margaret, write to her father by all means. It may provoke a crisis of some sort, and that is the one thing to be desired just now."

But Boyd Westover was not destined to send that letter. He toiled over it half the day and more. He wrote it in forty different forms. He used up more letter paper than had been consumed at Wanalah during a year or more past, but he could not get the thing into a shape that would do. Finally he threw down his pen and turning to Jack Towns said:

"The trouble is, Jack, that when I try to formulate my complaint there isn't a thing to challenge or question. Colonel Conway has not been here to call upon me, but I cannot decently complain of that. He has refused to join with others in nominating me, but that too was his right and I cannot question it. The whole thing is so negative that really there isn't a point I can mention as a ground of complaint."

"Yes? Well—"

"Yes, well, what? Why don't you say something?"

"I will. I'll say that you're irritable to-day. You showed it your confab with your overseer, who is a very worthy man with an exaggerated notion of the work a field hand ought to do in a day. You showed it at breakfast, when you complained because the buckwheat cakes didn't make their appearance precisely on time. Is there anything else you'd like me to say?"

"Yes. What am I to do in this matter, by way of bringing about a tolerable situation?"

"Why, nothing, of course. I could have told you that this morning, but you wouldn't have believed it then. Now that you've exhausted your literary capacity and most of the Wanalah stationery in a futile effort to do the impossible, it may be worth my while to say to you that in a case of this kind there is nothing you can do except await events with due respect for your own dignity. Shut up your desk and send for some horses. Let's have a gallop before dinner time. And by the way, I'd like to ride that young iron gray mare you've got in your stables. She impresses me so favorably that I should buy her if she belonged to anybody who would sell."

"Why, when did you inspect her, Jack? I hadn't a thought—"

"I know you hadn't, but while you've been busy at your desk, trying to accomplish the impossible, I've been down to the stables and had the mare out for inspection. She's a beauty and, so far as I know the points of a horse, she has all of them that are worth while. She's a Red Eye of course?"

"Yes—Red Eye and Nina. She's Nina's own colt. I'll tell you

what I'll do, Jack. If you'll stay with me, making Wanalah your home till this confounded election is over,—just to keep me sane, you know,—the mare shall be yours, as a souvenir of your safe return from the Rocky Mountains."

"Done!" exclaimed Jack. "But if I have to club you by way of keeping you sane, you won't too greatly mind, will you?"

"Not in the least. It's the clubbing I want. Really, Jack, I often think I haven't quite grown up and never shall. I have my full complement of inches, of course, and I can be dignified upon occasion, but when it comes to emotional things, somehow—"

"Somehow you're nothing but a romantic, sentimental boy. I've heard you quote Keats and Shelley when an arithmetic or a geography would have been much more to the purpose. I was born that way myself, and so you see I understand your malady and sympathize with you, but as for myself I've worked a complete cure."

"How did you manage it, Jack?" asked Westover in amused anticipation.

"Oh, easily enough. I have cultivated catholicity of taste in the matter of girls. You know all sentimentality in men has its ultimate origin in their attitude toward women. Now in sentiment, as in everything else, moderation is desirable and excess is destructive. Realizing that fact I have cultivated moderation, by falling madly in love with every pretty young woman I have met, and with some pretty old ones also. But as one encounters a rapid succession of pretty young women, the habit of falling in love with each of them is a securely

protective agency. You see I never have time to become idiotically in love with one young woman before meeting another who knocks all that out of my head. To-day's girl rescues me from yesterday's. It's a case of one nail driving out another."

"You are the worst cynic I ever knew, Jack."

"Perhaps I am. But I see the boys are here with the horses. Let's be off and away, forgetting philosophy and girls and pessimism and moonlight and molasses candy for a time at least. Is that a quarter of shoat Cilla is toting from the ice-house? In verity it is, and a decent respect for its succulent attractiveness should prompt us to arm ourselves and meet it with an appetite. So here goes for a good hard gallop, with stiff fences by the way."

XXVIII
THE EVENTS OF A DAY

Only once had Westover been interrupted during his hours of laborious and futile effort to write his letter to Colonel Conway. Jack Towns, being an ideal guest, had occupied himself with books, strolls, and other silent means of passing the time, so that his host had been in no way reminded of his existence. But the weather had not been so unobtrusive a guest. Considerably before noon there came a squall which for ten or fifteen minutes threatened destruction to everything movable about the place. It

unroofed a cellar door at the back of the house. It carried away the shed of a tobacco barn, and curiously enough one of the cook's pigs, which she was bringing up luxuriously on "pot liquor and kitchen stuff," disappeared during the brief hurricane. Whether the obese porker was really blown away, as most of the house servants stoutly contended, or whether it was that some colored person with an appetite had simultaneously seized the opportunity and the pig and got away with both, was a point never accurately determined.

Boyd Westover cared nothing for damages that might be repaired, but he was sorely distressed by the wreckage of a favorite mimosa tree that flourished near one corner of the porch. He even quitted his writing, when the little squall had passed away, and with Jack Towns's very inexpert assistance, attempted some repairs. But when there arose the question of sawing off a broken limb, he abandoned the undertaking, saying:

"We'll leave that till Carley Farnsworth comes. He's due here to-day to see some of my people who are ill. He's a much better horticulturist than either of us, Jack, and besides he's a surgeon and will know better how to give the poor tree a chance to grow into symmetry again."

Then, as he sorrowfully contemplated the torn and broken mimosa, he muttered:

"I shouldn't have cared half so much if the squall had blown away every barn I've got. The ruin of that tree is all that it means to me."

He little dreamed what other and immeasurably greater

consequences were to come to him as the result of that brief atmospheric disturbance, but he was destined, after a time, to find out.

When the two friends returned from their ride of a dozen miles or so, bringing with them a pair of wild turkey gobblers shot upon the flush, they found Carley Farnsworth in the hall, as the broad passageway through a Virginia house was called, very busily writing upon small slips of paper, of which he had prepared a considerable number before beginning to write. He was too busy to give more than a scant greeting to his friends, but in lieu of greater cordiality he handed one of his written slips to each, saying:

"Read that, and don't interrupt me, please. I'm expecting a messenger every moment."

On each of the slips was written:

"I am authorized by Colonel Robert Conway to add his name to the list of those who urge Mr. Boyd Westover's election.

"(Signed) Don Carlos Farnsworth."

As Westover and Towns looked wonderingly at each other, after reading the slips, Carley Farnsworth threw down his pen, exclaiming:

"There! that's fifty. Talk will do the rest."

Then, filling and lighting a long-stemmed pipe, he said to the others:

"Something has happened. Don't ask me what it is, for I don't know. Yonder comes Dick Ventress, and the slips are ready for him. He has a pot of gum stick'em in his pocket and he's going to paste those slips to all the nominating placards within twenty miles between now and to-morrow morning. They'll set everybody talking, and talk will do the rest."

When Dick Ventress had received the papers and galloped away, Carley vouchsafed some small and exceedingly unsatisfying explanation.

"Something has happened at The Oaks," he said. "I don't know what it is, but when I got there to-day to attend Miss Margaret's sick people, I found everybody agitated, Miss Betsy in something like collapse, and Colonel Conway littering up the house with the torn fragments of letters he'd been trying to write but couldn't. I gave him something to quiet his nerves, and suggested that in his state of mind perhaps literary endeavors were unadvisable. Presently he exclaimed: 'I'll arrange the whole thing. I'll write a letter to you.'

"With that he set to work and wrote this."

He offered a sheet of paper on which was written:

"Dr. D. C. Farnsworth.

"*My dear Sir*:—

"When you asked me to join you and others in nominating Mr. Boyd Westover for Senator, I felt bound to decline, for reasons which I did not, because I could not, offer. Through very distressing and to me embarrassing circumstances, I now discover that I have been acting under a misapprehension. There are peculiar circumstances which forbid me to explain myself further. I cannot do so without injustice to others. But so far as Mr. Boyd Westover is concerned I earnestly desire to make such atonement as is still possible. To that end I hereby authorize you to add my name to the list of those who urge Mr. Boyd Westover's election. You are free to make this public in any and every way that may seem to you desirable. If it were possible, I should myself announce it from the platform at Fighting Creek to-morrow. As it is I authorize you to do so in my absence. I beg you to use all the influence you can command to spare me the necessity of explanation in this case. I cannot explain. The situation is the most distressing one possible to me. I place it and myself in your hands, and I am always, my dear Dr. Farnsworth,

"Your sincere friend,
"ROBERT CONWAY."

"There you have the whole story, so far as I know anything about it," said the Doctor.

"I must say," said Jack Towns, "it is a very manly effort to make reparation under difficulties."

"Yes," answered Westover, "and that is characteristic of

Colonel Conway. I'd gladly sacrifice the election in exchange for the privilege of reading that note. He is altogether a man, and I must meet his manliness as a man. I'll write to him at once."

"He does not invite that," said Jack Towns.

"On the contrary he forbids it," added Carley Farnsworth, "and I forbid it in his name. Your impulse is manly and generous, Boyd, but you see he has asked me to use all the influence I can to spare him the necessity of explaining. A note from you would simply compel an explanation at his hands. It was to avoid that that he tore up all the letters he tried to write to you to-day. It is to avoid that that he doesn't mount his horse and ride over here to shake hands with you and tell you about this thing, whatever it is. It is to avoid that that he is going to absent himself from the meeting at Fighting Creek to-morrow, leaving me to announce his change of mind in his stead. What do you think, Jack?"

"Oh, there's only one thing to think. Until Colonel Conway shall see fit to open direct communication with Westover of Wanalah, it will be an extreme and unpardonable impertinence for Westover of Wanalah to address any personal communication to him. Circumstances forbid it. Courtesy forbids it. Consideration, conscience, common sense, convenience, convention, custom,—everything that begins with a 'c' or with any other letter of the alphabet,—forbids it."

"I suppose you two are right," answered Westover, "but to a man of my temperament it seems an ungracious thing not to recognize in some personal way the courtesy Colonel Conway has shown me. My impulse is to write to him and thank him."

"Well, under the circumstances you mustn't," said Carley Farnsworth, "and you're lucky, Boyd, to have sane friends to advise and control you."

"I reckon I am. But really, Carley, what do you suppose has happened over at The Oaks?"

"I am doing no supposing. It may be anything or nothing. We Virginians—all but Jack Towns and me—are so emotional, so sentimental, so chivalric if you prefer the term, that I long ago ceased my efforts to make a diagnosis of things of that sort. I only know that the Colonel is wrought up to a pitch that requires the remedy of going to bed, and that everybody else at The Oaks is correspondingly wrought up. Everybody except that thoroughly admirable Boston girl, Miss Danvers. She has a head, and she keeps it poised above her shoulders. If I hadn't an entirely satisfactory wife of my own in prospect, though not yet in possession, I should be strongly tempted to persuade that girl to stay south of Mason and Dixon's line. As it is, I really think some other fellow ought to do that as a service to Virginia society. Miss Danvers is a true blue, a thoroughbred. She has character, manners, breeding, beauty, simplicity, honesty, sincerity, loyalty, good sense, and all the other qualities that go to make a woman admirable. She is the only person who knows what the ruction over at The Oaks was, and she's the only one there capable of handling the situation sanely. She seems to have everybody there well in hand, and to be controlling all of them wisely. She has a persuasive gift that astonished me when she actually got Colonel Conway to go to bed in the middle of the afternoon, and induced Margaret to do the same thing as a precaution against a nervous breakdown that was clearly threatened. I had ordered both those goings to bed, with all the

authority of a medical adviser, but to no purpose. When I spoke to that Boston girl about it, she answered gently but confidently: 'If you think that advisable, Doctor, I will see that it is done,' and by Jove she did the trick so promptly that before I left I saw them both in bed, and gave each of them a sleeping potion that will keep them quiet for many hours to come."

Under ordinary circumstances, Jack Towns would have declared his purpose to go over to The Oaks at once and make love to the Boston girl. For some reason, on this occasion, he shrank from all jesting. He had talked for an hour with Millicent Danvers on the evening before. He wanted now to talk with her for another hour, but, contrary to his custom, he said nothing of his purpose. He went to dinner with the other two, and after the dinner was done he slipped away to the stables, mounted the superb mare that was now his, and rode away to The Oaks.

XXIX
THE WORK OF A WILD WIND

This is the story of what the wind-storm did at The Oaks, to disturb the usual placidity of life there.

It was Aunt Betsy's custom, as it was that of many or most other women in Virginia, to write a multitude of "notes" each day, some of them filling six or eight sheets of paper, with criss-crossings to make them seem undecipherably interesting, and to despatch them by young negroes on bare-backed horses to their

more or less neighborly destination. A statistical economist once made a careful reckoning by which he convinced himself that this practice cost the planter families of Virginia about seven and one-half times the amount they contributed in stamps to the postal revenues of the nation.

It was the practice of the young women of the plantations to write all these letters before breakfast. It was Aunt Betsy's more leisurely practice to write them whenever she pleased, and she usually pleased to write them between ten o'clock in the morning and the one o'clock hour that was sacred to the luncheon known in Virginia as "snack."

On the morning of the happening at The Oaks, the day being sufficiently warm, Aunt Betsy brought out her desk—an oblong box which when opened offered a slanting writing surface, with spaces below its lids for letter paper, envelopes, and papers of every kind. Women usually laid these so-called "desks" upon their laps and managed somehow to write there, as no man ever could have done. But it was Aunt Betsy's habit also to retire into the house now and then upon occasions of real or imagined necessity, and in anticipation of such interruptions she always had a slender-legged stand at hand—a thing "drunkenly artistic," as Boyd Westover had once said—upon which to place her desk whenever she was minded to suspend her writing for a while.

On the morning in question she had a gown in course of construction by her seamstresses, who were working in the back porch with a room opening off it which her modesty used for purposes of "fitting" and "trying on."

She had therefore frequent occasion to suspend her writing.

It was during one of her most exigent fits of trying on that the squall struck the place. As a good deal of thunder and lightning accompanied the weather disturbance, and as Aunt Betsy was possessed of that sort of cowardice concerning thunder and lightning which persons so afflicted call "nervousness," she promptly shut herself up in a dark closet and remained there until the squall had passed away.

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But with the first onset of the wind the frail table on which she had left her open desk toppled over; the desk was whirled out into the grounds and dashed against a tree with a force that instantly reduced it to splinters, while its contents—correspondence and curl papers alike—were scattered, if not to the four winds, at least to the one wind which was blowing with demoniacal fury.

Margaret and Millicent who had just returned from a morning stroll rushed frantically, picturesquely and, in an unconscious way, gracefully, to the rescue. The desk was in fragments and far past praying for; but by a deal of scurrying the two girls and some of the house servants managed to collect the scattered papers and place them upon a table within, while Aunt Betsy was still ensconced in her dark closet, waiting for the last rumble of the thunder to cease. As Millicent deposited her share of the spoils upon the table, she looked at Margaret with frightened eyes and said:

"Please send everybody out of the room but you and me."

For Millicent had not yet accustomed herself to talk freely in the presence of servants as if they were deaf, dumb, and blind, incapable of understanding what might be said in their presence and therefore incapable of repeating it. That habit of the Virginians had its origin probably in two facts: they never said anything that they were afraid to stand by; and the negro was not, in law or in fact, permitted to testify against a white person. In the courts his testimony was barred by statute; in social life it was even more absolutely barred by convention. No negro

ventured to report anything he had heard white people say, and if he had done so, no white person would for one moment have listened to him. To have done that would have been to invite and incur absolute and eternal ostracism.

But Millicent, brought up in a totally different atmosphere, could never accustom herself to this, and so she asked to have the servants dismissed from the room before saying what she had to say about the papers in her hand. Margaret smiled at the request, but after the revelation was made she rejoiced that it had been preferred and acted upon.

When the servants had left the room, Millicent held out a handful of letters that she had picked up in the wild scramble of rescue.

"There is something wrong here, Margaret," she said in her open, honest way. "Some of these are unopened letters addressed to you—letters that bear stamps and post marks, letters that have come through the mail. These others are sealed letters addressed in your handwriting to Mr. Boyd Westover. They are stamped, but they bear no postmarks. They have never been mailed."

She stood silent for a moment, rigid with an indignation that she knew not how to express in words.

Meanwhile Margaret stood looking at the letters, dazed, pale to the lips, paralyzed. Then she looked from the letters to Millicent and the girl thought she was dying or already dead, so white was her face at first and so livid a moment later.

With the womanly instinct of ministry, reinforced by a

passionate impulse of friendship, Millicent passed around the table, threw her arm about the stricken girl and gently forced her to lie upon one of the broad lounges or settees, or whatever else they should be called, that in those days invited repose in every dining room and every hallway of the plantation houses.

With that ready appreciation of necessity which is characteristic of womanhood, she went to the sideboard, poured a thimble glass of sherry and compelled Margaret to drink it. Then she tinkled a bell and when the servant appeared gave quick, concise orders for the summoning of Margaret's maid and other strong-armed servitors.

"You must get your mistress to bed at once," she commanded, "and send some one to summon Dr. Farnsworth quickly. He's at the lower quarters."

But Margaret, rising to a sitting position, promptly negatived all this. Sustained by wrath, indignation, resentment of insult, and by outraged pride, she forced upon herself the calm control that for the moment she had lost, though only for the moment. With that instinct of race, that courage, that self-mastery that had been always a precious possession of the Conways, she dismissed the superfluous servants who had hastened to her upon hearing that she was in trouble, and assumed control of the situation.

"Thank you, Millicent, dear, for bringing those letters to me. They are mine, and I will dispose of them. Diana, bring me my desk, please."

When the desk was placed before her she selected a sheet of

paper and an envelope as calmly as if she had meant to send a note to Hallie Harvey or any other girl friend, asking her for the proper count of stitches in a piece of fancy knitting work.

Then she wrote upon the sheet of paper, this note:

"Aunt Betsy:—Your desk was blown out into the grounds and wrecked, during the squall. We have gathered up the fragments of the desk and rescued all the widely scattered papers. I am sending you all of them that in any way belong to you. Those that belong to me I am keeping. I send you this note, instead of seeing you in person, because your maid tells me you have gone to bed.

"Margaret."

She sent the note, sealed, by the hand of a maid, and she sent with it the entire paper contents of the wrecked desk, except the unopened letters of Boyd Westover to herself and her own unopened letters to him. These she gathered together into a bundle which she thrust into her corsage.

Then she turned to a servant and gave the order:

"Send to the stables for saddle horses for your Miss Millicent and me. We are going for a ride."

To Millicent she said under her breath: "You must go with me, dear. I must control myself or I shall not be able to carry

this thing through to the end with dignity. I must have a dash on horseback. You don't mind, do you, dear?"

"Mind? *I mind*, Margaret? Why, you know that I would ride to the ends of the earth with you and for you, even under ordinary circumstances. Now that you're in trouble, of course I am ready. I don't know the facts—though I guess some of them—and I don't understand all that these things mean, but I know you have been wronged, outraged, placed in a false position, humiliated by some trespass upon your privacy or your personality, and I am here to stand by you till the wrong is righted, the outrage undone, and the humiliation lifted from your spirit. I'll do anything, everything—oh, Margaret, you don't know how I love you or how eager I am to help you!"

Margaret looked at her with loving and teary eyes. Presently she said:

"I know it all, dear. And yet you Yankees are supposed to be cold and calculating and hard. How utterly mistaken people are in their judgments! But here are the horses. We'll have a spin, and then—"

She paused as if in doubt and apprehension. Presently she added:

"And then I must confront my father. He is the proper person and he must set this thing right."

After a brisk gallop of half a mile, Margaret reined her horse down to a walk, and entered into conversation with her friend.

"I feel, Millicent," she began, "that I ought to take you

completely into my confidence, and tell you all that this thing means. Your loyalty and your affection deserve that. But there are reasons which I cannot explain that forbid so full a confidence. I am going to tell you all I can, and I want you to believe and know that whatever reserves I practise are practised solely for your sake."

"But how can that be, Margaret? Of course you are to tell me as much or as little as you please, but—"

"I see. I can't explain. I can only say that if I practise reserve at all, it is only because of my tender affection for you. Can you believe that blindly, without explanation? And will you?"

"I believe whatever you tell me, Margaret, and I do not wish to hear anything that for any reason you do not wish me to hear."

"Thank you, dear," said the agitated girl as she again pressed her horse to his paces; "God help me if I'm wrong!"

There was so strong a suggestion of tragedy in the girl's tone that Millicent felt herself called upon to interfere with Margaret's purpose, which she instinctively understood and which seemed to her scarcely less than suicidal. She said nothing so long as the horses were moving swiftly. When they resumed the walk, she turned to her companion and asked:

"Do you believe in my friendship, Margaret, and do you trust its loyalty so far as to forgive an impertinence in its behalf?"

"I certainly do, Millicent. I could never—"

"Listen, then, and don't interrupt. I know far more about this

matter than anybody has ever told me. My woman's instinct has instructed me. It may be in error as to details, but I am right as to the essentials, and in such a case it is the essentials alone that need be considered. I'll tell you the story of the situation as I understand it. You are not a woman to love lightly, or lightly to forget."

Margaret well nigh fell from her horse as she heard her own passionately uttered words thus repeated in merely explanatory fashion, but in a moment she realized that this was purely a coincidence. Millicent had chosen the words for herself; she could not have heard them as a quotation.

"There may be many fancies to a woman like you, but there can be only one passionate, self-giving, all-surrendering love. It is commonly said that there is no such thing as self-sacrificing loyalty or friendship between women—that while we may heroically sacrifice ourselves for the love of a man we never sacrifice that love in loyalty to a woman. It is a slander on our sex. I accepted it as true until very recently; indeed I saw many things to confirm it. I know better now."

She paused for a considerable time, but Margaret did not prompt her to go on. Perhaps she foresaw what was coming, and at any rate she saw clearly that there was struggle and disturbance in Millicent's mind.

After awhile the girl resumed:

"The one love of your life, Margaret, is for Mr. Boyd Westover. It began long before you knew it and it will last as long as you live. Now I am going to make a shameful

confession," she added. Then she broke into a gallop, but when the horses resumed a moderate pace she did not make the confession. Perhaps she shrank from it. Perhaps she deemed it unnecessary. Perhaps she thought its making might tend rather to complicate than to simplify the problems in hand. However that may be, she made no further reference to the matter, but took up her parable where she had laid it down.

"Something, I don't know what—yes, I do, but I don't know why—has come between you and Mr. Boyd Westover. I am not blind, and I think I am not stupid. There were unopened letters there from him to you, and other unopened letters from you to him. Without asking anybody any questions I know that for some reason somebody has sought to cut off communication between him and you. I see clearly that that purpose has been accomplished, and I see that as a consequence he has been thinking you fickle and treacherous, as women so often are, and you have been thinking him disloyal and dishonorable."

"No, no, no," interrupted Margaret. "I have never accused him of disloyalty or dishonor, even in my wildest moments of perplexity and distress. I have never for one moment doubted his honor. It is only that I have been unable to conjecture why he left me in silence, when in fact he was writing great, manly, loving letters to me every day. Oh, Millicent, it was cruel, and I can never forgive—"

She did not need mention the name.

"You haven't read Mr. Westover's unopened letters," suggested Millicent.

"No, I have no right now. They were written in the past, when he loved and trusted me. He might not wish me to read them now. He might not feel in the same way toward me now that he did then."

"That's stuff and nonsense, I think, Margaret. I really do. If I were you I should read the letters carefully. Then I should sit down and write to Mr. Boyd Westover, enclosing the letters you wrote to him at that time and explaining how all the trouble had come about."

"That would never, never do. It would be throwing myself like a cast-off garment at his feet. It would be asking him to renew relations that he may have been glad to forget."

"You say that, Margaret, but you don't believe it. Neither do I."

"I think, Millicent, you don't understand our conventionalities down here. It would be impossible for any Virginia girl, under such circumstances, to take the initiative in reopening relations. That is the prerogative of the gentleman in the case."

"But when the gentleman doesn't know the facts, and the woman does, what then?"

"That makes no possible difference."

"You are right on one point, Margaret. I do not understand your conventions, nor do I in the least sympathize with them. They are shams and falsities, as all conventionalities are, and they are cruel beyond measure. They decree that where a mistake has been made and the woman discovers it, she must let

wreck and ruin overwhelm two lives—her own and that of the man she loves—rather than send to him a simple and easy explanation of the mistake that has made the trouble. No, I do not understand such conventions. What are you going to do?"

"I'll place the whole thing in my father's hands, and he shall do what he will with it."

"And as to the one who has wrought all this mischief?"

"My relations with my Aunt Betsy will be changed. Come! We must hurry back to the house. I want my father to know what has happened."

They trotted on for a space, when suddenly Millicent reined in her horse and Margaret stopped in company, for Millicent had come to a complete halt in the roadway. For a moment the two confronted each other without a word, for Millicent, sitting on her horse with compressed lips and set jaw, did not at first explain herself. After a while she said:

"I cannot sit idly by and see two glorious young lives wrecked when a next to nothing would save both. I am a Yankee, of Boston, but so was Paul Revere. Let me have those letters. Ask me no questions, but let me ride as Paul Revere did!"

For a moment Margaret hesitated. The temptation was very great, but she put it aside.

"That would never do, Millicent," she said. "I understand your loving loyalty and I am grateful for it, but that would never do. To Mr. Westover you would be my emissary, no matter what you might say. It would be the same as if I went to him myself."

"Is your decision final, or may I argue the matter?" Millicent asked.

"It is final," Margaret answered, and not another word was spoken during the remainder of the homeward journey.

XXX
WHAT HAD HAPPENED AT THE OAKS

That little jaunt on horseback that Margaret, with her friend, took by way of steadying her nerves, was perhaps a mistake. If she had gone to her father at once, while "Aunt Betsy" was making herself comfortable in bed, the impulsive old gentleman would have been off on a journey to Wanalah within five minutes, and his intent to explain and make reparation would have accomplished its purpose instantly.

But Margaret went riding instead, and no sooner did "Aunt Betsy" learn of the fact than she made a quick recovery from her illness, and almost before the two young women were out of sight of the house, "Aunt Betsy," tearful and in every other way appealing, was closeted with Colonel Conway. She thus gained the distinct advantage of being first on the ground. Her tears and her agitation appealed strongly to the protective instinct of the chivalric old soldier. She told him in her own way what had happened, diverting his attention from her own misconduct by lamentations and copious weepings and protestations that in all she had done she had sought only to protect the honor and

dignity of the family and to prevent Margaret—"an unformed girl"—from compromising herself in her ignorance of the world.

It would be too much to say that she convinced her brother of the righteousness of her conduct. Tampering with letters—even without reading them—was to him a point of special sensitiveness, and there were other matters involved which he could in no wise reconcile with his conceptions of honorable conduct. But he recognized the weakness of women as a palliation of misconduct, and his sister's tearful appeals to him for the protection of her dignity affected him in the tenderest part of his nature.

He was profoundly displeased with her, but she was his sister, nevertheless, and he was her natural protector. It was his duty and his desire to spare her, so far as might be possible, but he felt also the obligation to censure and correct her.

"You have done a gravely improper thing, Betsy," he said, with sternness and tenderness struggling for mastery in his tone. "Indeed what you have done is unpardonable, inexcusable,—except that as a woman you did not know the enormity of your act."

"That is the main point, Robert," she interrupted, "and I beg you to bear it in mind. All I did was done with good intentions. I am naturally solicitous for the honor of our family, and I—"

"And you did a dishonorable thing in that behalf," he said with severity in his tone. "In your desire to protect the family name you did a thing that would forever subject it to shame, if it should become known."

"That is it, Robert. It mustn't become known. I depend upon you, as the head of the family, to prevent that. Blame me as severely as you will, but don't expose me, don't subject me to criticism and scorn! Oh, Robert, I beg you to protect me!"

"I'll protect you of course," he replied, "but you have made it difficult and exceedingly embarrassing for me to do so. I have my own conscience to reckon with. You have made me do things, in ignorance of the facts—I may as well be frank and say you have deliberately deceived me into the doing of wrongs for which I know not how to atone or even apologize. If you were not my sister, if you were not under my protection, if I could be indifferent to your feelings—my course would be simple and easy. A frank, manly statement of the facts would exonerate me. As it is—"

"As it is, Robert, you cannot subject your sister to humiliation. You *must* protect me from shame. You must take pains that what has happened shall never be known outside this house!"

It was at this stage of the conversation that Margaret entered. "Aunt Betsy," confident that she had secured herself, said:

"I will leave you to talk with your father, Margaret, if you desire."

"No," the young woman answered; "I prefer that you should remain. I, at least, have nothing to conceal, and I do not seek, as you do, to get my father's ear in private. Besides, I have some things to say to you, and I prefer to say them in my father's presence. I am mistress of The Oaks. Hitherto, out of a respect

which you have not justified, I have permitted you to exercise certain functions that belong to me. I shall do so no longer. I have given directions that hereafter I will make up the outgoing mail bag and open the incoming one."

"But, my dear child—"

"I am not a child, Aunt Betsy. You have made some grievous mistakes in forgetfulness of that fact. It shall not be forgotten again while I remain mistress of this plantation. What was it you were going to say, Aunt Betsy? I beg pardon for interrupting, but it seemed necessary."

"I was going to ask what the servants will think."

"I do not know what they will think, Aunt Betsy."

"On that point I must appeal to your father," "Aunt Betsy" replied.

"On that point it is *very dangerous for you to appeal*," answered the younger woman, still preserving an extraordinary calm that was at once astonishing and alarming to her aunt, but speaking with a degree of emphasis that suggested something behind the words.

"What do you mean? Explain yourself," said "Aunt Betsy," in that authoritative tone which she had all her life employed in addressing her niece.

"I will explain if you wish," Margaret answered; "but I'd rather spare you the explanation."

"I insist upon knowing what you mean," the elder woman unwisely replied.

"Very well, then; you shall hear. In addition to the wrong you have done me, wrecking my life and placing me in a grievously false position; in addition to the wrong you have done to another, you have been guilty of the crime of robbing the United States mails, Aunt Betsy, and as the minimum penalty of that crime is a long term in prison, I do not think it wise of you to suggest appeals in this case. It will be better, I think, to accept my decision as final."

"IT WILL BE BETTER, I THINK, TO ACCEPT MY DECISION AS FINAL."
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IT WILL BE BETTER, I THINK, TO ACCEPT MY DECISION AS FINAL.—*Page 365.*

The old lady rose in wrath, alarm, indignation and all the other emotions of an exciting sort, and demanded to know what her niece meant by such an accusation of infamy. At the same time Colonel Conway exclaimed:

"Oh, daughter, daughter, you do not mean what you say. Take it back! You are excited. You are beside yourself!"

"I am not in the least excited," the young woman answered. "I did not wish or intend to mention that aspect of the matter, but Aunt Betsy insisted upon it. I have no desire to emphasize it or to insist upon it, if only my authority as mistress at The Oaks is properly recognized. As your daughter, Father, I am entitled to that dignity which you yourself have been fond of insisting upon; and as your daughter I intend to exercise the authority and maintain the dignity of that position so long as you permit me to hold it. When you cease to permit that, I shall leave The Oaks and go to my own plantation of Tye, which my mother left me. You must remember that I am a grown woman of twenty-one, and that I am not a dependent upon anybody."

"Now, daughter," interrupted Colonel Conway with affection, "you are talking nonsense. You know that you are mistress of The Oaks, and—"

"That is quite all I am insisting upon. As mistress of The Oaks I do not intend to have my authority questioned or my affairs interfered with by anybody. I'm sorry I have this occasion to assert myself, but the circumstances are not of my making."

"But what do you mean, you—you—you ill-regulated girl,—

in charging me with a crime?" almost shrieked the elder woman as she confronted her niece in an attitude that suggested a desire to shake her. "What do you mean? What do you mean?"

"You'd better let that phase of the affair drop, Aunt Betsy," answered the girl with a calm that additionally exasperated her aunt.

"No, I will not let it drop. You have uttered an accusation that I cannot and will not let pass. You must say what you meant by it."

"I will say it if you insist," answered Margaret, still preserving her exasperating calm.

"I do insist. I will not rest under such an accusation. Go on! Tell me what you meant."

"I will," said Margaret. "You remember that five years ago an attempt was made to open our mail bag in some political interest. Father appealed to the Government for its protection, and from that day to this it has gone back and forth under a United States mail lock. In tampering with its contents—in abstracting from it letters addressed to me, you—I don't like to put the matter into plain words. Let me say instead that you violated the law which renders the United States mail sacred. I'm sorry I have had to call your attention to such a matter, but you forced the necessity upon me."

By this time it was necessary to summon maids and get "Aunt Betsy" back to bed again,—genuinely ill this time.

It was not until she was made as comfortable as

circumstances permitted, that Colonel Conway and his daughter returned to the library and resumed their conversation.

"Now, daughter," said the old soldier, "I am ready to do anything to right this wrong—anything, of course, that will not compromise your aunt."

"Father," responded the girl with a world of tenderness in her voice, "you ought not to have anything to do in the matter. It is Aunt Betsy who has wrought all the mischief. She has deceived you; she has deceived me; she has deceived Mr. Westover. It should be her duty, not yours, to undo the wrong she has done."

"But, my dear daughter, how can she? She is a woman."

"I know that, Father, and I know our Virginian view of such things. But it is all wrong. You men of Virginia have granted to us women a license that ought not to be. If one of us utters a slander, you hold yourselves responsible for it even unto death. If one of us lies—it isn't a ladylike term, I know, but it is what I mean—if one of us lies you hold yourselves bound to maintain the lie and answer for it, even at the pistol's point. You Virginia gentlemen insist upon only one point of honor for women. So long as we observe that, we may lie and cheat and slander at will and you sustain us in it. It is all wrong. If a woman does mischief, she should herself atone for it. In this case it is Aunt Betsy who has wrought the wrong and it is Aunt Betsy who should undo it."

"But how can she, dear?"

"By going to Mr. Westover, or writing to him, and saying frankly: 'I robbed the post bag of your letters to Margaret and

her letters to you.' That is what a brave man would do. Why should not a brave woman do the same?"

"But, daughter, your aunt is a lady and excessively sensitive."

"She forgot to be a lady when she did this infamous thing, and her sensitiveness is mainly a pretence assumed to play upon your chivalry and to deceive you and others. If she were honest in mind, a real, genuine, conscientious sensitiveness would prompt her to make precisely the reparation I have suggested. As she is utterly dishonest and dishonorable instead, I quite understand that no force, moral or physical, could ever compel her to an act of reparation like that."

"My dear, you are very hard upon your poor old aunt."

"Not at all, Father. Truth is as much an obligation of women as of men. So is courage of the moral sort. But it is idle to expect that after generations in which you gentlemen of Virginia have excused us from all obligations except that of chastity. You have assumed our protection, and you have met that obligation bravely; but—well, I have thought much on that subject, and what I have thought is of no consequence. What are you going to do by way of righting the wrong Aunt Betsy has done, as you excuse her from the obligation of herself righting it?"

"I'll do anything you suggest—anything that will not compromise your aunt. You see I must protect her."

"I understand. The one who has wrought the wrong must be spared the consequences. The victims of it must bear them. I have nothing whatever to suggest, Father."

And with that she advanced, kissed him tenderly, said:

"Poor, dear old Dad!" and quietly left the room.

Then it was that Colonel Conway set himself to satisfy his daughter's conscience and his own by writing a letter to Boyd Westover. Then it was that, after repeated failures, he compromised with his conscience by writing to Dr. Carley Farnsworth instead.

Then it was that under Dr. Carley Farnsworth's instructions Millicent Danvers sent Colonel Conway and Margaret to bed.

"Aunt Betsy" was already sleeping the sleep of one who feels that she has adroitly escaped uncomfortable consequences.

XXXI
A SUNSET INTERVIEW

The days were growing short, and so when Jack Towns approached The Oaks that afternoon, the sun was setting and Millicent was watching it from a little hilltop just beyond the orchard and perhaps half a mile from the house.

Jack came upon her there and was fascinated with the picture she presented. With her head bare and her hair in some disorder as a result of facing the west wind too fearlessly, she wore upon her shoulders a voluminous mass of fleecy knitted work known

in those days as a "nubia," or, by those who preferred good English to very bad dog-Latin, a "cloud." As he approached from the east he saw her figure silhouetted against the glowing western sky, and the grace of it fascinated him. It was like a great picture—suggesting one of Turner's interpretations of Venice, with an absorbing human interest added to the glow and glory of it.

For to Jack Towns the girl who turned to greet him as he rode up was a very absorbing human interest indeed. The hour he had passed in converse with her on the day before, had left him with a glamor upon him which even his jaunty indifference to permanent impressions could not dismiss. He had been moved to make this special visit to The Oaks by an irresistible desire to see more of a young woman whose superiority of mind and character was strongly impressed upon him, and whose very peculiarities—mainly due to differences of environment and education—were strangely appealing to his imagination.

Upon approaching her there upon the little, sun illumined hilltop, he dismounted, and, with bridle rein over his arm, joined her in admiration of the glowing sunset.

HE DISMOUNTED, AND, WITH HIS BRIDLE REIN OVER HIS ARM, JOINED HER.—*Page 373.*

HE DISMOUNTED, AND, WITH HIS BRIDLE —*Page 373.*

After the first greetings were over she said:

"Do you know, Mr. Towns, I think that is where your chivalry comes from?" And as she said it, she waved her hand toward the horizon with its gold and purple, intermingled with pinks and blues and exquisite greens that the dyer's art has never matched.

"I mean," she added without waiting to be asked for an explanation, "that you Virginians are inspired with gentleness and chivalry by the quality of the climate in which you live, and that your sunsets give color to your imaginings of courage, optimism, and high endeavor."

"I doff my hat in acknowledgement of the double compliment," he said, "to our climate and to our manhood. But surely fine sunsets are not our exclusive possession. You must have such at the North?"

"Sometimes—not often. They are so rare indeed that we make note of them and recall them afterwards as pleasant memories."

"But isn't that because you live in a large city where the vapors of industry cloud the sky and shut out nature's displays?"

"I do not live in a large city, Mr. Towns, except for the two or three worst months of the year, and not always even then. I live on the 'blue hills of Milton.' My father has a country place there, and since he has grown old enough to relax a little in his business enterprises, we live there almost all the year round. So you see I know our climate quite irrespective of the factory chimneys and their fumes. The sunset is dying out. I don't like to see the death of beauty or grandeur or glory of any kind. Let's

turn our faces toward the house."

As they turned Jack Towns in his own mind formulated his impressions in this wise:

"Here is a young woman who can think for herself and without any regard whatever for the conventions of thought; she is inspired with an appreciation of truth and beauty, which is only another way of saying that she is a poet in her soul—thank God she is not a poet in the magazines, for that would be dreadful. She has common sense, too, in an uncommon abundance. Jack Towns, you are falling in love in a way you never dreamed of before, and the fact doesn't alarm you in the least."

As his meditations kept him silent for a longer time than is usual when youth and beauty walk together in the gloaming, Millicent was the first to speak.

"I wish you could know our 'blue hills of Milton.' They have some attractions of their own."

"They certainly have," he answered. "I know them—at least in a small way."

"Why, how did that come about?" she asked in surprise. "I understood you to say you were never in Boston but once."

"'And that same is thrue for you,' as my Irish office attendant would say. I was never in Boston until a few weeks ago, when I went thither to arrange some financial affairs for a client of mine"—he did not mention Westover's name. "I had some negotiations with a banking firm there, and the head of the

establishment was exceedingly courteous to me. He took me to his country place to spend the Sunday. By a curious coincidence, his surname is the same as yours—Danvers. He's the head of the banking house of Danvers, Appleton and Wentworth. I wonder if by any chance he's a relative of yours. At any rate he deserves to be. For a more courtly gentleman I have never met. He's the sort of educated, refined, polished, considerate person that only three States in this Union produce, so far as I have been able to observe."

"Which are the three States, please,—that is to say, if you are free to designate them?"

"Massachusetts, Virginia, and South Carolina. Mind, I don't say that such gentlemen are not found in other States. It is only that those of them whom I have personally met have happened to be sons of one or other of the three States mentioned."

"I suppose there is a reason for that," answered Millicent.

"What is it?" he inquired in answer.

"They are the three oldest commonwealths," she answered, "and the three most conservative. You have a saying here in Virginia—a true saying, I think—that 'it takes three generations to make a gentleman.' The three States you have named have lived their own lives for a good many more than three generations, and so they have had time to make gentlemen. Still —"

She did not continue her sentence, till Towns urged her to do so. Then she said:

"I was going to say that about the most perfect gentleman I ever met was Jake Greenfield, a Vermonter, without education beyond what he called the 'rujimenteries,' whom I met in the Rocky Mountains."

"Tell me about him," implored Jack, saying nothing of his own acquaintance with Jake, who had been his companion and shrewd adviser during his stay in the Rocky Mountains in Boyd Westover's interest. "Tell me about him."

"I will," she answered. "I am always pleased to celebrate his virtues. Jake is ignorant, unfamiliar with the ways of society, and wholly unformed as to his manners, but he is instinctively a gentleman. He habitually eats with his knife—a dirk-like thing that he carries in his belt. He has no hesitation about sitting at table and picking his teeth with a fork. It never occurs to him to apologize for lighting his pipe at table or quitting the company before the others have done. None of the conventions of civilized life have dawned upon his intelligence as matters worthy of attention. When I knew him, if a single pie sat before him he would carefully count noses and divide it equally; but if the table were well dotted with pies he would seize upon the one nearest him and devour it from his hand without enlisting the services of knife or fork in aid of the process.

"I met him in the Rocky Mountains where my father had some mining interests, and I was a good deal distressed and disgusted by his lack of manners until I came to know the real man who lived under so rough an exterior."

"How did that come about? Tell me, please," said Jack Towns as he handed his companion up the two or three steps that

led to the porch.

"It was a rather thrilling experience," she answered, "at least in its beginning. I was only a girl then of eighteen or nineteen. I had gone to the Rockies with my father for the sake of 'roughing it,' as they say out there, and enjoying the out-of-door life. I was in the habit of riding alone, anywhere I pleased, for the region was a wilderness and nobody lived in it except a few surface miners. One day I rode away till I came to a little stream, a few inches deep, which was crossed by a ford. The road to and from the stream had been cut by nature or by man, through bluff banks, twenty feet high. I crossed the stream, scarcely wetting the fetlocks of my horse. I rode up through the cut on the other side to the high ground above, and thence on through a delightfully wild region, until presently it began to rain in that sudden and torrential way that belongs to the Rocky Mountains. I turned my horse about and trotted him somewhat hurriedly toward the ford I had crossed. When I got there I found the trickling little brook swollen to a mountain torrent, but I did not recognize the change as a matter of consequence. I saw that the water had risen, but to me that meant only that where I had had to make my horse wade fetlock deep before, I must make him wade knee deep now. I pushed him into the stream and almost instantly he was swept from his footing. The depth required swimming, and the onrush of the waters was so great that swimming across the stream was impossible. The horse made a gallant struggle to reach the other side within the roadway space, but he was swept away down stream. I was afloat on his back, imprisoned as it were between two perpendicular bluffs that offered no point of possible landing or rescue.

"Just as I fully realized my situation Jake Greenfield, mounted

upon a strong horse, appeared on the bank above.

"'Hold on for your life!' he cried to me, 'an' I'll be with you in half a minute.' With that he turned his horse's head and rode away for thirty or forty paces. Then, suddenly turning about, he rode straight toward the bluff, digging spurs into his horse's flanks at every step, and lashing his rumps with a black snake whip by way of making sure that he should not refuse the leap. A moment later there was a splash and a struggle in the water. Jake Greenfield's horse had leaped into the stream from the bluff twenty feet or more above, with Jake Greenfield on his back, and the two had sunk beneath the flood within a few feet of me as I clung to my horse.

"After a few moments both came to the surface, and the snortings of the horse indicated that his breathing capacity was impaired. By way of sparing him Jake slipped off the saddle and took hold of a stirrup strap as a towing line. But his poor horse's powers were exhausted and he could sustain himself no longer. He gave up the struggle and sank beneath the flood, a martyr to the duty he owed to his master—man. Pardon me, I'm making a long story of this, but the details interest me so."

"They interest me, too," quickly responded her companion. "You cannot narrate them in too minute detail to please me. I could listen all night to the story. Go on, please."

"Well, Jake continued to swim until presently he caught my horse's tail and used it as a means of keeping up with me. Then he said:

"'Turn him to the right! Keep close in shore. There's a little

break in the bluffs just ahead, and may be we can make it! More to the right! Closer in shore! There! There's the break. Make him catch bottom there if you can,' You see, Mr. Towns, every word spoken at that time was burned into my memory, and I recall every detail as vividly as if the thing had happened yesterday, or even to-day.

"I succeeded in 'beaching' my horse at that little break in the bank. It was literally like beaching him, for no sooner had he taken three or four steps through shoaling water toward the land, than he lay down, utterly exhausted."

Here the girl stopped in her narrative, as if it had been done. Jack Towns had no mind thus to lose the climax.

"You haven't told me yet in what way Jake proved himself a gentleman."

"That is true," she answered, "and it was that that I set out to tell you. Somehow heroism always appeals to me, and in telling you of Jake's heroism I forgot the other end of the story. I was soaked through, of course, and chilled to the bone. So Jake took me by the arm—he wanted to take me on his back but I wouldn't let him—and hurried me to one of his cabins. You see, as caretaker of the mining lands, he had several cabins, scattered about over them. He told me there was a motherly old squaw there who would look after me, but when we got there the squaw, after the manner of her race, had wandered away somewhere and was not likely to return. Jake built a big fire in the cabin chimney, and then went outside, telling me to 'shuck off them soakin' clothes' and wrap myself up in the quilts that covered the sole orderly bed in the place. As I did so I

bethought me of the conventionalities, and when Jake came back to cook my supper and dry my clothes, I protested that I could not consent to stay there alone, and without even a squaw to sustain my dignity. I simply must go to my father, I said, and when he objected that the mountain torrent lay between and was by this time twenty-fold fiercer in its fury than when I had dared it before, I declared that it made no difference; that at all hazards I must make my way to my father's quarters that night. By way of making the matter impersonal and in that way sparing his feelings, I dwelt upon the anxiety my father must feel for me. I think Jake understood my real objection to the situation. Indeed I know he did, for by way of reply he said:

"'Ef you only could rest quiet here an' not worrit overmuch, I've been a-plannin' to go up the mountain to where the stream don't 'mount to nothin', an' cross it an' go down an' tell Mr. Danvers as how you is safe an' sound nevertheless of your bein' tired out an' chilly an' all that. Ef you kin spare me, I'd like to do that.'

"Not at all realizing the fact that that torrent had its beginning twenty miles away and in mountains so precipitous that no man could scale them, I gave eager consent to his proposal, and after preparing such supper as he could for me, the devoted fellow—no, the chivalric gentleman, I mean—set forth in the torrential rain. I learned afterwards that he toiled up the stream for six miles, plunged into it and the darkness, breasted his way across it as it swept him down its resistless current, and with difficulty effected a landing on the opposite side four miles below his starting point. Thence he trudged through the darkness and the rain to my father's quarters, where rescue parties were forming to hunt for me. That's the story. Don't you agree with me that

Jake's a gentleman in the true sense of the word?"

"All that is what I should have expected of Jake," answered the young man. "You see I've just returned from that region, and during my stay there I was closely associated with him."

The girl uttered a little exclamation of astonishment; then, with that perfect self-possession which Jack Towns had found to be the most fascinating thing about her, she added:

"Confidence deserves confidence in return, and before you go," for Jack had risen and the two were advancing toward his restless, pawing horse, "it seems only fair to tell you that what you have said of the Boston banker who entertained you over Sunday has been very gratifying to me, for the reason that the gentleman concerned is my father, and the house you found so hospitable is my home. I sincerely hope you'll have other occasions to visit us there."

Jack's instant thought was:

"I'll make the occasions, and I'll do it pretty soon too," but he confined his speech to the courtesies of the moment, and a minute later he was riding at half speed toward Wanalah, wondering if his absence had kept supper waiting, and not caring in the least whether it had done so or not.

XXXII

WHAT HAPPENED AT FIGHTING CREEK

In Virginia in the late fifties there was no question of principle or policy or anything else at issue between the Whig and Democratic parties. Even in national politics there was none. The Whigs were supposed to represent tariff protection and internal improvements. The Democrats stood for free trade and sailors' rights, but neither the one nor the other of these cries represented anything vital, any policy that was pending.

In Virginia the instinct of self-preservation, awakened by hostility at the North to the institution of slavery, had stimulated both parties to an intemperate, uncompromising, relentless advocacy of slavery as a system right in itself,—a thing that nobody really believed,—and whenever Whig and Democrat met in debate, the only question between them was which could go to the greatest extreme in that direction. There were the old antagonisms between the two parties. They were still remembered with bitterness, and men grew excited and even violent in their discussion; but nobody on either side could have said what they meant, for the sufficient reason that they meant just nothing at all. There was a new, Free Soil party rapidly gaining strength at the North, and by both Whigs and Democrats in Virginia that party was regarded as the common enemy, to be fought to the death. But while waiting for that, the Whigs and Democrats fought each other for precedence and place.

Political speaking under such conditions was apt to be uninteresting to others than the speakers, unless it involved something of accidental and unusual moment. If any speaker under the excitement of perfervid oratory happened to use terms which his adversary could construe to be offensive to himself,

there was instantly awakened the interest that pertains to a quarrel which may presently ripen into a duel or a street fight.

Nothing of that kind occurred at Fighting Creek on the day after Jack Towns's visit to Millicent, but some other things occurred that gave peculiar interest to the occasion. Carley Farnsworth read from the platform the note in which Colonel Conway pledged himself to the support of Westover's nomination. That in itself was a staggering blow to Webb's candidacy. As Foggy, whose phrases were apt to be picturesque, put the matter:

"It knocks the underpinnin' out of our campaign, and it looks to me, Webb, as if it might knock the stuffin' out'n you."

But staggering as the announcement was, there was far worse to come.

When Sam Butler, the Democratic candidate for Senator, had emptied his mind and mouth of all the florid rhetorical phrases he had sat up of nights to construct, he brought a matter of practical political importance to the front.

"I have endeavored to show you, my fellow citizens, that Democratic principles ought to triumph in this election; but neither you nor I can fail to see that there is no chance of that in this senatorial district. After consultation with my friends and political advisers, I have decided that the issue lies solely between the regular and the independent Whig candidates; and as between these two I think no Democrat can hesitate to choose Mr. Boyd Westover as the fittest man to represent us. I therefore resign my own candidacy in Mr. Westover's behalf, and I urge

all my friends, all loyal Democrats in the district, to vote for him. I have been moved to this decision by impulses of patriotism and by a sense of duty to the district and to my fellow citizens."

This was a thunderbolt out of a clear sky, and for a full minute the crowd stood paralyzed with astonishment. Then Butler's most active supporter—by prearrangement of course—leaped to the platform and cried out:

"Friends, Democrats, patriots! It occurs to me that our party in this county has named no candidate for the lower house of the Legislature. In order that the Democratic vote shall not be completely unrecorded, I move that we now name Samuel Butler, Esq., for that honorable place. His candidacy for that will in no way interfere with his self-sacrificing decision to take himself out of the senatorial campaign. I ask all Democrats here present to gather in the prize barn across the road, to consider this suggestion."

A "prize barn" was one in which there were appliances for pressing leaf tobacco into hogsheads.

Ten minutes later it was announced that the late Democratic candidate for Senator had been unanimously nominated for the House of Delegates.

"Now I know," said Carley Farnsworth to himself, "what Edgar Coffey's message from Judy to Butler meant. It's the shrewdest bit of play I ever heard of. By securing his withdrawal from the senatorial contest, the Queen of the Mountains has enormously swelled Boyd's planter vote. And by

way of accomplishing that she has promised the mountain vote to Butler for the lower office, and it will elect him beyond a doubt. On the whole, I reckon I won't explain the matter to Westover. He's quixotic, and he knows nothing of politics. But, by Jove, it was a master stroke on Judy's part."

That night when Edgar Coffey made his report to Judy, telling her of the adroit and graceful way in which the program had been carried out by Butler, her comment was:

"Some folks has more sense'n you'd think."

When he had told her of the confidence with which Webb was reckoning upon the mountain vote to offset the loss, she added:

"An' some folks ain't got the sense the law allows 'em."

But if Webb had less political sense "than the law allowed him," there were certain of his followers who were better endowed. Foggy, in particular, realized the situation, and, by way of meeting it, summoned Webb and a dozen or so of his immediate supporters to a conference in the hostelry of a neighboring county seat.

There Foggy laid down the law to the optimistic candidate.

"These here two happenings," he said, "mean trouble. All the swell Whig planters who were holding back because of Colonel Conway's stand will now vote for Westover, and use their influence to make their overseers and others do the same. Every Democrat in the district will vote for him as a matter of course. They want to beat the regular Whig nominee, and now that they haven't a candidate of their own, they'll vote for Westover. Now

what have we got to meet all this with?"

Webb suggested the mountain vote, and Foggy instantly replied:

"So far as I can see, we ain't got no mortgage on that, and if we are to carry it we've got to go after it."

So they went on discussing the situation, ending by ordering a vigorous campaign in the mountains with Webb for leader and Judy Peters as the Dominant Power to be approached with negotiations.

When Jack Towns heard of this program, he went to Carley Farnsworth in some alarm, to suggest some counter move.

"I am conducting this campaign," answered the little doctor, "and I am in confidential relations with Judy. I'll tell you, Jack, but you must keep the secret, that it was Judy herself who conceived and planned and organized Boyd's candidacy. She made one of the best diagnoses I ever heard of in his case, and her therapeutics is matchless. Let her alone. She has made up her mind to elect Westover with such a majority as shall be convincing even to him, and she will do it you may be sure. If she wants to see any of us she'll have Edgar Coffey whisper a hint of her desire into our ears. Until she does that we mustn't interfere. She might resent it as a reflection on her skill in political management. Now let me drop a hint into your ear. I said just now that I was managing this campaign. That was a vainglorious boast. I didn't persuade Butler to retire in Westover's favor, but somebody arranged that. Have you any idea who it was? And if at the end of the campaign Butler

should find himself elected to the lower house of the Legislature by virtue of the entire mountain vote added to the regular Democratic poll down here, do you imagine for an instant that the result would take him by surprise? Now keep mum about all these things. I am only making suggestions by way of preventing you from making mistakes. Don't say a word to Boyd about it."

XXXIII
CONSPIRACIES

Jack Towns was particularly pleased with the reassurance that Farnsworth gave him respecting the campaign. It set him free. In his loyalty to Boyd Westover he would have ridden all night and all day in aid of his friend's election; but he greatly preferred to go to Dr. Carver's and dance all night with Millicent.

In fact he did very nearly that. He put his name down on her card for every set that wasn't taken in advance, and he danced all of them but three or four which she elected to "sit out." If she had been accompanied by a chaperon, she would have had to restrict Mr. Towns's allowance of sets, but chaperons were not deemed necessary for well-bred young women in Virginia. Such young women were supposed to know how to behave properly, and as for protection, was not the entire adult male population ready and eager to render it upon occasion?

Moreover, Jack Towns did not in fact secure an undue

proportion of Millicent's sets, for the reason that all the young men in the company, who managed to get possession of her card in time, put their names on it, for one dance each. She rigidly restricted them to one. Perhaps she considered Jack. But she put no restriction on Jack Towns in the matter, and Jack was so ill-mannered in his infatuation that he asked no other young woman for her card, except in the case of Charlotte Deane. Charlotte was no longer as young as she could have wished, and she was distinctly not beautiful or brilliant. So Jack, observing that there were no throngs of young men about her, asked for her card and put his name down for two dances.

For the rest, he devoted his attention to Millicent Danvers until everybody was set wondering if at last Jack Towns had really and truly fallen in love. The same question arose in Jack's own mind, but he, at least, was able to answer it. "Yes," he admitted to himself, "I have had many fleeting fancies before, but none that resembled this. I am determined to win Millicent Danvers if devotion can accomplish it. I never felt in that way before. Always I have felt, that while one young woman pleased me, there were others who might be equally pleasing. I don't feel so now. It is Millicent Danvers now, or nobody with me. I wonder what she will think of my big, disorderly bachelor establishment if she ever consents to be its mistress? I'll wager something handsome that she'll—well, it will be time enough to speculate on that when I have won her. By the way, she would say that differently—'when I shall have won her.' Anyhow my present task is to win her. If I do that she will take care of the rest. And after all a bachelor establishment isn't a home. Just think of the difference between my big house, where everything is in chaos, and that home of hers among the blue hills of Milton."

So he went on, thinking, wondering, speculating, so long as she was fulfilling an engagement to dance with somebody else whom he hated and held in unmerited contempt without any assignable reason. And when his own turn came and he danced with her, his fancies floated before his eyes as a dream pervades the mind, a dream that so rejoices as to make of waking a calamity.

Millicent did well whatever she did at all. In dancing with her, Jack felt that she simply lifted herself half an inch or so from the floor and floated about without again touching it. It was a delight to dance with her, as every young man who had enjoyed the experience stood ready to testify, but Jack Towns rejoiced even more in "sitting out" a set. For then, with her arm in his he could promenade the porches, or the pair could stroll out into the grounds where common prudence and courtesy required him frequently to readjust the wrappings that protected her otherwise bare arms and shoulders, or, better still, he could seek out a secluded nook in the porch or elsewhere, where they two might talk of things that held interest for both of them in common.

It was during one of these confabs, when they sat out two dances in succession, that Jack Towns invited himself to Boston and to Millicent's home in the blue hills of Milton. It came about in this way. Jack was really and earnestly in love, for the first time in his life, and the impulse to tell Millicent so was well nigh irresistible. But Jack was a Virginian, and he recognized the right of a young woman to be courted in her own home. He restrained his impulse of speech, therefore, so far as open avowals were concerned, but his utterances, short of a declaration, were such as to leave the young woman in no doubt

as to his attitude and purpose.

When she spoke of her prospective home-going, he asked, a little eagerly perhaps, when that was to occur. She answered:

"It must be very soon—as soon as I shall have done a duty that rests upon me. I'm sorry Mr. Boyd Westover isn't here to-night. He told me, when I met him casually this afternoon, that he was obliged to return to Wanalah."

"I suppose he was," answered Jack Towns in a peculiarly inscrutable tone that he adopted upon occasion. "But why? Do you particularly want to see him?"

"Yes, not only particularly but peremptorily. It is a part of the duty I have set myself. I cannot go back to Boston till I do."

"I see," he answered. "If you like I'll call at The Oaks and ask you to ride with me. We can ride over to Wanalah, and I'll see to it that he shall be there at the time."

"Oh, no, no, no! That would never do. There are reasons which I cannot explain, if you'll excuse me. I must meet Mr. Westover casually, quite by accident as it were."

"Very well, then," answered Jack, with all the confidence he was accustomed to assume at a court trial when his case was an uncertain one. "I'll arrange the accident and create the 'casualty.' You have only to respond favorably to the invitations you receive during the next few days. I'll take care of the rest."

There was a certain masterful self-confidence in his words and tone that was somehow exceedingly pleasing to Millicent.

She felt that Jack Towns was a man of limitless resource, a man accustomed to do things and to get others to do things, a man to be leant upon with confidence, and the feeling was altogether comforting. The thought that floated vaguely through her mind, though she shrank from formulating it, was that if ever Jack Towns should love a woman, that woman would be exceedingly comfortable in the certainty that his care of her would be always tenderly solicitous in its impulse, aggressively masterful in its manifestation, and measurelessly ingenious in its devices of safety for her against every ill. If she had permitted her thought to frame itself, as she resolutely refused to do, it would have been to the effect that he was a man into whose arms the woman he loved might throw herself in full assurance of a welcome and in trustful confidence of all-loving, all-daring protection. She did not let the thought formulate itself, but it floated nebulously in her mind, which was perhaps even more dangerous—if indeed there was any danger involved.

In answer to his words she said:

"You are certainly very good. I'll leave it to you to arrange for me, and as soon as I know definitely that my duty is done, I shall go back to Boston,—or at least as soon after that as my brother can come down here to escort me. You know the journey is a trying one."

"Yes, I know. But why trouble your brother needlessly? I shall be obliged to go to Boston sometime soon, and if you permit, I shall be glad to be your escort."

Jack was not fibbing. It is true that he had no business that required him to visit Boston, and yet he really felt it necessary

for him to go thither. He had fully decided to ask Millicent Danvers to become his wife, and he must go to Boston for that.

Millicent was right in saying that the journey was a trying one. In that infant age of railroad service the trip from Richmond to Boston involved eight or ten changes of cars, some of them at midnight. There were no sleeping cars, no parlor cars, no dining cars, no buffet cars—nothing in fact but rattletrap coaches, linked together with chains and pins and controlled only by hand brakes. No car ran through, or further than its own railway terminus. The connections were never close, and for the waiting times between there were no accommodations other than those which an open and often rain-drenched railway platform afforded.

But there was the question of chaperonage to be considered. Boston notions on that subject were different from Virginia notions. In Virginia it was held that a man in escort of a woman was in honor bound to protect her not only against all others but against himself as well. He must not, under such circumstances, permit his conversation even remotely to approach the confines of courtship. He must maintain, from beginning to end of the escorting, the attitude of one performing a duty with absolutely unemotional and impersonal temper. The man escorting was supposed to be a gentleman who would suffer no harm to come to the woman under his escort, even if his life should be the forfeit.

But Jack Towns understood the difference between Northern and Southern manners in that respect, and so, to his offer of escort, he promptly added:

"My good old negro Mammy will go with you, of course. She'll see that you have all the comforts that are possible on such a trip."

"But if you take her to Massachusetts she will be free, will she not?" asked Millicent.

"Free? Yes. She is free now to do as she pleases, and she regulates me with the high hand, just as she did when I was a baby. Why she even dominates my dress. Not long ago I came to breakfast with a blue cravat on, and she made me change it on the ground that I had a murder case to defend that day and she thought black would be more appropriate. When I get ready to go to the club in the afternoon, she inspects me, and if any detail of my costume fails to meet the exigent requirements of her code, I have to make a change, no matter how hurried I am. Oh, she's free. Why, she took away the breakfast I had ordered the cook to prepare for me the other day because it included fried eggs, and she was persuaded that fried eggs didn't agree with me. She is absolute mistress in my establishment, and every darkey there recognizes the fact. Her authority is supreme; mine is utterly subordinate. If I want any change made in the household arrangements, I must appeal to her to order it. Fortunately she always gives the order because she still regards me as her 'precious chile,' for whom everything must be done, and whose uttermost whim is to be gratified, regardless of the convenience of other folk, high or low."

"But she is a slave," answered Millicent, "and—"

"In a way, I suppose she is," he interrupted, "but all the eloquence of all the orators of Boston could not convince her

that her condition in life could be improved. She is absolute mistress of an establishment and of the poor fellow who owns it. She has everything that her heart desires, everything that her imagination can conjure up as a want. Her present is provided for, and her old age is secure. I don't know any device of freedom that can match that."

"Neither do I," Millicent answered; "but I cannot approve slavery as an institution. I am prejudiced, perhaps, but—"

"I am not prejudiced," he answered, "but I thoroughly agree with your dislike of slavery as an institution. All our great Virginians, Thomas Jefferson, John Randolph, George Wythe, Henry Clay, and the rest, have regarded the institution as an inherited evil to be got rid of in any way that might be practicable, in any way that might give to the negroes a chance to become self-supporting citizens. Thomas Jefferson put the Virginian thought into an apt phrase when he said that in freeing the negroes we must not 'arm them with freedom and a dagger.' He might have added, as many Virginians have done in practice, that we must arm them with a hoe and a plow."

"I see," she said, "and history teaches us that Virginia has done more for the restriction of slavery than any other State. It was in her cession of the Northwest territory that a clause was written forever excluding slavery from that region; and we cannot forget that in the convention which framed the constitution, the Virginia delegates fought vigorously for a provision to stop the African slave trade in the year 1800, and the New England delegates fought to continue it for eight years longer. I think these things are not understood, and I think I sympathize with your Virginian resentment of outside

interference by people who do not understand. At any rate I shall carry back to Boston with me a very different impression of your attitude from that which I had before. I shall be honored to have you for my escort, Mr. Towns, and delighted to be coddled all the way home by your dear old Mammy."

At that moment one of the young men who had secured a place on Millicent's card came to claim his dance, and the conversation was at an end.

But Jack Towns had a problem to solve. He had promised to bring Millicent and Westover together without seeming intention, and he did not know how he was to do it. Suddenly a thought came to him, and, as he had exhausted his claim upon Millicent's dancing card, he took French leave, mounted his mare and set off for Chinquapin Knob, whither Carley Farnsworth had preceded him many hours before. He arrived there about breakfast time and entered at once into negotiations.

Carley Farnsworth, as Jack Towns knew, was in close touch with Judy Peters; for these two friends of Boyd Westover had many confidences with respect to the campaign, of which Westover himself knew nothing, and Towns had learned all about Judy's attitude and initiative in Boyd's campaign.

"Of course Boyd's election is secure," said Jack, as he buttered a slice of the hot breakfast bread; "and now that Butler has withdrawn and Colonel Conway has endorsed his candidacy, his support will include a large majority of the vote down here."

"Yes, and that is what Judy and I have been working for. Her

influence in the mountains, when she gets ready to give the word, will settle the question of election. But Judy is practising psychological therapeutics. She wouldn't recognize the words, but they represent the facts. Her sole interest in this thing is to brace Boyd up by showing him that his fellow men believe in him. To that end she has planned to secure as heavy a vote for him as possible down here among the planter people. To that end she has held back all intimations of her purpose in the mountains. To that end she arranged with Butler to withdraw from the senatorial contest and run for the lower house instead. Of course you understand that she means to elect him to that."

"No, does she?" asked Towns in astonishment. "I hadn't thought of that. How astonishing!"

"Well, it is only a conjecture of mine, but it is what is going to happen. Judy always pays her debts to the last cent. In this case, by his own withdrawal Butler throws every Democratic vote in the district to Boyd, and you don't imagine, do you, that he did that without prospect of a recompense? Of course Judy negotiated it, and it is my conjecture that the price she is to pay is the mountain vote for Butler's election to the House of Delegates, which, with the Democratic vote down here, will elect him. Of course I know nothing about the matter. It is only that I can see through a millstone if there is a hole in it. And besides I know Judy's ways. She doesn't care a fig for this election except to make it serve her purpose of setting Boyd up again and making him feel that he is Westover of Wanalah."

"I see," answered Jack; "and the old woman would do anything in reason, I suppose, to aid in the accomplishment of that purpose?"

"Anything in reason? Yes. And anything out of reason too. What is it you have in mind?"

"Well, I want Judy to give a frolic of some kind, and I'll take Miss Danvers to it. Can you arrange that?"

"Easily, if it is likely to benefit Boyd. But I don't see—"

"Of course you don't. But I tell you it will do more for his rejuvenation than would his unanimous election to the Senate. Of course he must be there, and so must Miss Danvers. I will take care of the rest."

"What is it you're up to, Jack?" asked Farnsworth in not unnatural curiosity.

"I shall not tell you, except that I want Miss Danvers and Boyd Westover to meet casually. Besides, Miss Danvers is an interested and sympathetic student of Virginia life, and I want to show her the mountain side of it before she goes back to Boston. How soon can you arrange the thing, Carley?"

"Well, let's see. Edgar Coffey, who is not supposed to know me by sight or by name is to be here to-night. He will see Judy tomorrow, some time, and deliver my messages about Butler's withdrawal and the rest of it. Will next Saturday do for the party?"

"Yes, if you can arrange it so soon."

"Judy does things promptly, when she is minded to do them at all, and in this case she is sure to be so minded. You may safely invite Miss Danvers to be one of the guests at next Saturday's

frolic. Now you must go to bed. You had a hard day yesterday, and made a brilliant speech, and of course you danced all night with Miss Danvers. Since then you have ridden fifteen miles with a load on your mind. It is time for you to take some rest. The front room in the west wing is prepared for you. Go!"

XXXIV
JUDY'S PLANS OF CAMPAIGN

The events at Fighting Creek threw Webb's political advisers into something like panic. They realized that Butler's withdrawal and Colonel Conway's support of Westover's candidacy would give Westover a majority vote in the piedmont section of the district. If Webb was to win at all, it must be by securing the mountain vote. To that end they sent all their speakers into the mountains, arranging that Webb himself should speak there twice or thrice a day. He was a plausible fellow, persuasive in his oratory and capable of verbal acrobatics of a kind likely to be attractive to simple minded audiences. But chiefly, Webb's backers relied upon negotiations with Judy Peters, whose control over the mountain vote of her own county was almost absolute, and whose influence over the vote in other mountain parts of the district was apt to be controlling if she saw fit to exercise it, as in many cases she did not.

In the present campaign Judy had given no sign. Apparently she was altogether indifferent. If she should persist in that indifference, then a vigorous speaking campaign might turn the

battle; but if she could be induced to take an active interest in Webb's election, the result would be secure.

So Webb and some of his most persuasive lieutenants were set to "arouse Judy's interest." They visited her immediately after the Fighting Creek disaster, and told her of the danger that impended. She entertained them with glorified fried chicken, stewed shoat, salt pork with cream gravy, apple butter, and limitless apple jack, but she declined to commit herself. To all their solicitations she replied in carefully equivocal phrases that left them pleased, encouraged, but by no means satisfied.

"The old gal's a-goin' back on us, it's my belief," said Foggy when these results were reported to him.

"You are certainly mistaken," Webb answered. "I had a long, confidential talk with her and I came away from the conference with an unshakable conviction that she means to throw her uttermost influence in my favor."

"Did she say so in plain words?" asked Foggy.

"No, not precisely that, but she certainly intended to give me that impression. You don't know Judy, or you would understand. She likes to keep one hanging on, as it were. She never commits herself by definite promises. Sometimes she doesn't let even her henchmen know how they are going to vote until the night before election. We can safely trust ourselves in Judy's hands."

"Well, I hope you're right, but I'd feel a good deal better," responded Foggy, "if we had a definite promise."

No sooner was the visit of the Webb forces over than Judy

turned to Sapphira and said:

"Go an' hang my red petticoat on the frontmost panel o' the fence, an' leave it there."

"Is Edgar Coffey a-comin' long by here this evenin'?" asked the girl who had rendered this service on several former occasions.

"Don't be too knowin', Sapphiry, an' don't git yourself into a inquirin' frame o' mind. That there red petticoat's enough fer you to think about jest now."

About sunset Edgar Coffey came slouching up the road, apparently intending to pass the place without stopping, but when he saw the red petticoat hanging over the top rail of the fence he seemed suddenly to remember that he wanted a drink of water from Judy's glacial spring, with something to temper its coldness perhaps. So he leaped the fence, and passing around the house, toward the spring, confronted Judy at her back door. Quite casually she invited him in, and after her hospitable habit she brought forth a decanter of apple jack for his entertainment.

"Now drink sparin'-like, Edgar," she said, "'cause you's got business to ten' to an' I don't want none o' that confusion o' tongues the Bible tells about. But mend your drink an' git over your tired an' then I'll give you your pinters."

Edgar Coffey was habitually a sober man. That is to say he never drank liquor that he must pay for; but when the tipple cost him nothing he was apt to make up for lost time. Judy, whose habit it was to know all about the men she dealt with, knew this, and upon occasion tempered her alcoholic hospitality with

prudent reserve. If she had had no mission for Edgar Coffey to fulfil, he might have emptied the bottle without interference on her part. As it was, she withdrew the supply as soon as he had filled his little tumbler for the third time, and as soon as he had emptied it again she addressed herself to the business in hand.

"That there William Wilberforce Webb has been here with his gang, to 'lectioneer me," she said. She would have used some opprobrious epithet with Webb's name if she could have thought of one that seemed to her more scornful than the man's own cumbersome name did.

"Yes, I knowed they was a-comin'," answered Edgar.

"Never mind what you knowed. Listen to me. You is to go an' git Morris Bryant an' Lem Fulcher, an' Wyatt Fletcher an' two or three others, an' 'tend his speakin' meetin's, specially' them as don't lay close to here—them as is held in the furder parts o' the mountings where may be a word from me don't count for as much as it does round here."

"Is we to raise a racket an' break up the meetin's?"

"No. Yous is to be as meek as Moses, an' ax questions, jest as ef you was doubtful like an' a seekin' information. But you ain't to ax William Wilberforce Webb none o' the questions, 'cause he mout answer 'em an' spile the game. 'Tain't answers we want, but effec's. You is to ax everybody you see, what that feller's wagon-load o' name means. An' you's to wonder, jest curious like whar he got it to tote round. An' then you can sort o' explain your curiosity by sayin' you's heard somewhere's as how William Wilberforce is one o' the biggest abolitionists, an'

wonder whether Webb is his nephew or his son, an' if Webb ain't maybe a abolitionist in disguise, a tryin' to git into the Legislatur. Ef anybody answers your questions an' tries to explain, you can jest say, 'Well, I dunno nothin' 'bout it, only it looks sort o' 'spicious like,' an' go away an' hunt up another crowd. You know how to do a sneakin' thing like that, Edgar, better'n anybody I ever seen, an' the men I's named fer your feller sinners ain't no slouches at that sort o' thing nuther. You's got no call to argify or say anything as anybody can pick up. You-all's business is jest to ax questions, raise suspicions an' make impressions."

She chuckled as Edgar winked at her in token of complete comprehension, and as she did so she muttered:

"That feller's name'll be the death of him yit."

Then she added:

"Now you can have another pull at the apple jack, Edgar, an' then you must be off, fer they's a big Webb gatherin' 'pinted fer to-morrer over at Olivet church, an' I want all you fellers to be thar."

"Wait a minute, Judy," said the hulking mountaineer as he unlimbered his legs and sat upright in his chair. "I's got a message fer you from Dr. Carley Farnsworth."

"Why didn't you tell me that fust off?" asked Judy almost angrily.

"'Cause 'twouldn't 'a' been polite, like, tell you was done speakin'. 'Ladies fust' is my motto."

"All right. Limber up your tongue an' tell me what 'tis."

"Well, he says he'll cover all expenses, but you is to give a very select—them was his words—a *very select* Brunswick Stew here next Saturday an' let him bring up a wagon-load o' folks from down below. He says it'll do more'n the 'lection itself for Westover in the way you an' him is a-thinkin' of. I didn't ax him what he meant by that, 'cause he seemed to think you'd know all about it. Oh, he said you must be sure to send a partic'lar invite to Westover. He's to speak over at Cob Station Friday."

Judy received the message placidly, and, without comment upon it, hurried Edgar Coffey away on his mission.

"Well," she said to herself presently, "Carley Farnsworth ain't no fool; but I'd give somethin' purty to know how he expects me to make a Brunswick Stew this late in the fall when they ain't a tomato or a ear o' green corn left alive in all the land."

Then suddenly she called for her three sons, Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, and Theonidas, who happened to be at home at the time.

"We's a goin' to give a barbecue nex' Saturday, right out in the patch o' red oak an' black gum woods. So you's got to git to work. Kill an' dress a shoat an' two lambs an' 'bout a dozen chickens, an' hang 'em in the spring house to cool. Then you three haul out the lumber from the corn crib an' knock up a lot o' tables. No, Daniel Webster an' Henry Clay can ten' to that, while Theonidas digs the roastin' pits an' chops some oak an' hickory wood to roast with. Chop it short, Theonidas, an' split it fine, so's it'll go to coals quick."

After she had given these orders and instructed Sapphira as to duties that must devolve on her, she busied her mind with other things relating to the affair. First of all she filled and lighted her pipe and sat down in a big rocking chair to "do a little studyin'."

"Very select," she mused. "That means I mustn't let the fellers drink too much. I can ten' to that, so they ain't no bother. He's a goin' to bring a lot o' stuck-ups with him. That's all right, an' I'll make 'em think we's purty nigh on to bein' sort o' civilized ourselves. Le's see; Burch Wrigley an' Lewis Vance an' Jim Woodson won't do. They'd go round chawin' meat an' a holdin' it in their han's what hain't been washed sence Noah's flood cleaned things up, like. Them fellers ain't to have no invites. I'll send 'em a feed in a bucket instid.

"Le' me see! Jim Wood's a-goin' down to the speakin' at Cob Station, Friday. I'll tell him to tell Boyd to come up here Friday night. Then I'll have him on the ground fer Saturday. Oh say, Judy, I'll send a invite to William Wilberforce Webb! It'll be good fun to see him when he fin's out what sort o' party I's got, an' oh Jemimy! When he fin's Boyd here! An' jes' ten days 'fore the 'lection too! It'll be fun all over the woods!"

And Judy was so pleased with her little device for amusement that she chuckled over it for full ten minutes afterward. She wound up her chuckling with the exclamation:

"William Wilberforce Webb! Blue lightning what a name! By the time Edgar Coffey an' them fellers is through with him he'll wish he'd boxed up that name an' put it in his cellar 'fore ever he come up into the mountings. An' I'll string out the whole o' that name every time I speak to him on Saturday."

Having thus settled upon her arrangements and set them going, Judy turned her meditations into another channel.

"Of course Carley Farnsworth knows what he's about, but I don't. May be I can figger it out, though. He sent word as how this thing would do more good to Boyd than the 'lection itself. I reckon it somehow tetches on his trouble with that gal what's been a preyin' on his mind. I reckon that's it, an' Carley sees how to make it patch things up like. Course that's it. They wouldn't be no sense in it ef that wasn't the meanin'. All right. Ef we can straighten things out, twix' Boyd an' the gal, they won't be no more trouble o' no sort 'bout him. They ain't never no cause to worry 'bout a feller that's got a big office an' a little gal all to wunst, I reckon."

XXXV
A MOUNTAIN TOP REVELATION

The barbecue at Judy's was successful in every way. Jack Towns and Carley Farnsworth took two crowded wagon-loads of young women up the mountain, starting early in the morning, and there were a dozen or twenty young men on horseback to complete the piedmont contingent. Boyd Westover was already at Judy's, and the Queen had summoned all the presentable mountain folk, male and female, to the feast and frolic.

Millicent had begged Margaret to go, but there were conclusive reasons why she should not, some of which she

mentioned in excuse and some of which she forbore to mention. Her aunt was really ill, as a result of shock. Her father was by no means well. She herself was in distress, and above and beyond all, she did not wish to meet Boyd Westover. She could conceive of nothing more embarrassing than a meeting with him under the circumstances. She did not say so to Millicent, but Millicent understood, and Millicent had plans of her own, in aid of which, as Jack Towns had clearly set forth, to her, this expedition had been organized.

Another absentee, whose absence Judy resented rather angrily and vituperatively, because his absence robbed her of anticipated fun, was William Wilberforce Webb. He was on his way to Judy's when he learned that Boyd Westover was there. Then suddenly he remembered some engagement that took him in a different direction and far away from the festivity. He sent an elaborately apologetic and rhetorically grandiloquent letter of apology, which Judy did not read further than the opening sentences that announced his inability to be present.

Having dug so much of meaning out of the rubbish of words in which it was hidden, she muttered:

"The durned coward!" and cast the letter into the fire.

But there was fun enough and to spare. The mountaineers understood that this was a show, that they were the performers and that the guests from the piedmont region were the audience. They put forth their utmost endeavors to entertain, and they were abundantly successful. Their contests of strength and agility, their exhibitions of skill with the rifle, in throwing "rocks" at a minute mark, and in other ways, won a degree of applause that

might have satisfied even the morbid desires of an opera company.

Millicent was standing by Westover's side, talking of indifferent things, when some change of program in the athletics created an unannounced intermission. She seized upon the occasion for the accomplishment of the purpose that had brought her thither.

"There must be a grand view," she suggested, "from the top of that rock up there."

"There is," he answered, "and I'd like you to enjoy it. Will you mind walking—or perhaps I should say climbing—up there?"

She responded gladly and the two set off. The climb was not an easy one, and it was quite half an hour before they reached the summit. When they arrived there Westover led his companion to the best points of observation, but he was disappointed to find that her enthusiasm was less than he had hoped.

"You don't care much for the views after all," he ventured to say, half reproachfully.

"Yes, I do. Or rather, I should enjoy them intensely, if it were not that I have something on my mind, something that it is my duty to do and that I fear I shall go wrong in doing. It was for that that I came up here with you, Mr. Westover, in order that I might talk with you apart from the crowd down there."

She paused timorously, and nervously stripped the glove she

had unconsciously removed from her hand. By way of encouragement, Boyd Westover said:

"Go on. I shall be glad to hear anything you have to tell me."

She remained meditatively silent for half a minute more. Then she asked, with great, open, honest eyes looking into his:

"Mr. Westover, can you, do you believe a woman—in the same way that you take a man's word, I mean? If Mr. Towns, or Dr. Farnsworth, should solemnly assure you of the perfect truth of anything they might have to say to you, you would believe him as implicitly as if his statement were a fact within your personal knowledge. Can you believe a woman's solemn assurance in the same way and to the same extent?"

"When you are the woman making the statement, yes!" he answered gallantly, but with an assurance of sincerity in his voice, and with a still more emphatic assurance of sincerity in the eyes that looked straight into hers. "I shall believe anything you tell me as firmly as I believe in my own existence, or in the stability of the rocks under our feet."

"I thank you sincerely," she said, with that Bostonian fulness of expression that had peculiarly charmed all the Virginians who had enjoyed a meeting with her. "Now I'll make the statement that you are to believe as absolutely true."

She paused, as if framing her utterance carefully. After a moment she said:

"In what I am going to say to you, and in seeking this opportunity to say it, I do not represent anybody but myself.

Especially I do not represent Margaret Conway."

He started a little at the name, and she observed the fact, but she went on, not heeding it.

"Indeed in telling you what I am going to tell you, I am violating Margaret's earnest and express commands. Perhaps I am even violating a confidence of friendship. I don't know, and it makes no difference. It is my duty to tell you, and I'll do that duty at all hazards. It involves the life-long happiness or unhappiness of two persons whom I hold in affectionate regard."

By this time Westover, nervous, restless, troubled and enthusiastic as he was, was wrought up to the verge of delirium.

"Tell me!" he cried earnestly. "Tell me quickly! I can endure the suspense no longer."

In reply the girl, who had completely recovered her self-control, said very deliberately:

"What I have to tell you may perhaps explain many things that you have not hitherto understood. It is this: the letters you wrote to Margaret Conway at the time of your trouble were never delivered to her; the letters she wrote to you at that time were never posted. That is all."

"How do you know this?" he asked, seizing her by the shoulders as if intent upon shaking the answer out of her. "Do you *know* it or is it only conjecture? Tell me, quick, how do you know it?"

"I have seen the letters," she answered, calmly enjoying his

half-mad excitement.

"But how do you know mine were not received and hers not mailed?"

"I have seen them," she answered. "Yours were not opened and Margaret had never seen them. Hers were addressed and stamped, but bore no postmarks. Be perfectly sure, Mr. Westover, that I know all I say."

"But who interfered? Why were the letters stopped in transit?" he asked almost angrily.

"That I am not free to tell you. I am concerned only for you and Margaret. The rest concerns another person, and I have no right—"

"Was it Colonel Conway? Did he—"

"Mr. Westover, you know Colonel Conway. Therefore you know it was not he, just as you know that he isn't a coward or anything else dishonorable. Now please don't ask me any further questions. I have already violated obligations, I suppose. At any rate I have put you in possession of the essential facts. The rest lies with you. We must go down the hill now."

The two started off together, but before they had journeyed far, Westover stopped suddenly and, taking both the girl's hands in his, said fervently:

"I thank God, and I thank you, Millicent Danvers. To the end of my life I shall thank you. Now let us be off, for I must get away from here."

She did not ask him why, but she understood and approved.

XXXVI
THE MEETING AT THE OAKS

As the two neared the scene of Judy's festivities, Millicent suddenly stopped and, looking straight into Westover's eyes, asked:

"You are very sure you believe me, and that I have acted upon the prompting of conscience alone?"

"Millicent Danvers, I never believed anything in my life more confidently than I do that."

"And do you think I have done right?"

"Right? Yes. You have saved two lives from wreck and wretchedness. Could anything be righter than that? You have a sensitive conscience; bid it rest easy in the consciousness of a brave deed well done. Charles Kingsley says: 'God gives it to few men to carry a line to a stranded ship.' That is what God has given it to you to do. Be sure I shall not compromise you in any way, and may God always bless you!"

Both were too much overwrought to indulge in further speech. They hurried on to the house, and Boyd went instantly to Judy, saying:

"I'm sorry to miss the rest of the frolic and especially the evening dance; but I find I must leave immediately."

"That's all right, Boyd, ef it's becase o' the gal," answered Judy with womanly sympathy. "Jest set still here fer five minutes an' I'll have Theonidas bring your horse round to the road back o' the house, so's nobody'll see you a settin' off. Say, Boyd, that Boston gal's awful nice. I wish 'twas her."

"Let Jack Towns dance with her to-night, Judy, and you'll be satisfied."

Five minutes later Westover was in the saddle and hurrying down the mountain as rapidly as his concern for the welfare and the bones of Rob Roy would permit. That enthusiastic quadruped had an unconquerable preference for the faster gaits familiar to horse flesh, and, if left to himself, he would have gone at a gallop all the way down the mountain. But his master, with a discretion superior to his, restrained him, permitting only a trot on the levels and compelling what the horse evidently regarded as an absurd walk down the steeper inclines.

In spite of all restraints the good horse carried him over the twenty-mile distance in little more than two hours' time, and it was at the gloaming time that he approached The Oaks.

He had formed no plans when he rode away from Judy Peters's place. His first thought as he went down the mountain was that he would go to Wanalah, write a letter to Margaret, enclose it in a note to Colonel Conway and send it by a special messenger. He abandoned that program promptly, and after framing and rejecting several others of less elaborate formality,

he resolved to go straight to Margaret.

"I have a right to do that," he said to himself. "Now that I know what her attitude has been it is not only my privilege but my duty to deal directly with her, to tell her what I have learned, to tell her of the misapprehension I have labored under, to renew my suit and to learn from her lips what her present feeling is. I know that, already, but it will be reassuring to have her tell me of it. God bless that Boston girl and her New England conscience and her courage! For it required courage of a high order to do what she did. Not many people would have dared do it."

So thinking he rode into the house grounds at The Oaks while the last glow of daylight was fading out of the sunset side of the sky.

Seeing a young negro, he dismounted and tossed the rein to the boy, saying:

"Don't stable him; just walk him back and forth till he cools down and then hitch him somewhere handy; I shall ride again presently."

Walking rapidly up the path he stepped upon the porch, and there met Margaret face to face for the first time since he had gaily bidden her adieu at midsummer.

"Margaret!" he exclaimed.

"Boyd!" she answered, and a moment later he had taken her in his arms and caressed her fervently.

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"MARGARET!" . . . "BOYD!"—*Page 436.*

"You have come at last!" she said as she withdrew herself from his embrace.

"At last?" he asked in answer. "It was only two hours ago that I learned that I might come at all. I was twenty miles away then, and I am here now, here to claim fulfilment of the most glorious promise a woman ever made to a man—here to claim you, Margaret."

"I know," she answered, as they sank into porch chairs. "Don't let us waste time in explanations, now that they are so utterly unnecessary. Just let us be happy."

The conversation thus begun lasted until near supper time. It is not necessary to report it for the information of any who have been lovers, and as for the rest, they would never understand.

Just before the late supper time Westover suddenly awakened to his duty.

"I must see your father," he said. "Without his permission I have no right to consider myself a guest in his house."

Margaret, knowing her father's perplexed eagerness to see Westover and be reconciled with him, smiled as she answered:

"I'll send for Father."

She did so, and presently the old Colonel came limping into the porch. As he approached, Margaret slipped into the house, leaving the two men alone.

They greeted each other with a cordiality that rendered all

explanations and apologies needless, but Colonel Conway insisted upon explaining and apologizing.

"I've been a coward, Boyd! I've been an abject coward."

"I don't know any other man living who would dare say that, Colonel."

"Perhaps not. No, I suppose not. Still it is true, and I'm profoundly ashamed of it."

"Now my dear Colonel Conway," interjected Westover, "let us not talk of that. This is the happiest hour of my life and, I hope, of Margaret's. Let us not spoil it by discussing disagreeable things which are completely past and gone."

"But there are some things that I must explain, Boyd, and you must listen to me. I ought to have gone to you in Richmond at the time of your trouble. I didn't, because I was forbidden to do so by an authority which I was cowardly enough to yield to. Margaret—great woman that she is—told me then I was a coward, and she was right. When you came back to Wanalah my purpose was to go to you at once, but the same authority forbade, giving me a sufficient reason in the fact that you had written no line to Margaret. I know better now, but only within the past few days. Under that mistaken belief I refused to join in your nomination. A few days ago a catastrophe here revealed the truth to both Margaret and me. She appealed to me to do what my sense of honor might suggest. That meant that I should go to you at once, grasp your hand, tell you of the misapprehension and of the facts that removed it, and ask your pardon. No, don't interrupt. You are generously disposed to

spare me, but I shall not consent to be spared. My first impulse was to do what Margaret expected of me. But an appeal was made to me to spare another—the culprit in the case—and I weakly yielded to it. I compromised with my conscience and my honor. I wrote to Dr. Farnsworth the letter you have doubtless seen, and I did no more. It was all cowardice, and I am heartily ashamed of it. Will you forgive me, Boyd?"

"Colonel Conway," answered Boyd with intense earnestness, "no man with a cowardly nerve in his body could ever have made the manly self-accusing apology you have offered to me. You grievously wrong yourself. It was not cowardice that restrained you, but a tender and generous consideration for a helpless person who was entitled to every protection you could give her. Now let us talk no more of this! Let us never refer to it! Let it be a dead thing of a dead past—a thing done with, forgotten, banished forever from our minds!"

"You are very generous," answered the now feeble old man. "But that is not a thing to be wondered at. You are Westover of Wanalah, and for nearly two hundred years that name has stood for all there is of gentle, generous and courageous manhood. You'll stay to supper of course?"

"No, Colonel. I have much to do to-night. I must ride at once—as soon as I shall have said 'good night' to Margaret."

It took a considerable time for the saying of that good night.

"I'll be over here at ten o'clock to-morrow morning, Margaret," he said, "and we'll go for a ride. I'll have a servant bring over a young filly I have in my stables, that you'll be

delighted to ride. She's spirited, but as gentle as a zephyr—that's what I've named her—'Zephyr'—and her paces are perfect. She's to be yours from this time forth. I personally educated her for you last summer, before—before the trouble came."

"But to-morrow is Sunday; aren't we to go to church?"

"No. We are going to Wanalah, so that you may look over the place and see what alterations are needed. I must tell you, Margaret, that an investment,—very wise or very lucky, I don't know which,—made by my father in my name, has suddenly borne fruit, making me, Jack Towns says—and he has charge of the business—three times over the richest man in Virginia. The wealth is of no consequence in itself, but I mention it so that in deciding what shall be done at Wanalah you need have no fear of expense before your eyes."

"But church is at Round Hill, to-morrow, almost under our noses. If we don't attend, what will people say?"

"Hang 'people.' We are 'people' now. We're happy and we're going to stay happy. And after all what can they say? They'll say that Boyd Westover and Margaret Conway are very much in love with each other, and we don't care to contradict that, do we?"

"I do not," she answered.

"Neither do I. So let them say on. They'll wonder when it is to be, and I'm wondering about that myself now. When is it to be, Margaret?"

"I don't know. Of course I must have time to make a

trousseau."

"What for?" he asked. "Hang the trousseau, or make it after we're married. What's the difference? You've plenty of clothes, and you're charming in any of them."

"But Boyd, dear,—"

"But Margaret dear," he interrupted, "you see our marriage was to have occurred in the late summer or early fall. It has already been unreasonably delayed. It is nonsense to delay it further. Think a little, and think quick, and name a day."

"If you must have it so, I suppose it must be so. You are the Master now. And besides—"

She did not finish her sentence till he challenged it, saying:

"Besides what, Margaret?"

"I was only thinking," she answered, "that I can't persuade Millicent to stay much longer, and I do want her to be my first bridesmaid. You see, Boyd, it isn't only that I'm very fond of her —I am *very grateful to her*."

"So am I," he answered with emphasis, but neither the one nor the other said aught of the occasion for gratitude. They both understood. But he eagerly grasped at the helping hand:

"Then you *must* name a very early day, or she will have flitted."

"Let me see," she said; "the election will occur one week

from next Tuesday; that is ten days hence. Our wedding shall occur on the day after you are elected Senator."

"But suppose I should not be elected?"

"In that case the day will come round just the same," she said; "but you will be elected. I have Dr. Farnsworth's positive assurance that you will be elected by the largest majority any candidate ever received in this district, and Dr. Farnsworth is a man who deals exclusively in facts, never in conjectures."

"Then you have concerned yourself about my election?"

"How could it be otherwise? As I told you in the long ago, Boyd, I am not a woman who loves lightly or lightly forgets."

"I know," he answered. "Your father is taking his supper alone. Go to him at once. I'll mount and away."

XXXVII
THE OLD CLOCK TICKS AGAIN

"It's a rambling old place," Westover said, as he and Margaret strolled through the vast spaces of the Wanalah rooms with their highly polished white ash floors, their wealth of stoutly built, time darkened furniture, their ancient, oaken wainscots and their hospitably spacious fireplaces. "I suppose a modern judgment would say tear it down and build anew—"

"Then the modern judgment shall have no welcome when I am mistress here. Tear down Wanalah, with its walls of thick masonry, its generously large rooms, and its memories? Only a vandal would do that. I'll tell you, Boyd, there is only one change I'd like you to make here."

"I'll make it. What is it?"

"There's a beautiful old standing clock in the dining room that has never ticked since I have known Wanalah. Won't you have somebody put new works into it and set it going again?"

"Yes," he answered, "but it shall not run until you and I return from our wedding trip and you enter the house as its mistress. We'll go to it together then and set it going, to mark time in a new era at Wanalah."

"You are very good and thoughtful and tender, Boyd. I suppose you are a trifle romantic also, but I shall certainly not quarrel with that, now or ever."

"Speaking of our wedding trip, Margaret," he said eagerly, "what is it to be? We can go anywhere you like and everywhere you like and for as long as you like."

"Am I really free to choose?" she asked, looking into his eyes.

"Yes, really and absolutely."

"What I would like best, then, would be to go up to that place of yours in the high mountains. It was there that you suffered most on my account; I want you to rejoice and be happy there,

Boyd, by way of recompense."

"But it's rough living up there, Margaret; perhaps you'd find it ____"

"I'd find it delightful. How could it be otherwise, with just you and me there?"

"It shall be so then. Nothing could delight me more. I'll get Theonidas to carry my things back up there at once. They are still at Judy's. And we'll take along with us whatever baggage you want."

"That will be very little. It is the air, the sunshine, the rain, the freedom and *you*, Boyd, that I want. And besides, you know you have forbidden me to have a trousseau. I'll be a wood nymph or a water witch or something of that sort, and such beings do not bother with baggage, I suppose."

During the next week, Westover was speaking day and night, all over the district. He really cared nothing for the office he was running for, but it was his temperament to do his mightiest to win in any contest in which he had a part, and in this case he had the additional impulse to gratify Margaret by securing the biggest majority possible for his election.

Meanwhile, in his enthusiasm, Colonel Conway forgot all about his gout, and busied himself in the fulfilment of the promise he had long ago given, to fill The Oaks at the wedding time with the most brilliant company the country could furnish, and to have feasting there of a kind that might make the occasion

memorable. He even made a journey to Washington and fairly forced his old commander in the Mexican War, General Scott, to be a guest, honored and honoring the occasion.

Judy Peters was also an honored guest. When Westover learned at last what part she had borne in his nomination and in his campaign, he rode all the way up to her place to persuade her to come. And when the time arrived, he sent the Wanalah carriage to fetch her. She appeared at the ceremony, in a gown more gaudily gorgeous than any that had been seen in that region since "the time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary."

Colonel Conway devoted his particular attention to her. Among other special courtesies he shared with her a bottle of precious old Madeira—too precious, as he told her, to be "wasted on a lot of young fellows whose palates are not educated up to it."

She drank the wine with relish, and after the third thimbleful glass she gave judgment.

"It's better 'n apple jack, but in the matter o' taste, 'tain't quite up to peach an' honey, is it now, Bob?"

Since his boyhood nobody had ever ventured to address Colonel Conway as "Bob," but as it came from Judy's barbaric and privileged lips, he rather liked it.

The wedding was held in the early morning because Boyd Westover had explained, without a hint of whither they were bound, that he and Margaret had a long journey to make before nightfall.

The wedding morn was on the day following the election, and the returns were all in. Carley Farnsworth summarized them to the company by announcing that Westover was elected by the vote of more than three-fourths and nearly four-fifths of the citizens of the district.

Then he added:

"And Sam Butler, Democrat, is elected to the House of Delegates, chiefly by the mountain vote, which seems to have been pretty nearly solid for him."

Judy Peters beamed upon Colonel Conway, and ventured the remark:

"'Tain't no use a-votin', Colonel, ef you don't stick together an' vote to 'lect. That's our way up in the mountings."

"Ah, Judy," the Colonel replied, "I'm afraid you're a sad sinner. I'm afraid you manipulated that vote."

"I ain't close acquainted with that big word o' your'n, Bob, but I was purty nigh right in my jedgment as to how this here 'lection was a goin' to come out. Say, Bob, what d'you think that there comb-cut rooster William Wilberforce Webb thinks of hisself by now? I wonder ef he'll unload some o' that name?"

Westover and his bride left as soon as the ceremony was over, but Colonel Conway kept the festivities going all day, and there was a dance at night.

The occasion was rich in opportunities for Jack Towns, and, with the alert energy which was characteristic of him, he made the most of them. When, two days later, he left for Boston as Millicent's escort, there was no room for doubt in anybody's mind as to the outcome of his visit to the blue hills of Milton.

It was a month later, and winter had begun, when Westover and Margaret—just entering the house—went to the clock and set it going. She said something—no matter what. He said nothing, but gathering her head to his breast, he caressed her. Words seemed superfluous.

THE END.

* * * * * *

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[The end of *Westover of Wanalah* by George Cary Eggleston]