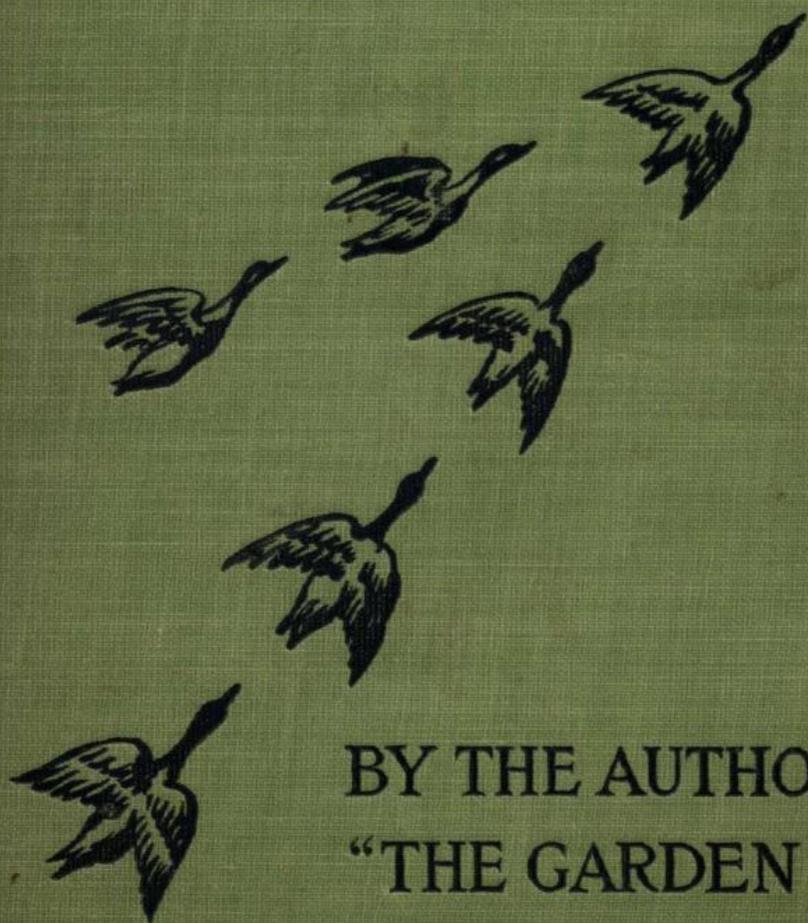


THE OPEN WINDOW



BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE GARDEN OF A
COMMUTER'S WIFE"

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The Markis and the Major. (*See page 15.*)

THE OPEN WINDOW

TALES OF THE MONTHS

TOLD BY

BARBARA

AUTHOR OF "THE GARDEN OF A COMMUTER'S WIFE,"
"PEOPLE OF THE WHIRLPOOL," ETC., ETC.

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IS INSCRIBED TO
REV. ALLEN E. BEEMAN
IN RETURN
FOR A THOUGHT

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I THE MARKIS AND THE MAJOR

TOLD BY BARBARA, THE COMMUTER'S WIFE

JANUARY—THE HARD MOON

When Christmas has passed it is useless to make believe that it is not winter, even if the snow has merely come in little flurries quickly disappearing in the leaves that now lie suppliant with brown palms curved upward.

Early December is often filled with days that, if one does not compare the hours of the sun's rise and setting, might pass for those of an early spring. Sharp nights but soft noon air, meadow larks in voice down in the old fields, uneasy robins in the spruces, a song sparrow in the shelter of the honeysuckle wall, goldfinches feeding among the dry stalks of what two months gone was a scarlet flame of zinnias, or else in their rhythmic, restless flight binding the columns where the seeded clematis clings, in chains of whispered song.

All through the month the garden, thriftily trimmed, and covered according to its need, refused to sleep in peace and thrust forth its surprises. One day it was a pansy peeping from beneath a box bush, then a dozen sturdy Russian violets for the man's buttonhole, that, fading in an hour, were outlived by their perfume, while on the very eve of Christmas itself, the frosted wall flowers yielded a last bouquet, just a bit pinched and drawn like reduced gentlefolks of brave heart, whose present garb is either cherished or overlooked from a half-reminiscent pleasure in their society.

Many say that the ending of the year with Christmas week is only an arbitrary time division, and so is meaningless. But this cannot be so. The natural year has ended and it begins anew, even though we do not at once see its processes, for intervals in nature there are none, and the first law of being is emergence from unseen sleep, wherein is stamped the pattern for the after-growth.

Thus with Christmas passed, we all must yield to Winter. Playtime with its dalliance outdoors is over for man, and the little beasts lie in their lairs, except when hunger prods.

The poor, God help them, drawing their heads down into their garments, prepare to endure. They have not two or three changes of raiment to match the graded weather from September to January—the relentless hard moon of the Indian calendar. Resistance is their final set of winter flannels, which must be worn sleeping or waking.

With January the rabbit season is over, and the sturdy dogs, the merry, tireless beagles, left to themselves, abandon the trail after a sniff or two, or else return from the run with stiff, wounded feet: for does not a spear lurk in every blade of frozen stubble? and, after nosing into the house, they lie in relaxed comfort by the kitchen stove. That is, unless the thaw from their hair-set foot-pads annoys the cook (and few recognize dog needs and rights as did Martha Corkle), in which case they slink out again sheepish under reproof, and, loping uphill to the cottage, charge at Martha's kitchen door until she opens it, protesting as usual at their lack of manners and the mess "the beasties" make. This, however, is wholly from principle, because protest against dirt in any form becomes a thrifty British housewife, even though transplanted to America.

In truth all the while her heart is swelling with pleasure at their recognition, voiced as it presently is in a baying chorus, heads well thrown back, throats swelling, tails held aloft and firm, for sweet as the voice of love is hound music to the people of the English hunting country, however far from it their lives have led them. Then presently, after a meal of stew seasoned to each dog's liking (for Lark is fond of salt and likes to chew his biscuits dry and lap the gravy after, while Cadence and old Waddles, being scant of teeth, prefer to guzzle the softened food and like a pinch of sugar), they fall prone before the fire, their bellies replete, and round, pressing the floor as close as their heavy heads. Whereupon Martha heaves a sigh of deep content and seats herself in the window corner of the front room, behind her geranium pots, with her white needlework of scallop, sprig, and eyelet hole, a substantial old-time craft lately returned to favour.

This occupation also is a sign that it is winter without doubt, for not until the Christmas puddings have been made and eaten and the results have worn away, does Martha Saunders (born Corkle) sit in the bay window of her front room shedding abroad the light of her rosy face and her bright geraniums by day, while the gloom of night is pierced by her clear lamp with its gay shade, whereon an endless steeple-chase is portrayed against a screen of ruby isinglass. Here in Oaklands whoever sets a drinking trough before his door in summer-time to succour man and thirsty beasts receives so much a year from the town fathers. Why should not those who, in the dark season, set a row of jovial red geraniums behind the window-pane by day or a well-trimmed light by night, be equally rewarded? Is not the thirst for light, colour, and other home symbols as keen a desire of the winter wayfarer as his thirst for water in the torrid season?

The first New Year callers were out before sunrise this morning while the hoar-frost lay thick on the porch of father's office, for here, Whirlpool customs to the

contrary, the country doctor and his tribe expect a gentle drift of friendly visitors, as much as do the people at the parsonage, and often with them there come homespun good-will gifts.

These early guests were nameless, and left their gift upon the door-mat, where father found it. A pair of redheads, duck and drake by chance, such as the gunners at this season harvest from the still-water inside the lighthouse at the bayhead.

Any one interested in following backward the tracks these callers left would have found that they began at the edge of the bare, drifted sand beach and followed the wavering fence of the shore road until the outline of that also disappearing, the footprints crossed the upland fields to the lower end of the village street, where many of the houses, old, sedate, and self-sufficient in their ancestry, were prouder in their garb of mossy shingles than the Bluff cottages in all their bravery of new paint, and porches supported by stone pillars.

Entering by the yard of one of the humbler of these houses, through the back garden, the footsteps meandered toward the side porch that served both as well-house and wood-shed; there the owners of the feet left a similar burden of ducks on the well-worn oak door-sill instead of on the door-mat, for that was thriftily housed within. To leave it out all night would be to incur the criticism of the Misses Falcon, dealers in village patronage and censors in chief, next door, a most disastrous thing for the single dweller in the house, whose livelihood depended upon the public, as announced by a quaint glass sign, lettered in black, that filled the right-hand lower corner of the foreroom window. C. HALLET. TAILORING, NURSING, AND ACCOMMODATING, DONE WITH NEATNESS AND DESPATCH. The last of the three accomplishments meaning that in the between seasons of her more serious work, Charity Hallet would accommodate her neighbours in any way, from putting up jellies and jams for the slothful to turning carpets, or setting a house solemnly to rights for a funeral.

After leaving the yard, also by the back gate, that no telltale prints might mar the plumpness of the front walk, or jar the white rime that made mammoth cakes of the box bushes on either side the door, the footprints took a short cut to the hill road and paused at our steps, evidently with some scuffing and stamping, and none of the precautions used in approaching the other door.

Here the two sets of footprints, those of dog and man, alone told of who had come and gone, and yet we knew as plainly as if the social cardboard had been left. The overlapping, shifty human footprints, suggesting a limp or halting gait, were those of a rubber-booted man. The round pad-marks of a four-foot, with a dragging trail, spoke of a dog either old or weak in his hind quarters.

As I, answering father's call, scanned the tracks, our eyes met and we said, as

with one voice, "The Markis and the Major," whereby hangs a pleasant winter's tale. A comedy that was turned from tragedy merely by the blowing of the bitter northeast wind among the sedge grass. A simple enough story, like many another gleaned from between the leaves that lie along the village fences or the lanes and byways of the lonelier hill country.

Down in a little hut, by the bay-side, lived the village ne'er-do-weel; this was a year ago. He was not an old man in action, but at times he looked more than his fifty odd years, for life had dealt grudgingly with his primitive tastes, and besides being well weathered by an outdoor life, both eyes and gait had the droop of the man of middle age who, lacking good food, has made up for it by bad drink. Yet, in spite of a general air of shiftlessness, there was that about him still that told that he had once not only been nearly handsome, but had been possessed of a certain wild gypsy fascination coupled with a knack with the violin that had turned the heads, as well as the feet, of at least two of the village lassies of his day who, though rigidly brought up, had eyes and ears for something beyond the eternal sowings, hoeings, reapings, and sleepings of farm life. Even in his boyhood he was looked upon as a detrimental, until, partly on the principle of "Give a dog a bad name and he will earn it," he absolutely earned one by default, so to speak, for the things that he left undone, rather than deeds committed.

He was side-branched from thrifty country stock; his father, a proxy farmer and the captain of a coastwise lumber schooner, had on a northbound trip married a comely Canadian-French woman, half-breed it was whispered, who was possessed of the desire for liberty and the outdoor life, far beyond her desire to observe the village *p*'s and *q*'s. This new strain in the cool New England blood caused neighbourly bickerings, bred mischief, and had finally made the only child of the marriage a strolling vagabond, who instinctively shunned the inside of a schoolhouse, as a rat does a trap. So that after his mother died when he was sixteen, all his after days he had lived in the open by rod and gun, fish-net and clam fork, berry picking, or playing his fiddle at village picnics and other festivals.

It was at one of these festivities that he first met Charity Hallet, called in those days Cheery from her disposition that fairly bubbled over with happiness. A fiery sort of wooing followed; that is, fiery and unusual for a staid New England town, where sitting evening after evening by the best room lamp or "buggy dashing" through the wild lanes of a moonlight night or of a Sunday afternoon were considered the only legitimate means of expression. Alack! this man possessed neither horse nor buggy, or the means of hiring one, and the door of the Hallets' best room was closed to him, as well as every other door of the house. What would you

have? Swift dances snatched when some one else relieved the fiddler; meetings by stealth in the woods, intricate journeys through the winding marsh watercourses where, hidden by tall reeds, a duck boat slipped in and out, holding a half-anxious, half-happy girl, while a tall, bronzed youth either poled the craft along or sometimes pushed it as he strode beside it waist deep in water, his eyes fixed upon the merry ones beside him.

Of course discovery came at last, and Charity's father sent her to spend a winter with an aunt in another State and "finish" school there.

Meanwhile for half a dozen years the youth followed the sea and on his return found Charity an orphan in possession of the house and a snug income, and though she was still unmarried, a vein of prudence or a change of heart, just as one happens to view it, had at least diluted her romance.

"Get some employment with a name to it; I couldn't stand an idle man hanging about," she had said when man and dog (there had always been and always would be a dog following at this man's heels) for the first time entered the Hallet front door and prepared, without ceremony, to resume the boy and girl footing as a matter of course.

The man, of primitive instincts and no responsibility, had looked at her dumbly for a minute, and then the light of her meaning breaking upon him he jumped to his feet and bringing his heels sharply together, said, "I thought you were fond o' me, Cheery, and that women sort o' liked somebody they were fond of hanging around 'em," and without further ado he called the dog, and closing door and gate carefully behind him, turned from the village street to the shore road with easy, swinging gait; but from that day his fiddle never played for the village dancers.

The thrifty half of Charity Hallet congratulated the half that was longing to open door and heart to man, dog, and violin in the face of prudence and the village, upon its escape. But sometimes prudence and the wind race together, for the next year the most trusted man in the township, under cover of decorous business, made way with all of Charity's little property, except the house; and the glass sign, once used by a great aunt, was rescued from the attic rafters, placed in the forerom window; and at twenty-five Charity, who had been sought far and near, and had been wholly independent in action, began the uphill road of being a self-supporting old maid.

The man's feet never again turned toward her front gate, though the dog's did, and many a bone and bit did he get there, for the dog who grew old, evidently bequeathed knowledge of Charity's hospitality to his puppy successor, and so the years went. If mysterious heaps of clams, big lobsters from the deep fishing, delicate scallops or seasonable game appeared in the morning under the well house, no word

was spoken.

Five, fifteen, twenty years went by, and the very face of the country itself had changed and Cheery Hallet had almost forgotten how to smile. The man's natural hunting grounds being largely reclaimed from wildness, the game becoming scarcer and the laws of season and selling close drawn, like many an Indian brother of old, too unskilled to work, too old to learn, he found himself absolutely facing extinction, while in these years the drink habit had gradually crept upon and gripped him.

A few days after Christmas he was sitting outside his shore hut, that, lacking even the usual driftwood fire, was colder than the chilly sunshine, facing hunger and his old red setter dog, the Major, who gazed at him with a brow furrowed by anxiety and then laid his gaunt, grizzled muzzle against his master's face that rested on his hands. The turkey won at the raffle in Corrigan's saloon had been devoured,—flesh, bones, skin, and I had almost said feathers,—so ravenous had been the pair, for Charity Hallet being ill was tended by a neighbour, who would rather burn up plate scraps than feed tramp dogs, as she designated the Major, who as usual had come scratching at the kitchen door, and so for many days he had crept away empty.

A few days only remained of the upland open season, but for that matter the sportsmen speeding from all quarters in their motors to the most remote woodlands and brush lots had changed the luck and ways of foot hunting, and what birds remained had been so harried that they huddled and refused to rise. His duck boat was rotten to the danger point, while the clam banks that had meant a certain weekly yield had the past season been ruthlessly dug out by the summer cottagers, who herded in a string of cheap and gaudy shore houses and knew no law.

This was the plight of Marquis Lafayette Burney, fantastically christened thus at his mother's command, and called from his youth "The Markis," in well-understood derision.

Feeling the dog's caress, the man raised his head and gazed at his solitary friend, then out upon the water. The wind that ruffled the sand into little ridges raised the hair upon the dog's back, plainly revealing its leanness. Out on the bay beyond the bar the steel-blue tide chafed and fretted; within the protecting arm lay still-water without a trace of ice on it, while in and out among the shallows the wild ducks fed and at night would bed down inside the point.

Along the beach itself there was no life or sound, a wide band of dull blue mussel shells thrown up by a recent storm only intensified the look of cold, while the gulls that floated overhead carried this colour skyward, and cast it upon the clouds.

"It's come jest ter this, Maje," the Markis muttered, "there's nothin' ter eat! nothin' ter eat! Do you sense that, old man? Come fust o' the year, if we hold out to

then, we'll hev to make other arrang'ments, you and me! Town farm's a good place fer the winter, some say, and some say bad, certain sure we won't be over het up there, that's what I dre'd in gettin' in out o' the air!" Then as a new thought struck him, he cried aloud, "God! suppose they won't take you in along o' me!" and the Markis started back aghast at the thought and then peered about with blinking eyes that he shielded with a shaking hand, for the Major had disappeared.

The Markis whistled and waited. Presently from behind the dunes loped the Major carrying something in his mouth; with a cheerful air of pride he laid before his master a turkey drumstick, sand-covered and dry, the last bone in the dog's ground larder; then, stepping back with a short, insistent bark, he fixed his eyes on the Markis with lip half raised in a persuasive grin.

As the man slowly realized the meaning of the bone, his bleared eyes filled and the knotting of his throat half stopped his breath. Pulling the slouch hat that he always wore still lower to hide his face, though only gulls were near to see, he drew the Major close between his knees and hugged him. Who dares say that any man o'ersteps salvation when a dog yet sees in him the divine spark that he recognizes and serves as master?

Into the hut went the Markis, took down his gun from its rest above a tangle of shad nets that he had been mending before cold weather, picked up a pair of skilfully made duck decoys, and looked at them regretfully, saying, "A couple o' dollars would fix that boat in shape, but where's a couple o' dollars?" the last coin he had fingered having gone to pay the Major's license on instalments, the final quarter being yet due, and only two days of grace.

Still rummaging he picked up some bits of fish line and flexible wire; these he dropped into a ragged pocket together with a handful of unhulled buckwheat. Then he padlocked the door of the cabin carefully, threw his gun over his shoulder, and set off along the road that led up country, with his slow slouching gait, the Major to heel, muttering to himself,—“I hain't never done it before, I allers hunted square, but time's come when I'll jest hev ter set a couple o' snares and see what'll turn up. I know where I can place a pair o' grouse for two dollars at this time o' year, and two dollars means another week together for us,—yes, another week!”

Two hours later the Markis and the Major crept out of the lane that ran between a brush lot and stubble field on the Lonetown side of the Ridge. Both master and dog were footsore and weary, while the Markis wore a shifting, guilty look; for he had spoken truly: pot-hunter he had always been, but never a setter of snares, except for mink or muskrat. To be sure he would come to the front door to offer berries that he frankly said were gathered in one's own back lot, but this day was the

first time that he had thought to set a loop to catch a partridge by the neck instead of shooting it in fair hunting.

Straightening himself for a moment he glanced shoreward down the rolling hills, while the Major dropped upon a heap of dry leaves and dozed with twitching limbs. The sun came from behind the wind clouds with which he had been running a race all day, and suddenly the face of nature melted as with a smile and grew more tender. A big gray squirrel ran along the stone fence, a blue jay screamed, but the Markis started nervously and once more looked shoreward.

What was that flickering and glimmering far away upon the beach? Merely the sunlight flashing upon the single window of his cabin? No, a puff of smoke was running along the dry grasses from the inlet of the creek, where the men who watch the oyster grounds had beached their boat and kindled a bit of fire to heat their coffee.

Another puff, and the smoke arose in a cone the shape of the Markis's cabin that the hungry flames were devouring!

With a harsh cry the man dropped his half-made snare and fled impotently, for now indeed were the Markis and the Major homeless vagabonds!

When father, being sent for by a farmer of the marsh road who said that both man and dog had doubtless perished in the hut, reached the shore a little before sunset, he stumbled over the Markis lying among the broken sedge and seaweed, numb with cold and despair, the Major keeping watch beside.

When, after being shaken awake and some stimulant hastily forced between his lips, the Markis started up muttering a plea to be left alone, and saw who was bending over him, he whispered, for his voice was hoarse and uncertain, "It's you, Doc, is it? Well, I'd ruther you'n another! For it's all up this time; it's either go to the town farm to-night, or be a stiff, and I'm near that now. We thought mebbe we could pull through till the next shad run, Maje and me, but now the nets and all hev gone!" Then, sitting up and pulling himself together with an effort, "Would you—I wouldn't ask it of any other man—would you house the Maje, Doc, until maybe he'd drop off comfortable and quiet, or I get round again? and once in a time jest say, quick like, 'Maje, where's the Markis?' to keep me in mind?"

This time the Markis made no effort to hide the tears that washed roadways down his grimy cheeks.

"But there is no need of this," father replied, as, clearing his throat and wiping his nose, he tried to look severe and judicial, (dear Dad! how well I know this particularly impossible and fleeting expression of yours)—"I got you the promise of

work at Mrs. Pippin's only last week, to do a few light errands and keep her in split kindlings for three square meals a day, and pay in money by the hour for tinkering and carpentering, and you only stayed one morning! Man alive! you are intelligent! why can't you work? The day is over when hereabout men can live like wild-fowl!"

"Doctor Russell," said the Markis, speaking slowly and raising a lean forefinger solemnly, "did you ever try to keep Mis's Pippin in kettlewood for three square meals a day, likewise her opinion o' you thrown in for pepper, and talk o' waiting hell fire for mustard, with only one door to the woodshed and her a-standin' in it? Not but the meals was square enough, that was jest it,—they was too square, they wouldn't swaller! Give me a man's job and I'll take a brace and try it for the Major here, but who takes one of us takes both, savvy? Beside, when Mis's Pippin was Luella Green she liked to dance ter my fiddlin', and now she don't like ter think o't and seein' me reminds her!"

Here father broke down and laughed, he confesses, and with the change of mood came the remembrance that the son of the rich Van Camps of the Bluffs, whose sporting possessions dot the country from Canada to Florida, needed a man to tend his boat house that lay further round the bay, and to take him occasionally to the ducking grounds at the crucial moment of wind and weather. Thus far, though several landsmen had attempted it, no one had kept the job long owing to its loneliness, and the fact that they lacked the outdoor knack, for the pay was liberal.

In a few words father told of the requirements. Shaking the sand from his garments the Markis stood up, new light in his eyes,—“What! that yaller boat house round the bend, with all the contraptions and the tankboat painted about 'leven colours that Jason built? I'd better get to work smart in the mornin' and weather her up a bit, it 'ud scare even a twice-shot old squaw the way it is! The weather is softenin'; come to-morrow there'll be plenty o' birds comin' in and we'll soon learn him how to fetch home a show of 'em, which is what most o' them city chaps wants more'n the eatin',—won't we, Maje? Yes, Doc, I'll take the ockerpation straight and honourable and won't go back on you! Go home with you for supper and the night? That's kindly, we *air* some used up, that's so! And something in advance of pay to-morrow? and he'll let me raise a shingle and pick up what I can takin' other folks fishin' and shootin' when he don't need me? and he'll most likely supply me clothes,—a uniform like a yacht sailor's, you say? Well, I suppose these old duds are shabby, but me and they's kept company this long time and wild-fowl's particular shy o' new things, and the smell of them I reckon! Weathered things is mostly best to my thinkin', likewise friends, Doc!”

When young Van Camp, arriving at the shore one day at dawn for his first

expedition, saw his new employee and his aged dog, he shuddered visibly and for a moment inwardly questioned father's sanity; but having been about with half-breed guides too much to judge the outdoor man by mere externals, he laughed good-naturedly and abandoned himself to the tender mercies of the Markis and the Major, saying lightly as he glanced at the faded sweater and soft hat, "It's cold down here; I'm sending you a reefer and some better togs to-morrow."

So the three went out across the still-water to the ducking grounds and brought back such a bunch before the fog closed in the afternoon that Van Camp clapped the Markis on the back and declared the Major must be a Mascot, and that he deserved the finest sort of collar!

"A Mascot! that's what he is, in addition to being the wisest smell-dog on the shore!" affirmed the Markis solemnly, the eyelid on the off side drooping drolly. "All he has to do is to smell the tide when it turns flood, and he knows jest where the ducks'll bed next night!" All of which Van Camp, Junior, believed, because it seemed suitable that the dog he hired with the man should be superlatively something; and next day there arrived, together with the reefer, a yacht captain's cap, a set of oil-skins, and a great tin of tobacco,—a broad brass-studded collar, such as bull-dogs wear, but an ornament unknown to self-respecting "smell-dogs" even if, like the Major, they were *bar sinister*.

The morrow was New Year's day, and the day after, just at evening, the Markis, clad in a trim sailor suit from cap to trousers, was seen sauntering down the village street toward the cross-roads at the Centre, where his tangled trails to and from the two saloons had before-times often puzzled the Major's acute sense of smell. Behind the Markis loped the Major with drooping tail and the heavy collar, too large for his lean neck, hanging about his ears. But had not his master fastened the hateful thing upon him? That was reason enough for wearing it, at least for the time being!

Slowly the Markis passed the two saloons and nonchalantly entered the market, where he carefully selected a whole bologna and a ham! Crossing to the grocery he bought a month's provisions to be sent to "Van Camp's Boat House, for Capt'n Burney!" Then pulling on a fresh corn-cob pipe in leisurely fashion he stopped at the paint shop, from whence he took a sign board, that he carried, letters toward him; next he repassed the saloons and gradually gained the wooded lane that skirts the marsh meadows.

Once under cover he pulled off the new reefer, wrapped it around the board, and began to run, never pausing until he gained the boat house.

Throwing open the door he quickly stripped off the new stiff, confining garments, and slipped eel-like into loose trousers and the gray sweater that made him one with

the seaweed and the sands. Then drawing the old soft hat well down to his very eyes he opened the tool chest that stood under the window and, taking therefrom gimlet, screw eyes, and hooks, he mounted an empty box, and proceeded to fasten the sign he had brought over the door. When it hung exactly even and to his liking, he walked backward, slowly surveying his handiwork, talking to the dog meanwhile. "What do you think of that, Maje? You and me hev got a business, we hev! employment with a name to it! Don't yer remember what she said? No, you wasn't the dog, though; 'twere old Dave, yer granddad! There'll be jest two o' us in the business, man and dog. You know the saying as two's a company. Onct maybe I'd chose a woman partner! when they're young wimmen's prettier, but fer age give me er dog! Dogs is more dependable, likewise they don't talk back, eh, Maje?"

On the swinging white board, edged with bright blue, in blue letters he read these words aloud, slowly, and with deep-drawn satisfaction:—

THE MARKIS AND THE MAJOR.

Decoys and Fishing Tackle to Rent.

Sailing, Gunning, Fishing and Retrieving done with Neatness
and Dispatch.

Reëntering the boat house he gazed about with a sigh of perfect content, dropped into the ship-shaped bunk that was his bed, hat still on his head, and stretching himself luxuriously, said to the Major, who crouched beside, "I reckoned we'd hev ter make a change long first o' the year, and I reckon we *hev!*" The coffee-pot upon the new stove in the far corner brooded comfortably and gave little gasps before being fully minded to excite itself to boiling, while the wild blood, even a few drops of which often makes its owners think such long, long thoughts that stretch back to the dawn of things, coursed evenly on its way until a delicious sleep, such as had been unknown for months, laid its fingers on the eyelids of the Markis.

Cautiously the Major rose to his feet, looked about the room narrowly, sniffed the floor and then the air, shook his head and pawed persistently until the heavy new collar slipped over his ears and clattered to the floor. For a moment, minded to lie down again, he paused, sniffed the fresh air from the open window in the corner, then lifting the offending collar carefully in his mouth he gripped it firmly and crossed the room, jumped for the open sash, missed, tried again, and disappeared in the boat house shadows.

A loon laughed far out on the water, and the Major trembled guiltily. Gaining the beach crest he kept on to tide-water mark, where, digging deep, he buried the

offending bit of leather, covering it well, kicking backward at it, dog fashion, with snorts of contemptuous satisfaction. Then trotting gaily back he entered by the window, and soon two rhythmic snores, added to the bubbling of the overboiling coffee-pot, told that the Markis and the Major slept the peaceful winter sleep, while the sharp crescent moon of January slipped past the window, lingering over still-water to cover the bedded wild-fowl with a silver sheet.

II THE STALLED TRAIN

FEBRUARY—THE COON MOON

He was no kin to the man of Whittier's eulogy, though he might well have been; Jim Bradley was only the conductor on the milk freight that fussed and fumed its way down the valley of the Moosatuck every evening, at intervals leaving the single track road of the Sky Line to rest upon the sidings while a passenger train or the through express took right of way.

To Miranda Banks, however, Bradley seemed a hero as he sprang from the caboose, swinging his lantern, when his train took the switch and halted on the side track below the calf pastures.

To be sure his claim to heroism had, so far, rested upon the fact that both he and his vocation moved. In Hattertown very few people or things had moved these ten years past; they had groped as being between daylight and dark. The beginning of this twilight period was when the trade that gave the town both its name and reason for being, owing to change of methods and market, vanished across the low gentian meadows of the Moosatuck to install itself anew in Bridgeton, fifteen miles away. The empty factory, long and vainly offered for sale, became a storage place for the hay that speculators bought on the field from the somnolent hillside farmers and held for the winter market. At the same time the hay gave the building a good reputation among the travelling brotherhood of the back roads, who work a week and tramp on again (an entirely distinct clan from the hoboes who follow the railroad through villages and alternate thieving with stolen rides upon freight trains), and the factory became a wayfarers' lodging-house, until gradually the unpainted boards turned black and the building grew hollow-eyed as its window panes were shattered.

When man wholly forsook it, swallows and swifts brought primitive life to it again, the one nesting against its warped rafters, the others lining the chimney, now free from plaster and very hospitable, with their bracketed homes, until their flocks pouring forth from its mouth at dawn and swirling and settling at evening, seemed in the distance a curling column of smoke.

The row of cheap wooden houses where the factory hands had lived, had also mouldered away and joined the general ruin, only a starved grape-vine or rose-bush telling that they had once been homes; until, at the time I first saw the place, the most depressing of all palls seemed over it,—the shadow of a dead industry.

It was an October morning when Lavinia Cortright and I drove up into the hill

country with father, who went to see a woman who had applied for a free bed in the Bridgeton hospital, an aunt of Miranda Banks, she afterward proved to be; and while father went into the little farm-house, that had bright geraniums in the windows and wore more of a general air of thrift than any of those we had passed in the last mile of our uphill ride, Lavinia and I sauntered along the road and finally settled ourselves on a tumble-down stone wall in the midst of a wild grape-vine whose fruit was black with sun-ripeness and bore the moist bloom of the first frost.

As we gazed idly over the fields toward the river, that seemed, as we looked down upon it, to filter through the glowing branches of the swamp maples, washing their colours with it, rather than to flow between banks of earth, we sipped the pure wild grape wine where alone it may be found,—between the skin and pulp of the grape itself, a few drops to each globe,—and fell to moralizing.

“You like to find a reason for everything, Barbara,” said Lavinia Cortright, after a long pause; “can you tell me exactly why the country hereabout seems so desolate and impossible? It has all the colour and atmosphere of the perfect autumn landscape, and yet the idea of living here would be appalling.”

I had been thinking the same thing as Lavinia spoke; there was something in the very wind that blew over the ruined factory settlement that was deterrent; funerals might take place there, but how could enough impetus ever exist to cause weddings or christenings?

At this moment the door of a small building, the schoolhouse at the cross-roads immediately below, opened, and a dozen or more children rushed out pell-mell, followed by the slim form of a young woman, evidently the teacher, who closed the door and prepared to take a cross cut through the fields, the worn track leading up to the pasture bars close to where we were sitting. No bell, no whistle, no exodus of labourers from the fields to mark the noon hour, the impulsive rush of childhood breaking bounds was the only clock.

The woman disappeared in a dip of the land, and then presently her head emerged from it and the whole figure appeared again walking between the deep green bayberry bushes that make the dark patches in the waste hillside fields. She walked without either energy or fatigue, looking neither to the right nor left; the freckled face, tending to thinness, interested me from the first glance, for though it wore very little expression, it was in no wise vacant; the chin was firm, and there was a good space between the eyes, which opened wide and had none of the squinting shrewdness I have met with in my wanderings with father among remote rural communities. It was an unawakened face, and as I began to wonder what could ever come to give it the vital touch, she reached the bars and seeing us for the first time,

paused, scrutinized us slowly, and then said with a tinge of irritation in the tone:—

“I wish you wouldn’t spoil those grapes, I’m going to spice them on Saturday. I should have done it last week, but they are always better for a touch of frost.”

I straightway disentangled myself from the vine with a guilty feeling, and murmured the usual apology of the roadside depredators; that is, when they deign to make excuses, about the grapes being wild and not knowing that they belonged to any one, but my words fell upon deaf ears.

“There were full ten pounds of grapes here this morning, but with what you’ve eaten and more that you’ve shaken off, there isn’t more than six pounds left. How came you up here, anyhow? Nobody ever passes this way; even the mail-man turns ’round below at four corners. I’m Randy Banks.”

This gave me my chance to explain father’s errand. “Do you think Dr. Russell can get Aunt Lucy in?” she asked, eagerness bringing a pretty colour to her cheeks. “It isn’t the care of her we mind, Ma and I,” she added hastily, “but it’s the loneliness for her of days in winter when I’m at school and Ma out nursing mebbe; being chair-tied at best, there’s just nothing to break the time, for nothing ever happens.”

“Now that you have the Rural Free Delivery, you get your mail and papers every day without having to go down to the Hattertown post-office,” I said, trying to find a cheerful loophole.

“That’s no advantage to us, rather the other way. When town was alive and we drove down to the post-office, even if we had no mail, and we never do except the newspaper, somebody else had and maybe opened it right there and told the news for the sake of talking it over with some one else. Then market and store were in the same building and chances were you’d be reminded of something you needed by seeing it, or maybe a bit of fresh meat would look tempting and be sold reasonable, too, if it was near week-end. But to go to that box at cross-roads, though it’s only a step, and find it empty, it’s as lonesome and strange as a draught coming from a shut-up room.”

Then as she realized that she was in a way complaining of her lot to a stranger, a thing that the etiquette of the entire hill country quite forbade, she broke off, and turning toward the house, said in a perfectly unembarrassed way: “Won’t you come in? Mother will have dinner ready. She’d be pleased to see you. I have to hurry back to school to-day, for the committee man is coming to see if the old stove can be mended or if we must have a new one, for it’s never done well since Joel Fanton put a shotgun cartridge in it last winter.” Then we went in, wondering if events would ever so shape themselves that she would become an active factor on a wider path than that between the corner school and the old farm-house.

It was three years before I saw Miranda again; meanwhile, a far-away city had thrown a lariat of steel across country, and it had encircled Hattertown; a railway that ran down the valley needed a southern outlet. The survey ran by the ruined factory, and rounding Nob Hill, crossed the river below the Banks' farm, and disappeared on trestles over "calf pastures," a name given strangely enough to many a bit of waste river meadow, as if calves did not need the best of material to become successful cows.

At the sound of the first locomotive whistle, announcing that the branch road was a thing accomplished and neither a scare nor a phantom boom, the Rip Van Winkles awoke and rubbed their eyes. They had slept a half-famished sleep. Rather than push and plan a way to sell their produce, they had ceased producing.

The Sky Line Railroad had come. Cruft's store was rented as a temporary station and the name Hattertown appeared in dazzling white letters on the black sign over the door. In one room were scales for weighing freight and a baggage truck, in the other, a ticket booth took the place of the old post-boxes, while on a shelf behind the little window, a telegraph instrument ticked and told the doings of the outer world to the only man in the neighbourhood that could interpret it. Time-tables were tacked above the two benches in a corner that made the waiting-room, but the greatest excitement of all was contained in a great *poster* that was not only stuck in conspicuous places in all the settlements along the line, but put in the mail-boxes as well, announcing that a milk train would be run nightly, Sundays included, and urging all farmers, if they had no milk to market, to make immediate arrangements for producing that commodity.

The Widow Banks had three cows. A dealer in Bridgeton had tried to buy them late in the autumn when fodder was at a premium, but she had withstood temptation and taken the risk of wintering them; if she had not, Miranda would never have met Jim Bradley during the negotiations for the transportation to the city of the polished tin can that cost the little teacher many days' pay, and was regarded by her as a speculation as wild and daring as any gambler staking his all on a throw of dice, nor would this story have found its way into father's note-book.

Jim Bradley came of good up-country stock, but the yeast of desire to see the world had led him upon the shining road, freight brakeman first and now conductor. Visiting New York every other day, he seemed a travelled man of the world to Miranda, whose outside life was bounded by two trips a year to Bridgeton and the paragraphs upon racial traits, habits and customs, exports and imports contained in the Geography which she had heard droned and mispronounced annually for the five seasons she had taught at the corners.

A year had passed, and now when Jim Bradley ran his train into the siding at Hattertown, he could not have told which light he saw first, the railway signal or the well-trimmed lamp in the Widow Banks' kitchen; this light, being always kept bright and clear, was lit at sunset with the regularity of a lighthouse beacon, the reflector improvised from a tin plate being turned so that the welcoming rays met the milk train as it rounded the hills and left solid ground for the trestles between eight and half-past every evening.

As the whistle of the eight-fifteen morning train spelt *school* to Miranda, so the whistle of the milk freight, one long and two short, not only spelled but shouted *Jim Bradley*, and as a matter of course, she took her hand lantern if the night was dark, or else trusted to the moon and stars and following the now well-worn path through the corn patch to "calf pastures," reached the low shed by the water-tank almost at the moment that the engine gave its final puff, and Jim Bradley swung himself from the caboose and seeing that his rear lights were properly set, promptly forgot his train for an interval ranging from twenty minutes to perhaps half an hour, when traffic on the through express was heavy.

Widow Banks had long since announced to inquiries both of the really interested and maliciously curious order, that Randy and Jim Bradley were keeping company, though, at the same time, regretting with a sigh that his business didn't allow of evenings spent in the austere "fore room" where the one visible eye of the departed deacon's portrait done in air brush crayon, might witness the courting. Neither was it possible for Randy to exhibit him to the neighbours in a bright and shining buggy with a blue bow tied to the whip, of a Sunday afternoon, nor had they the chance for the same reason to judge of his capacity at prayer-meeting.

If either Randy or Jim had been questioned as to their relations to each other, they would have been speechless upon the subject. Neither had given the matter a thought, and therefore neither was worried by the mazes of material analysis.

Miranda simply obeyed a call that made the spot where Jim Bradley was the only possible place for her to be between eight and half past; but when the train left the siding, crossed the bridge over the Moosatuck and disappeared, she returned to the house and gave her mind up to the correction of the smeared papers whereon the youth of Hattertown were struggling along the Arithmetic road, and in striving to prepare for the puzzling questions that the school's bad boy might spring upon her on the morrow.

Jim regarded matters much in the same way, that is, all through that spring, summer, and autumn. When winter set in and the siding grew chilly, the tank shed with its little stove became the only shelter, for, without realizing why, it never

occurred to the man that the caboose with its bunk and litter of flags and lanterns was the place for Randy.

One night she noticed that Jim had a heavy cold, and the next evening she brought with her a basket in which a little pot of hot coffee and a generous wedge of equally fresh-baked mince pie kept each other warm. Jim smiled at Randy with a glance in which feigned indifference and indulgence struggled, as by way of tablecloth she spread the napkin that covered the basket, on a barrel top and motioned for him to eat, saying as she handed him a paper of sugar, "I didn't know how you like your coffee sweetened, so I brought some sugar along."

In some way the steam from that tin kettle as he looked across it, altered the perspective of his existence and changed his terminal; for the first time he wished that Hattertown was at one end or the other of the route instead of a brief turnout in the middle.

Then as Randy under his guidance dropped the lumps of sugar in the pail (cup and saucer lacking), he suddenly formulated for the first time the fact of her refinement and the difference between her and the other women that he met along the route. A sudden vision of a home other than a caboose with meals taken at depot restaurants blazed comet-like across his firmament in a way that startled—no, fairly frightened him. That night the time passed so quickly that they were obliged to hurry up hill at a pace that left Miranda flushed and with no breath for speech as she opened the narrow storm door to the back porch and swinging her lantern on a peg, turned to take the basket.

Jim Bradley looked at the girl, whose cape hung about her neck by a single fastening, its hood that she had pulled up for her head covering, falling back so that the glorious hair that was usually plastered and twisted into the subjection fitting a schoolmarm, was loosed and fell into its natural curves and waves. Then he looked out into the dark to where one of his brakemen was waving the "time up" signal lantern furiously. Buttoning his short coat with the air of making all snug and fit that a man might have who was about to face some new and dangerous situation, he stepped into the porch so quickly that Miranda was caught betwixt him and the inner door at the moment when she had raised her arms to smooth her ruffled hair.

"I want to tell you something right up and out," he said, also breathing hard from his run up hill. "That pie was the best I ever closed teeth on, better even than ever the old lady made and *she* took three prizes for mince pie running at the Oldfield Fair;" then, before Miranda's arms could drop, Jim had grasped her in a swift but complete embrace, landing a kiss at random that all the same fell squarely upon her lips, and fled down hill through the night without another word.

When Miranda returned to the kitchen this evening, she did not join her mother where she sat sewing by the reading lamp, but dropped on a bench before the open wood stove and began following the pictures the embers painted, with eyes that really took no note of outward happenings.

Widow Banks glanced at her daughter anxiously, then caught a glimpse of the smile that was hovering about her usually rather set lips, noticed the ruddy mane from which the hairpins rose in various attitudes of resentment, and glancing at the untouched task upon the table, gave a contented sigh and began to knit reminiscences of her own youth into the muffler she was fashioning for a missionary box. To be sure, she had planned a theological career for her only daughter. She was to have married a young theologian who had occupied the pulpit of the Pound Rock Church for a year and then gone to India, where by virtue of her experience as a teacher, Miranda was to help him convince the heathen, do credit to her religious training, and become a factor in the world. This plan belonged to seven years before when the girl was twenty, and it had not happened because the stubborn streak inherited from the deacon, stiffened Randy's neck and perverted her judgment to the extent of preferring Hattertown to India, and declaring to her suitor and mother in one breath that if she ever felt a hankering for the heathen she could find plenty without leaving home.

When February comes the romance of winter is over in the hill country, and this long short month brings only the reality. It is a betwixt and between month, fully as trying as its opposite, August, that time of general stuffiness, flies, and limp linen.

January had been a month of even snow and good sleighing, but a sleet storm had made the many downhill roads that converged at Hattertown well-nigh impassable with glittering ice; while in February, coughing and snuffling, as much a part of the month as St. Valentine's Day, sadly interfered with discipline at the Crossroads Schoolhouse. Miranda, under pressure, allowed herself to confess for the first time, that seven years was quite long enough for a woman to sit upon the selfsame wooden chair, or wrestle with the constitutional peculiarities of a sheet-iron stove. This stove, having been second-hand upon its arrival, was now wearing three patches through the ill-fitted rivets of which smoke and gas filtered, obscuring the wall map of North America that was at least three states behind the times.

The season and bad weather of course had some effect upon her point of view, for given June, open doors and windows, and a glimpse of the Moosatuck to draw the eye from the faded map, the most pressing of grievances would have vanished.

Somehow Miranda had never realized until now what an exasperating month

February was; formerly she had used the evenings for her spring sewing and was really glad of the forced cessation of the small events that made Hattertown's social life, but now the ice crust upon the hill slope above calf pastures made walking impossible between the house and the station siding, so that two or three and in one week five evenings went by and only the greeting of lantern signals passed between Jim Bradley and Miranda.

The next afternoon on her return from school, Miranda found a letter in the box, directed in a round, bold, and unfamiliar hand; moreover, it was for her. Therefore, as it was a man's writing it must be from Jim. Instead of opening it as she walked along, half a dozen children struggling on before or at her side, she dropped it in her pocket and then smiled to find, a few minutes later, when she reached her gate and needed a hand to open it with (the other carrying books) that it had remained inside the pocket caressing the square of paper.

Widow Banks was then "accommodating" at the house of the new ticket agent and telegraph operator, who had pneumonia, as his wife was obliged to fill his place. The Banks' house was empty save for the cat who purred before the stove, there was no necessity for seeking privacy; yet Miranda went through the kitchen and shut herself into the little storm porch before she opened the envelope, and held the sheet close to the single diamond pane in the outer door that she might read.

"Respected Friend—" the words ran, "This has been the deuce of a month with ice and tie-ups. I need to see you *Special* to-morrow night. If the run is close so I can't get up, I'll fix to have Sweezy's boy go fetch you to the depot with a team, so come *down* sure.

"Yours with Compliments,

"JIM BRADLEY."

What did the *Special* mean? Was her hero going to leave the Milk Freight for a better job? That meant a passenger or possibly a through train, and neither of these would pause on the side track at Hattertown. Or—well, there was no use in guessing; "to-morrow night" was exactly twenty-eight hours away and that was all there was to it. So Randy put wood on the fire, skimmed a saucer of cream which she gave to the cat as if in some way propitiating a powerful domestic idol, lit the lamp, though it was broad daylight, and began the preparation of curling the feathers in her best hat by holding them in the steam of the tea-kettle, and then realized that as the morrow was Saturday, she would have plenty of time for both housework and preparation.

The last Saturday morning of February did not really dawn, for the discouraged

light merely struggled with a snowstorm so dense that the rays only penetrated by refraction. A little before noon the fall ceased, but the sky would not relax, and scowled dark and sullen as if with the pain of its recent effort, the snow lay heavy on hill and lowland, covering land and water alike; and, lodging on the ice, completely obliterated the boundary of the usually assertive Moosatuck.

A few crows, cawing dismally, straggled toward what had been down stream from their cedar roosts, but all other sounds were muffled. It was almost noon before the village, headed by the first selectman with two yokes of oxen and as many ploughs, dug itself out; and a great snow-plough bound north cleared the rails for the morning mail train, now hours late. Meanwhile Mr. Sweezy, the host of the "Depot Hotel," the wit of the reconstructed Hattertown, did a thriving trade with many usually abstemious citizens exhausted by the wielding of snow shovels, in beverages that did not bear the label "soft drinks," and the ticket agent's wife in the little booth struggled with and made more incoherent the reports that came over the snow-laden wires.

In spite of the storm and the desirability of daylight, there were four souls under the magnetic influence, as it were, of those bands of steel rails, that wished it were night. Two that they might meet once more, and two in order that a distance might reach between them that it seemed likely would end in a more complete separation.

Neither couple had ever seen or heard of the other, and yet the strands were fast weaving to draw them together and make it impossible to blot either from the other's memory.

The first couple were man and maid, the second, man and wife.

Jim Bradley,—working his way slowly on the morning trip from New York in dire apprehension that the return trip would be hopelessly delayed as far as the interval at Hattertown within visiting hours was concerned,—and Miranda Banks, who looked from her watch-tower of the kitchen window over the snow waves that had enveloped all below, through which the various hay-ricks and chimney stacks emerged and seemed to drift like bits of wreckage in an Arctic sea. As she gazed she brought New England thrift to bear, and decided that hat and feathers would be an unseemly head covering on such a night, even if the meeting should be possible, and straightway put it by and began the freshening of an old hood with scraps of ribbon.

The second couple, John Hasleton and Helen, his wife, stood looking at each other across a table in the richly furnished library of one of the best modern houses of the city that was the Sky Line Railroad's eastern terminal.

Everything about the room indicated a soothing combination of good taste

augmented by money; the soft but not too profuse draperies and rugs, black oak shelves holding books of enticing title and suitably clothed, unique specimens of bronze and porcelain on table and shelf, prints upon the walls that through skill of dry point and gravers' tools reflected the faces of the past,—poet, king, warrior, gallant, and court beauty, all given an added touch of reality and animation by the glowing colours the hearth fire flashed upon them. But on the two faces that gazed across the table lay an expression of animal hatred,—no, not animal, for that is direct and primitive, while human hatred is so compounded that one unimportant ingredient is often the yeast that ferments the whole inert bulk.

The man was openly furious, both in speech and mien; the woman held herself verbally within that purely technical and outward quality of self-control that is so exasperating to the opposite side, who feels that something is at stake besides success or defeat in argument.

This couple, of the relative ages of twenty-seven and thirty odd, had been married five years, spent largely in travel and social pleasures, satisfying their various tastes by acquisitions, and passing brief winters in the city house given by an indulgent father to his only daughter on her marriage.

Until this time, no great responsibility had fallen on either to say you must or must not do this or that. But now circumstances called the husband to give his time to various interests in New York, necessitating a permanent removal.

“You forget that I have not refused to leave my home and assured social position here, and if I am willing to begin again elsewhere, you have no right to forbid this visit that will not only make everything plain, but amuse me greatly as well.” The words were reasonable, but the voice was hard, and the pointed white fingers, heavy with rings that seemed to touch the table top lightly, but in reality supported the swaying figure, were tense and cold.

“Social position be damned! I’ve had enough of it these three years and over, but if not a soul should ever again speak to you in the street, I’ll not have it said that you have spent a single night in Tom Barney’s house, much less passed two weeks there and been thrown into the arms of the crowd they travel with!”

“Don’t be coarse. Mr. and *Mrs.* Barney’s house,” corrected the woman’s voice; “and when I know that you spent innumerable week-ends before our marriage at one or more of their country places and that he proposed your name for the difficult Cosmopolitan Club and engineered your election. I wish to make this visit, I have accepted the invitation, and I am going.”

“I repeat, I will not allow my wife to sleep under the Barneys’ roof. If, with your sharp insight, you cannot grasp the reason, then you must yield obedience to what I

consider seemly.”

“If that is all, the matter is possible of arrangement,” replied the woman’s voice, growing colder than the February sleet outside.

“Then you will yield this point?”

“Yes, I will yield the point of being your wife,” and the woman, suddenly feeling the need of greater support than the touch of finger tips upon the table gave her, moved slowly toward a deep chair before the fire and dropped from view behind its screening back.

For a full minute the man stood staring at the place where she was not, then turned and crashed from the room, overturning a porcelain jar in his blind haste.

Ten minutes later the front door shut.

An hour later, Mrs. Hasleton’s maid was packing a suit case while her mistress, dressed in a street gown and seated at her desk, wrote half a dozen notes. Presently looking up, she said: “Elise, you will follow me on Tuesday, as I had arranged, with the trunks packed for a two weeks’ visit. I have written the directions for you.” Then, glancing through some time-tables, “Tell Peter to be here at two to drive me to the station.”

“A bad day for travel? Not at all; the snow packs in the streets, that in the open country blows off and amounts to nothing.”

Why she did it, she could not have told, but Mrs. Hasleton chose the least direct way of reaching her destination; and, instead of going as usual to the parlour car, entered a day coach, where she sat tapping her foot nervously, waiting for the train to pull out, without so much as lifting her heavy brown veil.

It was in itself a novel sensation, this leaving with no one to say good-by, to go to a city where no one expected her; for she had determined to spend the next two days at a woman’s club to which she belonged, going to the Barneys’ on the following Tuesday, that being the time of the invitation. She had not yet told her change of destination to Elise.

The man strode about the half-cleared streets until he was physically almost exhausted, and then entered his club, where he hid himself in a corner, curling up like a half-sick and surly dog who both craves and resents sympathy. A group of younger men entered, joking each other and harmlessly boisterous. Spying Hasleton, they proceeded to unearth him from his lair. Shouted one, “We have a scheme afoot for Sunday, and we want a steady head like yours to come along and collect us and see that we start for home straight on Monday morning.”

“Grumpy and got a cold? Nonsense, you want some lunch.”

The Milk Freight crawled in on the slippery rails at the Hattertown siding only an hour late, which was doing very well, as sleet had followed the snow and everything was a glare of ice. But now the threatening snow clouds had vanished and the stars were piercingly clear.

The Sweezy boy had gone up for Miranda Banks in a sleigh before eight o'clock, and she waited patiently in the little room outside the ticket booth, with only the two benches and the air-tight stove for company. The natives who usually gathered at the station on winter evenings were mostly in bed, tired out by snow shovelling, the few remaining having collected at Sweezy's Hotel to listen to his accounts of other February storms he had known.

Inside the booth the sick operator's wife, who was waiting until the freight and express had passed safely through before closing up, alternately dozed and started to listen to the tick-tickety-tick, that sounded to the girl outside as mysterious as the death-watch beetle in a wall.

Then the milk train came in. Jim Bradley crossed the little room and inquired the whereabouts of the through express before he saw Miranda.

"I haven't heard since Oldfield," replied the tired woman, "but I reckon you're good for an hour's holdup anyway."

The milk supply was low that night and quickly loaded, then Jim Bradley, throwing off his outer coat and pitching his cap at it, wholly relaxed and stretched luxuriously on the bench behind the stove, regardless of chilblains. For a few moments the unusually bad weather of the month, the present storm, and various bits of local news held their attention; then Bradley sat up erect, folded his arms, and said: "Now for my news. No, I won't let you guess, for if you hit it, you'd knock half the wind out of the story. I'm promoted,—first of March I'm boss of the through morning local No. 11 and can pick my own crew!"

Randy's heart sank, though she knew that this meant progress. "It's very nice," she stammered, looking down; "they must think a lot of you."

"Is that all you've got to say about it?" and Bradley fixed his eyes upon her face so that she could not avoid them.

"I guess so. What do you want me to say?"

"Which end of the line you'd rather live at; that's what's concerning me now."

When Jim Bradley's arm was free once more, the breathing from the ticket office was audible and regular, and the instrument also seemed asleep for a time and ceased its ticking. In fifteen minutes life plans were on their way to being settled, when in the midst of optimistic happiness arose a ghost called Theoretical New England Conscience.

Ten long, slender fingers were linked between ten short, heavy ones, when a few harmless words severed the conjunction. "Tell me, Jim, are you Methodist or Congregational? Ma heard up Telford way that your uncle on your father's side was a Congregational preacher, and it would seem real suitable, 'cause my father was a deacon."

Jim Bradley started as if a broken rail had suddenly confronted his engine on a curve, then he answered quietly: "Yes, uncle was. I'm not either, Randy, I'm a Roman Catholic. You see mother was out of Irish stock and she kept to her religion, and I, well, I held to it as long as she lived, and after because *it* held to me. It's a good religion for us knock-about men," he added half-appealingly. "It never forgets you and it's always there." But Miranda sat silent and drooping, white to the lips.

Jim Bradley looked at her and tried to give her time; he well knew from his early life just what his statement meant to this girl with the rigid ideas of the hill country; but because he understood, he would not say a word to force his creed upon her if she would do the same, and he told her so. Still she crouched on the bench and the only words that he could get from her were, "What would they all say?" and "Ma would never look at me again," repeated over and over.

Suddenly the instrument began a vigorous ticking. The woman started and, grasping the key, answered the sounds.

"Anything for me?" asked Bradley, glad to move and break the spell that had fallen over both.

"No—yes—wait a minute," said the operator, with a puzzled expression on her face, looking at Bradley with eyes that seemed only half awake. "You are to go right on to Bridgeton and take further orders there."

Putting on coat and hat and turning up the wick of his lantern, Jim once more faced Randy, who stood with her hands clenched in the fringe of her long cape.

"Well, it's good-night for now," he said cheerfully; then as her eyes met his he added, "Don't say it's good-by, girl; for God's sake, think it over."

"It's—it ought—it must be good-by," she whispered; "but oh, Jim, I do care, care *so* much; if only something stronger than either of us could decide and say it would be right."

"Good-night, Randy," said Jim, and the swing of his lantern was answered by the train's whistle. When it left the siding, Randy stood on the edge of the platform watching it go out over the trestles and gain speed on the level bit before the bridge, the red and green signal lights blinking at her like harlequin stars.

Sweezy's boy, who had gone into the hotel for shelter, emerged slowly and then disappeared in the barn to get the horse and sleigh. Still Randy lingered out on the

platform end.

The lights were disappearing around the curve and the village lay as silent and dead as if no railway pierced it, few houses showing any light. Suddenly three shrill whistles pierced the air, the signal for down brakes, followed swiftly by a splitting noise, a vibrating crash, and a roar that was muffled almost immediately.

For a brief second Miranda waited for another whistle. None came. Glancing toward the station she saw a couple of lighted lanterns, one red and one plain, that were partly hidden by a baggage truck. Seizing one in either hand, she started down the track, springing lightly between the ice-coated ties. When she reached the beginning of the trestles across the low calf-pastures, she stopped long enough to shake off her heavy cape, that risked her balance, and then flew on.

The bright starlight showed the outline of the bridge ahead, but where was the train with its winking lights? Only one dark hump broke the outline of the trestles. On again over the perilous ice-coated footing that a man in daylight would have hesitated to traverse. What was that? A cry? Yes, a halloo, repeated as continuously as breath would allow.

As the girl drew near, she saw that the obstacle in front was the freight caboose, lying on its side on the bank at the very beginning of the bridge, and from beside or under it, Jim Bradley's voice was calling.

Feeling her way more carefully now, she answered, "I'm coming, Jim; where are you?" and finding solid earth beneath her feet once more she crept around the end of the car.

An endless minute told it all; *something* had caused the engine to leave the track when halfway across the bridge, the brakes had not answered, and the six cars had followed their leader into the river, the caboose alone breaking free—wedging and overturning on the bridge. Bradley had sprung from the rear steps only to be pinned fast below the knees, body prone on the frozen earth.

"Oh, Jim! Jim! tell me what to do first! How can I get you out before it kills you?" she cried, for though Conductor Bradley did not groan, in spite of himself his arms would twist in his agony.

"Turn the light under here and see what holds me," he gasped; "there's an axe in the caboose if it should be anything you could chop." Then as she started for the sidewise door he half raised himself on his elbow to clutch her dress, and then dropped, ear to ground.

"No, don't mind me; take that red lantern and run back as far as you can go above the depot and signal the express—it's coming—I can hear the growl of it along the ground!"

“But, Jim, it can’t come this half hour yet; it was to pass you at Bridgeton.”

“That woman operator’s made a mistake. It’s coming, I tell you, go!”

“I don’t want to leave you, Jim, I can’t,” wailed the girl.

“‘Tain’t what we want, Randy, it’s what’s got to be. Go, or if you won’t, don’t come near me, I couldn’t bear you to touch me!” and the man threw one twisting arm across his face, for turn away he could not.

Back over trestles and track flew the girl; past the station, from which suddenly awakened men were stumbling up the track calling; past the overtaken wife of the station master, who was wringing her hands, but all seemed unconscious of any danger save the wrecked freight.

Then a broad pathway of light streamed down the track, almost blinding Randy, who, gaining a firm footing on the side bank and clinging to a telegraph pole, waved the lantern to and fro—to and fro, until a whistle answered the signal and the train came to an abrupt stop, with Randy, her red lantern, and the great, panting engine almost side by side.

In an instant the track was swarming with people; the conductor of the express, by chance an operator, went to the telegraph key to summon help of various kinds, the poor woman who had made the error having utterly collapsed. The crew, armed with pails and axes, hurried to the wrecked freight, for now the smell of burning wood came on the air, while the passengers of the express, satisfied that they had nothing further than a night’s discomfort to fear, were scattered about, filling the little waiting room at the station and Sweezy’s Hotel to overflowing, while looking up the possibilities of food and lodging; fortunately, owing to the storm, the train was but scantily filled.

A woman from one of the day coaches, evidently a lady from quiet mien and tone, dressed in a plain cloth travelling suit, went to the bare and formal hotel parlour, and asked if she could have a room, as she was travelling alone and did not care to pass the night upon the train.

“I’ll fix yer out if possible,” said Sweezy, “but you’ll have to wait a bit in here; I’ve got a lot ter tend to first, and most like there’ll have to be some doubling up.” So saying, he threw open the door between the long “parlour” and a little office in an alcove where there was a stove, leaving Helen Hasleton sitting in the dim light of a single candle, for lamps were at a premium in Hattertown just then.

Choosing the least uncomfortable of the chairs, the woman threw herself back in it, taking off her veil and hat to ease the strain upon her aching head.

People passed to and fro in groups, occasionally glancing in, but she seemed

neither to see nor to hear them. At last a familiar voice speaking her name startled her, and she looked up, facing the door; it said:

“Hello, Burt, you didn’t tell us your wife was with you,—thought you were off with the boys alone. Don’t apologize. Everybody gets rattled when they’re held up like this and know that four or five good fellows have come to an end a few feet ahead of them.

“Pretty well tired out, aren’t you, Helen?” and there came into the room her father’s oldest friend and business associate, holding her husband by the arm, and pushing his wife and daughter before him in his eagerness.

After a few minutes’ aimless prattle the party of three left, having decided to spend the night on the train, the elderly man making jocular remarks about leaving the couple to have a *tête-à-tête* in peace.

Complete silence for a moment, and then, that being the last thing the woman’s nerves could endure, she said: “Why did you follow me? What right have you to put me in a position like this after this morning?”

“I did not follow you, for I did not know that you had left Boston.”

“Then it is as Mr. Dale hinted, you were going alone with some men without even telling me.”

“After this morning, what right had you to know?” The blow that she had set in motion, but of which she had not before gauged the full power, struck her squarely between the eyes.

“At least we must assume a part, not make ourselves ridiculous and start a scandal here to-night among people that are almost relations, before,—before things are arranged,” she said, on the verge of tears.

“As you please; creating public comment has never been my plan,” he answered, and drawing a chair to the feeble light, he took a copy of a comic paper from his pocket and at least feigned to read, while the woman closed her eyes, and from holding them closed to keep the angry tears back, finally fell into a sleep of exhaustion where she sat.

An hour passed. Hasleton went out, but as usual, could gather little absolute knowledge of the wreck. He saw his companions playing poker in the parlour car; they, having heard of his wife’s presence and deeming that she had followed him, winked knowingly, and he, having nothing to explain and much to cover, drifted back to the hotel. Seeing that the woman slept, he, in his turn, settled himself as well as might be on the hard sofa, and, cramped and uncomfortable as he was, dozed, being too much bewildered by the condition of things to plan or even think.

Twelve o’clock was called slowly and almost spitefully, it seemed, by the clock

in Sweezy's bar and lunch room; usually this was the signal for closing, but to-night no excise regulations were enforced. Sweezy, having sold all the eatables that could be procured and most of the drinkables, was busying himself disposing of people for the night, as it was not possible to remove the débris and get the track in shape under four or five hours. He had spent a profitable evening and was, consequently, in fine joking humour. Peering into the parlour, he saw the sleeping couple, and not remembering that the woman had entered alone and asked for a room, he awakened them, giving the man a cheerful slap on the back to boot. "Be you folks married?" and upon Hasleton's giving a sleepy assent, he continued, "All right, then, I kin double you up and that'll take the last room, and then I'll make shake-downs in here for half a dozen schoolmarms goin' to a convention. First to the right at the head of the stairs, sir." Then, setting a spluttering candle on the table at the woman's elbow, as if he naturally expected her to take the lead, he disappeared.

Helen Hasleton started to her feet, her face lowering and furious. "You might have prevented this, it's taking a mean advantage of me," she fairly hurled the words at him. "You can go upstairs, I shall stay down here with the other women."

Burt rose with difficulty, stiff and aching in every limb, and taking up the candle, said, "Very well, it seems rude to leave you here among strangers and without a bed, but under the circumstances, I can only obey your wish."

"Obey!" snapped the woman; "there is no such word, or if there is, I do not understand its meaning. This morning I was to obey you. To-night you offer at once to make a spectacle of me and obey me. Rubbish! Go back to the car with your friends and say there was no room for you here."

Something moved in the alcove, a long shadow fell upon the floor, followed by the presence of a tall, clean-shaven man in the garments of a priest, who stood for a moment looking from one to the other.

"There is a word obey, and it will always have a meaning until the world falls apart. The question is, whom shall we obey and what," said a deep but quiet voice in the perfect accents of well-born speech. "If one woman had not obeyed to-night, you two perhaps, as well as all on board the train, would have been lying crushed or burned in the river-bed beyond, dead, distorted, horrible! Jim Bradley, the conductor, pinned in the wreck, was found by the woman he was to marry, frantic of course to rescue him. He told her to leave him, to go back and save this train, and she obeyed. They have carried him to her home and the surgeons are at work; the end I do not know. I have left them but now, and with them the two rites of the Church that best could help, belonging to the two ends of life, marriage that gives her the right to care for him, and to him the last sacrament.

“And yet you stand there, man and woman, and bicker and create falsity from empty words, forgetting that nothing can transpose right and wrong. Shame on you both!”

For several moments no one moved; then Hasleton replaced the candle on the table, as he saw the outlines of the man’s face, young in spite of gauntness and close-cropped gray hair, and in his astonishment almost whispered, “John Anthony!”

“Father John,” corrected the voice calmly, but in a tone that forbade further questioning, though recognition gleamed in his own eyes; for John Anthony had been a college mate of Hasleton’s, who, though always serious, had, ten years before, suddenly, and to the world in general unaccountably, given up the brilliant promise of public life for the priesthood. Two men alone knew that the first motive for his course lay in that it was the only immovable barrier he could place between his nature and temptation,—the mad infatuation of a beautiful married woman, whose husband was his friend.

As all this flashed through Hasleton’s brain, he lowered his gaze and stood with bowed head. A few more seconds passed. The woman’s clenched hands relaxed, and raising her eyes, she met those of Father John that had never moved from her face, and in their depth her woman’s instinct saw both comprehension and the scars of conquered temptation. Then she took the candlestick from the table and crossing the room slowly, went up the narrow, uncarpeted stairs, step by step.

As Hasleton raised his eyes again to Father John’s face, their hands met in a tense clasp that told its tale to each. No words were spoken, and Hasleton, in turn, went up the creaking stairs.

Five years passed, and Hattertown looked much the same as of old. The factory ruins were now but a heap of wood dust where vagrant hens scratched for slugs. The Milk Freight still ran on the siding every evening, but Jim Bradley was not the conductor, neither did Miranda Banks teach the school at the corners.

In one of the offices of an important station of the Sky Line Railroad works a short, thick-set man, to whom many others defer as their manager; his face is strong and cheerful, but after noting his chin lines, very few bigger men would try to browbeat him in spite of the fact that he moves with a crutch, one leg being shortened almost to the thigh.

The working day ends, and going downstairs, the man sees a horse and low buggy driven by a trim woman with glorious ruddy-gold hair turn toward the platform. She, smiling a welcome, moves the tiny girl beside her to make place; and the horse, taking his own head, trots to a quiet by-way apart from the main road that

leads past stately country places.

“Where is Jimmy this afternoon? I hope he hasn’t been cutting up, Randy,” said the father, questioningly.

“Oh, no, but we’ve company at home that I left him to entertain. Guess who?”

“Your mother?”

“No, Father John, and only think of it, he’s going to stay two days before he goes up to the Hasletons’ for his usual August visit. On hearing of it, Mrs. Hasleton brought me some flowers and fruit this afternoon, and when she had seen the house, asked me if I would let her John and little Helen come to me of mornings this winter and learn to read and spell with Jimmy. She said that she knew I had taught school in the old-fashioned way, and that she preferred it to kindergarten methods for the boy. Think of my being able to teach the Hasletons’ children anything. Isn’t it splendid, Jim? How pleased Ma will be.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Jim Bradley, closing one hand over those that held the reins, “but I know something, or rather somebody, else that is splendid, even if she couldn’t just at first make up her mind which end of the line she’d live at.”

Miranda Bradley, not one whit abashed, laughed softly. “It wasn’t really a matter for me to decide which end, was it, Jim, since Hasleton Manor Station happens to be almost in the middle?”

Thus it came about that neither the remote hamlet of Hattertown nor a bleak February day was without influence on vital things.

III THE VANDOO

MARCH—THE MOON OF SNOW BLINDNESS

“How can you ask me to invite her?” I said, looking up from a letter Evan had a moment before handed me to read, and blinking at him reproachfully; for I had been driving about with father all the afternoon with the brightening March sun reflected by ice-coated March snow in my eyes, until the lids seemed to be controlled by rusty wires and everything was enveloped in rainbow-hued mist through which black spots danced.

“Is it possible that you have read the letter? Hear what she writes: ‘Terry says that you live in the country and that you wouldn’t leave your home for anything in the world. I want to live in the country because I was born in the West and lived on a ranch until I was well grown, and I haven’t yet found a city big enough to give me elbow-room, much less a comb in a twelve-story beehive, which in New York it seems is the only available shelter for people like Terry and myself. Besides, I want room for a riding horse and pasture to turn him out.

“We’ve been looking at country places ever since we were married last March, for Uncle Sandy has promised to buy me a home when I want to settle, but he doesn’t believe in paying rent; we’ve seen many that would do, but that isn’t what I want. If we buy a house it must be one that can—not only make me buy it as a matter of course, but that will hypnotize me so that I shall never wish, or be able to get away from it again. Uncle Sandy told me long ago that this was the only way to be sure about choosing one’s husband, and I know he’s right, because though there were plenty of men about, I could do very well without them, one and all, until Terry’s horse stepped into a (prairie) dog’s hole, throwing him so that his ankle buckled, and they brought him up to the ranch because Uncle Sandy is a sort of natural bonesetter. That was in March, too. March has always been a good month to me: that’s why, this year, I’m building on striking a home in the month. If we don’t, I foresee a wandering life and bad days for Terry ahead! [“She is certainly frank,” I interjected.]

“I want to see your place and, if possible, find out what it is that makes you hug it so close, and I want to see it soon; so if you will please engage a room for us at the nearest hotel, Terry and I will go down for Sunday, and I can wait behind a bit and look around the neighbourhood.

“I’ve been at him about this for a month, but he always forgets to ask when

he sees you. Then, too, the poor boy is a bit discouraged; we've been to so many places that we know the railway time-tables of all the villages within an hour of the city as well as we know our twice twos. He thinks the only possible way to be satisfied is to inherit a place, and "feel the blood of your people in the soil" as he puts it. But how can we? I've no people but Uncle Sandy at the ranch, which is several thousand miles inconvenient to Terry's work, and his people are in the old country, where, at best, the family nest, though decidedly a last year's one, was overfull, and dropped him out (he says you'll appreciate that). So you see, we've both got to start and make believe until it seems natural.

"I hope I'm not putting you to trouble, but in the West we're always glad to step out for a prospective homesteader.

"Sincerely, your possible neighbour,

" VESTA DONELLY."

"I didn't suppose it would put you out very much to have a jolly sort of girl here for a few days at this dull time of the year," said Evan, regretfully, rather than apologetically, and dodging the real issue.

"It isn't the trouble. I would welcome any one with open arms who cared to come here in the first three weeks of March (as to the fourth week, barring a blizzard, my mind goes back to the earth and revels in the task of keeping the temperature of the hot-beds equable, an occupation not naturally appreciated by company). But knowing the country as we do, can you possibly consider March a good month for exploiting real estate? Especially a March like the present, that starts by being snowbound in the fields, and so sloppy in the roads that the wheels of anything but father's stanhope are mired and won't go round, while down in the valley the light sleigh almost turned into a boat and floated this morning.

"There is nothing attractive of any kind that I know of for sale, and if there were, it would repel people at this season. Even the Cortrights' trim, lovely house, standing between the great oaks, looked, this afternoon, like a belated and bedraggled straggler, propped up between two policemen waiting for the patrol wagon to come for it. Besides, at best, this Mrs. Terence Donelly is looking for the impossible with true Western fervour.

"One must grow up with a place and feel rooted in its earth to love it in March; she won't have the ghost of an idea what the garden means to us by looking at it now, for it isn't there, only its spirit, and that, like everything dead, is invisible except to the eyes of those that love.

"What is Vesta like? How old is she, and who were her people?" I asked, for

optimistic Evan was beginning to look depressed, which is something wholly against the rule.

Terence Donnelly was a college chum of Evan's at Oxford, and is as fascinating and warm-hearted as only a well-bred Irishman knows how to be. He had visited us many times before the Western trip that had buckled into double harness a spirited roadster who had travelled straight and true in single harness without either check-rein or blinders for nearly forty years. Consequently, Mrs. Terence was an object of an interest that became intense upon the thought of meeting her.

"She is small, her hair is light brown and her eyes flash and dance so that I don't remember anything else about them," said Evan, slowly, shutting his eyes, as if searching his memory for an accurate picture. "I happen to know that she is twenty-six, though she does not look it by five or six years. I haven't made up my mind about her disposition; one moment she has an almost pathetic expression as though she needed sympathy and protection, and then her eyes blaze, and she runs her hand through her front hair until it stands on end, and she reminds one of something as unapproachable as a coil of slender live wire.

"Her people? Her father was a Californian, but her mother was an Eastern woman by descent, the daughter of a Judge Morland who came from Massachusetts, and, like many another boy, tired of farm life, taught school to get his education, and then by the same process worked his way out West. Terry has tried to look up the family to please his wife, who seems very lonely in spite of all her independence, but there is no one left. That is why I thought you might cheer her up from the woman's side of things if they settled here. She is unconventional enough to satisfy you, I'll warrant, and would be delighted to go up in the attic on a wet day and dream pussy willows, and the fact that hers may be the western species of the tree would be a sort of tonic for the dreams."

"You must have said something to Terry about his wife's coming here," I announced, when he had ended.

"I may have," Evan answered. "The poor fellow is worried because she is getting restless, and hasn't a woman friend in New York, and I thought if she could meet the Cortrights and Bradfords, Sukey Latham and the rest, the air might clear in a twinkling."

"I'll write to her to-night; imagine you and me, married only a year and living in Chicago or San Francisco, father dead, and not even Aunt Lot or Martha Saunders to turn either against or to, and no home to which to return! *What* a wretched time you would be having with me! Nevertheless, upon your head be the failure to find in this neighbourhood the ideal house built around a magnet."

“Oh, if you once get her here something will be sure to turn up,” said Evan. “She may find a few bits of old furniture, or a bargain in a jug or spoon up at Tucker’s curiosity shop; he’s had a dull season, and the Donellys are keen about getting old Colony things so that when they find *the* house they may have the fittings, as they seem to take it for granted the house will match.”

Father, who had come in while we were talking, stood with his back to the study fire rubbing his hands together as if it were midwinter, while the sleepy dogs only roused enough to wag their tails drowsily, take a comfortable yawn that arched their backs, easing the muscles, then settled down again.

“Is it thawing or freezing?” I asked, crossing the hall to him.

“Both,” he answered, laughing, “one overhead, the other underfoot; a fine climate this, to test the vigour of the New England people. I’ve just come down from the Dearborn farm from visiting old man Becker, who is racked by grippy pains. He says there is more snow in the south meadow than any spring since the old deacon died, and that is forty years and he reckons March is ‘no good to anybody but for plotting and planning.’ He gave me this handbill yesterday, which owing to the weather, it’s several days in advance of its being posted. I was reminded of it by hearing the words ‘bargains in jugs and old spoons;’” and father pulled out a crumpled sheet of paper from his side pocket, which, being spread upon the table, took the form of a tree poster that read as follows:—

“VANDOO! PART I

“The entire goods and chattels belonging to the estate of Sarah Dearborn deceased, will be disposed of on the premises by public vandoo on the 12th of March, or if stormy, the first fair day thereafter. Goods will go to the highest bidder and must be paid for at time of purchase and removed within two days.

“A list of the property may be seen on the premises.

“A grand chance for the friends of the late estimable lady to obtain souvenirs.”

“VANDOO! PART II

“On Friday, March 15, the real estate belonging to the estate of the late Sarah Dearborn, as follows: Parcel I consisting of one two-story oak-framed dwelling with attic, wood-shed, and buttery, two barns and smaller out-buildings, and seventeen acres of land, the same comprising the homestead and to be sold together. Parcel II, ten acres of woodland

situated on the Ridge Road, Parcel III, ten acres of salt meadow, Parcel IV, forty acres of plowed and grass land being known as the South Meadows. These pieces will be sold together or separate to suit the bidder.

“Grand chance to secure high land for building lots, with a land boom and a trolley only a few miles away and coming nearer! Come one! come all!

“These two important vandoos are under the management of Joshua Hanks, licensed auctioneer and attorney for the Executors.

“Oaklands, March, 19—.”

“Here is something, I’m sure, that will interest Mrs. Terry,” said Evan, who had followed me; “naturally she will not care for the house, for it is low and rambling, but it will be a chance to go to an auction sale conducted with strict hill-country etiquette, unless I’m mistaken, for even the leading word, ‘Vendue,’ is spelled according to the local pronunciation. It is always as good as a play to hear Hanks conduct a sale, he is all commercial bathos. Don’t you remember going with me, Barbara, to an auction on the Ridge where some one complained that a certain cow was damaged, and not sound as represented because she had a broken horn, and Hanks gave a thrilling account of how the horn was broken and tried to prove added value from the happening?”

“But, father,” I asked, “why is the Dearborn farm to be sold? I thought Miss Sallie had pinched and denied herself even ordinary comforts the last half of her life to leave the place, with a little sum for keeping it up, to some grandnephews.”

“It is one of the many cases that come to us all, and especially into the life of a country doctor, that prove how foolish it is for people to make plans for those who come after them, or pinch or save beyond the ordinary bounds of prudence,” answered father. “I knew Sallie Dearborn for upwards of fifty years. The Lord intended her for a woman to love and be loved, yet a streak of obstinate martyrdom from first to last made her lose her chances of happiness one after another, because to accept them would interfere with some elaborate and prudent plan she had made either for indefinite posterity, or more often merely on general principles of thrift.

“After the old people died, they say that Sallie had a chance to marry a promising young fellow and go out into the world, but to have withdrawn her interest in the land at that time would have hindered her two brothers, and after a controversy that no one understood, the lover went away.

“Presently one brother died, and the other, having married a delicate wife, broke

away from the farm to go to the southwest. For years Sallie toiled and scrimped to pay him his portion and keep the place of five generations 'in the family.' She has even paid her farmer Becker and his wife with *post obits*, that she might leave a money equivalent of the farm in the bank so that the two nephews might have equal portions without selling the homestead and furnishings. The first choice going to the elder, with many directions as to the handing of it down being left to the one who takes it and its quaint furnishings.

"Now, as it turns out, neither man wishes the farm or fixings, nor has sufficient interest in their fate even to bring them here to oversee affairs, and everything available is to be sold without reserve and turned into money!

"Deborah Becker, who lived with Miss Sallie as companion more than helper these forty years, is almost heart-broken, and told me this afternoon that such a happening had never entered Miss Sallie's head, for that not long before her last illness, she even sent for samples of wall-paper, labelled and put them away in the old mahogany desk of the Squire's that always stood in the best room; this paper for the guest room, that for the parlour, as a guide for the doing over of the house when 'one of the boys' should take it."

"Timothy Saunders' saying is true, 'The future's a kittle mare that travels best her ain gate and lacking both bit and bridle,'" I said, "but yet it is pathetic when one has sacrificed everything to a sort of old country land-pride, to have it come to naught. Didn't she leave you a letter of some sort, father, that was to remain sealed a year until everything was settled?"

"Yes, Barbara, a sealed letter enclosing a key; the key of the old desk, which the will says is to be disposed of according to directions given me. I hope it may give rise to no complications. Who that saw Sallie Dearborn during the last half of her life would dream that she was once full of woman's romance crossed with chivalry? These have seen her grim, calculating, measuring every egg or berry that she sold; sending her weekly paper to the Bridgeton Hospital, but first cutting the white margins therefrom, and rolling them into lamp-lighters to save matches at two cents a box!"

With the prospective "Vadoo" as a motive, I invited Terry Donelly for over a Sunday and his wife for a week's visit. When she came, of a Saturday after dusk, I found, as Evan had said, that one moment she was tender and almost piteously feminine, so that I was impelled to take her in my arms as I would a child, while in a moment of animation, a flush would mantle her cheeks, too thin for her years, the gray eyes would flash, little bright glints play about her hair, until she was, indeed,

like a bundle of lithe, live wires.

At such moments, Terry's laughing eyes would grow grave, and the banter, which was one of his charms, die on his lips; that she was restless and he apprehensive even through the spell of strong affection, there was no doubt, and on Monday, when Terry left her with me, there was something appealing in his glance and the grip he gave my hand.

The day was fairly pleasant out-of-doors in that a frozen crust made good walking, and, arm in arm, Mrs. Terry and I explored my haunts; I pointed to the stakes and trellises where the garden had been and would be again, and for a moment we sat upon the seat where the "Mother Tree" had been and looked down the walk that had bordered that first garden of the long ago. Would she understand from these bare outlines the why of it, the voiceless potency of that which bound me?

If she did she said nothing until afternoon, when I took her to my attic corner, and building a log fire in the Franklin stove, drew the dumpy old lounge before it and called the dogs to soothe us with their sleepy influence.

At first Mrs. Terry sat upright, hands clasped about her knees, gazing at the fire, and breathing quickly.

"How I love that," she said; "we have not had these fires since I left the ranch, and I've often slept out by one as high as the wall when we've been on camping trips."

Then gradually her breath came slower and more evenly, and she dropped back half against the sweet clover pillows and half against my shoulder.

"When we looked over that rolling icy field beyond the garden this morning, with the dazzling light on the snow, just as it is at home, and I shut my eyes, I could see the ranch, and Uncle Sandy and the boys, and fat Mrs. Malone, the housekeeper, so plainly that I almost put out my hand to touch them. There's something queer about March; lots of the range cattle get through almost until spring and then give out, and the boys that have held out well all winter often go nearly blind of a sudden. I guess it's because by March you've braced up and stood all you can of winter, and because it's called spring, you lose nerve and can't pull the strap up another hole for a fresh grip."

Then with a sudden movement, burying her face in my shoulder, she half whispered: "That's the way it is with me; ever since I left the ranch, I've kept myself braced so that Terry should not know how homesick I feel. At first I thought it would pass, then I thought if I had a place where I could strike root the pain might wear away, and so I've hunted and hunted, but now, to-day, coming here and feeling

some one else's home feeling, but from outside, it's like March snow to my eyes, I can't bear it; there's not another inch to pull up and the saddle girths are slipping, slipping under me, and there's no help. I must go back!

"I was born in March, I met Terry in March, the next March we were married, and now, oh, Mrs. Evan, unless you can help me and hold me, we shall part, Terry and I, for no fault, and I shall go back to Uncle Sandy in March! No, don't look at me so hardly, I can feel your eyes right through my hair: you, who have always been at home, can't judge me. It isn't that I don't love Terry better than any one else, but the earth loves you, too, and sometimes it won't let go. I could not know it would be so until I came away; no one could. Some day it will all be changed, this coming of a man and taking the woman away; he will come to her and stay, for home is more to the one who stays in to keep it."

As she leaned close to me, I could feel the beating of her heart and with it another sound, a sort of feeble echo as it were. Then I gathered her up and held her close, and told her of those two first years and of my own separation from home and country.

"But after that you came back," she cried, "and Terry can't go back with me; we thrashed that out in the beginning, for even Uncle Sandy said there was no opening for a lawyer in a grazing country, because every one settles their own disputes quick, unless they are big enough for the government to butt in, and anyway a lawyer isn't popular. Well, at last, thank God, I've found some one to understand it, some one who has lived through that feeling that pulls you back to where you started." And Mrs. Terry, clasping her arms around my neck, fell to crying, not passionately, but comfortably, that blessed outlet that Nature has given us women in compensation for much pain we may not avoid.

Gradually the sobs stopped, she was asleep. So, laying her carefully back on the pillows and covering her with an old afghan, I left her to the dreams bred by the singing of the firewood accompanied by a little, whistling snore from Peter, the old hound.

The morning of the sale at the Dearborn farm was mild, as though March was preparing to go out like a lamb that scented green pastures. Two days of rain had washed the snow from the open places, and though the roads ran mud, yet it was the mud of promise.

We made an early start, that Mrs. Terry might have a chance to see the few bits of old furniture likely to attract one who had no association with the family or place; for the Dearborns were of the plain Yankee stock that, aside from a few heirlooms

kept most of the time behind drawn blinds, had furnishings of the plainest sort. There was a good tall clock with a ship atop of the pendulum sailing toward a port it never reached, a handsome claw-footed table of mahogany, a chest of drawers, and a dozen chairs of the same wood, patterned diversely, a four-post bed, carved with some skill, a Davenport sofa with carved ends, a hooded cradle, a low-boy, and a work table with heavy brass handles. The silver table ware, worn thin by use, was of a slender pattern, the ends of the handles of spoons and forks being abruptly angled; while of china, outside of the modern ware in daily use, there was a tea-set of Lowestoft with its odd small-necked tea-caddy and helmet cream-pitcher, and a more complete service of blue and white India porcelain.

A bevy of neighbours and one or two dealers, including old Pop Tucker, were buzzing about these things, but what seemed to attract Mrs. Terry far more, were the pitiful little personal articles that belonged intimately to the life of Sallie Dearborn, and that she had never doubted would pass either to her own kin, or, if worthless, be destroyed instead of being exposed for criticism and sale, as the law ordains in the settling of an estate where no friendly hand intervenes.

Worn table-linen tied into bundles, underclothing, much darned stockings, shoes, a well-worn Bible filled with little memory markers bearing names and dates, a book filled with household recipes copied in a stiff, exact handwriting, and lastly, resting on the seat of a chintz-covered chair, as if its owner had left it there for a brief moment while she went to other tasks, was a deep work-basket, big as a peck measure. The inside pockets of this basket were filled with spools, needle-cases, tapes and all such gear; the outside bags held bits of half-finished work, and knitting, the rusty needles sticking from a ball of home-dyed blue-gray yarn, just as they had been laid away; while a thimble of an odd pineapple pattern hung on the top of a long darning needle that occupied the middle of the pincushion.

“This is simply cruel,” whispered Mrs. Terry, the electric wire look reappearing as she rumbled her hair and held the basket close to her as if to protect it. “There is nothing in this basket worth a nickel, unless that dingy thimble is gold, and to have it put up and sold to some one of those old cats yonder, who have been going about pinching and smelling everything, not that they mean to buy, but just to see, as that one with the green porcupine topknot in her hat said a minute ago, ‘what dear Sallie had that set her up so.’”

“A lot of a woman’s secrets drop into her work-basket, and mix up with her pens and writing things when she’s alone, and it’s wicked to sell any of these things. I’m going to buy this basket, Mrs. Evan, and wrap it up in a pink paper and bury it if you’ll lend me a spade and the ground isn’t frozen too hard; if not, I’ll burn it.”

“I mean to buy that old Bible, too, with all the births and deaths written in. The porcupine woman said she would buy it if it didn’t bring over a dollar, because she hadn’t had a chance to ‘leaf it over well’ and there were dates in it she wanted to write out and there might be letters tucked in somewhere! From what I’ve overheard, Miss Sallie must have had a lover fifty or sixty years ago, who went away, and as no one ever knew why, her friends’ children are still curious about the matter.”

Mr. Hanks’ vigorous pounding on the table in the kitchen, and the ringing of a bell, gathered about him an audience of nearly one hundred people, and the selling began, room by room; for, to save confusion, the large pieces of furniture were sold where they stood.

During the morning the sale dragged, the dealers had everything their own way, and in spite of Mr. Hanks’ pathetic reminiscences concerning each article, from an old pew stove to a five-cent factory-made wooden spoon, the derelicts that did not receive a single bid would have filled a wagon. The afternoon session began in the best room, wherein was the four-poster, the cradle, a good mirror, the work-basket and the tall desk, the fate of which was contained in Miss Sallie’s letter to father.

As we stood in the doorway, a flood of sunlight, coming in through the small, iridescent window-panes, gilded the dust that lay upon everything and lent warmth to the quaint buff wall-paper, festooned with loops of bright flowers and birds of paradise; a brave paper in its day and one that had faded with dignity.

“I don’t know quite what there is about this room,” whispered Mrs. Terry, “but bare as it is and cold, it seems familiar and somehow more homelike to me than any other I have ever seen; I wonder could I have lived in it in dreams?”

Before I could answer, one of the swift changes passed over her, and stepping forward, she said in the perfectly clear, unemotional voice of a business man, “Mr. Hanks, as it is growing late and I must go, would you object to selling the contents of this room as it stands? Wall-paper and all, if it is possible to get it off?” I was amazed and a little worried, for I knew nothing of the length of Mrs. Terry’s purse.

The country folks gasped and whispered among themselves; they did not wish to be cheated out of a moment’s excitement. The dealers began a series of mental calculations, but no real objection being made, Mr. Hanks stroked his chin a moment, muttered something about its being possible that the wall paper being fastened to the house might be real estate, and then said, “The bed must be a separate lot, the desk as is known is not for the sale, but the rest of the fittings I will put up in bulk ‘as is,’ madam, which is a learned and professional term you must know for the way they seem to be to the casual eye, not what perhaps the brush of

fancy might paint them.”

The green porcupine lady shut her mouth with the snap of a turtle, murmuring something about the widow’s mite being disdained, as she saw that both the Bible, and the basket containing the thimble that was suspected of being gold, would vanish from her horizon.

Of course I was in no way responsible for Mrs. Terry, yet for one who confessed to being on the eve of running away, to buy a wagon load of furniture seemed hardly rational. When, ten minutes later, Mr. Hanks, after selling the bed and contents of the room for one hundred and fifty dollars, was fairly beaming at his success, and I realized that the furniture must be removed within two days, my heart sank.

Not so Mrs. Terry’s; after giving Hanks a very substantial deposit upon her purchase, she tucked the Bible under one arm, and hugging the basket to her breast, made ready to go.

That evening, after supper, she spread Bible, basket, and herself upon the rug before the den fire and began examining the contents of the old work-basket as a child does a picture puzzle, saying naïvely, “It’s no harm to look at the things before I bury them,” whereat Evan heaved a sigh, and I knew that he was mentally weighing the stability of Terry Donnelly’s marriage, though at the same time his eyes twinkled with amusement.

“See,” she continued, “here’s a finished sock wrapped up in paper with something peppery, and the other is all done but a bit of the tip of the toe. I think I’ll finish it if I can get the rust off the needles; yes, it rubs off and the rug polishes them nicely,—there seems to be enough yarn on the ball to finish the toe, though it’s rather mothly; it looks ages old. Can I knit? Oh, yes, I used to knit long stockings for Uncle Sandy out of heather yarn. I knit a pair of golf stockings for Terry last fall, but one foot was shorter than the other, and he said it always drew up his big toe and distracted his attention when he was ‘putting.’”

“That carries me back a long way,” said father, who had come across the hall, newspaper in hand, for a little visit and to exchange cigars with Evan, a nightly custom, as he watched Mrs. Terry knitting in the firelight. “When I was a young fellow, not only the old folks, but all the country-bred girls learned to knit as soon as their skirts went down and their hair was put up. Then, when the attentions of one of the young men who took them to and from meeting and singing-school were recognized as serious, when he became ‘steady company’ and privileged to sit in the best room and hold the skein of yarn for her to wind, the girl with many blushes would ask him to write his name with hers on a bit of paper, which folded up, made

the centre of a ball of yarn from which she straightway began to knit *Him* a pair of socks to prove her housewifery.”

“What a well-packed idea!” cried Mrs. Terry, rising to her knees, “and perhaps, who knows, the name brought good luck and helped her get both feet alike!”

“I’m not sure about that,” laughed father, “but I do remember that there was a lot of curiosity about those papers and sometimes a girl would steal her rival’s knitting ball to find whose name was inside, and feuds came of it that were worse than tangled yarn.”

“Do you suppose there could possibly be a paper in this ball?” Mrs. Terry cried suddenly, as she squeezed it tight; “it isn’t all yarn, there’s something inside and it isn’t a spool. No, I won’t unwind it, I’ll knit this last inch out,” and the fingers flew, while it seemed as though her strange hair stretched out to look, and pulling away from its pins fairly danced in the firelight.

As the stocking ate up the yarn, I found myself getting nearer to Mrs. Terry, father drew his chair close, and Evan leaned against the fireplace.

“Why are we all so breathlessly interested?” I asked, addressing the ball of yarn as much as anything.

“Because,” answered father, “of the possibility of unearthing romance, and twist, distort, and disguise it as we will, simple love is the most interesting thing to every one of us.”

“Last round,” called Evan, who was watching so closely that Mrs. Terry’s fingers trembled nervously.

The row was finished and bound off, though the rotten yarn had to be pieced three times in the process; then she began to unwind the wisp that remained. Yes, there was a piece of paper inside, brittle and yellow.

Slowly she opened it, for it threatened to tear in shreds, and read in an awestruck voice, “‘Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all my days. March the 20th, 1842. Sarah Dearborn and Richard Morland!’”

“Richard Morland was my mother’s father!” she said, scarcely above a whisper; “how did his name come here, Dr. Russell?”

Father held the paper to the lamp, scarcely less excited than Mrs. Terry, who stood with clasped hands and a strange, searching expression in her eyes as they followed him.

“Richard Morland, yes, that is the name,” said father, making sure of every letter. “He once taught school at the old centre village. It was before my time, but it is a matter of record, and some of the old people still speak of him. As I remember the

story, the school-teacher always boarded at the Dearborn farm.”

“Then my grandfather once lived in the house where we were, to-day, and probably slept in the four-posted bed and saw the parrots perched in the flowers on the wall the first thing in the morning,” Mrs. Terry said slowly, turning her back to the room and speaking, as it were, to the fire.

“It is very strange, because when I went into the room, it did not seem new to me. I, too, must sleep in the great bed and wake up with the sunshine on that old, old paper.”

“It is a pity that it couldn’t be taken off the wall so that all the fittings might be kept together,” I said thoughtlessly. But the young woman wheeled around swiftly, and putting a hand on either of my shoulders held me off, at the same time that her expression drew me close.

“That paper shall never come off,” she said. “If grandpa had married Miss Sallie, she would have been my grandmother and I should have belonged in the Dearborn homestead. It’s too late for that now, but I’m going to buy the place and manage it that way. Don’t you see, Mrs. Evan? I’ve found my reason, the reason that I wanted to make me stay somewhere until I had taken root and couldn’t get away. Then perhaps I may find out something more from the old place to make me hug it tighter. Anyway, the south pasture is just the place to turn out horses.

“Don’t you think, Dr. Russell, that they might be willing to sell before next week? Please may I use the telephone? I’ll call up Terry, he will be so relieved! And then I must get to work and find out why Miss Sallie wasn’t my grandmother.”

Now the time had come for father to open Miss Sallie’s letter, which said that—the desk and its contents were to become the property of the owner of the house!

“The desk and all the wall-papers Miss Sallie chose for the refurnishings!” cried Mrs. Terry; “it’s actually like having some one to share the responsibility of it all. Ah, you see, Mrs. Evan, I told you that dreary old March is my lucky month; another thirty days and it might have been too late.”

The day that the deed was transferred, father handed Mrs. Terry the key of the old secretary. Whispering to me, “I don’t want even Terry to come up yet, only you must be with me when I open it, for you understand,” she literally pulled me up the narrow stairs.

Dragging up the big arm-chair, she seated herself in it and turned the key slowly in the creaking lock. As the flap fell back, revealing a row of pigeon-holes and two shallow drawers, she whispered, “I don’t know exactly whether I’m opening a treasure chest or a grave!”

After some hesitation, she pulled out a drawer and took from it a bundle of yellow papers, folded lengthwise and tied with a faded blue ribbon. “Letters from R. M. to S. D., preserved to show my kin how good a man their foolish aunt lost through thinking that land could weigh in the balance with love,” read Mrs. Terry, reddening deeply; “and here is a picture of grandpa cut from black paper, and a queer curl of hair. Ah, *now* I see where my inquisitive hair comes from.

“A letter of advice to my kin if they think to marry, and a request.” Mrs. Terry read this slowly to herself, saying as she did so, “I hope she wants something I can do for her.”

There was a long silence, so long that I looked up rather anxiously at last.

“What is it?” I asked.

“She wants grandpa’s name to be given to the first child that is born in this house,” said Mrs. Terry, in an awestruck tone, “and that seems to me like a loaf and fish miracle, for I was *so* afraid that Terry would want to call him for his own people, and his father’s name was Patrick Dennis! Oh, how nice it is to have even a might-have-been grandmother to shoulder such responsibilities!” And once more she threw herself into my arms as she had done the afternoon in the attic, peeping over my shoulder at the hooded mahogany cradle into which the beams of the victorious snow-quelling March sun were shining.

“Something seems to have turned up, or else we have all gone snow-blind,” said Evan that night.

IV THE IMMIGRANTS

APRIL—THE GOOSE MOON

It was early in April, an hour before sunset. The keen wind that blew down through the valley, sweeping the forge pond into little ripples, was tinkling with spring sounds,—wayside voices of robin, meadow-lark, purple finch, and cheery song sparrow; the red-wing's good-night blending with the piping of the marsh frogs; music of little brooks newly born of melted ice and spring rain on the rocky hillsides; here and there the chime of cow bells worn by Peter Salop's rambling herd returning from their first day's browsing in the brush lots,—all blended into the steady rhythm of the water as it fell in an unbroken sheet from the pond's edge upon the rocks below.

Spring rushed toward the ear that evening more swiftly than to the eye. There were yellow tassels of fragrant spice-bush in moist warm hollows, echoing in tint the winter-flowering witch-hazel; wands of glistening willow outlined the waterways, and the red glow of life lay upon the swamp maples; but only the eyes of the wise might hope to find the hiding-places of the white and rather blue hepaticas, or the nooks deep in the hemlock woods where the wax-pink arbutus distilled fragrance from the leaf mould.

As the sun slowly vanished behind the long chain of hills beyond the Moosatuck, the warmth of the first spring day swiftly followed, and soon the sky was barred with the dull red-purple and citron that promised unwelcome frosts.

In all the countryside but two people were to be seen out-of-doors or in any way seemingly conscious of the evening's beauty, and these were alien born; Peter Salop, the owner of the pond, mill, and forge, and Ivan Gronski, his hired helper. Peter was English born, a portly and comfortable man of sixty odd, who, having come over in his youth, had made a little money by city trade. Once upon a time he had gone home again to pick up the old life for middle-aged rest, but though the land was there, the people that made the life had vanished. Now coming for the second time, he had settled in our hill country near his sons, and because he was born in a mill, a mill he must own, and, because as a boy he had loved to creep into a neighbour's forge and watch the molten metal take shape, a forge he must have, even though its work was no more ambitious than turning scrap iron into cheap ploughs and third-grade tools.

Among other traditions that he brought with him and never seemed to have lost

in his forty years of city trading, was a love for the sound of cow bells, the sight of sheep grazing on the rough hillsides where they were almost indistinguishable from the rocks, the sight and smell of snowy "May" or Hawthorn, big bushes of which grew in his house yard, a love of lying prone on green grass, hands behind head to watch the sky, and an intense respect for the game laws. It was this latter quality that had begun an intimacy between Peter and Evan, and together they had formed an alliance to put down the trapping, ferreting, and snaring among the hills, about which the country lad, native by a few generations, has no conscience.

Wild geese had been flying these two weeks, and Peter Salop was minded that if a flock dropped to rest and feed on his pond, there should be none lacking in their onward flight. Moreover, with the wild-fowl in mind, he never cut the heavy-seeded marsh grasses and sedges that grew in the pond's backwater, and had scattered wild rice until it had become naturalized. So now Peter paced up and down the highway that skirted his property on the west, hands behind back, his eyes first resting upon the pond that, here and there, glistened silver-like between the meshed alders that hedged it like coin within a knitted purse, then sweeping the road up which either the mail man or the home-coming cattle might at any time be expected.

For the moment, a flock of white geese held the right of way with half-raised wings and heads erect, forcing their master to one side; for this was before the day of heartless motor cars, when in rural regions, at least, the road belonged to the females, who drove buggies with sundry twitches of the reins as though they were pulling in fish, and to the ducks, geese, and portly hens escorting young chickens.

The other human figure in the picture was working steadily back of the cow barns, occasionally looking across the pond toward the sunset, but without once ceasing his toil of carrying hay from the stack and making ready for milking. What he thought, if he thought at all, left no trace upon his flat features, that were tanned and weathered to the deep hue of sole leather, although his long, light hair, and scant, bristling mustache, showed that originally he must have been fair of skin; his short, thick-set, yet lean body, with its long arms, worked like a machine until one would have supposed that an overseer was standing by him with a lash.

This unceasing labour was a sort of inborn habit, one of the few traditions that Ivan Gronski had brought with him. He never stopped to think why he worked so incessantly. Peter Salop would have told you that Ivan worked but never thought about his work, and in this way he stood in his own light, adding, "By 'n by he'll get to thinkin', no doubt, and then he'll most like not work at all."

But Peter did not know the reason. Once in the years gone by, Ivan had stopped when he was working, stopped to listen to what another said, that 'if the tax to

support the idle was not so heavy upon them all, there would be more time to raise the head and breathe the air, while if a time should come when there were no idle to be clad in gold and gems, they, the people, might even in work hours stand, hands upon hips, and laugh!’ Then had Ivan not only listened but answered, “God hasten the day,” crossing himself with one hand, while with the other he pressed the little icon, worn under his blouse, against his flesh until it left a mark.

Some one had heard! Swift as the bird flies the words travelled. Nicholas, the man who had spoken, disappeared from among his fellows who worked in a nobleman’s field, while the man who had merely answered soon felt the dreaded spy shadow hovering over him, following him and blighting the way before.

In Ivan’s hut there were five: Maria the wife, Zetta the eldest girl, ’Tiana (short for Tatiana) who crept about, and Paul the baby, and over them all the spy shadow hung. Some day, Ivan had hoped they might all go overseas to America, where it was said that one might not only laugh, but own land and houses; perhaps this might happen when Paul also could walk. But all that was before the spy shadow fell. A little money had been saved and hidden beneath the thatch, but the shadow seemed to shut a door between Ivan and freedom of motion even. What day it would come in the door, he could not tell. Some work horses from the estate were to go for exhibition to a neighbouring fair. When they were ready, polished and sleek, with bunches of ribbons braided in their manes and tails, the man in charge of them fell suddenly ill, and not daring to disarrange his overseer’s plans, he begged Ivan to wear his new boots, blouse, and cap, and ride the horses to the fair. Maria urged him to go, and overlooked the new blouse carefully,—a stitch was lacking here and there, she said,—and had he the eyes for it there was something strange both in her face and her manner of wishing him good-by.

The first night of the fair, amid some little jollity and confusion, an overseer in a village near to Ivan’s pressed close to him and whispered in his ear, “Michael is in Siberia, I, too, am beneath the spy cloud and therefore I go away to-night; come you with me, else it will be too late, to-morrow they mean to arrest us both; keep on moving with the crowd and do not let your face change.”

“How? I cannot, I have no money, and there is Maria and all. You need not think I will do that.”

“Maria knows and wishes it, then she follows when you have made a place. She has sewn the money from the thatch into the blouse you wear.”

Involuntarily Ivan pressed his hand to his side where something had been chafing him, and there he felt the little box that held their treasure. Without question Maria had placed it there, Maria must know more than he. So Ivan Gronski turned his

back upon Russia, hatred of his country being all that remained of it in his heart, for what other heritage is left to an honest Russian Pole!

Three weeks later the two men reached a seaport, after arrest, hunger, and despair, all three in turn, had threatened them; another three weeks, and they stood upon American soil. The brother of Ivan's rescuer, already well established, met and vouched for both; the friend found quick haven, but Ivan drifted here and there at first, working in ditches, on railways, clutching at every penny to save it for the coming of Maria and the others when he had "made a place," then losing again through sickness, hearing seldom from her, and then always through Michael, the friend with whom he had come.

When working for a junk dealer in Bridgeton, he had been sent one day, in company with another man, out far across country with a load of scrap iron, its destination being Peter Salop's forge. While his companion bargained about the iron, Ivan had watered the horses and, idle for the moment, stood looking across the pond to where a field of ripening wheat waved to and fro against the blue midsummer sky. He had never set his eyes upon a wheat field since the time when his fellow-worker, in tying sheaves, had spoken of liberty and he had answered. How long ago was that, years or only months? He could hardly tell. And what was that beyond the field edge lying low to the land almost concealed by a tall poplar—was it a peasant's hut?

No, merely the low-built house of some early settler, the wide stone chimney and sloping attic eaves seeming lowered by the intervening hill. But a throb came into Ivan's throat and tore it, and suddenly the oppression of his race that had gripped him even in the New Land like a paralysis, gave way, and long-drawn sobs swept him until he swayed and shook like the wheat in the wind.

A heavy but kindly hand was laid on his shoulder. "What's the matter, my man?" asked the deep voice of Peter Salop. But before Ivan hid his face in his arms, Peter saw the tears and a reserve fell upon him.

"The wheat, the hut, Maria, and I make no place for her," Ivan explained, piecing out his few words of English with direct gestures.

"Homesick?" shouted Peter; "want to go home?" making the common mistake of thinking loud tones help to interpret a strange tongue. "What are you, a Polack or a Slav?"

Ivan understood, and a sadness deeper than tears came to him, almost giving dignity to his hunched form. "Me? There is no go home for me, I am a Russe!"

Peter Salop might be called dense upon some occasions, but not now. For a moment he too was an immigrant, and that other pond and mill, whose double he

had sought in later life in a strange land, were before him.

“I need a farm man, if you’d care to stay about here,” he said presently; “to begin, twenty a month if I board you, thirty and you find yourself; more, bimeby if you fit in.”

“Yeas, yeas, oh yeas,” gasped Ivan, clinging only to the first proposition, which for the moment overshadowed the others.

Ivan stayed; indeed, he seemed rooted to the spot, and this time was now three years past. In the working hours he only worked, but after, he schemed and planned in his little room in the horse barn about the place for Maria, always with the cottage back of the grain field in his mind. Now the plans had taken solid shape and this spring she would come, for did not the letter say so, the letter she had written him at Christmas?—that is, if he had the money ready. This being so, had not the good friend Michael arranged about the passage, and made all safe? For it is not wise for a wife to have much money in the house or write many letters, when the spy shadow has rested on the husband and he has escaped.

The cows came slowly up the road, nipping a green tuft here and there, before turning each to her particular stall. The boy who drove them, a grandson of Peter’s and a namesake as well, gave a whoop of delight as the last one entered the door, and carefully taking a slender trout pole from its resting-place on a beam, he unearthed a bait box from beneath the door stone and sped off through the alders up-stream, to make the most of the hour of twilight, waving his hand to old Peter as he went.

The milking over, Ivan turned the cows into the yard, carried the pails up to the milk-room door, where he received his own small can, then throwing his coat about him as if it were a sleeveless cloak, and raising his head as though lifting the day’s toil from his shoulders, he strolled slowly toward the pond. The evening mail was overdue by this time, and each night he thought might there not be a letter saying when? For surely it was spring now: April the 15th said the Insurance calendar on the barn door. But primitive Ivan had a truer almanac in his head, made up of ice and snow, sun and wind, water, flower colours, and bird songs, though he could not call them by name; for three years this calendar had grouped itself about him and spoken to him in clearer tones than printed figures.

Yes, it was spring in truth and fulness. Twice the marsh frogs had piped up and been stilled again by ice; that was in March. Now they had chanted for fourteen uninterrupted evenings; that meant April. Also yesterday, and the day before that, the straight wild goose arrows had crossed the sky from south to the north-eastward.

The first time in his boyhood that he had seen birds resembling these, in that they looked dark against the sky, an old crone had crossed herself and muttered, "there go the birds of famine." Here in this land it was otherwise, these birds were the wise prophets, seeing spring from afar. Moreover, best of all the signs, in the field above the pond, the fall wheat had raised its green ribbons far enough to flutter in the breeze that whispered as it ran, "Summer, harvest, bread!"

The twilight began to deepen, and the purple bars locked the horizon against the warmer rays. A mist rose from the pond as high as Ivan's heart and chilled it. A merry little screech-owl whose quavering call belied its feelings, flapped over to its nest in an abandoned dove-cote.

Suddenly the frogs began to croak, "If she shouldn't come, suppose they do not come!"

"Maybe that they are dead," throbbed Ivan's heart, as though responding in a litany. And why not? The last letter was more than three months back; life had been hard to Maria, she told of work in many places, and in Peasant Russia winter is a demon who travels with famine for horses and wolves for his hunting pack!

There was a harsh bird cry in the distance. Far overhead, a second, nearer, clear and sonorous, then a dark arrow clove the dusk, fell swiftly, broke into feathered fragments, as with some little manoeuvring and splashing, the wild-goose flock settled upon the forge pond. Then the pendulum of hope swung back toward Ivan. At the same time, the postman's white-topped wagon with its sliding door stopped at the four corners. Peter Salop, preparatory to his evening gossip, shuffled his mail deftly in his big hands as one who had been in the haste of commercial life, at the same time giving a whistle and then calling, "Hi, Ivan, are you there? Here's a letter, a *Roosian* letter," he added, as the man came forward, half eager, half reluctant with dread. Then as he saw the cramped, thin writing by the light of the carrier's lantern, Ivan's face relaxed. No, Maria was not dead, she could write her own letters to him,—a proud distinction. Content with this, he put the letter inside his shirt, gave a silent good-night greeting to his employer, and balancing his little can of milk carefully, hurried along the Lonetown cross-road that wound toward the north between forge and farm.

For half a mile he kept on the road that twisted and circled until he reached a crudely fashioned gate in the loosely piled stone fence; opening it, he went up a straight dirt path edged with bits of stone to the door of a small house, took a key from his pocket, and let himself in.

Going into the furthest of the three rooms into which the first floor was divided, he lighted a lamp that stood on the uncovered pine table, and drawing up a stool,

laid the letter before him, scanned it carefully and then jumped up again. No, he would feed the fowls first, else it would be too dark, bring in his water, fix fire and teapot, make all snug,—then for the letter. What was Ivan doing in this little house, and whose house was it? His own, as well as the five acres of rough land that lay about it.

Two kinds of people traverse the country nowadays, reviving the dead and dying farms: the idealists with money (more or less) in pocket, seeking to find homes on the old lines wherein to spend it; the immigrant looking for a foothold where he may wrest a living from soil whereon the native would starve.

The house, with its three rooms and loft above, was the ruin clinging about its stone chimney that Ivan had spied across the corn field that summer day three years before, one of a dozen such lonely places that had fallen to the town for taxes. Year after year no one had come to pay, and all had fallen away but chimney and stout oak frame.

From the moment Ivan had seen its veiled outlines across the wheat field, he had desired it. At first he only thought of it, and walked around it silently on Sunday afternoons. In a few months his tongue loosened to Peter Salop, “Could the place be bought?” “Yes, surely, for the price of the rough land.” So before the second summer came he owned it.

Little by little—in the off season when Salop could spare him—board by board had he floored it and closed it in. Odd windows picked up second-hand had followed, a ladder reached the loft chamber; then came the paint, odd cans bought at an auction, bright blue with red for window-frames and door. Next he made a sort of corral of birch brush woven with wild grapevines in one corner where once had been a barn. This meant a poultry-yard; four posts and some boards thereon back of the house stood for a wood-shed. The old well was cleaned out and a swinging bucket geared above it.

By the third fall, the rough land was broken up and one little corner spaded and made ready for the vegetable garden to come this spring. Spaded and combed and brushed it was as for a flower-bed, this work largely done by the women, being half the secret of how the immigrant can live upon the bit of land the native scorns.

In-doors a few bits of plain furniture, some dishes, pots and pans, and a stove made home; no, one thing more, a little mongrel cur that a year before had followed Ivan from the village, entered the house with him, and on being fed, refused ever after to leave the place, watching all day for his return, and sleeping either on door or hearth-stone, according to the season.

The evening work done, the fire lit and tea made, Ivan broke the edge slowly from the envelope, grasping his icon and muttering a prayer as he did it. Yes, Maria and all were coming, also his young sister. Coming? As the date read they were now on the seas and any day might bring them.

For the first time since the parting, Ivan seemed to realize the meeting, lost his head, and shuffling his feet, danced with joy. Hitherto he had worked always, worked at first without success; now he let himself feel as a man, which he never had done since the spy shadow came between him and the sun. Then he was merely Fear walking; how long ago was it? He could not seem to reckon, but what mattered it now that it was over?

Lamp in hand, he strode through the three rooms and noticed for the first time how many things were lacking, that workmen in the houses on the upper road possessed. What did that matter? In two days another month's pay would be due, and Maria could go some day to Bridgeton and choose for herself. All that evening he talked to himself and to the cur by turns, telling him how Maria would tend the garden and Zetta the poultry, and by and by, when they were old enough, 'Tiana and Paul would gather both fagots and berries in the big unfenced country by the Ridge.

Next day Ivan was uneasy at his work; a pedler's wagon passed and he followed it and bought a doll for 'Tiana and a jingling toy for Paul, to give them welcome. The evening mail brought him another letter, this time from the friend Michael in New York. Maria had landed, and, the legal formalities being over, would go by the noon train to the Glen station on the morrow!

Life came to Ivan, and vigour; his stooping shoulders straightened, man's blood pushed the serf's blood through his veins. With the letter extended in his hand, he went to Peter Salop, his master, and telling its contents, dared to ask a half holiday that he might be at the station at noon. This was gladly granted, and he strode home on air, the doll and toy in his pocket and a ham, the gift of Mrs. Salop to help him make a feast, swinging over his shoulder. He put the doll and toy on either side of the little mirror on the kitchen shelf, and eating a cold supper, hurried to sleep.

A long two miles separated the Glen station from the forge; a good half hour before train time, Ivan reached it, clad in his best, a bit of myrtle sticking in his buttonhole. As the engine slid up to the narrow platform, he barely had the courage to raise his eyes. A woman got off, then another, and two men, but no Maria, and the train went snorting on its way.

"Another train from New York?" repeated the station master, busy with his trunks and packages. "Oh, there's another at four."

For a moment Ivan hesitated, and then turned back toward the forge, stripped off his bits of finery, and tried to lose himself in work. Peter passing by on his way to the village for a wagon that was at the repair shop, guessed what had happened and wisely said nothing. The good-hearted never jar a brimming goblet.

He would not go too early, thought Ivan, and so the second time he reached the station almost as the train pulled in. This time there were many people, chiefly for the Ridge, and he pushed his way among them wildly; but when the little crowd parted and vanished, Maria was not there! "Six-thirty is the last train up to-night, mostly freight, not often passengers," chirped the agent.

Ivan slunk off behind the station, head down and the old stoop to his shoulders. He had eaten no dinner and his head reeled. Stumbling into the general store close to the station, he bought a hunk of cheese and a small loaf, and going down the road a short way, he climbed up the wooded bank and finding some soft moss, threw himself down and whittling his bread and cheese into mouthfuls, ate from necessity rather than with relish, for all of a sudden he felt strangely and intensely weary. A little nap could do no harm, so coat under head, Ivan fell soddenly asleep, like the wayfarer he had once been.

The six-thirty train came slowly into the Glen station, for it was both long and heavy with freight cars, a single combination passenger and baggage car being at the very end. This same halted far below the station, where the water-tank made a barrier between the railroad ground and the open fields.

Slowly four clumsy, heavy-laden figures in petticoats crawled down the high steps, assisting a little boy in curious trousers, while a good-natured brakeman helped to steady and replace the various bundles that were fastened to head and shoulders. As they huddled together, straightening their garments and belongings, the whistle blew three times shrilly, and the train creaked and moved heavily on.

Is there any stillness more intense than that which closes around the countryside after the bustle of a train has ceased? The evensong of the birds and the peeping frogs only serve to deepen silence from the purely human standpoint.

The heads of the three elder women were covered by kerchiefs, the little girl was bareheaded, and the boy wore an odd cap, but all alike had an expression of fatigue and resigned anxiety. The elder woman must have been pretty once, but her face was lined and thin with toil and poor feeding, while the other woman, of twenty perhaps, was round-eyed and plump.

"Where is he, Maria? Where is Ivan my brother? He leaves us here alone in a strange place at nightfall?" she asked in her foreign tongue. "I can see no houses, it is

like a green desert.”

“Perhaps it is Siberia, then!” said the girl of twelve, with a shiver.

“Hush,” said Maria, “thy father has not forgotten us in all these years, he will not now,” but nevertheless dread was creeping over her, and she raised her hands nervously to loose the band that bound the bundle to her forehead.

“I’m hungry and I want to go to sleep,” piped the little boy, and crouching toward him on the bare ground his mother strove to comfort him.

Ivan slept like one dead, until a shrill whistling sound waked him with a start, and reading the time by the shadows that had not only lengthened, but were vanishing, he rolled to his feet, and half slid, half stumbled down to the road, across the head of which the evening train was moving.

Pulling on his coat, he tried to run, but his feet, numb with inaction, refused to do more than walk. Would he ever reach the station?

At last he felt the boards under his feet, but the long platform was empty, and the station master was setting his night light and preparing to leave. “No, there had been no passengers on the evening train,” he answered curtly, wondering if this wild-eyed man who had been there thrice in one day was a bit out of his head.

For the third time Ivan was about to turn away, when something fluttering far down by the water-tank caught his eye, and as he stared the forlorn group came into view, walking slowly up the track. Another moment, suspense was over, and they stood facing one another.

“Maria and all.”

“Ivan.”

Then at last the women began to cry softly, and Ivan with wet cheeks ran from one to the other, untying the burdens that bound head and throat, and that never more should choke them.

Halting suddenly, Ivan gasped, “But where is Paul, my baby?”

Then Maria laughed in earnest. “This is Paul, a well-grown boy; he has not been a baby these seven years. Have you lost count of time, Ivan, my friend?”

And truly, he had, and flushed when he thought of the little one he had expected to fondle, and the jingling toy at home, and with the knowledge came a certain tinge of disappointment.

Then was the procession formed for the homeward march, Ivan heaped high with the bedding; but they had gone but a few yards when a team, rumbling up from behind, came to a halt, and a jolly voice called, “Hi, Ivan, I think your people had better have a ride.”

Turning, he saw Peter Salop, who was driving his ice wagon, newly painted, with white canopy, red wheels, and blue body, home from the shop.

“It is the master,” Ivan whispered, and the group stood with bent heads, hardly daring to look at the magnificence.

Climbing in, the children’s tongues loosened among themselves. “At home, the master flogs us with a whip, sometimes, if he meets us on the roads,” murmured Tiana, “but here in this new country he takes us to ride in his beautiful chariot.”

Once at the house, Ivan and Maria wandered through the rooms, hand in hand, smiling shyly, and then laughing with pleasure. As Maria stopped before the little mirror to unwrap her head and set the hair-pins, Ivan snatched up the jingling toy and thrust it in the mantel closet, for somehow it wounded him to think of his mistake. But Maria cautioned him not to break it, saying: “It may be useful yet, who knows? Ah, who knows anything?”

Then leading her about the yard, her eyes rested on the sprouting wheat field and again tears filled them. “What is it that speaks, Ivan, my friend?” she asked.

“Something we have left behind and wish to forget,” he answered shortly.

“Yes, but what we are glad to leave, we are more glad to find here before us,” and she laid her face against his, which was also wet, but smiling; and high above their heads shot a wild goose arrow.

“What is that?” asked Maria, pointing.

“It is a sign of spring, and a good omen of birds,” Ivan answered.

V TREE OF LIFE

MAY—THE PLANTING MOON

One day, Evan and I played *make believe* and went a-Maying. This was not very long ago, yet in those days, high-road and byways were divided between horse and man only and therefore were our own, while we jogged along plucking at the branches and trailers that we passed, letting the horses browse, reins upon neck without risk of danger.

The *make believe* was that we were a couple of carefree children playing at going on a journey to seek the Tree of Life, which, should we chance to find in blossom and walk in its shadow, would enable us to live as long as we wished. This had been one of my childhood's plays, a hybrid born of Genesis and Pilgrim's Progress, belonging to days spent alone in the garden when father had gone a day's journey to see some patients over the hills, and Aunt Lot was immersed in preserves and forgot me. Blissful forgetfulness of children by their elders that is one of the gates to wonderland!

We took the idea as a motive for *make believe*, and if one plays at being a child, one must complete the game, turn loose the overworked horses of every day, Proof and Reason, and harness in their places Instinct and Belief, steeds who may be trusted to know the straightest road to happiness. As to the Maying part, that is a play also, and, at least in the New England country, a game of chance if you do not know the moves, but an ecstasy if the combinations fall right.

The Red Men waited for the May Moon to wax full and the truce flowers of the white dogwood to signal frost's surrender from the wood edges before they planted their maize. We wait for the first blooming of an apple tree to tell us that the springtide is at its height. Not one of the opulent, well-fed orchard trees, having all the advantages of a protected location, but a wayside, ungrafted scion of the old orchard standing alone in a field, on the north side of the spruce wind break. We called this tree "the Messenger." It is the bearer of inconsequent fruit akin to the wild, but in May it is garlanded with firm-fleshed, deep rose-hued blossoms. When this tree opens its buds, we know that its kindred of the hill country will also be decked, and it is our time to go forth, for here the Maying is the festival of the Apple Blossoms, and the blushing snow of it veils the grim gray hills, and brocades the silken emerald of the grassy lowlands every May as completely as the gold and purple of golden-rod and aster mantle the land in autumn.

People make journeys to the Orient to see the Festival of Fruit Blossoms, where many of the trees enclosed in gardens are shown with suggestion both of art and artifice; all this is deemed wonderful because it is far away. Distance promises change, and change is seemingly the key-note of current life. Perpetuity was the ambition of our forbears, else we should not be here. Yet when the near-by holds a Festival of Apple Blossoms reaching from our doors to the horizon line that travels before us, when we try to reach it, do we make a national event of it? Who goes out? Who sees? The reeds shaking in the wind, perhaps; the bluebirds that nest in the hollow tree trunks; the flaming orioles that, grown wanton with spring joy, rifle the honeyed blossoms; but people, where are they? No parties of school children playing in the abandoned orchards, no others sauntering along the highways like ourselves. For the twenty years that we have gone up through the hill country for this Maying, we have never met any others bent upon the same errand. So we call this festival our own, and as we stray along, we conjure up companions from the past to bear us company; the people who planted the orchards that still remain and blossom through all the neglect and moss that Time has dropped upon them.

Each year, though we traverse mainly the same roads, by some fashion we always come upon some place or sign that has before escaped us, though rarely anything that brings past and present together as happened on the day that we played *make believe* and set out to find the Tree of Life.

After we left Oaklands and the Bluffs behind, and dipped into the valley north of Hemlock hill, we began to look for signs and symptoms; for in this country, one can never tell what a winter may bring forth, what tottering chimneys may have collapsed into a stone heap, or piece of primal woodland disappear into the maw of a travelling saw-mill to emerge in form of railway ties. Yes, the overshot water-wheel had disappeared from the Mill in the cedar woods, and the back of the lilac house on the hilltop overlooking the Moosatuck was broken, though the giant lilac bushes that hedged it seemed striving to hide its crippled state.

Here was our first stop. I love to sit on that which was a door-stone; well-sweep on one side, wood-shed on the other, across the road the skeleton of the oak-timbered barn where the rays of sunlight and swallows in intimate kinship, shoot in and out through chinks and knot-holes. Before me, the old orchard sloping downhill to the bush-screened Moosatuck, tall flowering ferns, the cinnamon and royal blending with spreading brakes to hide the tumble-down stone-walls. Then only to close the eyes and think backward, and the people come; only do not think too far. I do not care, even in make believe, for the company of the Indians, the stone heads

of whose arrows are scattered through the valley. They were no kin of mine; they left no trace, neither making the world happier or more fruitful.

In the apple orchards runs the blood of our race, the blood of the sweat and toil of our pioneer forefathers; all these old orchards are peopled, for those who have the eyes to see, and so there is no loneliness for us in this silent hill country.

The ancients had it that every child was born under the influence of a particular star; a more spiritual age, that each child has its guardian angel. I have always believed that my particular guardian is a tree, and that one an apple, for this was the first tree that I remember lying under and looking up through the flower-laden branches at the sky, as mother sat upon the round seat that encircled the big trunk, the great fragrant Russian violets growing at her feet.

The first two birds I learned to call by name lived in that apple tree,—a robin who had saddled his untidy nest of mud and straws on a drooping branch, and a pair of purling bluebirds, who lived in a little hole where a broken limb had let in the rain and consequently decay followed,—while my first remembrance of being hurt was when a heavy Baldwin apple fell from the tip-top of the tree and bumped me on the forehead. As I grew up and left dolls behind, my kinship with the tree grew more material,—four apples and a book, to be taken at regular intervals in the depths of the big leather chair in father's study, being my formula for comfort on a rainy Autumn afternoon.

When we had looked and dreamed our fill, we turned into one of the meandering cross-roads that traverse Lonetown converging toward Pine Ridge, to crawl slowly upward to our watch-tower. This is the place of all others in our haunts for looking down upon the country as if mirrored in a pool or seen as mirage—Tuck Hill in May time, and there is nothing more to be desired! Evan and I crouched on the summit in the shelter of an old tree, still brave with blossoms though the trunk had fallen forward as if on its knees, and gazed our fill.

For days after, I felt the rush of the wind through my hair, for at this spot the wind of the hills meets the breath of the salt-water. Below, two rivers, that give the hill its name, shot their silvery arrows through the overhanging foliage; Tuck being an Indian term for river, as *Moosatuck*, *Aspetuck*.

No Druids crowned with oak leaves, or men of myth and marvel, came to us there, such as Puck could conjure from his charmed British hill home; only pictures of the simple settlers who planted their dwellings in the wilderness near ways that are remote even now from the pulse of things. These humble settlers dared and suffered

and won out in spirit unconquerable; and though people and homes have vanished without written history, yet God in Nature has made record of them. Far and near throughout the land the festival of Apple Blossoms is celebrating them in the orchards, some still vigorous in age, and others all of gnarled trees that are leaning slowly earthward, as though making ready to fall to final sleep. Again others, young limbed and smooth of bark, unlicensed gypsy scions of the old race, often bitter of fruit, and yet sometimes chancing to bring forth a blend incomparable. These striplings, that wandered from the parent close, had ventured in stony pastures, sought shelter in wood edges, and followed the watercourses, and one and all seemed to whisper to the winds that bore their vital pollen, "Yes, they are all gone who planted us, but we try to shift for ourselves and live forever, for we cannot forget our mother, the Tree that stood in the midst of the First Garden!"

All these things I said half aloud, ending with the query, "Why has no one hereabout planted an orchard for thirty years at least?"

"You are forgetting that we are playing make believe," muttered Evan, who had been lying so still that I thought he must be trying to 'hear the grass grow,' which is the outdoor man's cover for sleep.

"If we are children, we mustn't preach or think about why the orchards are running out or why no one plants apple trees," he continued. "Children never look behind or before, but make a whole lifetime of a single happy day, and it's because people nowadays are like restless children that they do not plant orchards; what do they care for the future; it seems too long before the fruiting time; they want a quicker crop."

"Who is talking a sermon?" I cried. "Come down through that lane where we tied the horses; it's full of dogwood and pinxter flowers; we will fill the chaise and bury ourselves in them; being children, it does not matter if they fade by noon so that we can gather more," and then we wandered down and on, choosing the pleasantest ways, and letting the horses lead so long as we kept due north, or fancied we did.

"We should cross the Ridge before noon," said Evan, after we had driven for many miles without keeping track of time. "I wonder if there is a short cut: here is a green lane that runs in the right direction, but it has a gate to it, and may either be a pent road or a private way." Strangely enough, the old gray horses turned toward the gate, nosed it, and whinnied in unison.

"See the wild fruit trees and bushes that hedge it," I cried; "apples, cherries, a peach or two, tall blackberries; I wonder if there ever was a garden in this corner? There are all the signs, the lilac bushes, stoves that might have been a chimney, and

there are new horse tracks in the turf, and colts pasturing yonder in that field. The way is pretty enough to lead to the land of Forbidden Fruit, and we may find the Tree of Life we are looking for at the end. Do let us go in; as we are only children, no one will have the heart to scold us if we should find ourselves in some one's yard." So Evan opened the gate, which was made of rough-sawn chestnut boards, and followed rather than led the horses along the way, for the trees closed low above our heads and shut out the distance.

In a glimpse across the fields we saw the tower and broken outlines of a little church.

"That's not Pine Ridge Church!" exclaimed Evan, stopping short. "The Ridge Church has a pointed steeple, and that is"—"A Christopher Wren box," I said, the name by which Evan had once designated that particular style of architecture with a tower top that looks like a turned-over table, legs pointing skyward.

"Where are we, Barbara? You were born in this country, not I; this lane seems to be leading us due west, and I'm getting hungry, a natural feeling for a child."

"I do not know," I confessed; "there is a place back of Banbury somewhere in this direction called Fool's Hill because of its cross-purpose roads, where father once had a patient, but I've never been there. Wherever we are, we can stop for lunch at the first flat rock that we see."

Still another sweep of lane and the sound of running water. The horses pricked up their ears and whinnied again, and their call, evidently of interrogation, was answered. Suddenly we emerged from the trees into an open space; a rushing brook crossed the meadow, and was itself crossed by a railed bridge of logs and wide chestnut planks.

"Why didn't I think to bring my trout pole," sighed Evan.

"It's not at all necessary; I can supply a bent pin, and boys always have string in their pockets; while you cut a hickory pole, I will dig for worms with one of these tin spoons; Martha never gives us anything but tin when we go a-Maying."

Evan looked about as though inclined to accept my offer, and then he stood transfixed, pointing toward a tree on the other side of the river we were preparing to cross; it was a slender white birch that leaned out over the water as if keeping watch, both up and down stream, while its pointed, silver-lined leaves trembled and tittered as it swayed. Halfway up the trunk was a small board that said in unmistakable letters,—"*No hunting, fishing, or trespassing—by request of Father Adam.*"

I pinched myself to see if I were awake, and I believe that Evan did the same, though he would not acknowledge it. Now, indeed, had *make believe* come true.

“Why?” I began, but Evan promptly replied, “Why not?” Hearing a rustling among the bushes, I half expected the bodiless head of the Cheshire cat to appear, but instead there stood a tall man with a strong, smooth-shaven, sunburned face capped with curling white hair, and dark eyes that, though their flash could be seen even across stream, had a genial sort of twinkle at their corners. Save that he was coatless, his clothes were neat almost to precision, even to a clean linen collar turned down over a loose black tie, something unusual in any part of the hill country.

Then Evan spied the man, who stood gazing at us more in amazement than anger. “We were looking for something quite different when we saw your sign,” said Evan, awkwardly, “and now we’ll go away as soon as I can turn the horses.”

“Are you Father Adam?” I asked.

“That is what people call me,” he answered; “and who are you, and what are you trying to find?” This time his gaze took a sweep that included not only ourselves but the horses and the chaise, which we had forgotten was decked like a bower.

“We? Oh, we are only two children out a-Maying,” I said, the spirit of make believe taking complete possession, “and we are searching for the Tree of Life, so that we may pass under its branches and live as long as we choose. Do you know where we might find it?”

“Yes; it grows up yonder in the midst of my orchard. How did I come by it? Ah, that is a story that I only tell those who promise to believe it. Now it is my turn to ask questions,” said Father Adam. “Where did you get those horses?”

“We borrowed them from father, who is Dr. Russell and lives down at Oaklands.”

“So then you are *his* daughter; well, I know that you are telling the truth, for I sold him those gray colts, as they were then, sixteen years ago.”

“They whinnied when we turned in the gate, and rather led us on; can horses remember a place for sixteen years?”

“Yes, and longer if it is the home where they were foaled; but the time has been broken, for the doctor has chanced in every few years.”

Then I began to wonder about this man’s age, who spoke of a few years as if they were but days; was he fifty, or seventy, which?

“Come, let us go up into the cleared land, and I will show you the tree and tell you its story,” said Father Adam, as he took Gray Tom by the bit to lead him, the horse nosing and nibbling at his hand familiarly.

“Is it far?” asked Evan; “because if it is, I think we’d better eat our luncheon first; children always listen better when they’re not hungry.” Something in the tone made Father Adam laugh, and a different expression took possession of his features,

as though at first he had doubts as to our entire sanity which were now removed.

“It’s only a few hundred yards, and if those who only pass under the shadow of the tree may have their wish, how much more will happen to those who eat bread beneath it!”

So we two followed him hand in hand, over the bridge and through another bit of lane, and then a vision of peace broke upon our sight,—a green hill sloping upward to a group of elms that shaded a low, rambling house, on one side of which was a bit of garden gay with tulips, bleeding hearts, and columbine, flanked by rows of beehives, tilled fields showing beyond. But it was the right slope that held the eyes; row upon row the apple trees, in first full maturity, made endless aisles into green space—aisles so wide that we traversed them side by side and yet had room to spare.

Then, again, we came upon an open, a square court of grass, and in the centre an apple tree such as I had never seen before,—tall, with two main trunks, high-branched, straight and spreading at the top, elm fashion, half was covered with dazzling white flowers, the other half with pink, after the pattern of a florist’s formal bouquet.

“Sit ye down there,” said Father Adam, “and hear my story. Will I eat with ye? Well, I’ll break a bit of bread for company, for I dined at noon, and it’s now past two.” While he was speaking, the man had slipped the harness from the horses and left them to graze and roll at will.

“Though this was my forbears’ homestead, I was born out in Ohio on a little farm in the Muskingan River Valley. Seventy years ago it was hard living there as far as indoor comforts went, yet all the rich land was free for the tilling, and the corn and wheat flourished, but the thing I first remember about spring was the blooming apple trees. Everybody had them, half a dozen about the dwelling and then an orchard strip, while in almost every settlement there was a space roughly fenced in where young seedling trees were cultivated.

“Who made these apple nurseries, where the settler might get the stock of what was truly the Tree of Life to him, the fruit, food and drink that moistened his bread instead of tears? Was it the pioneers’ own providence? Was it the government? No; it was Johnny Appleseed who planted and cultivated, and the apple trees were his.

“Did you ever hear of the man? Few of your generation have, yet I remember him as I saw him when I was a lad, sixty years ago, and my mother, who was Massachusetts born, numbered him among her distant kin. She said, and she had it from her mother, that he was born in Boston in the year of Paul Revere’s ride; and that his real name was Chapman (the same as my mother’s), John Chapman. He

was a studious boy, and wished to be a preacher, having a zealous streak to go overseas and teach the heathen, but what with the war and troubled times, the way was not made straight. Yet the times were fair enough for falling in love, and this he did with one Anice Chase, but while he bestirred himself for the wherewithal to marry, the white plague laid its hands on her. In those days, at the first sign, the victim was set apart as doomed, and so it was with Anice. Only a year from their betrothal, and John journeyed on foot three days out from Boston town to her father's farm to bid her good-by.

“It was a May afternoon, and the lilacs and apples in the yard were all abloom; Anice on a couch lay under one of those trees, for she would not rest content indoors; the sight and smell of the flowers were all she thought or spoke of. Long they talked together, and then she said so feebly that he could scarcely hear, ‘Go and preach, but not to the far-off heathen. Stay in your own land, but go westward, preach Christ and the Garden of Eden, which is Home, and wherever you go plant the apple, the Tree of Life that stood in the midst of the garden, as its symbol and mine. For I shall reach the garden first and wait for you close to the door.’

“That night Anice died. John Chapman soon after fell ill of a fever, they said from exposure on his homeward journey, and when he recovered, he had strange fancies, and then totally disappeared.

“Soon after the year eighteen hundred, early in spring, and for nearly half a century following, a traveller made his way from western Pennsylvania into Ohio, journeying straight across country to the Indiana border, whether there were houses in his route or not. He was a strange-looking figure, tall, gaunt, and clad in curiously assorted garments, sometimes hatless and barefoot, sometimes wearing mismatched shoes and a peaked cap of his own manufacture. Either on his back, or else in a small cart that he dragged after him, he carried a bag filled with apple seeds. Whenever he came to a likely spot, he would loosen the ground with a rude, strong hoe, plant some seeds, weave saplings into a strong enclosure to keep the cattle out, and then pass on. Wild beasts never molested him, the rattlesnakes turned from his path, and the Indians, brutal as they were at that time in their treatment of the settlers, not only never harmed him, but treated him with reverence as a messenger of the Great Spirit.

“Then, when the day was done, he would knock at the door of a cabin, and after partaking of simple food, for which he would always offer to pay, either in coin of which he managed to earn enough to supply his few needs, or else in young apple trees, he would draw close to the lamp or throw himself on the floor by the fire, and pulling a tattered Bible from his shirt, open it and proclaim as one reading a letter,

‘Behold I have planted the Tree of Life at your doors, now hearken to the news fresh from Heaven.’

“To a few of the women, from time to time, he told detached fragments of his history, and my mother being one of these, recognized him almost by intuition as her kinsman John Chapman; and either feeling the distant tie of blood, or because we children gathered about him and hung on his words, he came to our cabin more frequently than to others, for next to his beloved trees, he loved little children and all animals. For women who tried to better his attire or sympathize with him, he had no eyes. ‘I have a wife waiting for me beside the gates of Paradise,’ he would say, ‘and what has she to do but busy her fingers in making me wedding garments, and none but of her making will I wear.’ As to his name, Johnny Appleseed was the only title he was known by in that country.

“Every spring he returned to Pennsylvania for more seed, for which he bartered at the cider mills, and wherever he went his path was strewn with his kind deeds. Did he come across a sick horse left to die by pioneers, it was housed and fed at his expense. Did he meet a traveller more ragged than himself, he always found that he had a garment he could spare, until finally, a feed bag with opening for head and arms was his most common coat.

“One autumn, being lame, he tarried a long while at our cabin; it was the year that I was ten, and word came that the Connecticut home in which my father was born had fallen to him, who, being the youngest, had been obliged to strike out for himself. At first my mother cried, for she had learned to love the free life, hard as it was, and she could not bear the thought of leaving what was now *home* to her; but in Connecticut there were better schools, and mother came of gentle stock, and had planned to make a preacher of me.

“When the day for leaving came, Johnny Appleseed, who had not left the vicinity of our cabin for weeks, appeared beside my mother in the kitchen; in one hand he held a straight young apple tree, securely packed in moss and sacking for the journey, and in the other a leaf from his Bible, the page of Genesis that tells of the Tree of Life.

“‘Take them with you, Hannah, and you will not be lonely,’ he said; ‘where the Tree of Life is there is home, and I give you fresh news of it; soon I shall enter forever into the garden where it grows;’ and before she could answer, he had disappeared among the trees.

“My mother brought the apple tree back with her, set it in the midst of her garden, and cherished it as she did her own children; the leaf from Genesis is now in the family Bible, where the record is writ of her own entry into The Garden. Mother

would never let the Tree of Life be grafted, for grafting was a thing that Johnny Appleseed discountenanced, and many good varieties came from his seedlings; as it grew, two branches of equal vigour started half a dozen feet above the ground; yet when it came to bloom, one main branch bore white flowers, and the other rose, while the apples of the white flowers were yellow with rosy cheeks, and the fruit of the pink flowers golden russets.

“See, Adam,” said my mother, the year that the tree blossomed (she had christened me Adam because I was her first man child), ‘I will call one branch Anice and the other John. What does it signify? That they are united in the Tree of Life.’

“Not many years after, we heard that John Appleseed had come to plant at the house that had once been ours, and after talking cheerfully at supper, spoke of an unusual light that lingered after sunset, and the clouds that were like a door opening in the heavens. After his evening reading, he went to sleep as usual on the floor, leaving the door open, for the night was mild. In the morning they came upon him, the rising sunlight shining on his smiling face, for Anice had been allowed to open the garden door at dawn.”

The bees hummed, and the petals of the apple blossoms fell upon us until Father Adam broke the spell by saying, “It is turning four, and little children should not stay out after dark, for the babes in the wood must have had a cold, damp bed in spite of the robins.”

So we thanked him, wishing to ask many questions that we could not, and pulling the faded blossoms from the chaise, took the flower branches from the Tree of Life that he gave us together with a jar of honey, and turning the way he pointed, up past the house, to the high-road, the grays, old as they were, trotted gaily home.

Then I told father. “Yes,” he answered, “I know where you have been, to Adam Kelby’s farm. A Methodist preacher of power, also a farmer and raiser of fine stock, called Father by the hill people, because that’s what he is to them one and all, never straying far from home. He was born out in Ohio, and believes strange things about apple trees, and holds them sacred, as the Druids did the oaks, some people say. Well, so do I!” As for Johnny Appleseed, he was an actual being who lived and toiled much as Adam has said.

We could not stay indoors that night, but sat on the back steps and supped with the dogs, eating buttered bread in great slabs, with honey to boot. Feasting slowly and dreamily, as pleases children who have been out all day, and between whose mouthfuls the Sandman is beckoning.

As I finished my last bit, assisted by Lark, who has a sweet tooth, I said half to myself, “We’ve certainly been a-Maying, but I wonder did we play *make believe*, or are we really children who have found the Tree of Life.” Evan echoed, “I wonder,” and straightway spread more honey on his bread.

VI WIND IN THE GRASS

JUNE—THE MOON OF STRAWBERRIES

“The Boy will go back to his mother’s people of course, and then at last, Ernest, you will be free to carry out our plans,” said Eileen’s clear voice, in which there was an unconscious note of uncertainty mingled with expectancy. As she spoke, she gave her slender fishing rod an unnecessary jerk that meshed line and hook in the tendrils of an overhanging grape-vine.

Without speaking, her companion secured his own pole in a crotched tree, and swinging out over the stream that rushed noisily past, quickly disentangled the line; then, taking the rod from Eileen, he reeled up the line and cast the fly deftly into the quiet pool below. Twice he framed his lips to answer her question, but those two innocent words, *our plans*, seemed to stop his voice; at his third essay, his line played out swiftly while the reel sang the tune that the fisherman loves. Then, after a short, exciting bit of play, a splendid brook trout, more than a pound in weight, lay upon the moss beside Eileen.

“There is a King trout for you,” Ernest said; “could anything more beautiful come out of the water?” and he made a fresh cast still farther down the pool.

Eileen’s first glance of admiration changed as she watched the trout quiver. “Put it back, please,” she cried; “now it’s a fairy thing, and more beautiful than any jewels I ever saw; but as soon as the water dries away it will only be a dead fish to be cooked and eaten. I love to catch fish, it’s so exciting, but not to keep them.”

“Yes; but Eileen, after all, to be eaten, that is what it was made for,” answered Ernest, in quiet, practical tones, yet smiling indulgently. “The unkind thing would be to put it back and let it have its fight all over again when some other fellow played it and it had learned fear. Besides, have you forgotten that this is the last day of the fishing and that we came out to get some trout for your father, who is sick and needs tempting, that being your excuse for my leaving work?”

Then they glanced at one another, laughing; the trout went into the creel, and the soft wind came down with the stream, laden with fragrance of grape flowers and the courting ecstasies of birds, then escaped from the trees, and was spread over the low meadows to the eastward, making low music in the long grass, fit accompaniment to the bobolinks that soared from it, singing.

Two more trout were caught in quick succession, then luck and the morning turning together, the pair came out into the open fields under the shade of a group of

old willows, to free themselves of the weight of rubber boots, and allow Eileen to rest a few moments after the rough tramp down stream that had been half climbing and half wading.

May was withdrawing her veil, woven of apple blossoms in a green mist of unfolding leaves, to reveal June's young splendour, and for the two sitting under the willows it was also early June; they were the children of neighbours, and though their parents were of widely different fortunes, they had been friends since Eileen had caught her first sunfish on a pin and string arrangement, rigged by Ernest, and he, for inattention to his lessons, had been forced to wear her pink shirred sunbonnet at school.

Her father was a promoter and politician; his, a farmer and wagon-maker, who, following an oft-repeated story, died just as his son had begun to work his way through college. How often Eileen and he had planned what he would do and be when this was accomplished, and she had done once and for all with the city boarding school to which her mother's, rather than her father's, ambition had consigned her. Now she had accomplished in a way and returned, but for family reasons Ernest Wray, a born book-lover, was still plodding in the old paths of his father, the wagon-maker.

"You hear the wind in the grass when you do not hear what I say," said Eileen, presently, in a tone half laughing, half pettish, as Ernest, placing the creel in the water to keep the trout fresh, secured it from floating away with a stone.

"Come and sit where you must look *at* me and not beyond or through me, and answer the question I asked you half an hour ago. When does the Boy go to his mother's people, so that you can carry out your plans?"

"Did you ask me that before?" said Ernest.

"Perhaps not in the same words, but the meaning was the same."

"Then I did not hear you, for I thought you said *our plans*, Eileen."

To the man, the girl stood for everything that beckoned him into the future; to the girl, the man at this time was an indispensable comrade when she was at home, upon whom she was eager to practise certain school-taught theories. Her influence over him fed a growing vanity, standing in the place of love, of which, as yet, she had really no comprehension.

"Put it any way you choose, only tell me when you are going to send the Boy to his relations," she said, this time in a voice of assurance. "I suppose it is too late now to rent the farm and sell the business before autumn. Of course you are four years too late for college, but you might still manage the law school. Father thinks that the trolley line through the upper road into Bridgeton is an assured thing, and that before

long your farm could be turned into money for house lots; that is what we mean to do with our land.”

“There is one unsurmountable objection to my doing all this, Eileen,” said Ernest, speaking slowly, that his voice might not tremble; “I am not going to send the Boy to his mother’s people, and I hope to sell neither the farm nor the wagon shop for many years to come.”

Eileen stared at him in speechless amazement for a moment, when a new idea came to her.

“Then your father left more money than was supposed, so that you can send the Boy to school and keep the place while you study, though I don’t see why you should bother with either him or it,” she said, half angrily. “Surely, after being tied, all your life, to this hill country, where nothing ever happens, you must long to get away as much as I do.”

“And you wish to get away? Of course you will like to travel, but not to go away for good? Would you like to see your homestead cut up and the brook turned into a drain for a new village?” he asked, quickly drawing his eyes from hers to follow the stream.

“Of course it’s a lovely old place, and I’ve had lots of good times there, but I’ve never expected to live in Oaklands all my life. Yes, I’m even willing to go for good and all, I think, quite for the sake of going. You know you were to come, too, and do fine things that should get in the newspapers. Oh, Ernest, have you forgotten all the plans we made before they built the sawmill dam, and we used to canoe from the Ridge falls quite down to Moosatuck?”

The momentary warmth in her voice made him flush, even as he took a new hold on himself to keep back the words that struggled for speech.

“No, Eileen, there is no more money than people thought, nor even as much. The farm must be worked, and the wagon shop also, to give us a living.”

“But why should you support the Boy,” she interrupted, growing incoherent through her disappointment, “just because your father, when he was past sixty, chose to marry a young woman from nobody knows where, and then both died and left the Boy, only seven years old, who has no claim on you, to drag you down? For father told me last night what I never knew before, that house, land, and business all came from your mother’s people.”

The man tingled hotly to know that his neighbour had been discussing the intricacies of his family affairs with Eileen, but in another light it gave him comfort. Her hardness toward the Boy was undoubtedly caught from her father, not born of her own feelings. But she, lashing herself more and more, persisted in her question:

“Why should you support the Boy? Why do you not send him to his mother’s people, if she had any?”

“Because I love him, Eileen, and he loves me and needs me. Young as he is, he stifles his loneliness lest it should trouble me, or his mother ‘hear and be too sorry,’ as he puts it.” Ernest spoke quietly, all the uncertainty that had swayed him ending. “His mother’s people live in a crowded city. The Boy has an active mind in a frail body; he needs fresh air and a quiet life if he is to live to manhood, Dr. Russell says; shall I refuse him the chance?”

“And lose your own?”

“Possibly; if only one of us can have it, why not he as well as I?”

“What do you mean to do if you stay here? How can you keep house?”

“Turn the farm largely to fruit, and with helpers enlarge the wagon shop; in spite of cheap Western makers, there is a good demand for hand-made work wagons. As to the house, Aunt Louisa Taylor will care for it, and between us, God willing, we will make the Boy into a man and let him go to college for me. Do you know, Eileen, that a good many of the world’s best soldiers have gone to the fight as substitutes for those who could not, and the work was better done than it would have been by those who grieved because they could not go?”

“Have you lost all your ambition, Ernest? Can you be content with such an empty life? If any tongue but yours had told me of this absurd sacrifice, I would not have believed it.”

“Not *all* my ambition; I still have my books, and I can buy others. I have my rod and my gun, and all outdoors, besides the Boy, and—memories of what, until to-day, I thought might be. I believed that you cared for me, Eileen, that you liked our old hills and their life; I thought that you, too, loved the bird on the wing and the sound of the wind in the grass. I knew that you would go away to travel for a long while, perhaps, but I thought you would want to return.”

“I do care, Ernest, that is, in a way; but there must be something else to do in my life besides merely caring. Father is going to take mother and me abroad this summer. I was keeping it a secret to tell you to-day, for I thought that you might join us; I’m so disappointed;” and the golden head buried itself in the slender arms that were clasped about the mossy stump of a fast-vanishing willow, and tears washed away the steely look that sometimes crept into Eileen’s gray eyes.

As she crouched thus, a change seemed to come over the perfect June morning; ragged clouds edged with rain came out of the west and darkened the sun; the singing wind turned to a gale that beat a path before it through the ox-eye daisies, and the ripening wild strawberries looked like blood drops in the grass.

The change came and passed rapidly, and with it Eileen's emotion, and in a moment more they were strolling uphill toward her house as though nothing had happened. True it was she could not picture Oaklands without Ernest; that is, Ernest the man in the open, clad in his loose brown suit, carrying rod and creel, a figure that her imagination turned into a hero of romance. But the other Ernest, the man of the wagon shop, sweat drops on his forehead and uprolled sleeves, superintending some manipulation that he would not leave to the judgment of his workmen, repelled her forcibly. It was this second man that she wished to conceal from her friends of school and city. Many other women in country towns have felt this way at twenty-two. That individual work of the hands has fallen into disrepute is the fault of a feminine point of view as well as the encroachment of machinery.

"When are you going away?" Ernest asked, as he paused at the kitchen door and transferred the trout, wet moss and all, from the creel to the dish that Eileen brought. It was an old-fashioned blue and white platter with cut-off corners; in the centre was the picture of a ruined castle, while the border was wrought in a shell pattern. Ernest had doubtless seen it many times before, yet in the brief moment while he laid the trout upon it every unimportant detail was fixed in his memory, together with the outline of the ten pointed, flexible fingers, tanned with the morning's fishing, that held the dish.

"Won't you come in and see father?" Eileen said, without looking up. "He frets so at having to keep upstairs; only indigestion and overwork with his head, the doctor says. This was the beginning of the idea of the trip abroad, and at first, father wouldn't go, but when he found that he could combine business with the journey, he changed his mind."

"Not to-day, Eileen, it's nearly noon." He might have added that the great work wagon made for Mrs. Jenks-Smith of the Bluffs was to be sent out that afternoon, and that he must go over every bolt and screw, after his father's habit, before it was delivered; but he refrained, as well as from saying that the Boy would be waiting for him to come home to dinner.

"Why didn't Wray come in to dinner, and where is Eileen?" asked her father of her mother, as an hour later he finished the second of the delicately broiled trout with a relish that belied the symptoms of indigestion.

"He was busy and couldn't, and she's downstairs writing letters, to see if she can't get one of her classmates to join our trip and make a fourth; she thinks it makes pleasanter travelling."

“Then she couldn’t coax Wray to go. Well, I’m glad; I thought he’d too much sense to loaf about all summer, as I must. I hope they haven’t quarrelled and she’s turned him down.”

“I thought that and put the question to her, but from what she says, I guess he didn’t give her the chance. I think she’s vexed because he intends to stick to the farm and wagon shop and keep his stepbrother here, and I don’t blame her; a girl with her schooling and a father like you can look higher than a man who works with his hands, even if he has got a whole room full of books and goes down to read Shakespeare and nose out county history that had much better be forgotten with Martin Cortright. Eileen’s handsome, and she’s got a tongue in her head; there’s no knowing what may happen or who she may meet in travelling, or visiting some of her friends that are scattered all over the country.”

“Nonsense; I know very well what I *don’t* wish to have happen. Wray is worth ten of the pretty boys that lounge about nowadays, and haven’t enough grip either of body or brain to stick to anything.”

Mrs. March, however, did not argue; she had no capacity for it, having had pretty much her own way through life by the mere force of inertia. She had cherished romantic ideals in her youth, but not to the extent of marrying one of them. In fact, she had named her only daughter for the heroine of a novel over which she had shed many comfortable tears, and fortunately, Eileen, of a slimmess and fairness hitherto unknown on either side of the family, had grown into the name. Mrs. March was the typical American woman of a country town who has means enough to go to New York at intervals, who after forty regards Europe, indefinite and at large, as the one aim and end of life and needed rest, but who, owing to a limited intelligence, returns from *the* tour sadder, much wearier, but in no way wiser than when she left, in spite of a miscellaneous collection of photographs and guide books.

Ernest Wray walked slowly uphill, his house being on the main road above the Marches’, while the acres belonging to it climbed one above the other, over the Ridge and down the other side. This road was the highway between Banbury and Bridgeton, and there was a cheerful amount of passing on it. As he pushed open the front gate, he looked about the yard for the Boy, but saw no signs of him. A pair of setter pups came from the porch to meet him, stumbling over their own great soft paws, and fastening their sharp first teeth in his trouser hems, pulling him backward at the same time that their shrill barks welcomed him.

Aunt Louisa Taylor (so called because she had ushered Ernest, as well as most of the younger portion of the community, into the world) was setting the dinner table

in the little room out of the summer kitchen, whose windows disclosed a view of both ranges of hills and the valley between.

No, she had not seen the Boy; he had gone to look for wild strawberries with Jephtha Lewis's children a couple of hours before, Jephtha being the head workman in the wagon shop. As she spoke, Ernest heard footsteps in the room overhead, which was his own; and so he hastened upstairs, calling the Boy's name, which was Asa, after his father, though when people spoke of him among themselves, they usually said the Boy, because it seemed to distinguish this child of an old man from all other boys of the neighbourhood.

No answer came, so going to the Boy's room, the great south chamber that had been the child's mother's, and finding it empty, Ernest went on to his own, where in a heap on the floor, his head buried in the white-knitted quilt, half crouched, half knelt the Boy. At first Ernest was startled, thinking the child was ill, or had perhaps picked and eaten something poisonous. But as he turned his face up to his half-brother, the expression was of misery of mind, not body.

Sitting in the low rush-bottomed rocker, Ernest drew the Boy to him tenderly, so that the pale, downcast face rested against his shoulder. Raising it gently in his hands, he said, "What is it, Asa? tell big brother."

"I can't, oh, I can't say it," sobbed the child, yet without shedding a tear. "It's the Brown boys that told me, and their mother *knows* it's true."

(As the widow Brown had made desperate but unsuccessful efforts to become his housekeeper instead of Aunt Louisa, and annex her unruly brood to his household, Ernest quickly conjectured the report that had reached the Boy.)

"Very well, then, if little brother cannot say it, big brother must try; only look up and say Yes and No, so that he may know that he is guessing right. They said, perhaps, that I am going away and that you are going to live far off with strangers?"

"Yes."

"They said that everything here belongs to me and nothing to you?"

"Yes."

"They told you that one day I would marry some one who was very beautiful, like a princess in a fairy tale, and that I should not care for you any more?"

"Yes, oh, yes, that was the worst of all!"

"I have also heard all this, but it is not true."

"Not even a word, brother?"

"Not even a word."

"And you want me for always?" said the child, now standing before him and searching the man's very soul with his solemn brown eyes.

“Only God and your mother know how much.”

“Can I bring my bed right in here close to yours, and put my story-books in the little shelves by yours, and just keep that big lonely room to play in when it’s wet? Yes?”

Then, clasping his arms tight around the man’s neck in an ecstasy of relief, he whispered, “Can I have one more wish, just one more?”

“What is it, Boy? You must name it first, in fair play, you know.”

“May I call you daddy? Boys can have lots of brothers, but a daddy’s very special, and there’s never only one of him, just like you.”

Ernest waited a moment before he answered, for something swayed him that was stronger than his will, impelling him to cry out, “No, not that!”

And then he whispered back, “Yes, Boy, from now on,” and clasping the child in a way that almost hurt, he kissed him on the forehead.

Thus was the compact sealed.

The tension over, the Boy, who could not realize what the other’s promise meant, speedily became a child again, and freeing himself, cried, “Now I shall be here to see the Thrashers hatch out; there’s four eggs in the nest in last year’s pea brush down by the fence; do let us go over and see them, Daddy; if we don’t poke them, they won’t mind.” Then, as they looked across the fields, the Boy laid his cheek against the man’s, and nestling, murmured in a voice of deep content: “Isn’t it a lovely, lovely day, and everything is so happy. Listen: now I can hear the wind talking in the grass, just as you say it talks to you.”

The summer hurried on and slipped away, as it has a way of doing after the rose and strawberry have held their garden carnival, where each crowns the other.

In July the Marches went abroad. Ernest had not broken his habit of dropping in at his neighbour’s house, but he had seen less and less of Eileen, who, very naturally, was absorbed in her preparations and the visit of the young woman who was to be her companion. Before leaving, Eileen had sent Ernest a photograph of herself taken in the filmy summer gown she had last worn. Why she did it, she herself could not have told; neither could Ernest have fathomed her motive if he had tried.

He was about to slip the card into a drawer, then hesitated, and taking from his mantel-shelf in the living-room a picture of Eileen at sixteen, plump, wide-eyed, and serene, for which, at the time, he had carved a somewhat clumsy frame of tulip wood, he substituted the new picture of the lovely, graceful woman with birdlike poise of head and expression, for the old, placing it on his desk.

The Boy, coming in, spied the photograph, and always alert for new impressions,

climbed on a chair to look at it, crying, "Oh, Daddy, isn't this Eileen pretty? She looks up at me just like Pandora peeping up from the box, or a wood-thrush when it's going to sing. She's prettier than the Sleeping Beauty in my book. I want to take her up to live on our bureau and be our fairy Princess; may I?"

And the man, wishing to say No, as in many other things the boy asked, answered, "Yes."

Autumn came—and winter. The Boy began to thrive so well that even father marvelled at the change; there was no outdoor sport fit for his age that Ernest did not enter with him, and the long evenings were filled with delight drawn from all of childhood's countries, Fairyland being not the least. Christmas was the time set for the Marches to return, but new business at Washington claimed the father, and after a brief week spent in house closing, mother and daughter joined him there; and from that time Eileen came to be more and more of an unreality save to the Boy, who seemed to regard her portrait as a living actuality and the third person of the household, saying one day to the Man: "I'm going to marry the Princess when I grow up if she will wait, and not grow old. Do you think, Daddy, Eileen will ever be old like Aunt Louisa?"

"She will never grow old to me; she has stopped," the Man answered.

The spring of the following year was cold and very wet, bringing more illness than usual to the well-drained hill country, especially to the children. There was scarlet fever at Bridgeton, and some one brought it to the Ridge School, the Boy being one of its first victims.

"Who is going to nurse the Boy?" asked father. "Aunt Louisa is too old, and no risk must be taken with him. His bed must be moved into the large room with the open chimney, and a log fire kept on the hearth. Would you like me to send over a trained nurse from the Bridgeton Hospital?"

"I will care for him," said Ernest, setting about the preparation of the room as quietly as a woman could.

That night began a siege that lasted for weeks that seemed like years: on one side deafness and blindness in league with death, on the other side Nature, the doctor, and the Man, while between them lay the Boy.

From the end of the first week the doctor came twice daily, then followed nights when he never went away. Meanwhile, the Man prayed wordless prayers, fought on, refusing to be discouraged, seeming to infuse his own vitality into the Boy's failing pulse by sheer force of will. Yet all this time the doctor dared not look him in the

eyes, so fierce their agonized questioning.

Then at last Nature first routed death, and then slowly, one by one, the others of his train, until one soft, mild day in early April the Man carried a bundle rolled in blankets and, partly unfolding it, set it in the big chair in the sunny corner of the south porch, where, from above the wrappings, two great brown eyes looked out, and the voice of the Boy said clearly, if faintly, "Why, Daddy, I'm so surprised, it's spring again; and the robin's sitting tight on her nest, so there must be eggs in it." Then, lying back, he closed his eyes, with a sigh in which both weakness and content took part, his fingers, thin as birds' claws, seeking the Man's, and twining themselves with his.

Presently he said, as if he had been thinking, "I've had a big long sleep, I guess, and my throat hurt so, and when I was thirsty, I dreamed that my mother used to turn over my pillow when it burned, and you always came and gave me a cool drink. Did you, Daddy? Was it always you?"

"Yes, always."

"And did mother turn my pillow? Did you see her?"

"I did not see her, Asa, but then she may have been there; you know the room was often dark."

"Everything is normal now," the doctor said that evening when he came in; "in another month, with fresh air and careful feeding, the Boy will be quite himself again."

Then at last the sluice-gates opened, and the waters of sorrow and joy, so long pent up, rushed forth, and the Man stood before the doctor, his arm before his face, sobbing like a woman.

At first, the doctor was minded to steal away, then, realizing the nerve strain Ernest had undergone, he laid his hand upon the arm to urge him to go to bed, and repressed a start, for the flesh burned under his touch. Worn out by his vigil and carelessness of self, the Man had caught the fever.

"But I cannot go to bed; the Boy is only half out of the woods even now," protested Ernest, as father told him of his condition in as few words as possible.

"Do not worry about him," said father, cheerily. "I will fumigate his things tomorrow and take him down to our house and Mrs. Evan's care if it is necessary, I promise you." So the Man yielded to the weariness that weighed him down, and soon, in his turn, was tossing in delirium, not knowing that a white-capped nurse was caring for him as he had cared for the Boy.

The fever itself had taken but a slight hold on Ernest; it was the other spectres, worse than death, that threatened him, Deafness and Blindness; his parched throat and tongue refused to form coherent sound, as he lay there with bandaged eyes and

ears, that surgery had rendered wholly deaf in the one hope that Nature might repair the necessary wounds.

As the fever left, and consciousness returned to stay, loneliness possessed him, entire and complete; except through the sense of touch, he was utterly isolated from his kind.

The days went by, until one came, after the pain had left his eyes, when they removed the bandages cautiously, and he saw the chintz figures of the wall-paper in the partly darkened room, and heaven itself could not have seemed a fairer vision.

Presently they let him read, a few words at a time, and the nurse wrote answers to his various questions on a pad that she kept upon the bed; but oftentimes, when he thought that he was speaking, he had in reality made no sound, for he could not hear his own voice.

They brought the Boy, now fast gaining colour and strength, in to reassure him, and Asa, who smiled and puffed out his cheeks to show how he was gaining, left in his hand a little bunch of pansies and hardy English violets. The Man pressed them to his face, but scent was as dead as sound. Would he never again hear the wind in the grass, or Eileen's voice laughing as they went fishing and the fish slipped the hook? Then it came to him, who for a moment had forgotten more recent events, remembering only the past, that hearing had nothing to do with this.

May fluttered past the Man as though on the wings of many birds. The sight of the lilacs under the window, and the apple blossoms scattered through the valley, were his portion of it, and the blood in his veins seemed to grow warm again and his heart began to take courage. The horses were plodding to and fro, ploughing the river meadow, but he did not ask who was guiding the work, or whether the men at the wagon shop were idle or busy; his head was still tired, so tired that he had scarcely the strength to think.

"You must try to rouse him now," said the specialist, who was watching the unresponsive ears, to father; "with bodily health the hearing will return."

It was June when he first crawled down the narrow stairs and took the Boy's seat in the sunny porch, near which his dinner was spread by Aunt Louisa, who bustled about him affectionately, trying by gesture, as well as by written words, to raise his curiosity to the point of questioning how they were managing without him.

Every few days the Boy came with the doctor, now bringing him some little thing that he had made, or a bunch of wayside flowers. One day he brought a knot of white musk roses fastened together with grass. The Man caught at them eagerly, for such grew in the old garden at Eileen's. Burying his nose in them, their fragrance penetrated the awakening sense, the same moment that a high-pitched peal of the

Boy's laughter, as he made the young dogs do their tricks, reached his ears. Ah! blessed Mother Nature, who had day and night been knitting, knitting, to rejoin the severed nerves and tissues that they might carry the messages to the brain once more!

Strawberries were ripe and passing, and the blush rose on the kitchen porch was shedding its satin petals when the Man said abruptly to father, who had this day come without the Boy: "When may Asa come home, Dr. Russell? It is a shame to trouble your daughter any longer, and besides, I need his company. I've been over the farm to-day, and to-morrow I shall go outside to the wagon shop; yes, to-morrow I must take up life again."

"Trouble my daughter—Mrs. Evan?" stammered the doctor, as though taken by surprise. "Why—oh, yes, to be sure, I'll bring him over to-morrow, and perhaps I can persuade his foster-mother to come, too, and render an account of him."

But on the morrow, the Man did not go to the wagon shop as he had said; the day was sultry, and showers threatened, so he wandered down "cross lots" until he met the trout stream, and quite unconsciously followed it until he came upon the group of old willows, under whose shade the old Eileen had vanished.

It was not until he had almost reached the trees that he noticed there were people there, picnickers, probably, yet something led him to pause and look again. Surely, it was the Boy lying upon the grass, with eager upturned face, listening to some one who was evidently reading aloud; but though figure and book were in sight, foliage concealed the face. Another step, and he saw that the reader was Eileen.

The Man must have cried out, for instantly the pair started, and the light fell full upon Eileen's hair and face, the same as of old, and yet not the same, while the boy came bounding toward him, calling, "Oh, Daddy, so you've found out at last where the Princess and I come to read every day!"

"The Princess! How came she here?" said the Man, sick at heart, for he thought the strange haunting dreams of his illness were coming back. "She does not live here now."

"She didn't," cried the boy, babbling on eagerly, as he pulled the Man under the willows, "but they all came back here after you got sick, and my Princess took me up there to live with her in their house; the doctor let her, and we've been playing a fairy story all the time, and she's been, oh, so very good to me, Daddy. She's made me custard and cookies, and sang me to sleep when my legs ached from forgetting how to walk; 'n besides, her father told Peter how to plant the fields, and he's set Jephtha figuring on an awful lot of wagons. But I've forgotten, I wasn't to tell, I

wasn't to tell, because in fairy stories, if you tell, the lights go out and everything stops. Oh, Princess and Daddy, play you didn't hear. Oh, don't let it all stop!" and the Boy clasped his hands tightly, while an agony of fear passed over his sensitive face.

But the Man had ceased to hear him. Taking two steps that brought him face to face with Eileen, he paused and stood looking down at her, and his expression checked the Boy's tongue.

"Is this all true?" he almost whispered, and as he spoke he grew white to the lips and reeled.

"Sit down upon the bank; you have walked too far and you are faint," she said, spreading a shawl that lay beside her on the grass. He dropped to the seat she offered, but never took his eyes from her own, over which the lids drooped lower and lower.

"Is it true?" he repeated.

"We came back in April," she answered softly.

"Why?"

"Because I saw in the home papers that you were ill, and—I wanted to be near."

"Why, again?" he questioned, almost cruelly, but now he had reached a point where he could bear no uncertainty, no mere palliation.

"Because, Ernest, though I know that there are many other things in life besides caring,—caring is best," the drooping lids rose slowly, and the gray eyes looked fully and frankly into his. Then, dropping on her knees beside him, she cried passionately, as she circled with a gesture all the beauty round about, "Can you hear, can you see as you used? Ah, I have been so horribly afraid!"

Clasping his long, thin fingers, that would tremble, about hers, the Man drew Eileen toward him; "I can hear the wind in the grass, I can see what lies behind your eyes, Eileen; do I need more?"

"You won't let the fairy story stop? Please promise you won't," interrupted the Boy, unable to wait longer for his answer.

"Part of it must," answered Eileen, "because you see, Boy, the Princess who wished to live in a story-book, has turned out to be merely a woman—" "For the sake of her lover who was not a prince," added the Man.

Then, as the Boy looked at them, the comprehension of it all slowly beamed from his solemn eyes.

"Then I must choose you a new name," he said.

"Yes, Boy, surely; what shall it be?"

“I will call you Mother, because I love you,” he said very slowly. “Then when other children say it, it won’t hurt me so here,” pressing his hands to his throat; “and my real mother away up there will hear and know that I’m not lonely any more, and that will make her glad.”

And the wind blew on through the wild grass, where never a scythe came to end the song!

VII THE SIMPLE LIFE

AN EPISODE OF JULY

THE MIDSUMMER MOON

When Rodney Kent, known as Billy, and Marjory, his wife, instead of taking a honeymoon abroad, immediately tied themselves down by purchasing a very modest house on the west slope of the Oakland Bluffs, their friends held up their hands and rolled their eyes in astonishment.

It is true that the couple themselves had never entertained a thought of the European trip, but their friends, after seeing the amazing display of wedding gifts, concluded that an expensive and protracted honeymoon would be a fitting way to begin the state of life that living up to the presents indicated. They did not formulate that Marjory was the last of a large family whose parents had always lived quite up to their income in rearing and educating their brood, or that Billy, with a host of friends, naturally hospitable and all doors open to him, was as yet only a confidential clerk in a law firm in spite of the fact that the distinguished chief, himself a bachelor until recently, treated Billy like a younger brother.

The young couple, however, from the beginning had faced facts as they were, for at their respective ages of twenty-four and thirty, they not only had a goodish bit of common sense mingled with their affection, but they had also seen more than one matrimonial shallop, at best equipped only for still water and overloaded with unsought responsibilities, founder pitifully in the cross currents of the social sea.

The house had at once absorbed all of Kent's savings, and was consequently, unlike a city apartment, an object to be considered seriously. This was the attitude that his men friends held toward the venture; neither did it seem strange to any one of the twoscore of assorted male temperaments that the couple should desire to spend their first summer entirely away from the paths of conventional social restraint. All the criticism, of which there was a belated April shower, mingled with not a few hailstones, came from the bride's friends, her own elder sister Agatha taking the lead by saying to a select few who had dropped in a couple of weeks after the wedding to talk it over and hear the latest news of the bride, that Marjory seemed determined to slump, and had no sense whatever of the duties she owed society. While that any woman with her wedding presents, possessing a grain of pride, would try to make a front during the first year at least, adding as a final thrust, "So selfish in Marjory,

short-sighted too; she'll ruin Billy's prospects for a place in the firm by keeping him away from all his friends. If they had only taken a smart little apartment, they would have been able to give half a dozen select dinners before the season breaks, and possibly they might have managed to get the Head of the Firm and his wife to come to one, and see the silver service he sent them, or at least give them a return invitation, for if Mrs. Coates should take up Marjory, you know their fortune, social and financial, would be made."

"Marjory can entertain in the country quite as well as in town, and it's far less stuffy from now on; it's almost May, you know," said little Mary Taylor, called Pussy from her demure and confiding ways, which none the less covered sharp, if delicately pointed, claws, when their use became necessary for the defence of her friends; she had been maid of honour at the wedding, and was a staunch friend of the bride.

"You know English couples often borrow a country house from friends to settle in for the honeymoon, if they've none of their own," she continued. "There is nothing lovelier than a newly furnished country house, all white enamelled furniture, flowered chintz, and muslin draperies, with the maids in light blue or pink chambray and ruffled bib aprons; besides, Agatha, you know that to be asked to a week-end party is more of a compliment than a dinner. I shall make Margie invite me to the very first of them. Then, of course, she will be sure to go in for a specialty,—golf, tennis, motoring, or the garden craze; everybody rushes you out to see the garden now, and tells you how many loads of earth it took to fill it in, and who the landscape architect was.

"I only hope Margie will have an English garden with wooden benches; the seats in an Italian garden have no backs, and are *so* cold if you sit out in the moonlight, in a thin petticoat; and of course that's one of the things that one goes to week-end parties for, the moonlight spooning, I mean."

"You may banish all your pictures of that sort of thing," said Agatha, speaking in a tone in which mystery and disgust were blended. "There will be no draperies or garden seats or maids; my sister has but *one* person to do everything, an old black woman named Juno, who wears a turban, and who, I believe, was Billy's nurse. As for the house, it's in the middle of a field, with some gloomy woods behind it; there's hardly a thing in it but wall-papers, Japanese matting, and flower vases, for Marjory has absolutely sent all of her magnificent silver and bric-à-brac to storage at Tiffany's. For the rest, they've a ginger-coloured pony and an absurd buggy, by way of a trap, and I shouldn't be surprised to find that they all, including the pony, take their meals in the kitchen, and that Billy wears an apron and waits on Marjory and Juno, for she says they intend to lead the simple life this summer. Think of it!

Deliberately committing social suicide.”

Agatha’s voice had a tragic break in it. Poor Agatha, who had never committed a social error in her life, and had made the most of everything almost to the extent of separating a poached egg on toast garnished with parsley into three separate courses, toast, egg, and salad! Yet at thirty-eight she had acquired nothing but an equivocal sense of correctness and a complexion that refused either to stand the light of day or to receive graciously and absorb the improvers that the owner lavished upon it.

Before Pussy Taylor or any one else could recover from their astonishment, the door was flung open, the butler announced in his formal drawl,—Mrs. Rodney Kent, and Marjory herself came in, stopping short in the middle of the room with a quizzical expression as she saw the very conscious faces of her friends.

“My dear,” purred Pussy Taylor, throwing her arms around the bride’s neck, “you’ve come just in time to defend yourself. Oh, yes, of course we were talking about you, and now, before you begin about the country, we must know instantly why you have on your last spring suit, which is of an entirely different shade of brown from this season’s wear, instead of your lovely reseda going-away gown; what you are doing in the city at five o’clock in the afternoon, when you are supposed to be wandering in green lanes and picking violets hand in hand with Billy, who, every now and then, kneels to tie your shoes; and lastly, why you are personally conducting those three queer bundles, and what do they contain? I’m sure if I had appeared at the front door similarly laden, that last butler of Agatha’s training would have sent me to the basement.”

Marjory looked about for a safe place of deposit for her bundles, which she finally confided to a tufted chair; then, throwing off her jacket and drawing off her gloves very deliberately, she took the proffered half of the seat that Pussy occupied by the tea-table.

Marjory was not what is commonly called a pretty woman; every feature was alert and too well adapted for the expression of humour for mere prettiness. A brunette of good colouring, she possessed that quality of charm that no one denies, even while they cannot locate its exact source. Matching her forefingers together, she began to count off the answers to Pussy’s questions.

“Number one. I wore my old suit because this morning it looked like rain; no one seems to bother much about rain in the city, but in the two weeks we’ve been at Oaklands, I’ve learned to tell by the colour of the morning sky, as we see it between two great trees on the hilltop, what the weather is likely to be. This morning it said rain, and though it’s held off all day, it’s beginning now.”

“Mercy me!” exclaimed Pussy, rushing to the window; “and my new lace coat is shrinkable, and interlined with chiffon, to say nothing of my maline hat. May I use the ’phone to call a cab, Agatha?”

“Secondly,” continued Marjory, “the Head of the Firm asked Billy, as a favour, if he would come down to-day,—though he still has two weeks to his credit,—for things were getting in a snarl. As I didn’t care to stay alone, and needed some downtown things, I came, too, and where do you think Billy and I lunched? In the private office of his Majesty, to be sure.”

“What a common thing for you to do,” interrupted Agatha, “trailing into the office after Billy and lunching with Mr. Coates before Mrs. Coates has had a chance to make her wedding call.”

Marjory flushed, but without replying to the criticism, continued, “Then after luncheon the Head of the Firm kindly offered to pilot me to do my last errand, which was in a very mussy sort of street that ran west of City Hall Park, and the result of the shopping is in those three boxes.

“Yes, Pussy, something breakable; I’ll give you three guesses. No? You give it up? Well, then, the boxes are full of eggs. Plymouth rocks, white leghorns, and buff cochins, each kind by itself. Not store eggs for cooking, with some ingredients missing, but hatching eggs that will turn into chickens; for it seems that they are quite different affairs, and Mr. Coates explained the whole matter to me so nicely.” (“How disgusting,” muttered Agatha.) “I find that he was brought up on a stock farm, and expects to have a model one of his own as soon as he and the Missus can settle upon a location.”

“Marjory Kent, will you please remember who you are, and refrain from applying such a vulgar title to Mrs. Erastus Coates, whose mother was Martin Cortright’s aunt, and her father a Philadelphia Biddle? Suppose it reached her ears, do you think it would improve your prospects?”

“Me? Oh, that’s not original; I was merely quoting the Head of the Firm, who called her ‘the Missus.’”

“I thought that no one used hens, and that all you had to do was to buy a box full of eggs, called an incubator, and the lamp that goes with it did the rest,” said Pussy, wisely, for she sometimes read the advertisements in her brother’s sporting paper.

“An incubator,” said Marjory, blind to the looks of boredom on the faces of her friends, “puts all the responsibility upon us, and unnecessary responsibility is what we are planning to avoid, for this summer at least. So as we have three very broad-chested, comfortable hens, who are simply ‘creaking’ with a desire to set, as Juno the cook puts it, we are going to supply them with good food and a nest of eggs

apiece, and let them take the responsibility.

“Do we care to raise poultry and things? We don’t know; who was it that said, ‘We know what we are but not what we may be?’”

“Juliet,” cried Pussy.

“No, Ophelia,” said Agatha; “you might know that in Marjory’s present state of mind she would only quote a mad woman!”

“Whichever it is, that is our present condition, for we may develop a liking for anything simple! So we shall try chickens and see, and that’s another thing that we’re going to do this summer,—try to find out what we really like to do. Billy says that the best beginning is to do nothing that we are sure we dislike.”

(“And lose all your friends in the process,” growled Agatha.)

“That sounds comfy, but meanwhile aren’t you going to fix up your house, and ask us all out there by nicely chosen twos or fours?” pleaded Pussy. “Surely all this stuff about no maids and the simple life that Agatha has been telling us isn’t true; you will have tables and chairs and beds, and not expect us to sleep on the matting, with our heads on blocks, like the Japs?”

“It won’t be quite as simple as that, though I don’t know exactly what Agatha has said; merely, as I told you before, we are going to try to avoid unnecessary responsibility in everything, and keep the time we gain for ourselves. Possibly, after all, that is what is really meant by the simple life.

“To have no maids wouldn’t be doing that. Juno is a treasure, and to have no cook would be putting an awful responsibility upon me; while if I had to get up and make early breakfast for Billy every morning, it would be putting upon him the responsibility of tiring me out. We’re not going to ask a human being to visit us, for then we should be responsible if they didn’t like our ways, but to any one who takes the initiative of inviting themselves, we shall be as nice as we know how. And mind you, Pussy, if guests come in pairs, and choose the full o’ the moon, we’ve a lovely comfortable bench that we bought of a pedler. It is set nearly on the edge of the woods, where it’s all ferny and sweet smelling, and quite out of sight of the house. If our guests, who invite themselves, choose to go there, of course we shan’t have to be responsible for what happens! Now I must run up and see mummy, for Billy’s coming for me in about five minutes, and I’ll give you a chance to quiz him all you wish.”

“Hopeless,” sighed Agatha, despondently, as the door closed; “but what can you expect when she was born eccentric?—and Billy always agrees with her in everything. He even wears a long mustache when all the other men of his class are smooth-shaven, simply because Marjory said she could recognize him in the street

two blocks sooner than if he were without. There is one thing certain, *I shall not go to Oaklands unless I have a proper invitation.*”

“Perhaps,” Pussy began, and then choked and started again, “perhaps two of you would like to drive up town with me. I see the cab is here, and it’s more than a shower.”

No one else was ready to leave, however, and in going out, who should Pussy bump into but the bridegroom, who was coming up the steps arm in arm with another man, who at the sight of the now blushing Miss Pussy, raised his forgotten umbrella, took her to the cab, and then concluded that it would be only polite to shield her from the rain at the other end of the route.

CHAPTER II

Marjory and Billy Kent were seated at their breakfast table, which, indeed, was lunch and dinner table also, and was spread on the back porch. The fact that it was Saturday, and therefore “Massa’s day to home,” accounted for the way in which the pair were lingering over their meal, as well as for the chuckling good nature of June, short for Juno, who paused to gaze affectionately at “the chillun” every time she came near the little window that connected the kitchen with this outdoor dining room.

When the meal was once put upon the table, there was no need of further service, for a revolving stand in the centre of the table brought everything conveniently to hand. But still that did not prevent old June from peeping.

As yet the rolling ground that surrounded the house on three sides was billowy with long grass, and showed little sign of cultivation; on either side of the steps was a wide bed of heliotrope, and another of mignonette, and a soldierly line of sweet peas and other garden annuals broke the stiffness of the path leading to the little barn that housed horse, cow, buggy, and hay under one roof.

“What are you thinking of, Marjory Daw?” asked Billy, looking up from his newspaper at the face that was looking contentedly into space. Yes, Billy Kent read the newspaper at the breakfast table, as he always had done in his bachelor days. His wife would not dream of taking the responsibility of upsetting the habit; in fact, she had grown to like it, especially as he often read bits of interesting news that might otherwise have escaped her.

“I was thinking of three things together,” answered Marjory, smiling, “waiting-maids, chickens, and cats.”

“Do you want a waitress?” said Billy, quickly. “I was thinking at this very moment how jolly it is to be alone with ourselves, and perfect freedom of speech

between us. Somehow the desire for it is always developed by eating!”

“No, I do not wish one. I was thinking the same thing when you spoke. What is handing a few dishes through to June compared with having even one’s unspoken thoughts read through your back, while as for fussing and dusting up the living-room, I love it, for it gives one a chance to get acquainted with one’s things, and see if they stand the test of being either useful or beautiful. We need not use the dining room before September, and by that time we shall have decided what not to put in it.”

“But how about the chickens and cats?”

“I’ve made up my mind that I don’t care for them any more than waitresses. You see, Billy, I’ve decided already that we only want to grow things that are pleasant when they develop. Morning-glory seeds grow into those lovely flowers that have transformed the clothes-poles yonder (yes, they try to reach out and appropriate the clothes-line, but I give them a warning pinch now and then); and tomato and lettuce seeds turn into delicious salads; but the adorable fuzzy chicks turn to broilers that have to have their heads cut off, and a cat turns into so many kittens that they must be drowned. So we won’t have either of them after this summer. A cow will stand the test, for she will not only look well out there in the grass, but milk is such a peaceful, placid thing, it makes me sleepy even to think of the sizzling it makes in the pail when Peter milks.

“By the way, I’ve had a letter from Pussy Taylor; she will be in town the last of the month for a few days between seashore and mountains, and as she says she wants to come here, I’m dreadfully sure she will.”

“Why the word ‘*dreadfully*’? Isn’t she a very good friend of yours?”

“Yes, Billy; but somehow this summer is so perfect that I’m afraid it isn’t real, and that somebody will come and wake me up.”

“It’s real enough, sweetheart, and will continue to be if we don’t expand without knowing it and suddenly wake up and find that we have dropped the oars and are being towed beyond our depth. Your father had a talk with me about this country matter last week; he thinks that I am making a mistake in living out of town, that I ought to be seen at the clubs and dine people in winter; he is afraid that when in the future it comes to the matter of a third partner, the Head of the Firm will think that I spend too much time on the road for a junior, and jump over me for an outsider; yet I know that I’ve never had so much time for sleep and law reading these ten years. By the way, have you thought of a name for the place? I’ll have you some paper stamped.”

“Yes, I’ve a name; it is ‘*As We Like It Inn*,’ and I want it put on a little swinging sign to hang by the front gate, and then the people who come to stay with us will not

be misled.”

“Talking of guests, there is one in particular that I want you to invite in some perfectly informal way, and then make a special point of treating precisely as if she were one of ourselves,” said Billy, with a very conscious look, bringing out each word with such undue precision that his wife stopped arranging the flowers in the bowl before her and fixed her eyes suspiciously on his face.

“Who is it, Billy? Some one that either I probably never have thought of, or else object to, or you would never hold on to your words so.”

“It is Mrs. Coates; she has been down to luncheon two or three times lately, with the Head of the Firm, and she seems really interested in our affairs and wants to know you; says she had no chance to call in town, because we came here the very day of the wedding, so you see she has really followed your rule and has as good as asked to come.”

“Yes, I see,” said Marjory, straightening herself, and all the comfortable relaxation of mind and body at once leaving her attitude; “and I suppose she will come here from that palace called a cottage at Tuxedo, and find the rooms too small to breathe in.”

“If she does, keep her outside,” said cheerful, short-sighted Billy; “of course you will lunch out here, and then if talk fails, you can take the pony and drive her down to the Cortrights’ for a call; you know she is Martin’s cousin. Naturally she won’t stay overnight; she hates, she says, to sleep in strange places, and of course she couldn’t bring her maid here and we have none to offer her.”

“Me have Mrs. Coates out here? I wonder what Agatha would say,” and then Marjory realized that all such wonderments were things of the past, and hastened to add, “The best way will be for me to write and give Mrs. Coates the option of any day next week; then if it rains, the choice will be her own. But Billy, don’t you think I had best open the dining room? It’s hardly polite to ask her to lunch on this little round white wood table as we do, with the dogs lying on the steps.”

“Don’t make the mistake of doing anything different, Margie. Can’t you realize from even the little that you have been about for two years, that a glimpse of really contented people, living unobtrusive lives, is the greatest novelty you could offer her?”

In the modern garden of Eden, social judgment is the serpent, and social ambition the forbidden apple, and at this moment an unexpected whiff of wind brought the scent of this fruit to Marjory’s keen nostrils. Mrs. Coates wrote an immediate reply that she would come the following Friday, while Kent, the matter

being settled, did not give it another thought, except to take it for granted that when the wife of the Head of the Firm once knew Marjory, she would be her friend for life.

When Billy returned home on Monday, he brought Marjory news that meant their first separation. The Head of the Firm wished him to go on a three or four days' business mission of considerable importance, and Billy did not attempt to conceal his elation at the fact. Marjory also entered into the spirit of the occasion, and made no complaint about being left alone; but when twilight closed in on Tuesday, and there was no one to meet at the turn of the road, no one opposite at supper, and no glowing firefly that marked the location of Billy and his cigar among the piazza vines, it changed the aspect of things. That a first night of separation is inevitable, does not make it any the less of a shock to the young wife. Out of the gripping loneliness comes the wonder, "How did I live before, and what should I do *if—?*" a question which is usually and naturally drowned in tears.

Before the tears had more than started, however, Marjory jumped up with a very resolute expression on her face, went into the house, lit the lamp in the den, and finding her pad and pencil, seated herself in front of the lamp, elbows on table, and gazed at the paper with the same blank intensity that Agamemnon Peterkin's face must have worn when he tried to write a book to make his family wise, but discovered that he had nothing to say.

But what Marjory failed to write down, she repeated to herself half aloud: "It is all very well for Billy to say, 'Don't make any difference for Mrs. Coates; I particularly want her to take us as we are, and I'm sure she also would prefer it,' the question is, would she? Luncheon 'just as we are' for Friday would be the peas and beans left from Thursday's dinner added to lettuce for a salad, bread and butter, raspberries, and iced tea.

"Mrs. Coates will arrive at ten-thirty, then we will drive around by the Cortrights'; by one she will be hungry, and I must at least add meat or chicken to the menu; which shall it be? I think I'll consult June."

So saying, Marjory, glad of an excuse to talk to some one, went to the kitchen porch, where sat that comfortable old aunty, rocking, fanning, and crooning hymns to herself, and there laid the case before her.

Ah, little imps that sometimes climb up aloft and grin at those who, mistaking you for cherubs, take your advice, why did it happen that the master of the house was called away at this particular juncture?

"Missus Coates am sure one ob de quality, honey," said June, unfolding and

setting in place her silver-bowed spectacles, even though it was dark, and instantly being seized with a flow of language. "If she's real quality, I don't allow it's showin' right 'spect and dignification to Marsa Rod's Bosses's Missus to feed her with cole vittles on the back stoop like she was hounds, even if you-all do like the airyation and simplification ob it your two selves.

"Lor", Miss Margy, do dress out de house a bit, and fetch out dem weddin' gifts dat outshun all de glories ob Solomon and was hid away so quick dat folks hadn't got through blinkin' at 'em. Spread Missus Coates a banquet ter bulge her eyes, and old June'll do some tall cookin'. Den sweep down dem stairs to fetch her in with a long-trailed skirt out behind and a real lace hankerchief stuck in front just soppin' with perfummary. I tell you, Miss Margie, when Marsa Rod's pa and ma down Baltimore way done entertained the governor and his lady—"

But at this introduction to a recitation of Juno's that was warranted to last an hour in its most abridged form, Marjory interrupted her with, "I'll think it over and decide to-morrow; at least you shall make your stuffed peppers and Creole chicken," and then she fled to her own room and locked the door.

Sleeping was an empty ceremony that night; instead, Marjory devised plans for Mrs. Coates's entertainment. By morning, all the pleasure and originality of their daily life had apparently vanished, and Marjory had resolved to leave her own coign of vantage and meet Mrs. Coates more than halfway.

In the first place, she went to town and secured a trunk full of silver from the safety vault, and then spent two nights in a fever of anxiety, because for safe-keeping she had put the trunk under her bed. She unpacked draperies from the attic chests, crowded all the ornaments into the three rooms she expected to use, the dining room, living-room, and den, before it occurred to her that if she was to have a luncheon of many courses in the dining room she must also have a waitress, or preferably two, to match the splendid silver service.

Where were waitresses to be found? After spending a hot and weary morning scouring the neighbourhood, she finally discovered that the niece of a near-by German truck farmer had "waited," and the eldest daughter of the family who worked on the adjoining place would like "to learn"; so, telling them to come early the next morning to be instructed, she repaired to Bridgeton for white aprons and caps, as she found that both girls owned decent black gowns.

It must be confessed that the dining room had a very high-bred and elegant air when the round table was spread with a lace-edged cloth, its load of silver, cut glass, and candelabra with delicate green candles to match the fern decorations. (Then, of course, it was necessary to draw in the blinds, both to keep out the glare and give

the candles a chance.)

The German girl's name was Gertie, and her American assistant, apparently without good and sufficient reason, was called Sapphira. The latter slipped into her costume with comparative ease, but poor Gertie was innocent of corsets, and the apron bands and strings vanished entirely at the waist line, causing the staying of the apron in position to appear a feat of legerdemain.

This would not do, so Marjory rummaged out a pair of old stays of her own, into which she coaxed the abundant but soft flesh of Gertie, who looked on in dumb astonishment, only saying at the end, "Ver ist, where has gone me?"

"Inside, I suppose," answered Marjory, laughing; "for I'm sure none of it has come off."

On seeing the preparations for artificial light, Sapphira asked confidently: "Say, Ma'am, you must freckle awful easy. I wouldn't have thought it here indoors, though; Ma does, something awful, so I've knit her wash cotton gloves to wear when she hangs out the clothes."

When the two girls seemed to understand their duties, Marjory wisely desisted, and left her instructions to sink in, her parting word being that neither one was to speak unless she addressed her. Marjory had thought of borrowing the Lathams' motor to go to the train; she could not force herself to that length, however, and compromised by sending Peter with the buggy instead of going herself, while she put on one of her trousseau gowns of mull and lace instead of the youthful duck skirt and linen blouse of every day, which, though it added several inches to her height, added ten years to her age.

When Mrs. Coates stepped from the buggy and came up the three steps, Marjory's feelings were mingled of relief and disappointment, for the lady wore a plain skirt and coat of tan linen, and a very simple hat of brown straw; so that the poor little hostess, in her trailing skirts and high-wired collar, felt overdressed to the verge of rudeness.

The greetings being over, Mrs. Coates pleaded the heat of the cars and the warning of a headache as an excuse for staying under the shade rather than driving, and so they went to the side piazza, and began a conversation that was made up largely of words wherein quantity took the place of vital interest.

Mrs. Coates's almost affectionate manner in greeting Marjory was gradually losing its spontaneity; her husband had said, when she proposed going to visit the Kents: "I want your judgment, my dear; I'm thinking of taking Kent into the firm. As a man he's all right, and he's full of praise for his wife and her inexpensive tastes; but I want *you* to judge his wife before making the partnership proposition, for the

woman is usually the pacemaker of the pair, and if she's the sort to try and splutter all over the surface of society with a flash like fat that's jumped out of a frying-pan, it will not be good for either Kent or my business."

So Mrs. Coates was observing, and she in her turn was beginning to be disappointed, for nothing could be more unlike her real self than Marjory was that morning.

"Luncheon is served," called rather than announced Sapphira, with the air of a theatrical novice who has heretofore merely brought in a card on a tray and is given her first lines, which are, "The Prince has arrived," and the break gave both women a feeling of relief.

Mrs. Coates turned and looked expectantly about the veranda, for Billy had dwelt so much about the charm of their meals out-of-doors; but as Marjory led the way into the shadowy dining room, where the two maids stood motionless, she blinked once or twice, until she had taken in all the surroundings, and then seated herself with a feeling somehow of having been the victim of a hoax.

The table and room were both correct and charming, but so much like the hundreds of others at which she had sat in houses both public and private for many years, that she could almost tell with her eyes closed the rotation of the dishes of the menu, from the little-neck clams to the green mint frappé. She had dared to think that there was a young woman who had stepped out of the flock of sheep, not only because they ran too fast, but because she preferred not to flock. Well, it was merely another shattered delusion; also knowing the Kents' income to a penny, she frowned on *two* waiting-maids.

The luncheon progressed, likewise Mrs. Coates's headache; she had long ago acquired the necessary trick of using her fork so as to appear to eat; but in reality she only took some salad, and secretly longed for iced tea in place of the claret, while the conversation fast relapsed into the discussion of the trivial events of the past winter, largely composed of the names of people familiar to Mrs. Coates and only slightly known to Marjory.

As the ice cream was in order, there came a sudden halt, while a noise blent of choking and pounding came from the pantry. Finally, Sapphira came in alone, bearing the cream dish upon the tray at a very tipsy angle.

"Where is Gertie?" Marjory asked imprudently.

Setting the dish before the wrong person instead of passing it, Sapphira, with arms akimbo, whispered with a hoarse fervour that gave the words megaphone power:—

"She sampled one of them stuffed peppers on the sly, and near swallowed it

whole, but it wouldn't go all down, and on account of those corsets of yours being so tight, she can't retch it up neither, though I've slapped her back, and June's going to cut the strings if you don't mind, 'cause they're all knotted."

Horror surged over Marjory, the meanness and responsibility of deceit almost overwhelming her; she dared not catch Mrs. Coates's eye, yet a sudden movement on that lady's part made her look up, and she saw that her guest was deadly pale.

"Might we have a little more air?" Mrs. Coates asked quietly.

"Open all the blinds to the east," said Marjory.

Sapphira did as she was told, but in her turn became transfixed at something she saw a field-length away. Suddenly she began to clasp her hands and sway to and fro, crying, "Oh, ma'am! Oh, Mrs. Kent, little Jimmy's fell in the rain barrel, and I must go fish him out right off and spoil your party."

Then, turning, she whisked off her apron, threw it on a chair, clutched at her cap, which had five wire hairpins to moor it, and crying, "I'll fetch it back when I've dried Jimmy and get it free," she clattered down the front steps and away.

Some women would have made a remark about the depravity of servants in general, or said the girl had gone mad; others would have shed tears; Marjory glanced at Mrs. Coates, and detecting a slight twitch at the corners of her lips, burst into a peal of laughter, not hysterical giggling, but genuine, unfeigned merriment, and at the outburst she was herself once more.

Then in a few words Marjory confessed, ending with, "I'm sure I never should have done such a thing if Billy had been at home and June had not accused me of not treating you with dignification; but ah, how disgusted with me Billy will be."

"Is it absolutely necessary to tell him?" said the elder woman. "Yes, I see by your face that for you it is, at least sometime."

"You are ill; please come up and lie down and let me bring you a cup of tea," said Marjory, a few minutes later, as she noticed the shadows under Mrs. Coates's eyes, "and I'll shut up this tell-tale room and put it in order to-morrow."

"I'm afraid if I do that I shall miss my train, for if I once give in, these headaches always last until sunset."

"Then please miss your train, and stay all night. Please let me telephone home for you," said Marjory, with a ring of sincerity in her voice; "my little spare room isn't a sham, and I can smooth headachy foreheads beautifully, mummy used to say. If your head is better at sunset, you can come to 'just as we are' tea on the porch, and Billy will be home by then." Then Marjory's voice dropped to a sort of purr in unconscious hypnotism. "A cool, thin wrapper—a cup of tea—and cologne on your head? Yes? You will?"

Soon Mrs. Coates found herself relaxing under Marjory's soft touch, being gently undressed, and discomfort vanishing, while cool hands unloosed her hair that had never been smoothed by a daughter, or touched by unpaid help since she was a child.

"Oh, Billy, she came, she has a headache, she's actually asleep up in the spare room, and she's going to stay all night; aren't you pleased?" was Marjory's greeting, as she clung to his neck, and swiftly passed her hands over his face as though she could not trust the evidence of her eyes alone that he was all there.

"But, Billy, if I ever have quality company again, don't go away. It's—I'm so silly, I mean nervous, you know." Then she felt a desire for time; and inwardly prayed that no ill chance should lead him into that dining room just yet.

"Pleased? I should say I am, but it's no more than I expected;" and in this he was perfectly in earnest.

Then Marjory ran off, dragging him after her, for fresh sweet peas and bluets to decorate the little white wood supper-table on the porch, where in due time the wife of the Head of the Firm joined them, refreshed, and her headache gone, while she delighted June by the justice she did to her iced coffee and fried chicken, "Maryland style," as the bills of fare word it.

Marjory chancing to step indoors to light the lamp, Billy drew his chair confidentially toward the lady of quality, for Billy was one of the rare men who could always be confidential without giving offence.

"Don't you see I didn't exaggerate, Mrs. Coates, when I said that Marjory and this sort of simple living were made for each other?"

"No, you didn't exaggerate," she replied, a little reminiscent smile fluttering about her mouth. "You really underrated your wife, for you did not tell me that she has a delicious sense of humour, a very good quality for the wife of a lawyer who is about to become the junior member of a prominent firm, and a quality of saving grace to be copied by the lawyer himself."

"Mrs. Coates, honestly, do you mean?—oh, there, I'm too cheeky to think it; come out, Marjory Daw, and listen to this;" and Billy rushed to open the screen door and fairly pulled his wife back to her chair, upon the arm of which he perched.

"Would you like I should wash up all that load of dishes, Mis'is Kent? I thought, as I lit out so sudden, I'd come back and offer," said a voice from the darkness, and Sapphira stumbled up the steps.

"All what dishes, and who is this?" asked Billy.

"It's part of a little joke that I've asked your wife to keep quite between

ourselves for the present,” said the wife of the Head of the Firm, tucking Marjory’s hand into her arm; “and if the Junior Partner is willing to protect us, I feel quite like walking down to see Cousin Martin Cortright and Lavinia.”

VIII THE ADOPTION OF ALBERT AND VICTORIA

AUGUST—THE CORN MOON

It all happened in August, the limp and lazy month of the year abhorred by Martha Saunders, born Corkle. It surely requires a certain amount of natural philosophy, adaptability to fruit and salad lunches, and an aptitude for lounging in shady places and watching the grass grow, or gazing through the trees skyward from the depth of a hammock, to make August even a mildly pleasurable month. Night is August's strong point; her full moon sheds a placid coppery light, making the glistening green of the cornfields, heavy in ear, look wet and cool; but in the daytime, the Harvest Fly proclaims the heat insistently, mould born of heavy dew invades the pantry, and the milk is curdled by the shock of frequent thunder.

All the defects of the month sink into her soul, but for none of the assuasions does English-born Martha care. She would not effect even a temporary compromise with her sturdy red-meat diet; she considers lounging of any kind a sin, and the very sight of a hammock calls up most unpleasant memories.

The year that she married Timothy and left our house for the cottage at the poultry farm on the hill above, I gave her one of these offending articles to hang in the shade of some apple trees overlooking the coops, thinking it would be a point of vantage for her. But no, the thing was barely put in place and swaying in the breeze, when her substantial form came from the house and stood before us, arms folded, head erect, but eyes closed: "Mrs. Evan," she said, moistening her lips conspicuously, "I thank you kindly for your wish, but if it please you, Timothy shall take *it* down again, for those things are more than I can stand for. Oh, yes, I've tried one, and when I was in it, I was minded of the ship the morn after the third night out, which being a storm, the 'atches were down and the smells not working out, took a good clutch on the stummick, so that a fine cup of tea couldn't find lodging there, the ship still heaving short all the time; and no disrespect intended, Mrs. Evan."

As Martha came from a county in old England of peculiarly equable climate, she lacked her usual energy in the New England August, and a sort of mental prickly heat usually settled upon her, more trying than the bodily variety. In fact, the most strenuous part of the season's labour was over: the early chicks were already broilers; the next group were firm on their feet, and the late ones not yet to be set; while the old hens spent all their time kicking up the dust and moulting with a thoroughness sometimes embarrassing to the beholder.

By this time also the jam and jelly gamut had been run through strawberries, currants, gooseberries, raspberries, and the rest, leaving only peaches, the spicy beach plums, and quinces for the future, so that Martha's capable hands were fairly empty, save for the bit of housework, and what was that with a husband as canty and well-drilled as Timothy? Thus it came about that, into what should have been Martha's vacation time, unrest entered, and each year she managed to worry herself and prod Timothy into the pursuit of some new scheme which, fortunately, generally came to an end with the first cool day of autumn.

"The woman's harvest spells" were what Timothy called this mild sort of summer madness, and in speaking of it to father, he once said: "Of coorse ye ken, Dochtor, that some weemen are mickle like their own settin' hens: when busy season's over, they'r nae content to scratch beetles in the bonny fresh grass in the pasture, and moult quiet like, but they must raise up dust and maak the feathers fly. Hecht! Dochtor, ye ken, ye ken, and naught said, I see it in yer eye!"

In one of these temporary summer periods, Martha had become a convert to Christian Science, but backslid before winter, because she continued to have the nosebleed, for which she had paid no small sum to be cured by absent treatment, and about the failure of this method she expressed her mind freely.

"Tush, tush, woman, and dinna fash yoursel," said Timothy, with twinkling eyes. "Doubtless they meant ye weel, but their minds was na pooerful enoo to send the healin' through sic braw oak trees as we hae hereabout! Man has to stick up poles like birds' twigs to catch this new no-wire telegraph, so mebbe had we a braw toor on the hoose to draw it down, yer nose might catch the benefit o' their far-away healin'!"

Then Martha sniffed and eyed her spouse dubiously, for his Scotch birth should have made it impossible for him to joke, even though constant contact with father and Evan had inoculated him with the tendency.

The next August it was the Salvation Army that stirred Martha's religious conscience, for she had two of these useful articles,—one that guided her actions as regards life in general, and another that was wholly devoted to the interests of her beloved Mr. Evan and his family.

She took this second conversion in a very matter-of-fact way, but insisted that Timothy should go with her to some round-up meetings over in Bridgeton. For a few weeks matters went well; Martha sewed violently all through the sweltering days on shirts for reformed convicts, until one evening a pretty lassie, young enough twice over to be his daughter, had innocently asked Timothy to take part in a street service, at the same time showing him how to pound and twirl a tambourine.

“I’ll not have my man made a monkey of, hussy! He’s as knowin’ as any of your officers, if his figure is a bit warped,” she proclaimed, and straightway left for home, declaring, as she crossed the threshold, “Them as can’t hold to and be content with the Established Church of England had better do without benefit of Gospel;” and Timothy, Dissenter as he was, had cautiously responded “Amen!”

But this particular and unforgettable August, a far more serious distemper had fallen upon Martha Corkle Saunders: the race suicide idea had not only penetrated her brain, but had therein incubated to such an extent that not only was Timothy’s peace of mind destroyed, but the unrest of the situation enveloped us as well.

All normal women are more or less fond of children; and Martha, being no exception to the rule, had alternately spoiled and ruled my Ian and Richard until they had escaped from her as full-fledged schoolboys, it being shortly after this time that the hysterical screed appeared.

Suddenly Martha fell into an attitude of melancholy self-reproach; she was childless; and so was Timothy, and she immediately saw, as mirrored in themselves, the extinction of the English race. In vain did I remind her that as her first husband, “not being durable,” as she expressed it, had lived but a short time, while she was well faced toward sixty when she married Timothy, no reproach could be attached either to her maternal instinct or to her race loyalty. My words fell unheeded. “Our Queen,^[1] she replied, “had nine all by one marriage; she would expect something of me,” and straightway fell to crying, a thing that Martha had never been known to do before under any stress, either of joy or grief.

“But what can you do?” I gasped; then an idea struck me; “it isn’t possible that you are thinking of adopting a child at your age?”

“That’s my very mind, Mrs. Evan, that is, leastways, *children*, young children, two at the very least, following out your own idea that an only child is quite unfortunate, and no disrespect intended.”

“But do you realize what it means?” I pursued relentlessly; “your whole life changed, broken rest, no more quiet meals for Timothy, sickness and teething, amusements to be supplied as well as schooling. When children are born to us we are always, at least, comparatively young, and everything seems natural and a matter of course; but you and dear old rheumatic, set-in-his-ways Tim! I think it would be cruel. The sun must be affecting your brain.”

“Cruel it may be, Mrs. Evan; duty is cruel, and so is death itself, but my mind is made up.”

“And, pray, how will adopting some one else’s children prevent race suicide in your particular case?”

“It won’t be my *family*, to be sure, Mrs. Evan, but they must be *English* children, and no other; that is the race part of it. I’ve spoken to Dr. Russell, Mrs. Evan, to see what he can do about it, mayhap in Bridgeton or at the hospital.”

“What did Timothy say when you told him?” I ventured weakly, after the long pause had become awkward, Martha standing, as she was, erect yet respectful, the drops of sweat upon her forehead, above which the pink bow of her cap quivered, it seemed, with imparted nervousness.

“Timothy Saunders quoted Scripture, Mrs. Evan, as a right-minded man should in solemn moments; he says, humble like, ‘The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!’ I’m not quite minded what he fits the words to, but the spirit o’ resignation is right and dutiful.” So saying, Martha dropped a melancholy courtesy and left me under cover of rescuing a very fat and apoplectic Plymouth Rock hen, who, having worked her way partly through a hole in the fence, was trying to back out against the grain of the feathers that securely anchored her.

“Poor Timothy!” I said to myself; “I wonder what you meant; is it your comfortable home, won so late in life, that you fear you are in danger of losing, or were your remarks merely spoken on general principles?”

That night I talked the matter over with father. Yes, Martha had spoken to him, and all he could do was to postpone the event as long as possible by failing to find suitable children. He had tried to compromise the matter by suggesting a pretty little orphan girl of ten, who came of good American people, but was homeless. No, this would not do. Two children of English parentage, if English birth was impossible, not necessarily babies, but young enough to have no recollections—this was what Martha demanded.

Early one morning, of the second week of August, Effie, Timothy’s niece, who had been our waitress for some years, came knocking at our bedroom door long before the usual hour, at the same time saying something that I did not understand. I answered that I was awake, thinking that she had merely mistaken the time; but the knocking and talking continued, and I went to the door with a feeling of apprehension lest father might be ill, or something have happened to the boys, who were spending a few days up at the Bradfords’.

There stood the usually reticent Effie, hands clasping and unclasping nervously with half-suppressed excitement, while her tongue flew so fast that I had to listen keenly to catch even an idea of her meaning.

“Nobody’s ill, ma’am, only there’s twins left up at Uncle Timothy’s, fine big ones, a boy and a girl, ma’am.”

“What?” I managed to say, going into the hall and closing the door behind me.

“It came about this way: Aunt Martha didn’t rest well last night, as I make out, and she went into the sitting-room and lay on the lounge. Just as it was coming light, she was minded to get up and turn off some work before the sun heated her head, as it’s been doing lately, but somehow she dozed off again. Then wagon wheels going up the Bluffs road stirred her, and she says to herself, ‘Those lazy Polack milk pedlers above are late this morning,’ three o’clock being their time of starting for Bridgeton.

“Howsomever, the next minute she thought she heard a step on the porch, and then, raising the blind, she saw a man hurry out of the yard.

“Going back to the bedroom to call Uncle Timothy, she heard and saw that which made her stand still and let out a yell that uncle said nigh stopped his heart, for on the floor right under the open window was two babies sprawlin’ about as if just waked, and when they set their eyes on her, they began to cry both together (which was small wonder, ma’am, seeing the figger aunty is in her nightcap), until she fell back quite weak in her chair.

“Uncle Timothy shook on some clothes, and came over for me to stay with aunty while he hitched up.

“‘Where are you going?’ says I, thinking the doctor had an early call out.

“‘To take the brats down to the constable on their road to the Orphan House at Bridgeton,’ he growled, ‘Timothy Saunders’ hoose being no dump for gypsy strays.’

“But when I gets over to aunty’s, she’d picked herself together, and the two babies were sitting up among the pillows, crumbing crackers into the bed, she chirping to ’em, looking at ’em as if she couldn’t unglue her eyes from theirs.”

“Sitting up! How old are these babies, pray?” I asked.

“Oh, a matter of a year or more, I’m thinking, ma’am, reading by the teeth and the way they can pull to their feet,” said Effie, catching her breath in the short interval.

“Then aunty turns to me and fairly wizzles my stummick with her next words. ‘Look, Effie,’ says she, ‘see the doings of the Lord, a boy and a girl, and English-born, no doubt, if but from the red of their cheeks and their noses, shaped strong and high like our blessed Queen’s, and no disrespect intended.

“‘Come next Sunday, moreover, I’ll have them baptized Albert and Victoria to give them a fair start, even if their poor dead parents as is dead and gone did see to it, as most like they did, being English; twice will only set the colour better.’

“‘Are their parents dead? Did they fetch a note?’ said I.

“Are ye a silly,’ snapped aunty; ‘would living parents spill such angel infants into strangers’ windows, think ’ee? Don’t stand there gapin’ at me, but trot down and ask Mrs. Evan for the kindness of a few of her lads’ old slips if she’s any laid by, for I mistrust from the smell of those they’ve on that they’ve been a long journey from soap, and when I’ve had the bonnies in a tub, I’ll trim them up fresh. Why don’t ye budge, lass? Are ye rooted?’

“For, ma’am, I couldn’t stir, thinking aunty had gone clean daft, and while I was sort of getting wind to start, Uncle Timothy came in with a straw clothes-basket.

“Here, woman, put a quilt in this; it will make a good coop for yon strays,’ he said, reaching over to the peg where hung his top-coat.

“They’re well enough where they be until I can get a proper cradle rigged,’ said aunty, trying to make friendly with them, which they mistrusted.

“Cradle! They’ll need no cradle!’ said uncle. ‘I’m harnessed now to take them to the Orphan House. Come ye along wi’ me, Effie; they may be awkward freight; ye’ll be back again before your leddy’s up.’

“Orphan House! Bridgeton! and that’s where they’ll *not* go. Don’t ye sense, man, that the Lord has sent them to us to teach us our bounden duty? They’ll be our children by adoption quick as the law allows it, man. Orphan House, Bridgeton, indeed!’

‘I got a swift squint at Uncle Timothy’s face then, ma’am, and I’ve never seen him look so dour since the day he married and I helped him into his tight new boots; it was juist awful!

“Dinna ye heap disrespect upon the Lord, woman,’ he said at last; ‘twas not he put them in here; he doesn’t sneak babes in windows of the aged; his work is seen of men and in the open. Some rogue has put upon us for a pair of old fules, and I’ll not have it.’

“But ye know, Timothy, I’ve spoken lately to the doctor about a pair of bairns, and ye never gainsaid me,’ said aunty, beginning to cry, and a bit overcome for the time by his flow o’ words, for uncle never speaks much.

“Taking the known born with our eyes open is one thing, but a grab in the dark, pushed into the hand by others, is another. Ha’ ye looked in their bundle?’ said he, rolling over with his foot a paper parcel that had fallen under a chair. ‘Open it, Effie, lass.’

“My fingers could scarce untie the string for hurry, but all there was within was a few ragged bits of coarse clothes and some biscuits like the ones that they were crumbing.

“Dry food for bairns,’ said Uncle Timothy, picking up one and twirling it

between his fingers. 'It's time for the milking now. I'll speak to the dochtor and question around a bit before I take the youngsters over; that'll be after deenner, gin I find no trace of those that brought them. A small, dark man, say you, but you saw naught of his face? It's going to be mighty hot this forenoon,' continued uncle, weakening, when he saw how Aunt Martha was taking on. Then I slipped out and ran down to tell you, ma'am, and ask for the clothes."

Promising to hunt up some garments, I returned to Evan, considerably dazed by Effie's recital. We had all hoped that Martha's "Harvest spell" would vanish before the infants filling her numerous requirements should appear, but we had foolishly reckoned without considering the unexpected, which is always quite sure to happen.

"Don't worry," said Evan the cheerful; "the town authorities will be only too glad to be relieved of the charge of the waifs, as a matter of course, but at least an attempt will be made to find where they came from; and though there's nothing to prevent Martha's having them christened, the matter of legal adoption will require more time, and something may turn up. Don't you realize, Barbara, that it is a most unusual thing for children a year old or more to be abandoned? Foundlings are usually a few hours, or at most a few weeks, old. It's to the credit of human nature that few of even the lowest people will give up their cubs when once they've learned to know them."

"Perhaps, however, these are orphans, and it is the people who have them second-hand that wish to get rid of them," I said.

"That may be; but there was a certain method in the place chosen for leaving them that makes me think near-by people, possibly in Bridgeton, had a hand in it; if so, it will leak out."

So, angry as I was at Martha's total lack of common sense, but remembering all she had been to me and my boys in the past dozen years, I made up a bundle of such things as the needy hospital had not claimed, and after breakfast took it up to the chicken farm, where I found that father had preceded me.

It is useless to tell a woman over thirty that men are lacking in curiosity! Father asked two questions to my one. However, he pronounced Albert and Victoria sound of limb and lungs, but seemed to regard the whole matter as a joke, even going so far as to admire their pronounced Guelph noses, and was not as judicious as I had expected in the advice he gave to Martha.

The doings of the next three weeks I will give as recorded in my Experience Book. It had been a long time since anything had occurred worthy of record, so I resorted to it to relieve my feelings.

August 9. The investigation as to the origin of Albert and Victoria has proved a

complete failure; no one can be found who saw a horse and wagon driven by a strange, small, dark man on the day of their arrival or the night before. Already Martha's neat cottage has suffered a change, and the sitting-room looked this morning like a ship's deck swept by a hurricane; all objects that could be hung up or stowed away on mantel-shelf or in cupboard had been removed, and the chairs were huddled together in a corner. The twins move about in a very lively manner: Victoria, creeping on her hands and right knee, uses her left leg as an oar; while Albert, not content with this method, pulls himself slowly upon his feet and totters forward a few steps on a run, only to topple over, catching at anything within reach.

This morning, according to Effie, he caught at the cloth that covered the pan of evenly risen bread dough that Martha was about to mould into loaves, upset it, falling backward into the wreck that made a most comfortable air-cushion.

Timothy's bed has been moved upstairs, as the children have never been "trained rightly to sleep in their beds," as Martha expresses it, and the process is painful to a listener, who, as Martha says of Timothy, is "a bachelor boiled through, and hasn't maternal instincts!"

August 12. The twins babble away at a great rate between themselves, and Martha, anxious to find meaning in their utterances, called me in to translate. "It sounds to me like broad Yorkshire they do be trying for, Mrs. Evan," she said in perfect earnest; "but then, again, it mought be Lancaster; that talk is so overlappin' 'tis hard to reach."

To my ear, even with the echo of Ian and Richard's baby talk in it, the sounds are wholly alien and barbaric, a fit match for the carnal appetites of the youngsters. All in a minute, when Martha's back was turned, Victoria hastily devoured the contents of the dish wherein food had been put on the stoop for the hounds, while Albert howled and kicked with symptoms of a fiendish temper because he was not quick enough to get any of the scraps.

Victoria will be ill to-morrow!

"The 'ounds make too free!" ejaculated Martha, wrathfully (she who had raised many a fall litter by tiding them over cold days in the corner of our spotless kitchen). "Timothy must keep them off and fodder them at the stables and not put temptation in the way of Christian babes!"

By the way, I had almost forgotten to record that the twins were christened down at the Rectory yesterday afternoon. There was a difficulty about their second name that threatened to disrupt Martha's plans.

Timothy, who has been strangely mild and unassertive of late, crossing Martha in nothing, refused to lend the honoured name of Saunders to what he persists in calling

“the aliens.” Martha argued, but to no purpose; his name, he said, was his own; if he had shared it with her, she had no right to peddle it outside the family.

This, even the Rector was obliged to agree was just. Then an inspiration seized Martha. If not Saunders, why not Corkle? The late Corkle could raise no objection, and it would be a sort of belated compliment, and at the same time a delicate way of keeping his name in the ears of his successor!

13. Victoria was *not* ill; Martha is, however, beginning to look fagged; ten maternal days are leaving marks I do not like to see; the wholesome rosy cheeks look dark and veiny. Also some of her cast-iron theories as to the management of infants (which, by the way, she has never attempted to practise upon mine) are disintegrating like a paper bag that has fallen into a water barrel, until only a semblance remains.

Martha’s chief local aversion is a Polish family named Potowski who, unknown to the neighbourhood, unfortunately, leased the land adjoining us on the north, a couple of years ago. Against these people, sellers of blue milk, and as she expresses it, “Sabbath-hoed vegetables,” more than suspected of being Hebrews, she set her face and has full cause, for scarcely a day passes but one of the ten Potowski children overflow into our chicken farm and seldom retreat empty-handed, anything being acceptable at home, from an egg to a fistful of oats or an armful of hay.

So what was my surprise this afternoon to see Albert and Victoria crawl unhidden across the grass plot between the rear porch and dividing fence, and exchange much unintelligible gossip with a group of young Potowskis on the other side, while the new Martha sat under the bell pear tree fashioning some small creeping aprons with fingers that trembled strangely, too worn out either to chide or follow.

The new Martha, in contrast to the old, was rather dishevelled; no collar and brooch topped her tightly buttoned blue and white calico bodice; the parting in her brown hair was decidedly on the bias, and not only did the hair itself lack the usual polish, but suggested that coal ashes and not brushing had been its portion that day. While the tasty cap, the crowning glory of the mature British matron, of and below, a certain class, was altogether lacking.

“Yes, Mrs. Evan,” she said, with a sigh, as she saw me glance at the twins clinging frantically to the fence through which they were poking grass and leaves, “the young need young company, and it can do no harm for them to prattle with the fence between, and though the people yonder are no better than gypsies, their lingo goes for naught, for Albert and Victoria can only make out English words.

“Do they understand? Most surely do they, Mrs. Evan; they know their names,

and come crawling up quick when they see me fixing their bread and milk, bless their hearts!”

Yet I could not be deceived; Martha’s tones were those of duty oft rehearsed rather than affection. I’ve seen her, days gone by, cuddle and kiss my babies until the rose in her Sunday cap threatened to drop its petals with trembling; but if she ever kissed the twins, it must have been always in private.

Conversation languished these days, and while I was endeavouring to manufacture some, both twins began to scream, while Albert, letting go the fence, rolled into the grass, purple in the face and evidently choking.

Hurrying over, I seized Victoria, while Martha picked up the choking brother, running her finger inside his mouth to dislodge whatever he had tried to swallow.

Victoria was clutching part of a Frankfort sausage which she licked eagerly between her sobs, and, as far as we could learn from the enemy across the fence, who had contributed the dainty, Albert had snatched a piece of it, and by sucking, biting, and bolting, made way with it at the risk of strangling. Surely *he* would be sick, and I coaxed father to go up after supper in case he was needed. On his return he reported that the boy was sleeping normally, curled up *under his bed*, Martha confessing that it was well-nigh impossible to keep either child *in* a bed unless pinned down by blankets, which are rather unseasonable.

It certainly would be interesting from a psychological standpoint to know the origin of these waifs, and how and where they have slept, that they should show preferences so decidedly.

The 22d. It has been a very uncomfortable week at the chicken farm, I take it. The heat has been of the quality that makes breathing like inhaling the steam of a wash-boiler.

The twins are presumably teething, and Timothy, I find, mostly comes to our house for a quiet supper with niece Effie and our sympathetic cook, who was overheard condoling with him upon the discomfort the twins and Martha’s whim had brought upon those who were of the age to be grandparents, with their family housework, so to speak, done.

The 24th. Effie informs me that Aunt Martha has stopped baking bread, and takes it in from the baker. Timothy, accustomed to whittling wedges from his wife’s durable cottage loaves, supplementing the same with either butter or cheese, did not realize the flimsy quality of the substitute until his knife slipped through the compressible sponge and yesterday gashed his finger deeply.

The 26th. Martha sent down this morning to ask father if there is any *safe* kind of soothing syrup that she could give the twins to make them sleep at night. I went up

early in the evening to see if they had fever, and take father's answer, which was to the effect that all such drugs are pernicious, and that all teething children are fretful in the month of August. They had no fever, but were healthy and normally cross and uncomfortable. So was Martha.

Finally quiet fell upon the two small beds, and Martha came out upon the porch and sank heavily into the rocker. The glow of Timothy's pipe was missing from the corner where it had blinked and winked in pleasant weather for so many years. The hounds, having been banished from their lounging place because they might hurt the twins, foregathered with Timothy in the open doorway of the carriage house, in plain sight, through a gap in the trees. Presently Effie joined her uncle, and then the cook appeared, carrying something in a pitcher, doubtless a delectable mixture of iced lemonade and ginger-ale. A garden bench was pressed into service, and soon the cook's concertina chirped out "Comin' thro' the Rye," and Timothy's cracked laugh could be heard above it.

Martha sat bolt upright for a moment (it seems to me that it is very irritating to her that all opposition has ceased concerning her venture, excitement died away, and that we all treat the matter as nothing unusual); then she suddenly relaxed, saying irrelevantly, "Bairns were easier raised when I was a gell, Mrs. Evan, else my sister Bell, the mother of eleven living and three not complete, wouldn't be now turning sixty-three and mistress of the Blue Bell out Cheltenham way.

"Of course, some do give more trouble than others; likewise Timothy's niece, Jane Fergus, Effie's sister, has only six, and yet is always droopy. Timothy's wanting to send her money presents constant to help along, but its naught but bad management, say I. She couldn't manage three, so what sense of six?"

"Perhaps she dreads race suicide as you do," I said, and was sorry the minute after, poor Martha looked so weary, and the concertina had ceased to chirp and had swung into "John Anderson," which either by chance or diabolic intent on the part of the cook, changed in turn into "Home, Sweet Home."

The 28th. To-day I invited Martha to take a drive, as she wished to buy the twins a carriage; at the same time I sent Effie up to tend them. I don't know what there is about those children, but strong and healthy as they are, they do not seem young, but like the changelings in fairy stories. There is usually something attractive about youngsters, and I've seen even the most adorable little darkies, but to this rule Albert and Victoria are certainly exceptions.

As we neared Bridgeton I said, for the sake of breaking the silence, "Will you buy a go-cart or a little coach? The go-cart is cool for this season, but of course the coach will be more useful this winter."

“This winter? Some of us may be gone before winter, Mrs. Evan, and no disrespect intended.”

“Why, Martha, are you feeling ill?” I cried, declining to be included in the gloomy prediction.

“I’m not to say well, Mrs. Evan.”

“Where is it and what? Rheumatism?”

“Not so friendly as rheumatism, Mrs. Evan; it’s fulness and emptiness in spots, the one being in the chest and the other of the head. My mother had it in the other way, the head full, and died of a stroke.”

“If you feel ill, we will leave Bridgeton and shopping alone and go for a sniff of the sea,” I said, turning shoreward; “the old toy cart of the boys will serve for the present;” and Martha made no sign of protest.

August 30. Yesterday, Martha’s sense of the duties of citizenship had a chance to exhibit itself and hear all the praise that her heart could desire. Dressed in her best, and the twins wearing new white dresses and white hats with a pink and blue bow respectively, she took them to the Sunday-school picnic given by Effie’s church, over which a minister of the Severely Protestant type presided. Timothy did *not* go, be it said!

If Martha had plotted and planned a sensation, her success could not have been greater, and for a few hours her spirit soared. Albert and Victoria were handed from one to another, and fortunately did not cry, but treated the matter as something to which they were quite accustomed. (Effie told me with horror, that in their rounds they were fed everything, from candy to lemonade and pickles, and I believe her.)

To cap the climax, the Severely Protestant made a little speech, praising “our sister Saunders’ sense of duty in the preservation of two such interesting members of the English-speaking race, so often too lightly crowded out by foreign hordes; we, who through selfishness sometimes take the children nature forces upon us unwillingly, should bow before one who, exempt by age, volunteers in the cause of patriotism.” Scattering applause!

August 31. Again it is the unexpected that happens! This afternoon, as father and I were chatting in the cool depths of the Garden House concerning the adoption papers about which the town clerk was to call on the morrow, noise of a hubbub was borne on the breeze from the vicinity of the chicken farm.

As we listened, sounds separated themselves, children screaming and the piercing voice of a woman shouting being the chief.

“Something is the matter at Martha’s,” I cried, running through the side gate, father quickly following. Forced to go more slowly up the steep bank, I took in at a

glance the group gathered by the porch before I reached them. A short, thick-set woman with dark hair and a flat face was screaming and wringing her hands and embracing the twins alternately. A yellow-haired man with vivid colouring and a pronounced, drooping beak was gesticulating and waving his hands in the air. Mr. Potowski from next door was also gesticulating and trying to explain something to Timothy Saunders, who had him by the collar and was shaking his fist within a thread of his nose, also beaked and drooping. Mrs. Potowski was endeavouring to loosen Timothy's hold, her entire family jabbering in chorus from the other side of the fence. While on the stoop itself, apron over her head, shaken both with sobbing and the jerky motion of the patent rocking-chair, sat Martha.

Father's face was stern, indeed, when he reached them.

"Stop this noise instantly, every one of you!" he commanded. "I'll not have such disgraceful doings on my property."

The vociferous men and women began to cringe and protest.

"Now, Timothy, tell me what all this means as briefly as you can."

"Weel, Dochtor, as I make it out, those two came pushin' in, and claimed Albert and Victoria for their bairns. They've lately come from overseas, a month since, they claim, and being held sick in the ship's hospital, sent on the bairns to his brother, being Potowski there, for safe keeping, but whoever undertook to find *him* left them at the wrang hoose! To-day the man and woman got freedom, and comin' on and not findin' their bairns, took on like crazy ones, till Potowski here pieced twa and twa together and fetched them o'er here!"

"What does he say?" asked father of me, as Potowski began to bow to the ground and gabble in broken yet understandable English.

"He says that if the good grandmother there would like to keep the children, he does not doubt his sister would let her, if she would give money to bring over two more of the six that remain in Poland!" I stammered, my breath fairly leaving me as I realized that Albert and Victoria, with the English complexions and Guelph noses, who were developing either the speech of York or Lancaster, were in reality little Polish Jews! doubtless set within the Saunders' window to save the Potowskis a month's care of them.

At the same moment the truth flashed through father's brain.

"Get out, every one of you, before I get the constable to arrest you for fraud!" he shouted in tones wholly new to him; recovering himself and turning on the Potowskis, "I could make you pay this kind woman here for a month's board for the youngsters, together with several other things," he added threateningly, as they did not seem any too willing to go.

“I’d not like to go that far,” whispered Timothy, pulling at father’s coat sleeve; “the bairns hae served their uses, and earned their keep, I’m thinkin’.”

But at threat of the law the women, the most aggressive of the quartet, seized the children and scuttled out of the yard like so many rabbits, fearing lest Martha should remove the new frocks they wore, the men slinking along close to heel.

Then Timothy released a long breath like escaping steam and said that he must go to the milking, adding, “An’, Dochtor, will you see if you can do aught for the woman? She’s sadly fashed by all this business.”

As he passed Martha, Timothy tried to pull the apron from her face, but she held it only the tighter, whispering, “If ever again ye wish to send a money gift to Jennie Fergus, I’m more than willing, the poor young woman.”

“Martha,” said father, when everything was still once more, “I wish that you would go to bed and take a good sleep, and I will send Effie up to set the house straight.”

“I couldn’t sleep the week gone,” she sobbed, yet trying to control herself, “my head’s that empty it reels when I lay me down, and now thinking of the disrespect I’ve put upon our Queen, lays double weight on my chest, and no disrespect was intended.”

“Never mind; go and lie down and tell Timothy to come to me for some medicine before he has supper,” said father, the end of his nose twitching queerly, as it does when he is much amused and doesn’t wish to show it. Martha obeyed.

“Take everything belonging to those children and stow it in the barn loft; straighten up the house, make your aunt a good cup of tea, but don’t talk to her,” he cautioned Effie.

“And what physic is it, Dochtor?” queried cautious Sandy, as father counted eight small white tablets into one paper, and a tablespoonful of white crystals into another, writing the directions on each.

“It’s calomel, two grains in quarters, Timothy, and the other is Rochelle salts; it is a cure for several kinds of distemper, and we two’ll not forget to give it to Martha every year towards the last part of July!”

Then a twinkle that had been struggling in the corner of Timothy’s least-open eye broke loose and turned into an unmistakable wink.

“Timothy,” said father, trying to look stern, “did you suspect the trick that was being played on Martha?”

“I didna suspicion—I *kenned*; Potowski bought a bag o’ biscuit like them the bairns had, the night before at the village store! But Dochtor, *mon*, ye’ll never

breathe the thought,” he cried, clutching father’s hand like a vice in his alarm. “The woman’s too much to me to risk she’d turn against me, though it’s not best she knows it.”

“Timothy, you sly old sinner,” replied father, closing on the gnarled hand, “I will consider both these bits of information as professional secrets!”

The grip was returned, and looking first in father’s face, then towards his home, where quiet now reigned, and above which hung a slip of a moon, August’s gift to September, he said solemnly, “Dochtor, if the gude Lord had na been a mon, what *wad* hae become o’ the ward!”

[1] Victoria.

IX GROUNDESEL-TREE

SEPTEMBER—THE MOON OF FALLING LEAVES

The summer that old Madam Hale died had been followed by a swift autumn. Frost trod so closely upon the heels of the last thunder shower that the samphire glowed red in the marshes, while there was yet aftermath of clover in the uplands, and shy groundsel-tree garnished her plain summer garb with white feathers, before blue gentian had opened her fringed lids wide enough to show the colour of her eyes.

Unusual as the season was, it received scant attention from people of Westover Heights, so absorbed were they in the question of "What will become of John Hale?"

The Hales belonged to one of the old county families, and, in fact, a decided type, known as the Hale nose, a cross between Roman and aquiline, might be traced the length and breadth of the state and well across its western border, while a corresponding mental strength had marked both the men and women; Judge Hale, Madam Hale's husband, having been both a judge and a national legislator. But, like many another American family, prominent in the last century, the line direct had dwindled to John Hale, the only living child of the judge, and John, in his fifty-eighth year, was only now beginning his life as an independent being.

To any one born and bred outside of a certain circle and unacquainted with the intricate weave of the social fabric of certain conservative New England towns, such a condition is inconceivable. No one would have denied the possibility of such a happening more decidedly than John Hale himself when he graduated from college with distinct literary honours, and set out upon a year of travel, before taking a congenial position offered him by his alma mater.

It was during this year of absolute freedom that John Hale formed the only decided opinions that he ever seemed destined to be allowed, the most conclusive of these being that Jane Mostyn was the only woman with whom he could imagine wishing to spend his life.

Miss Mostyn was likewise making a sort of post-graduate tour, but not alone, for her father, a fussy, rather than nervous, invalid, was her companion. His invalidism was of the intermittent type that appeared when his daughter's plans in any way crossed his own, but was otherwise held in abeyance; and most people readily conceded that he was a charming man, for he could discuss many topics without affectation, and without posing as a pedant, was extremely well read. His regarding

his daughter as an absolute possession who should exist for his happiness alone was his chief eccentricity.

One of the strangest things about the acquaintance of the young people was that it began in Venice, when they had been born and brought up practically in the same New England township. The reasons that had militated against their previously having more than a passing glimpse of one another were the aggressively different political affiliations of the fathers, while Madam Hale knew that the Judge had been refused in early life by the girl who afterward became Jane Mostyn's mother, and so strange was her form of tribal fealty that she regarded this refusal as not only a slight to her husband, but as a species of criticism upon her own choice, though she did not marry the Judge until ten years after. Mrs. Mostyn had died when Jane was about twenty, and at the time when John Hale met her, she was in every possible way trying to draw her father's mind from his loss.

Usually if Mr. Mostyn stayed indoors, Jane did likewise, but one fateful morning the sea shimmered too alluringly under their window, and being attracted by the singing of a gondolier, she determined to brave conventions and go out, only to find the particular gondola was already occupied, and by a man. Hesitating, but only for a moment, for Jane Mostyn seldom hesitated, and usually compassed her ends (not connected with her father) by cheerfully assuming that there would be no opposition, she said to the man, who was looking at her with an expression half reminiscent, half questioning, and taking it for granted that he was either English or an American: "I do not speak Italian; would you kindly direct your man to return here to the hotel for me when you are through with him? I've taken a fancy both to his craft and to his voice;" at the same time writing her name in vigorous characters on one of the cards of the hotel, she held it towards him. A glance at the card, and the puzzled expression turned to one of pleased recognition. John Hale had not spoken to Miss Mostyn more than twice since she tucked up her hair, lengthened her skirts, and went to boarding-school, yet suddenly to talk with her at close range, as she stood there with glints of red setting off her deep blue gown and clear olive skin, seemed the most desirable occupation in the world. Motioning the man to push close to the landing, Hale sprang out of the gondola, and hat in one hand, the other holding the card, he said, "Do you chance to remember Johnny Hale at whom you used to jeer because his mother would not let him coast down the hill that crossed the railroad track at Westover Village?"

Miss Mostyn coloured as red as the cap that topped her black hair, and then extended both hands, the gesture brought about wholly by the impulse to be at once on friendly terms with a home face in a strange land, no matter how slight the

previous footing.

“Why not come out at once and enjoy the morning freshness? One can never tell what sort of an afternoon may follow,” Hale said eagerly.

“There is only one obstacle, this country requires a chaperon; where shall we get her? My father is out of the running to-day. Does your mother chance to be with you? No? Can you suggest any compatriot who may be staying at your hotel? We are the only Americans at ours.”

“No,—yes,” corrected Hale, while a mischievous smile flitted over his usually serious face, “Mrs. Atwood from Westover is here, travelling with an assorted party. I presume that she knows us both, and the poor soul is so homesick that she will hail the opportunity as a perfect godsend.”

“What, the wife of ‘B. Atwood, Leading Grocer, We strive to please and suit the taste of each customer’? Of course she will do as a chaperon, but, considered as ballast, I am afraid we shall require an extra gondolier.”

Hale laughed. “She has fallen away, as she expresses it; the change having been wrought by rushed travel, indigestion, and several inadvised cures of mineral waters. Here she comes now in that brown gondola with blue curtains, and holding on for dear life as if she were with an overloaded picnic party and some one was rocking the boat.”

Immediately recognizing the young people, Mrs. Atwood landed after several frantic efforts, during which her Baedeker fell into the water and floated off, looking like a fishing bobber of eccentric design.

“Let it go, Mr. Hale, let it go,” she panted, as he tried to follow and rescue the book, “I’ll be a good deal better off without it; I can remember what the courier tells us, but when I come to pick out the places and match his stories to them, I get a headache over the nose, such as I used to have when pa wanted me to go to high school, and I got as far as algebra, and then balked flat. Go out with you? Certainly, if you won’t be gone too long. Our party starts on at two; not but what I’d much rather stay here in peace until they come back. Why don’t I? Why, I should miss at least a half a dozen baggage labels for my suit case. I’m collecting them for daughter Ida. We couldn’t both leave Mr. Atwood the same season, so I’m making the trip, and Ida’s to have the suit case, and I don’t know but what she’s got the best of the bargain.”

Thus, under cover of harmless prattle that did away with the necessity of other conversation, they pushed off, and when, presently, in a lull, the gondolier took up his song again, gesture and sympathetic play of expression and eyes filled the place of words between Miss Mostyn and John Hale, so that in a single morning, under the

spell of peace and subtle, mutual appreciation, a friendship began and was cemented more securely than would have been possible during months of conventional intercourse.

From thenceforward until the end of the vacation year, while their paths could not be made to run absolutely parallel, they were at least continually crossing. Though totally unlike in temperament, each seemed able to develop the best qualities in the other. Miss Mostyn, quick and decisive in all things, lacked the very creative mental faculties that she was able to foster in John Hale, while in his company certain rather sharp edges in the young woman were smoothed away, and she became all that was charming and womanly. So vital was her influence that it began to be reflected almost at once in his work. The random sketches of travel were dropped for serious work, and before his return he was spoken of as a new man, who not only had something to say, something vital to add to the comedy of humanity, but, moreover, did it well.

That the two were virtually engaged was a matter of course, and as there were no financial reasons to make a delay necessary, Hale urged with masculine directness, as her father was with her, that they be married without fuss and feathers prior to their return.

To this Jane Mostyn would not consent, though at first she hesitated. There were reasons why the home-coming would be trying enough to her father; she could not leave him until he had at least in a measure readjusted his life.

Surely, as it proved, there was plenty of time for everything but marrying, for that magic hour of possibility passed out of the youth of Jane Mostyn and Hale at almost the moment that they set foot on their native soil. Before long, reasons for delay began to be entered on Hale's side of the ledger, springing from a too narrow idea of filial devotion. Within a month of his return, just as he had entered upon his new work, his father died, with only a few hours' warning.

Judge Hale and his wife had been romantically attached in spite of her almost masculine force of will and unrelenting purpose that had planned every detail of his life, which at the same time was veiled to the world at large by a physical fragility that made her appearance almost ethereal. Now, as a widow, she was doubly resolute, and even more fragile to the eye, and she clung to her only son with a tenacity not to be gainsaid. It was too much to ask of her whose life would doubtless be short, to make her home with him in the university town where she had no associations; so he transferred himself to the home at Westover, going to and fro, and by so doing missing the social side of his association with the college and much impetus that went with it.

Then the years began to fly by, each one laden with its own excuses. Madam Hale (she had always been thus called, "Mrs." by common consent seeming too lowly a title) loved her son passionately, but she loved him as he was related to and a part of her own projects, not with the sacrificial and rare mother love that considers self merely as a means of increasing the child's happiness and broadening its scope. Despotism has many forms, and the visible iron hand is the least to be dreaded. Is there any form of tyranny so absolute as that of a delicate woman over the man who loves her, be he husband or son?

Judge Hale, as the final mark of confidence in his wife, had left her in entire control of his property, including the homestead, probably never doubting that she would share it at once with John, but wishing the pleasure of giving to be solely hers. About this she was very deliberate. What need of haste? Her son shared her home, and his own income, though but a moderate salary, was sufficient for his outside needs.

Theoretically, she wished him to marry, and she would have liked a pretty, subservient daughter-in-law and a group of well-bred and creditable grandchildren to swell her train; but actually, she resented the idea of relinquishing an iota of her influence. While as to Jane Mostyn, they had gauged each other to a nicety, and though on friendly terms, each resented the other to a finality.

Exactly how the pair reconciled their relations to one another, no one knew, probably not even themselves. Westover Village had grown tired of waiting to see what would happen, and cited the case variously as one of obstinacy, where neither would give in, or else crowning them as filial martyrs, according to the temperament of the narrator. Neither Jane Mostyn nor John Hale appeared to mope in the least, but of the two the woman's life seemed the best rounded, and she, who in the beginning, though several years younger, looked older than the man, had now gained many years of youth.

Five years more passed, and Hale resigned what had then grown to a professorship, and, stopping his creative work altogether, relapsed to the mental drudgery of adapting the classics and editing schoolbooks.

So the world waggged on until, during the year that Jane Mostyn was fifty-five and John two years older, both parents died, Mr. Mostyn in June and Madam Hale in August. Then, again, the people of Westover were all alert to know if the old spark of romance would revive, or whether it was buried in cold ashes.

When the wills of the old people, one nearing and one past eighty, were probated, to the amazement of every one it was found that in each case there were restrictions placed upon the properties, so that the full enjoyment of them depended

upon the two heirs not only keeping up the family homesteads as long as they lived, but in absolutely living therein, so determined upon dictation were these parents even after death. The same lawyer, as it had chanced, had drawn up both wills, and he seemed to regard the whole matter in the light of a huge practical joke that might easily be set aside, as there were no near kin, either in the Hale or Mostyn family, and the several institutions that were the conditional residuaries would, under the circumstances, of course compromise.

Jane Mostyn felt that she had done her duty, and was now prepared within proper limits to live to the full what of life was left; but John Hale, to whom independent action had so long been a stranger, would neither in spirit nor in letter, it seemed, deviate from his mother's desires, and as her tyranny had been absolute, so was the gap it left in his life great. Thus by the last of September, after Madam died, people were all agog to know what would become of poor John Hale.

The Hale and Mostyn houses were of the same colonial type, and situated about half a mile apart, the one on the valley road that ran to Bridgeton, and the other on a parallel road that lay on the north side of Sunset Hill. The land holdings of each ran up the hill until merely a party fence in a wooded plateau at the top separated them. The houses were pleasantly located, but the view in front of each ran only the length of the village street, while the steep hill in the back shut off the east and west horizon respectively.

The morning after the first unexpected frost, John Hale had gone to the extreme boundary of his land on the hilltop to see to some fencing that the farmer said must be renewed. As he left the roadside for the rolling ground, a change came over him; as he began to ascend, his head grew clearer and his gait more elastic; he threw back his shoulders and a feeling of exhilaration possessed him such as he had not known for years.

A very short distance separated the heavy air of the river valley from the fresh breath of the hills swept by winds from across salt water, and he began to wonder why any one owning so much land should have literally turned his back upon the hill country as his grandfather had done. Then he began to realize that he, also, had his point of view limited by mere tradition. Coming out from the shelter of low-growing trees, the beauty of both day and scene burst upon him; he had almost forgotten how glorious the world is when seen from the hilltop on a ripe September morning.

He straightway forgot the broken fences, forgot the conditions of his mother's will, forgot that he was nearing threescore. He felt himself a young man again with love walking by his side and ambition before him, and immediately his steps turned

towards a well-hedged lane or pent-road that began nowhere in particular, crossed the hilltop at an angle and joined the upper road near his neighbour's garden, for all at once his new-born sense of youth and freedom led him as directly towards Jane Mostyn, as it had that September morning when they had journeyed on the waterways of Venice. Surely, yes, it was the anniversary of that meeting, the thirtieth; how could such things be? He would forget the between time; it would not be difficult; already it seemed like some dark dream that had suddenly lifted. Would Jane Mostyn feel the same? He would go and ask her.

A covey of quail rose from the edge of a field of buckwheat and passed almost above his head with a whistling flight. How long had it been since he had gone to the woods with dog and gun? Now for the first time in his life he realized his mother's affection as a sort of fetter that had bound his faculties until they had grown numb.

What did it matter now? He was on his way to find Jane. As he went up the lane he observed many things that he had scarcely noticed since his boyhood,—the scarlet berries of spice bush, and Jack-in-the-Pulpit, the frost-bleached fronds of wood and lady ferns, while feathers of white now wreathed many groups of dull green bushes that earlier in the season he would have passed unnoticed.

A curve in the lane brought him directly upon a tall figure, which, basket on arm, was gathering sprays of the plummy white things; it was a woman dressed in dark blue with red at the belt and throat, above which showed a wealth of bright, white, wavy hair, the face being in shadow; who was it? The dress brought some sort of compelling memory to John Hale, but the hair did not fit it. A branch broke under his foot, and the figure turned; it was Jane Mostyn, surely, her eyebrows and lashes, black as of old, a rich colour on cheeks and lips, while the white hair gave her an almost dramatic beauty. But why was Miss Mostyn in colours, when for the last three months she had been so heavily draped in black that her shadow seemed to leave a chill behind?

"I did not know that you ever came to these woods," she said, glancing down at her gown, in visible embarrassment.

Suddenly the combination was translated to Hale, memory coupled with intuition—she wore either the gown in which he had seen her on the Venice quay that other September day, or else its counterpart. So she had not forgotten!

"May I walk back with you? I was coming to see you. But then perhaps you would prefer that Mrs. Atwood should come as chaperon; she drove past the house an hour ago in a fine red motor-car."

"He has not forgotten," said Jane Mostyn's second self, of whom, lacking any other, she had made a confidant of late years; what she said, however, was, "We will

not go home; I am tired of shade and the pent feeling of the lowlands; let us go back up to the hilltop in the open, where one may see, hear, and breathe broadly, openly. This morning when I was in the library, I thought I should suffocate if I did not get away from both the place and myself for a day at least.” Then, looking at Hale, he thought rather anxiously, she added quickly as if she must say the words at any cost, “As I could not change my body and travel backward to youth, I changed my clothes.”

“What is that you are gathering?” Hale asked, transferring the basket to his arm and touching the feathers lightly; “I’ve never seen it before, and yet it grows here in profusion.”

“Groundsel-tree,” she answered; “you might pass by week in and out and never notice it, for its flower has no beauty; for that it must wait until frost releases its seed wings. I love the dear, shy thing; it has blown from the lowlands, and it keeps one’s courage up.”

Something made Hale look full at her, and there were tears clinging to her lashes as if ready to fall and betray her, but at the same moment they came out upon the hilltop and stood looking at the world together.

“I wonder if *they* had spent their lives up here instead of living in a valley of their own shadows, would everything have been different?” said Jane, yet perfectly unconscious that she had spoken.

John Hale held a branch of the winged seeds in his hand and looked from it again to her face. “If glory is given to a bush in autumn that is denied summer beauty, why may it not be so with people as well? Being under a spell we have spent the best part of the day in the valley, but now that we have seen the full light of the afternoon sun, we can never go down again, you and I. Jane, you must marry me now, to-day; not even the shadow of one more nightfall shall come between, and, moreover, you shall never go back to the black clothes that speak of the valley. Neither of us need wear that badge,—it has been discounted by thirty years’ service.” With a swift, passionate gesture he drew her to him so close that her breath came forcibly.

Could this be the same man who had first accepted her reasons for delay, and then intrenched them with others of his own?

As she leaned against him, glad to be powerless, she closed her eyes,—was she twenty or fifty-four? She could not tell.

“You must go to work; you must write again,” she said when he had released her, though it was only to hold her at arm’s length, and then cover her eyes and brow with kisses that made them both tremble,—“a book full of all we have both thought

and put away until now; but before that we must go on a journey so as to make sure that we may do as we please.”

“Shall we go to Venice?” asked Hale, touching the red scarf that was knotted above her throat; “but where is the red cap?”

“No, not so far back or away,” she answered slowly, shaking her head, “the red cap is too far back, and besides with motor-boats spinning about it wouldn’t be the same; we should be disappointed, and it’s foolish to court disappointment. Yet, John, I really think we might go to Stratford once more in spring, and see if it feels the same as it did to sit on the lovely damp, green grass and watch the Avon go by. Possibly we might take cold now,” and then they both laughed as they walked to and fro, swinging the basket between them as children do May baskets in springtime.

Presently a floe of ice clouds high in air crossed the sun, and at the same time something passed over Jane Mostyn’s face. Dropping her hold of the basket, she fell back a few steps, and giving a little shiver she could not repress, said: “John, we have forgotten the two houses in the valley. How can we be free and live on the hilltop? We can do without the money, but the tradition,—ah, what shall we do?”

“Do? Be married first and think it out afterwards; one more look, dearest, and then we will go down,” and, neither desiring to argue, they gazed in silence.

Presently Jane Mostyn gave an exclamation, and a look almost of awe crossed her face, and then an expression of deep content rested upon it.

“I have it,” she said. “Just then I saw it as plainly as in a mirage; after we are married, then let us marry our houses, move them to the hilltop, and join them in one house on the boundary line; thus shall we keep not only the letter, but the spirit also, by taking *them* up out of the valley with us.”

Again he drew her close, but now there were tears in his eyes, also.

Five hours later, Westover Village was electrified by the sight of Jane Mostyn and John Hale entering the Rectory arm in arm, soon to be followed by Mrs. Atwood, who, bearing an enormous bunch of bride’s roses, drew up to the door in her motor-car and alighted with great ceremony. Shortly after, word came by way of the back door that the couple were married, Mrs. Atwood being both witness and bridesmaid; but as they left by a circuitous route in Mrs. Atwood’s car, while that worthy woman walked home, the next question, To whose house would they go? remained unanswered until the following week, when it was found that they had gone to neither, but were stopping at a quiet place ten miles farther up the Moosatuck.

The next month brought a still greater shock, when a contractor from Bridgeton with a gang of men began the labour of moving the two houses up the hill toward a

newly dug cellar on the party line, that the gossips had decided was intended to support a great farm barn.

Another September and the new home had already become old to the two who were never tired of looking out and up, and with this double marriage all the old-time mental influence that Jane had held came back. John Hale was putting the finishing touches to a novel that competent critics said would more than make its mark, so unusual was it in conception as well as full of sweet and mellow strength.

The title alone was not decided, and as John one afternoon was striving for a simple combination of words that should suggest, and yet not reveal, the motive, Jane came into the room with an armful of late wild flowers and stood by his table arranging them in a jar that she always kept filled there. As she stretched out her arm to add some long, feathery white sprays by way of background, John caught her wrist, exclaiming, "See, you have also brought me the title; our book shall be called 'Groundsel-Tree'!"

X THE OPEN WINDOW

OCTOBER—THE DEER MOON

When Professor Hewlett resigned from the chair of English Literature and Letters at B—— College and returned, avowedly, to spend the rest of his days in the home of his forefathers, all Oakland was very glad, but, at the same time, not a little puzzled as to the outcome of the change.

There is certainly nothing extraordinary when a man of sixty-five, even though he is still at his intellectual prime, wishes to free himself from harness, and, without wholly leaving the road for the pasture, travel at his own gait; it was the domestic side of the man's life toward which interest turned, and this side consisted of the possibility of adjusting his family and work under the same roof, for even in his hours of leisure, no one could believe that John Hewlett would let his mental faculties lie dormant.

To an outsider this adjustment would have seemed the simplest matter possible, for though the Professor had been twice married, he had survived both wives, each of whom had left an only daughter; but these two, who composed his family, were as unlike in temperament as in personal appearance.

The first Mrs. Hewlett, a very handsome woman, whom the Professor had married the year after leaving college, was several years his senior. The Hewletts and Bartons had been people of culture as well as neighbours, and the marriage was the logical outcome of long friendship, rather than the focus of spontaneous love. Father, who was the friend of both, says that at this time John Hewlett was a dreamer, who walked head and shoulders in the air, never heeded his footing, and knew nothing of life; while Catharine Barton had made up her mind on practically every matter of importance, a quality upon which she prided herself being that if she once made a decision, she never allowed circumstances to change it. Aggressively devoted to what she considered her husband's best interests, had she lived, it is very doubtful if John Hewlett would either have gained fame as a scholar, or won a host of friends by his delightful personality. In half a dozen years he found himself alone with a little daughter Catharine, who was turning four, a beautiful child, but having the ice of her mother's blood in her veins, and rigid even at that tender age, sitting bolt upright in her father's lap and checking him with wide-eyed reproof if, in clasping her to him, her gown or hair was ruffled. Then the Professor gave the child over to his people to rear, and, turning his face away from women, save in the polite abstract, devoted

himself to work.

The Hewlett homestead—a square, substantial structure of the type that has four large rooms on a floor with an L, a wide, central hall, and large fireplaces—fell at this time to the Professor and an older sister, to whom he confided the little Catharine. Without plan or premeditation the house naturally divided itself in half, Miss Hewlett instinctively occupying the northern portion where the strong sunlight did not persist in penetrating to the fading of the much-treasured Turkey carpet that was an heirloom, while the southern portion the Professor filled with his books and such simple fittings as he needed,—a high chest of drawers, and a bed that had been his mother's, with carved spiral posts and head and foot-rail, being his only ambitious possessions; but in this part of the house the windows were never closed on the sun, that seemed to come in and transfigure and vitalize the Professor's solitude.

As Catharine grew up, she became more and more incomprehensible to her father, and kept even her very precise, ancestor-worshipping aunt in a state of constant repression by her ideas of propriety and etiquette. At twelve, she never committed the indiscretion of biting an apple, but always pared and cut it with a silver fruit-knife; at eighteen she left school and convinced her aunt that it was time for her to take charge of her father's mending and the dusting of his study, in which she sat for an hour or so every day that he was at home, this being in the order of her preconceived ideas of duty and pride in his mental achievements, rather than from the love that makes ministry of every form a necessity.

Professor Hewlett, yearning for some sign of affection, took heart at these demonstrations and prepared at once to make Catharine a partner in his simple pleasures as well as a companion in his work, going so far as to suggest that together they establish a winter home in the college town where heretofore he had merely had bachelor accommodations.

To this, Catharine showed quiet, respectful, but determined opposition: she did not wish to leave her quarters at the homestead where she had built around herself an imaginary position of importance. It was one thing to chide her father for always wearing his stockings on the same feet and so poking through the big toe unnecessarily (as though any one does such things on purpose or could if he tried); to persist in sorting his letters and papers, labelling them "answered," "unanswered," "lecture notes," and "proof sheets," until he was no longer able to find anything; or to hold up her forehead for a good-night kiss,—but to change her plan of living and be submerged by numbers in a larger place was quite another, and asking too much.

Poor old young Professor! He went back to his work that autumn more fully

convinced than ever that in it lay all that life had to offer him. Winter had never seemed so long as this, in which his fortieth birthday was creeping toward him with the spring and May. Some of his associates planned a little festival to celebrate the birthday, quite among themselves, arranging that Adela Heyl, a sister of one of the number, who had a fine voice and was coming to pass the spring in the town, should sing some of his songs, that she, without knowing more than the initials of the author, had found sympathetic and had set to music. For as a reflex to the serious student side of the man, he had both a vein of romance in him and a love of nature so exquisite and so delicately keyed that it was in itself an art.

It was a little late when Professor Hewlett entered the Heyls' cosey, unpretentious house, and while he was touched by the comradeship that was the motive of the festival, yet he at once drew within himself and became diffident at sight of the feminine element that had been introduced in what he had expected was to be a sort of bachelor gathering; for, seated at the piano was a young woman clad in white with a cluster of the white "Poet's Narcissus" set against her low-coiled dark hair. Shoulder curve and cheek told of the glory of a perfect development; the chin was dimple cleft and dark lashes veiled the colour of the eyes that were fixed on the keys of the instrument, as the accompaniment trickled through her fingers, and her throat began to quiver with song like the vibratory prelude of the wood-thrush.

"In Arden where the twilight lingers,
Love may dream but never sleeps,"

ran the words.

John Hewlett, who had drawn himself into a niched doorway on seeing the singer, hearing his own words written long ago and almost forgotten, half started forward and paused with both hands resting on the end of the piano, looking across its length at the singer, who at his motion raised her eyes unconsciously to his. They were a deep violet-blue in colour, but he did not know this then; what he saw was the woman's heart that lay behind, that seemed at once to awaken and spring to meet his own.

The first song glided into a second, and when, at the end of half an hour, Adela stopped and let her hands drop to her knees, the pallor of emotion rather than fatigue replaced her rich colour; and when her brother presented his friend Hewlett as the writer of the words to which her music had given new meaning, there was not one among the onlookers but who realized in some degree what this birthday festival foreshadowed.

John Hewlett travelled quickly over the fourteen years that separated him from

Adela Heyl, back toward enthusiastic youth. In a month's time, when he said that he loved her, there was really no need of words, and though he never gave the fact utterance, she knew, beyond doubt, that it was the first and only love of his life, as was his marriage that followed in October. For no matter whether a man marries once or thrice, there is but one real marriage, be it the first or the last, and no one knows this better than himself.

Miss Hewlett and Catharine went up from Oaklands to the wedding—the sister, in a flutter of mixed feelings in which sorrow at the probable ceasing to be mistress of the homestead, and delight at having new life come into the house, were mingled. The daughter went purely from a wish not to appear to censure her father's actions in public, and thereby gained added reputation for being dutiful. In private she expressed her views in words well chosen for their diamond-edged cutting power. She did not approve of matrimony on general principles; in her father's case she entirely disapproved. Having but a faint memory of her mother, as that of a vague person who had often said "You must not," and never "I love you," yet she taxed her father with shortness of memory in no gentle terms, and when he had come down to arrange some household matters prior to the wedding, he found his first wife's picture placed upon his desk together with a prayer-book he had given her, and which she had carried at their marriage, while at the same time Catharine asked if he was willing that her mother's furniture should remain in her rooms, or if it was to be sold.

Now, however, nothing could cloud his sunshine, and the technical and loveless remembrances that his daughter cultivated like a crop of birch rods were wholly devoid of sting. (By the way, the development of memory is supposed to be one of the best results of education, but father has often said, out of his experience as a physician who sees behind and below the scenes, that memory is often a destroyer of tenderness, and he thinks a capacity for wise forgetting is often a better quality.)

Being themselves happy, Adela and John Hewlett must, perforce, see all about them happy also, and instead of jostling and overturning the old, they merely planned to expand upon their own lines. The ample homestead was divided, and in the half with the primly drawn blinds and dark green door Miss Hewlett and Catharine reigned, while in the other part with the white door, where the honeysuckle climbed up to the open windows and the fearless Phœbes nested atop the never closed blinds, the Professor lived the indoor part of his new life, the only shadow in it being the twilight of the forest where love dreamed but never slept.

People who predicted trouble were amazed, for, strange to say, Catharine, after the first, never measured swords with Adela so few years her senior; it seemed as

though the very intensity of the new wife's nature was so incomprehensible to her that she shrank from stirring its depths.

Three years passed, and John Hewlett's name was spoken among English scholars as that of a great power, even though not yet at its height. In the fourth a deeper note was struck upon his heartstrings, a note above the joy of which was an instant reverberation of sadness, for the cry of his new-born child had apprehension for its echo,—a sudden and unaccountable fragility that had come upon Adela, against which science and love, though hand in hand, fought in vain.

“Her name is Rosalind,” he had said in the first happy days of reaction before, for him at least, the apprehension had taken shape, “for she came to us out of the forest of Arden.” Adela, raising herself by a great effort, put the child into his arms, and folding her in them against his breast, whispered, “Rosalind—that is the name I wished, so that I knew you would say it. Take her, and whatever happens, no matter what else she must lack, let it not be love.”

Two months later, in October, the fifth year of the marriage, and he sat alone with the little Rosalind again gathered in his arms, for Adela as a visible presence had gone.

Catharine, more moved than any one had supposed possible, offered to care for the baby when it became necessary for her father to return to college, while Miss Hewlett fairly begged for the child; but to both he turned a deaf ear. Under no circumstances should the child be separated from him, so Rosalind and a kindly middle-aged nurse, of father's choosing, went back with Professor Hewlett to the university.

During her first five years it seemed that the little girl would be fairly killed with kindness; report of every tooth was carried from house to house, as if it had been the news of the endowment of a new chair. At five, Rosalind had the direct manners of her father enveloped in a bit of coy, feminine charm quite her own. While she was gracious to every one, she belonged only to him, who was also the measure by which she gauged the actions of the outward world. She slept in a crib beside him, breakfasted with him, dined when he lunched, and had a little table and chair in the corner of his study.

“It's all very well for now,” people said, “but wait until she is a few years older, and she will need younger companionship.”

At ten, Rosalind began to pour her father's coffee, perched in a high-backed chair with her toes hardly touching the footstool. She was a child at heart and full of the whims and tempers of childhood; she both loved and hated with a will, but as she

took all her perplexities to her father to be sifted, he still managed to shield her from trouble, and in the next years that followed, the love of books, woods, flowers, and birds were woven into the fabric that bound the pair together. The little crib by his bedside had been replaced by a white, draped bed in the adjoining dressing-room, but she still knelt at his knees to say "Our Father," and in her love blended the actual and spiritual father in her prayers.

"Wait until she is eighteen and the beaux begin to come," said the croakers; "her father will then have to give up first place, and may not be able to shield her from disappointment."

But at twenty the change had not yet come; all the younger men flocked to her, but her fraternal comradeship was so decided that one boundary-line served for all. One, Henry Benton, a man of thirty, a favourite of her father's and likely to succeed him also, showed others what he felt, even though Rosalind did not see it, and one of those who saw was the Professor, and he stood appalled.

To him Rosalind was still a child to whom his love was sufficient; as a woman she found him still all in all, but did he wish it to be so now that he realized? He was nearing sixty-five and soon to retire from the university, for though his mental vigour was unimpaired, he had oftentimes an unaccountable fatigue that made father tell him that one cannot expect the heart at threescore to stand the pressure it did at two. What would happen after him? It might then be too late. Had he been selfish all these years, selfish through blind contentment?

Father love is often the most unselfish of all affections and best able to act free from hope of reward, and less self-centred than the mother love, even as her body is centred and dependent upon her maternity. Yet he felt himself at that moment an egotist.

Though it cut the Professor to the quick, he did all that a tactful man might to throw Benton and Rosalind naturally together, until, though she showed no tell-tale eagerness or emotion, she looked for his coming as a matter of course.

At this juncture, the spring of his retiring came, and the Professor and Rosalind came back to Oaklands, where Catharine, now over forty, was living alone, Miss Hewlett having decided the fall before upon a year's trip abroad; and it was toward the possible spectacle of the daughters as rivals and the father's position between the two, that village attention was turned, for it would be very marked should two separate households be maintained for only three people.

Rosalind did not seem to care for the title or prerogative of "housekeeper" so long as she was her father's companion. Together they had made a plan for a garden entirely encircling the house, where even the shady corners should be forced to yield

bloom, but this scheme was laid away until another season, because the Professor seemed to feel an ever increasing weariness now that the harness had been laid aside and there was no real necessity for exertion. No, there was one thing more,—there was still a volume of critical essays, prepared for the work of the university, to go to press. Rosalind begged her father to wait for a while and rest, but when he still persevered, she, too, threw herself into the work, that was completed at midsummer.

Then came a month of golden days, yet through them ran a thrill as of coming harm that Rosalind felt, but could not formulate; her father clung to her more closely than ever, but when she glanced up at him, instead of meeting a quick response as of old, his eyes seemed fixed upon something in the far-away horizon.

One day when father dropped in for a friendly rather than a professional call, he found the Professor alone,—in itself quite an unusual happening,—his face drawn and white with pain, hand pressed to side, and then together they faced the inevitable as they had done twice before. It might be months hence or even a year or two, or it might be any day, such is *angina's* subtle cruelty.

“Shall I tell Rosalind?” asked father; “it is best that she should know.”

“The time has come at last, then, when I can no longer stand between her and sorrow,” said the Professor, scanning father’s face with a piteous clinging to hope that was heartbreaking.

“No, John,” replied father, taking the hands that were fast becoming veined and transparent, between his own; “the time has come when you may no longer stand between her and either sorrow or love, for one is born of the other, and it is not in the plan of God or nature that she be spared; but if in her love for you she has learned to keep the windows open wide to the sun of things, you will not have failed in your hope.”

“Then all may yet be well with her,” he said slowly, making an evident effort to steady his voice, while at the same time as he glanced out of the window near which they sat, his pained expression changed to one of complete content, and, following his gaze, father looked into the upturned face of Rosalind, who stood below, her mother’s wonderful violet eyes flashing greeting between their long lashes, her arms filled with the crimson, gold, and sapphire glory of late September—boughs of swamp maple, pepperidge, birch, candelabra of fringed gentian, and smoke of seeded clematis.

Once in the room and her plunder arranged in some great blue jars, something either in the air or in an unconscious glance exchanged between the men made her start and then look from one to the other, and kneeling by her father’s chair, she took his face between her hands, and scanning every line said:—

“You are more tired to-day, Daddy, when I thought the bright frosty air would begin to make you better, or did I stay too long and make you worry, dearest?” Then springing up lightly, she followed father, who, without leavetaking, was stealing from the room.

“What is it, Dr. Russell?” she panted, when they had reached the end of the passage; “has anything happened since I went away? Are there any new symptoms?”

“Your father and I have been talking of grave things, dear child,” he answered; “no, there is nothing new,” and afterward he confessed that he was coward enough almost to run away. Reëntering the room, she again dropped to her place by her father’s knee; now it was his turn to take her face between his hands and draw her to him, seeking by unavailing tenderness to break the force of the blow that must come.

“What is it, father?” asked the lips, but before the words were framed, her heart knew the truth. Hiding her head against the breast where her mother had pressed it, more than twenty years before, and forgetting everything except that she had become a child again in her dread, she sobbed, “You must not go without me, for I cannot stay behind alone; wait, oh, father, do wait a little longer.”

“Beloved,—my heart flower,—your mother went alone, and yet I have stayed until now. Do you know what she said when she knew that she must first tread the path and she laid you in my arms? ‘Whatever else she must lack, let it not be love,’ and for this I have lived and hoped. Some day there will dawn in and for you a love to which mine will become as the shadow. Keep the soul windows open lest it pass by, even as we open the house windows to air and sun.”

Then for another whole month the arrow lay hid in the quiver, until Rosalind sometimes dreamed that it was not there at all. Oftentimes they would sit all day in the deep bay-window of her father’s chamber with the October sunshine piercing them and the call notes of the migrant birds falling from the trees now scant of leaf, until plans had been made between the two as for the separation of a necessary journey. But all this time, Catharine held aloof as of old; grieved she was, but with her sorrow was a formality; by temperament she was one of those unfortunates who always look backward to the morning that has passed rather than forward to that which shall be.

Frosts came, and under the leafless trees below the window Rosalind scattered food for the birds as her father sat by watching her, now he did not leave his chair. Soon the arrow was poised again in the bow, and, conscious of its vibration, her father said at the end of a day when he had kept his bed, after Catharine, coming in,

had drawn down the blinds to shut out the moonlight, lest it trouble him: "Open the windows, beloved, and when I go away in spirit, yet still lie here, do not close them, for moon or sun, nor place things near me that cast black shadows, lest the habit of darkness follow you."

That night father was sent for, but this time he could not stay the hand that drew the bow: in the morning, strange people came to the room with the bay-window about which the honeysuckle still bloomed in spite of frost. As they went in, Rosalind said, "Leave him on his bed, and do not close the blinds."

Catharine's side of the house was soon in utter darkness, and a dry-eyed figure clad in black sat in a sepulchral room refusing herself to those who came to sympathize. As the morning lengthened, she crossed the hallway and went upstairs, pausing with an exclamation of horror upon her lips before the open door of the great room. There her father lay upon his bed, across which the sun streamed, a smile upon his lips as if in sleep, while upon the counterpane and scattered all about were flowers. Clad in a soft white gown that had belonged to summer, Rosalind was garlanding the slender rails at top and foot of bed; yet as Catharine looked, the words of reproof she meant to say, halted and remained unuttered, and she crept down the stairs again, realizing for the first time in her life the loneliness of heart that was hers.

While daylight stayed, Rosalind never faltered, and a sort of exaltation took the place of tears. "How do you keepers of the faith reconcile the going of those whose lives are not lived out?" she suddenly asked the Anglican Catholic priest, who had been the family friend since before her father's first marriage, an ecclesiastic of the type more often found in cathedral than in New England towns, a quiet man and very human.

"What others think, I do not know," he replied; "for myself, I believe that each one of us is taken at the time, best, not for those that he leaves behind, but for himself, and this has been my experience."

"But my mother was young and had all life before her," said Rosalind, in doubt.

"She had tasted all the bliss of love and loving, and she left it before one bitter drop had entered the draught."

"But father was still happy in spite of past sorrow; why was it best for him?"

"Because he had reached the summit of his life and work; is it a good thing to find one's self groping backward?"

"Why do I stay behind then?" she pleaded with outstretched hands.

"Because your work of love begun must find its culmination;" and when he had gone, Rosalind sat with hands clasped in her lap, lost in wonder.

With night came tears. Ah, for one word, a sign or token; if any one could send a word back, surely it would be the father to his "heart child."

She lighted candles and grouped them on mantel-shelf and stand, but their light was pale compared to that of the moon. Then she stole away outside the door for rest that must be had. How long she slept she did not know, but awakening with beating heart at a dream that was half reality, she thought she heard a rustling in the great room: opening the door, she saw a snowbird circling about, gray and white, against the moonlight, and even as she looked, it lighted on the rail above her father's head and settled to sleep, head under wing.

"The open window," whispered Rosalind, and peace filled her heart.

Among all those who came to sympathize by word or deed in the three days that followed, one face was missed; Rosalind wondered at it, and then questioned her own disappointment as the days went by, each tense with readjustment, not knowing that absent on a journey at first, he had in tenderness dreaded to push into a house of mourning.

At last one day, a man, whose resolute yet self-restrained face was unfamiliar in the village, came slowly up the street, pausing afar off to look at the house that from his point of view only showed closed shutters. Presently he walked slowly on, and as he passed the gate, turned quickly as for a last look at a place where he did not dare intrude.

In the open window of the sunlit half sat Rosalind, dressed in white, a flower at her throat, an open book before her, while on her sweet human face rested the reflected light as from another world.

Then the man took courage, and, turning back, he knocked at the white door.

XI

THE RAT-CATCHER

NOVEMBER—THE MAGIC MOON

When Black Frost comes to the lowlands, he sometimes loiters for many nights along the river meadows, and sometimes climbs swiftly into the hill country, Wabeno the Magician always following in his wake cloaked in the golden haze of dreams called Indian Summer.

Through the long nights the Magic Moon lights the little beasts to their hunting, but ice fingers lock the shallow pools before day dawn, and, in spite of alluring sunny noons, both man and beast seek shelter, one by the fireside, where the singing logs repeat the songs they once learned from the rain on the leaves in the forest, the other in ground hole, rock lair, or, if sociably inclined, in house chinks, and crannies. In this particular November, however, the village of Oaklands was undergoing a new and strange experience born of the sudden preference of a nimble, four-footed rodent for houses with warm cellars and well-stocked larders, over the more remote barns and granaries. In short, the north end of the village, and some of the outlying houses as well, were suffering from a raid of rats that would have competed in numbers with the army lured to cover by the Pied Piper.

All country dwellers expect to house a few of the wood folk in the hard season, whether they will or no. The bats hang themselves up in the attic behind the chimney, and the squirrels use a loose shingle as a storehouse door; the wood rats burrow under the stable floor, and the pretty, white-footed mouse with pelt and eyes like a deer will often venture to the hearth corner, and not only remain unharmed, but even make himself a welcome guest by his strange singing.

Rats, however,—the great relentless rats of city docks and sewers, that carry both destruction and disease in their march,—are a wholly different matter.

The plague had its beginning in what was considered a necessary improvement for the health of the village as well as its morals, the demolition of an old tavern that for a century had stood at the crossways opposite the railway station at the side of the road where, a few hundred rods higher up, was Martin Cortright's cottage. The tavern, a relic of stage-coach days, and flanked by great barns and pastures of many acres that reached uphill quite to the Cortrights' boundaries, had gradually fallen, until it became a road-house of the worst type, with its barns crumbling, filthy with the litter of years, and the land used for the rooting-ground of a breed of black swill-fed pigs. Its malodour had so offended the nose of public spirit as embodied in the

Anglican Catholic, the Severely Protestant, Mrs. Jenks-Smith, Martin Cortright, and father, as health officer, that a public subscription had been secured, the place bought, the buildings, including the pig-pens, razed, and the land ploughed up to sweeten, preparatory to turning the plot into a sort of park to be a playground for the school children. All this had taken place in the early spring, and by fall every trace and odour of the nuisance that had existed was gone; but the Committee, when they had paid off all scores, had not reckoned with the rats that for generations had been housed upon the premises. During the summer, these rats evidently turned tramps, and, using the wide-chinked stone fences for runways, by which they travelled from farm to farm, lived in luxury, unobserved, though everywhere came complaint of the loss of young chickens and eggs, this being laid to cats, hawks, and weasels. But no sooner did Black Frost show himself than the winter homing instinct that comes upon man, as well as the lesser animals, seized the rats, and from all sides they began to travel back to their old haunts; these lacking, they sought the nearest shelter.

The Cortrights were away in early autumn, and late the first night after their return, Lavinia, candle in hand, going down the front stairs of her well-ordered and supposedly mouse-proof house, encountered a gray-whiskered rat coming up with so fixed a purpose, that even her shrieks and Martin's coming only drove him to the hall below where, according to the testimony of Martin and Lavinia, he backed into a corner and put up a successful fight against Martin, armed with an umbrella, the wall paper receiving the whole of the damage. The maid, intrenched in the hall above, whispered a different version of the encounter, which was that the Master, being short-sighted, and lacking his glasses, had charged at the corner where the rat was not, much to the rat's advantage.

Be this as it may, the postmaster, after having a ham cleaned to the bone and some valuable mail gnawed, tried traps in vain and resorted to poison, with the dire result that, in a week, after the stove fires were started, his family were obliged to go to his wife's mother's, while the movable part of the business took refuge in a corner of the Town House. Soon the one absorbing topic in Oaklands, that eclipsed even the town and presidential elections, both of which fell due that November, taking precedence of the local tax rate, new roads, tariff, tainted money, or trusts, was — "What shall we do with the rats?"

The Village Pharmacy, as the chief shop of the place is called, has many attributes of a department store and club-room as well, in the cold months. Here the men meet, who do not care to stay at home, or go to read in the library, foregather in the saloon, or play poker by a lantern in a corner of the windowless blacksmith's

shop. Among these, the rats came as a new subject, that was welcome, if its cause was not.

Better still, the Pharmacy coterie had a recent recruit and one that added not a little to the spice of its life, one Tom Scott, who owned a Queen Anne villa (no, it wasn't a house or a cottage; if you know the modern English suburban home of this type, you will understand), together with all the proper outside ornaments, and ten acres of land halfway up the east road to the Bluffs. The place was close to what Evan, in the earlier and snobbish days of the Bluff Colony, used to call "the dead line," because in the beginning there had been social war to the knife between the big landowners who lived above the line, and the small owners of the commuting tribe who lived below.

Mr. Scott had lived in Oaklands for eight years, during which time his two golden-haired daughters had turned from apple-cheeked schoolgirls to young women with the regular profiles and peculiar modulation of voice that tell of English origin. Their mother had the same features, voice, and colouring, but slimness had developed into the turtlesque figure of a staunch type of British matron in her early fifties, who has no American prototype. Fat women we have galore, but they usually carry their weight gaily, not ponderously, and seldom outlive their capability for wearing shirtwaists.

Mr. Scott was unmistakably English, tall, broad-shouldered, rosy, clean-shaven, and sixty, his closely cut, crisp gray hair showing no thinness at the crown and his deep-set eyes alert and keen to everything that went on about him, although he was not a man of many words and seldom entered into conversation of his own free will. In short, he was the type of the old country farmer, who, clad in cords and gaiters, spends half his time riding about his place on a deep-chested hunter, and is an ardent follower of the hounds when the chase does not interfere with market day. His speech, though usually correct, broadened with certain words; his *s* took the sound of *z*, and sometimes, when excited, he reversed his vowels.

That he was a man of some means, was evinced by the fact that he owned his home, paid as he went, contributed freely to local charities, had three or four good horses, kept and bred dogs, farmed his land for pleasure rather than profit, and displayed a love of sport by his interest in the county and local fairs and horse shows. At the same time he had evidently retired from active business life, as he only went to the city one day in the week, as any man of leisure might, who, though loving an out-of-door life, did not wish to cut entirely loose from old associations.

For the rest, though he was referred to familiarly as Tom Scott by all the men of his own age, and a good many of the younger ones, and considered by all a square

fellow, not one, if they had been questioned about the matter, could have told from whence he came, or that his previous occupation had in any way been mentioned.

When a new family comes to Oaklands, the natives have three tests by which the strangers are graded and accorded citizenship in one of several degrees, the first being financial, the second, moral, and the third, social. Have they paid for their house in full, or is it held on mortgage? Will they take a church pew, and if so, in which one of the four churches? Does the man of the family wear a collar, tie, and coat when at rest in the bosom of his family?—appearing in shirtsleeves upon the front porch, even of a hot summer evening, no longer being permitted by the rising generation of daughters trained at the Bridgeton High School.

The Scotts had passed the tests in a manner satisfactory to all, immediately taking a pew, neither aggressively toward the front, nor yet economically in the rear, in our equivalent of the Established Church, of which, it seemed, they were all members. Thus the only questioning murmurs that had ever arisen about the head of the family came from a few discontented people who had considered Tom Scott an inexperienced city man of money, and therefore had tried, but tried in vain, to sell him either an unsound horse, badly cured hay, or other farm produce of poor quality, but at a price above the market rates. To these Scott quickly showed so much horse lore, and such a shrewd and experienced side to his character in general, that they voiced the opinion between themselves that he wasn't, in their judgment, what he seemed to be, and that if it were known *how* and *where* he made his money—"well, gambling and horse-racing had made many a fortune, and the 'Piscopals should go slow before they committed themselves to his iniquities and asked him to pass the plate."

Few guests from outside ever went to the Queen Anne villa, and though Mrs. Scott and her daughters joined in the milder social diversions of the village, it was suddenly announced, the fall after they graduated from the high school and something in the nature of a party was expected of them, that mother and daughters were going to the old country to spend Christmas, but that Tom Scott himself would stay behind and keep bachelor's hall. Then again the murmurers said: "Why doesn't he go with them? Has he done anything that prevents his going home?"

It was a little after this time that Scott, an inveterate home lover, and now lonely and hungering for companionship, appeared at the Pharmacy, his mantle of reserve replaced by an almost garrulous familiarity. His first act was to buy a box of really fine cigars, which he passed about freely among his fellows, only frowning at the one outsider, a drummer, who, pushing his way into the group, prepared to take a fistful at once. "Slow, young man, go slow," Scott said deliberately, measuring the fellow

with a single sweep of the eye; “when you ask a gentleman to drink, he doesn’t fill five glasses before he empties the first, does he?”

The drummer slunk back with an exclamation half impertinent, half apologetic, and at that moment the door was flung open, and Martin Cortright entered, agitation written on every feature of his usually calm student face; going directly to the proprietor, who was leaning over the soda-water counter, he called in a voice very unlike his usual quiet tones:—

“Give me some rough-on-rats, and any other poison you have; if they die in the house, and we have to leave, so be it. My patience is exhausted. To-day, while we were out driving, the rats, or a rat, actually got into my little book room, though it has a hardwood floor and high wainscot, and gnawed the corner off the antique leather binding of my ‘Denton’s History of New York’; if this continues, imagine the condition of my library!”

“Why don’t you cover all the food in the house and try traps, Mr. Cortright?” asked Tom Scott, turning abruptly from the group who were discussing the merits of a litter of bull pups that were asleep in a box behind the candy counter.

“Traps!” ejaculated Martin. “We have tried five different kinds, and rats managed to take the bait from four, without snapping the springs, and the fifth, the wire-cage variety, they must have rolled about the kitchen like a toy, for we found it in a corner standing on end. My belief is, Mr. Scott, that intelligence in rats varies, as it does in human beings, and that these particular specimens are what might be called intellectual, and are only to be circumvented and trapped, if at all, by some one who understands their own methods. How do they get into the house? The foundations are solid, the cellar plastered, and with a cement floor that shows no holes, and yet in the space of a month there is hardly a door in the house that does not show the marks of their teeth.”

“You are perfectly right,” said Scott, with the utmost seriousness, interest sparkling in his eyes; “they must be understood and met on their own ground, for they have surely some runway by which they enter and leave, and no two tribes of rats work in exactly the same way, any more than any two gangs of housebreakers handle their tools alike.” Then, as he saw that all eyes were fixed on him inquiringly, he added, in the most casual way possible, “I’ve always been keen on watching animals to learn their ways, and as a young chap I had some queer experiences with rats.”

“Why don’t you take up the reward offered, and clear the town of the rats?” asked the drummer, sneeringly; “a gent who’s so well acquainted with their ways ought to find it a cinch.”

The sneer passed unnoticed. "Have the Selectmen offered a reward in the matter?" Scott asked.

"Yes, posted this afternoon," said the druggist; "there is one of the bills on the tree opposite. One hundred dollars' reward for any one who will either do the job or suggest a remedy."

For a full minute Tom Scott stood with his hands in his pockets looking into the show window and whistling softly to himself as if he were alone; then squaring about he almost called, so loud was his voice, "I've time on my hands now, and I'm going to take up that challenge, boys: if I make the rats go in my traps, I'll give the hundred to the Bridgeton Hospital; if they don't, I'll add a hundred to the sum to make it bigger bait for a smarter fellow."

"I wish you could start to-night and begin at my house, but of course that is asking too much; my wife and the maids are completely upset," Martin Cortright said beseechingly, as though Scott were some sort of priest whose incantations would bring immediate relief to the nerves of the feminine part of the household, and safety to his own beloved books.

"No, I was going to suggest that myself, I must get the lay of the land a bit before I can plan my game, and night's the only time for that. I must go to my house first for a few things that may come handy. Has any one a team outside?"

"I have," said father, who had opened the door as the conversation began, only entering far enough to hand some prescriptions to the druggist, with a few words of directions concerning their filling. "I must wait about for an hour at least, so that I can drive you up and back again as well as not. What, you are going to try and rid us of this plague? Surely, then, as health officer, it is my duty to give you a lift."

"Thank you, Dr. Russell," said Scott, still in a sort of dream, as the two went out together.

"I wonder where Tom Scott got acquainted with rats," said the first Selectman, who had all this time been playing chess imperturbably with the Town Clerk upon the top of a barrel of pop-corn balls.

"In jail, most likely; that's a thriving place for 'em, and there's plenty of time to watch 'em," sneered the drummer, who had just reached into the cigar box that Scott had left upon the counter, only to find that its owner had pocketed the remaining contents.

"You speak as if you'd had personal experience. I see you list rat-traps in your hardware side line," said the Town Clerk, tartly. He liked Scott, and also as a native he resented such remarks from a stranger.

"Mated!" cried the first Selectman, and the coterie began to break up.

Tom Scott and father drove along for a few moments in silence, and then father asked him some questions about Mrs. Hobbs, the friend of Martha Saunders, who was Scott's housekeeper during the absence of his wife.

"She's a good woman and a fine cook, but, Dr. Russell, she's too stiff for comfort; she serves my meals as if I was a gentleman, which I'm not, and never pretended, and won't sit down at table with me."

Father was somewhat surprised at this remark, for he only realized Scott as intelligent and a straightforward man of his word, and, further than this, social classification never entered his head.

The house reached, Scott deftly fastened and blanketed the horses, opened the door with a latch-key, and, leading the way through several dimly lit rooms, said, "Perhaps you'll kindly wait in here in my sitting-room while I hunt about for what I need; there's always a bit of fire in here, sir, and it's less lonely than the empty big rooms."

As soon as father accustomed himself to the light, he saw he was in what is commonly known as a den. A low book-case filled one side, above which hung some good sporting prints in colour, pictures of famous horses, all winners of the Derby, mingled with a few really fine engravings of English rural scenes by Birket Foster, and others of his school. In the bay window was a combination table and writing-desk, upon which papers were littered, a tray of pipes acting as a paper-weight, while three framed photographs and a work-basket of ample proportions spoke of the absent wife and daughters. Comfortable easy-chairs filled the other window recesses; one showing more signs of wear than the rest was drawn up before the hearth, within the arms of which dozed a large, but exceedingly amiable, bulldog, an old friend of father's, that doubtless would have wagged a welcome had he the wherewithal; this lacking, he grinned broadly, and reading in father's face that he wished to sit in the chair, rolled sleepily to the rug, where, resting against father's knees, he threw back his head, extending his chin and throat to be scratched.

As the dog finally dropped his head to the rug in absolute content, father stretched his feet toward the fire, noticing for the first time that it was not of logs but a glowing mass of Liverpool coal, a rarity in a New England village. Then, as idleness bred of a capacity for dwelling upon the details of what surrounds one, seized him, his eyes travelled upward to the mantel-shelf, which had odd, narrow cupboards on either side that reached quite to the ceiling; between these, set panel-wise in a heavy frame of black oak, was an oil painting. This was of such an unusual quality and subject for the surroundings, that father first rubbed his eyes and then pushed the chair back to see the better. The background was painted broadly, or,

rather, merely suggested a dark-walled room with the corner of a table littered with the remains of a recent feast; upon a crimson leather chair close by the table was perched a young woman, a-tiptoe, in her stocking feet; her copper-brown hair and some white, loose-flowing wrap drooped from her shoulders, while with both hands she held her skirts about her knees and stared in wide-eyed terror at a couple of rats that scurried across the floor toward her. The abrupt lighting of the figure came entirely from a bull's-eye lantern that was held in front of the man who crouched in the shadow directly opposite the woman.

So striking and realistic was the canvas that after an examination at close range, which revealed the name of the painter, an artist of repute who had made a name some twenty years before for his daring and original portraits and figure compositions, father placed the easy-chair in the best possible position, reseated himself, and for the moment forgot his errand and surroundings in his blended admiration and curiosity concerning the painting.

"I suppose you are wondering how a five-hundred-guinea picture like that came here, sir," said Tom Scott's voice, so close behind the chair that father started, only to give a second and more emphatic jump and ejaculate, "Bless me! for a moment I took you for a burglar," as the man came forward and stood leaning against the mantel, upon which he set a small bull's-eye lantern. Usually so carefully dressed and precise, even when working as he often did about his stable and garden, Scott had undergone a complete transformation. A close-fitting cap pulled down about his ears touched the collar of a dull gray sweater, below which were tightly fitting knee breeches, long stockings, and flexible, heelless shoes; a stout bag that he brought in he dropped on the floor, and it gave out a clank, suggestive of handcuffs and chains.

For a moment after father spoke, Scott coloured deeply, even allowing for the firelight, and then he repeated the question concerning the picture.

"Yes, I must confess that I am curious to know something of the history of that painting," replied father, speaking slowly and peering from half-closed lids, "for though it is evidently what is called a fancy piece, there is something about it that makes me feel that it was a real happening and the woman real flesh and blood."

It was Tom Scott's turn to start and scan father's face narrowly. Whatever he read there evidently satisfied him, for he said quickly, as if determined to speak before he changed his mind, "She was real flesh and blood, and she is still, please God. The woman in the picture is my wife!"

"Your wife? Not the Mrs. Scott that I know and have tended?"

"Yes, there's never been but one for me. Of course I'll not say that she's as slim

and girlish as she was twenty-five years ago, but she's just as game and true as she was that night. If you'll listen, I'll tell you the story of it all, and not make it long. Moreover, it will be a kindness to me. For some time back I've felt that I must share those days with some man that I could trust, and now, to-night, with all this rat talk, and the missus who knows being gone, I must speak it out to some one or lose my grip. No, don't look troubled, sir, it's no crime, only something I've held back for the good of my girls, as I thought, and if I do right or wrong, it's for you to help me judge, Dr. Russell.

"Some people hereabout, as well as in other places, have wondered where and how I got my start, and if the money I have was rightly come by. Yes, sir, I see by your face that you've heard this, and I'll not attempt to deny that, since leaving my trade, I've taken enough trouble to hide it to make people suspect more than there is to tell."

Opening one of the cupboards with a key fastened to his pocket by a chain, he took out a small double leather case; one side contained a photograph of an old lady in a black gown and a white puffed widow's cap; from the opposite opening, he drew a thick card, yellow from its rest in the dark, and handed it to father. Printed on it in heavy letters were these words: "Successor to the original Harry Leverings—Rat-catcher. At the old stand—2100 West 42d St.—Contracts made for clearing hotels and public buildings.—No poisons used, traps and strictly reliable men only employed." Across the bottom in silhouette were a string of steel traps and a bevy of scurrying rats.

Taking the card from father, whose face certainly expressed all the interest necessary to encourage the narrator, Scott placed it on the mantel-shelf as a sort of prompter, and straightway plunged into the story:—

"There were only two boys of us who lived to grow up at home, John and me. Of course, when my father died, John, being the elder, had the land holdings, a goodish bit of a farm that had given a fair living when well managed, while I had very little, but leave to get out. My mother loved me best, I knew, but John was the heir, and that was the beginning and the end of it. To keep me by her, she would have been willing to see me knuckle down to be little more than a field hand to my brother, but I would not. I had no trade except if knowing a good horse and how to ride him could be called one, but I could shoot straight, and through friendship with a game-keeper, I knew the ways of every beastie of the woods and fallows of a great estate on the edge of which our land lay. Many a night I've lain out in the fern with him, and miles did I tramp after him when he went about setting and tending his traps for things that killed the game. Poor McTaggart, I remember him well; he only died

last year.

“What I meant to do more than get away, I never knew when I took my fortune, less than a hundred pounds, and left for America, for John was hard and had an underhand way of working between me and my mother that made every day I stayed a battle. Then, too, he made trouble with my boyish sweetheart, Annie Fenton, a neighbour’s daughter, that in my eyes always acted as if she feared and disliked him, yet dared not tell him so. For a couple of months I drifted about here and there, but never locating. One night when I had been thinking that my money would likely run low before I had made my start, I was stopping at a cheap commercial hotel in New York, when I heard them talking of the rats that overran the kitchen, and about one Harry Leverings, who, with a gang of men under him, made a handsome living at rat-catching. This man, moreover, was coming there that night.

“Then my old days with McTaggart and my work of trap-setting came to me, and getting leave to go below stairs, I chanced to fall in with Leverings himself, who proved to be a fellow-countryman. One thing led to another; I told him of a kind of trap McTaggart made, and sent for one; soon I was working for him, improved the trap, took out a patent on it, and five years later, when he was ready to drop out and go home, I succeeded to his business, as the card says, and sometimes employed upwards of twenty men who travelled all about the country, though for some reason I can’t explain, my own name never appeared as head of the business.

“Meanwhile, things had gone badly at home; soon after I left, Annie Fenton’s father, thinking a bird in the hand the best bargain, tried to force her to marry my brother, but she slipped away to an aunt somewhere in America, leaving no trace of herself.

“John mismanaged the land, and, being caught in sharp practice, fell into debt, leased out what he could of the place without thought of mother, and went, some said, to Australia, though others said he had followed Annie. Next, my mother fell into straits, and as I knew she couldn’t be happy here, at least until I had a settled home, I sent her money every month, through old McTaggart, lest it should be caught in any way to pay my brother’s debts.

“It was close upon Christmas of the sixth year after I left home when I had about made up my mind to go back for the holidays, that one of my best customers, the owner of several large buildings for which I cared, asked me if I would go out to his country house for a week or so and see if I could do something about the rats, that, since cold weather, had come into the cellar in a drove and were working up through the house, destroying the woodwork and furnishings. He was to have house parties

there all through the holidays, and he wished, if possible, to have the rats kept down, if nothing more, lest they annoy his guests.

“By this time I had given up personal jobs, preferring to look over the ground and arrange the plans for my men, but Mr. —— rather insisted that I should go to his place alone, promising to put me up at the lodge, and so I went. Talk about seeing life, Dr. Russell, no one sees more of it behind the scenes, as it were, than a rat-catcher. To do his work properly on a large scale, he must be trusted to go everywhere, at all hours. Those years had educated me, and at the same time made me old at thirty. I saw into all their ways, how houses were furnished, the pictures and books people bought, what food they ate, and what wine they drank, and—beg pardon, sir, I’m getting off my story.

“This country house had sliding doors, draped by curtains all through, and I saw at once that it was through these doors the rat runways lay. Not wishing to make talk of the matter, Mr. —— explained my errand only to the butler and told him to give me freedom of all below the bedroom floors at night, so that I could remove both traps and rats, if any were caught before daylight. The second night of my stay there was a long dinner that lasted well into the night, with music and a play, for among the guests that had come were some singers and a famous artist, who rigged up a stage in the drawing-room and trimmed it up with draperies and the like.

“I saw a good deal of the doings from behind a curtain where the first of my trap line was set, and after everybody had gone to bed, and the extra waiters had left for their quarters outside, I took my dark lantern that I always kept lighted and went about the dining-room to see if any fruit or sweets that would distract the rats had been left upon the sideboard. At that moment I heard a rustling in a cage-trap, a kind I seldom use, on the opposite side of the room; going to it I found that three young rats had crowded into it together. Not wishing to go out, I dropped trap and all into the bag that a rat-catcher always carries. Then I continued across the room carefully, for the chairs were all in confusion, the men having been tired and left in a hurry. I was about to open the slide in the lantern front, when I saw, reflected in one of the long mirrors, a woman’s figure coming down the stairs, shading the candle that she carried in one hand.

“The figure came on through the open door straight into the dining room, where I stood half in the corner with the curtain held before me. The woman was slender and rather tall; her hair was hanging loosely and looked black in the dim light. She wore a white wrapper of some sort, and by the muffled sound of her steps, I knew that she was in stocking feet.

“What did she want—a glass of water, to meet a sweetheart, or was she looking

for some lost article? For all of these things had I seen happen. It was the last, for, setting the candle upon the table, she began to grope underneath it, and, giving a soft exclamation of pleasure, held to the light a glittering diamond collar with a wide clasp of coloured gems. But it was not the sight of these that made me turn so cold that the lantern nearly fell from my stiff fingers; it was when the light of the candle flashed full on the girl's face and reddish hair, and showed me Annie Fenton!

“Before I could pull myself together, I heard steps coming from the butler's pantry just behind me, and a man's figure, with a clean-shaven face and wearing the dress suit of a waiter, stepped into the light. Facing Annie, he laid his hand on her shoulder. She started and cringed, but not a sound left her lips.

“Why didn't you come to meet me as I bade you?” his voice whispered harshly. ‘Did you think now that I've found you, I would let you slip through my fingers again?’ Then, as his eyes fell on the collar, he closed his hand on it, saying, ‘That will be very useful to me just now; my plans aren't working well. Forget that you found this, my girl, and if you are wise, don't scream.’ Then ten words oozed from Annie's lips, ‘John Scott, let go! I said I'd never meet you.’

‘It was my brother,—at best, a would-be thief,—dogging my sweetheart. He was bearded when I left home, and so I did not know him. For a second my right hand was on the pistol that I always carry when at work; then I suddenly realized what it would mean to the two women I best loved if I shot my brother. If Annie would only scream, some of the gentlemen who slept in a chamber beyond the billiard room could hardly be asleep, and they would come. But how to make her?’

‘Dr. Russell, there's something works in us besides ourselves at times. Yes, I see you know it, too. Scarce knowing what I did, I turned my bull's-eye straight and full on Annie; with one hand reaching for the trap, I shook those fool rats loose, and they, half blinded, ran down the light streak toward her. Next thing I knew, she was up on a chair, and shriek upon shriek rang through the house. Before I could scarce move, the room was full of the gentlemen, Mr. —— and the artist being in the lead. The man, bewildered by the suddenness of it all, loosed his hold on the jewels, and vanished through the pantry, as if he dived into water, but quick as he went, they both knew that I had seen.

‘Before either of us could offer a word of explanation, my employer took in the whole matter at a glance, as he thought, recognized Annie as the maid of one of his guests, and, laying the uproar only to the rats and me, laughed at it as a great joke, while the artist fellow, seeing Annie, who kept on screaming and was too frightened to get down from the chair, called,—‘By Jove! What a picture! Stay there just for a minute while I make a memory sketch,’—at least, I think that's what he called it.

“Well, sir, we were married New Year’s Eve, and neither of us have since ever put in *words* what we saw and heard that night, just before I loosed the rats.

“A year after, I was overlooking some work in a picture gallery, when I came face to face with the picture as it’s there now, and I knew I’d have to buy it first or last, sir, even if it bit a hole in my savings, for even a rat-catcher, as I was then, if he had a good mother of his own, doesn’t want his wife, with no shoes and her petticoats up to her knees, to be seen outside his own home.

“Oh, yes, of course, that was twenty-five years ago. The rat money went into well-advised real estate; we are settled here, and the missus and the girls have gone to bring my mother, past seventy, to live with us. No, I didn’t go; I couldn’t. My brother is back on the place, and married to a girl with some property. Made money himself in Australia, they say,—God knows how.

“When you know that the things you remember aren’t there, and other things *are*, it’s best not to go back. Now, Dr. Russell, tell me, should I tell my girls, and the men that will want to marry them some day, the story that I’ve told you? What do you think?”

“I think,” said father, standing up so that they stood face to face, “that you are a gentleman; that being said is all, and there is my hand upon it. Nine o’clock already; we must be going.”

Tom Scott picked up his ratting bag that held some of his famous traps, and, taking the old card from the shelf, was about to throw it into the fire, then hesitated, and put it back in the case facing his mother’s picture, saying with a smile, half sad, half humorous, “I’m afraid, sir, there’s that about the old business that would make me lonely if I forgot.”

A month later a paragraph appeared in the local papers that read as follows: “Mr. Thomas Scott of our town has made good his promise of ending the scourge of rats, and has turned over the sum of two hundred dollars, he having doubled the amount of the reward offered, to the Bridgeton Hospital.

“There is a pretty little incident connected with this work. Mr. Scott, who has made a fortune in real estate, got his first start by inventing and patenting a particularly clever rat-trap, and it was with some of these traps, put by and almost forgotten, that he has been of so much use to his fellow-townsmen, for which they now take this way of expressing their thanks.”

XII TRANSITION

DECEMBER—THE MOON OF SNOWSHOES

I

“Good King Wenceslas looked out,
On the feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about,
Deep and crisp and even!”

sang the violin with pathetic accent, and then stopped abruptly, as the player dropped the bow and pressed his face against the window. The stars shone from the cold blue of a cloudless sky; below lay the city ablaze with light. It was a Danish city, and the player was a Dane, but when a violin sings, it speaks to each one in his own language. Bells pealing from a neighbouring church took up the same carol of Christmastide, and young voices echoed it faintly from within the doors of many homes.

On that Christmas night, two young women were drilling childish voices in the singing of the same tune. These women had never met, or either even dreamed of the other's existence, yet a current, as actual as the sound-waves of the music, at that moment began to draw them together, the player of the violin, Gurth Waldsen, being the unconscious medium.

Waldsen looked from the window at the outlines of the palace across the water, its ramparts twinkling with lights that looked like reflections of the brilliant winter stars, but his thoughts did not follow his sight. In a few days he would be an exile from both home and country, and though the leaving was wholly voluntary, yet the past and present struggled together. A visionary in many respects, refusing to understand social classification as read by his family, he had, in his mother's eyes, capped the climax of his folly on his graduation from the University by refusing a diplomatic career, insisting upon earning his bread literally by the sweat of his brow, and betrothing himself to a pretty, modest, blue-eyed girl of a near-by village,—“A girl of the people,” his mother called her, for though she had been carefully reared, her father, a poor pastor, had been taken from his peasant brothers and educated for the ministry because he was both docile and fragile.

Waldsen's mother was the controlling power of the family. His father, long since dead, had been a dreamer, a musician, and something of a poet, whose wife had

married him in a fit of girlish romance, and then lived to scorn him for his lack of ambition and reproach herself for marrying beneath her. Her only son should make no such mistake; she would oversee at least his social education, but she completely overlooked the matter of heredity.

So little Gurth grew up with only one parent. At ten the boy was tall and undeveloped, with a shock of strange golden-brown hair that he shook back as he played the violin, his greatest pleasure; but at twenty-two he was a slender man with a gold-tipped beard, straight nose, and blue-gray eyes, that looked at and through what he saw, all his features being softened by his father's dreamy temperament.

Mrs. Waldsen, therefore, set her face against the marriage with the bitterness of her disappointment stung to fury by the memory of her own past. If she loved her son, it was for her own gratification, not for his, and now, as her world was beginning to talk of him, his bearing and gentle accomplishments, should she allow him to be taken from her?

Gurth had waited several months after the first rebuff, hoping that time would mend matters. Andrea could not marry yet; she was the foster-mother to four small brothers, and managed the little household for her overworked and underpaid father, but in another year Theresa, the younger sister, would be able to take her place. Time, however, did nothing but rivet Mrs. Waldsen's decision, and in the interval the knowledge of her treatment of his father came to Gurth, and he knew then that argument was hopeless. He had some money of his own, though merely a trifling legacy from an uncle, and his last interview with his mother brought to an end all idea of remaining in Denmark. This was what he was fighting alone in his study that Christmas night, when, turning to his violin for sympathy, it sang the half-sad carol that Andrea had been teaching her little brothers the last time that he supped with her.

Gurth now regretted the time that had passed in temporizing, in drifting. To-night would end it all, and freed, as far as possible for a man to free himself, he would carry out in detail a plan of life that had often before vaguely offered him escape—not merely liberty to marry as he pleased, but also release from the particular social conditions into which he was born, that had at all times cramped him. He loved Nature and his fellow-men, in a genuine and wholesome fashion, but with the institution called Society, as it existed about him, he seemed pre-natally at war.

Putting aside what he had been, he chose to go as an emigrant, elbow to elbow with labourers; going to gain a living from the soil by his own toil, to try if the strength of body in him matched the strength of intention. He meant to follow an outdoor life, and thus make a home for Andrea, wearing the path a little before he let her willing

feet tread it with him.

As he looked about his rooms he almost smiled at his few possessions. Some long shelves of books, a rack of music, a few pelt rugs, a high-post bed behind an alcove curtain, chairs, a long oak table upon the end of which stood a great bird-cage, while half a dozen smaller ones hung by the window. A porcelain stove stood under the mantel-shelf, and above it was a litter of pipes and broken foils, while on one corner, in a little place apart, shrine-like and surrounded by growing ivy, the portrait of a young girl looked at him. It was merely a photograph taken with the crude art of a provincial town, but the stiff posing could not mar the charm of the face, and Gurth looked longingly. Leaving the window he moved slowly toward it until, resting his elbows on the shelf, he touched her lips with his, and then started at the unconscious act. To see her once more, to-morrow, Stephen's Day, and then go away! His heart and its primitive instinct whispered, "Marry her—take her with you!" What he considered his reason said,—“Where to? It is winter; the sea is deep and wide, the journey long. Make the home; wait for spring!” Ah, this was one of the many matters in which what is called impulse would have been wiser because the more direct of the two. It was morning before Gurth had thought the matter to a conclusion, and the streets had slept and were waking again before he threw himself upon the bed, still dressed.

He spent the following day in destroying papers and in writing letters to a friend or two. He had the equivalent of about five thousand dollars, to begin life with, and he resolved to hoard the money as carefully as if he were indeed a peasant starting for the New World. This money represented the land, the home; his own brain and hands must do the rest. A trunk of books, his violin, some of his plainest clothes, were all that he would take; a rough coat and a fur cap must be bought to supplement his wardrobe.

The bullfinch by the window piped gaily, and the chaffinches in the cages with fantastic dormers chirped in reply, reminding him of their necessities, and, after feeding them, he unhooked their cages and, fastening them, covered them and prepared to go out. He had promised Andrea that he would be with her for supper. It was already five o'clock, and the Clausens lived far outside the city, an hour's sharp driving on the Klampenborg road, and the sleigh that he had ordered was waiting. Packing the cages under the fur robes, he started the horse at a brisk pace. It seemed already, so powerful is imagination, as if this decision had given him a greater sense of liberty.

In a long, low-studded room, whose polished board floor was relieved by a few squares of bright carpet, two young girls were preparing the supper table. The

youngest was at an age when her closely braided hair lacked the dignity of being put up, and her skirts were still a few inches from the ground. She was squarely built, fair-haired, blue-eyed, and rosy with good nature. She held a large loaf, beautifully light and baked evenly brown, which she was regarding with great glee. "Lift it, Andrea!" she cried. "See how light it is, and how sweet it smells! Now that my baking is as good as yours, you can be married, for you know that father said a year ago you could not marry until I baked good bread!" and Theresa laughed teasingly. Andrea, so addressed, looked at the loaf carefully, then silently kissed the face that was smiling above it. She was half a head taller than her sister, with an oval face surrounded by thick, smooth, bright golden hair that was parted and braided in two wide bands and coiled around her head. Her cheek-bones, a trifle high for good proportion, were relieved by great, dark-blue eyes, with jet-black lashes; the chin was firm, the mouth not small but opening over long white teeth. The indescribable charm of the face came from the eyes. The kiss was the only answer that she gave her sister, who rattled on from one theme to another as she brought in the different dishes, occasionally joining in with the four little boys who were singing carols in a group around a battered piano at the other end of the room, mingling their shrill voices with the pastor's tenor.

"Mark my footsteps, good my page,
Tread thou in them boldly:
Thou shalt find the winter's rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly!"

Gurth paused on the threshold an instant listening to the singing, then entered without knocking. The little boys rushed to hang about him and explore his pockets, and the pastor and Theresa welcomed him warmly. It was Andrea alone who saw a change in his whole demeanour, and wondered at the bird-cages. The evening meal was soon eaten, and the boys went to the kitchen with the toys that Gurth had brought them; the pastor, scenting something, sat erect in his arm-chair, all forgetful of his pipe and expectant of some news, while Theresa hung over him. Gurth stood by the stove, nervous and uncertain how to begin.

Andrea went to him, and, putting her hand through his arm, said quietly, but with an infinite tenderness in her voice, "You are going away, dearest, and you have brought your birds for me to keep for you."

It was as if her voice smoothed away his fears and perplexities, so all four together they discussed the situation without reserve.

Gurth, forgetting his prudent plans, begged the pastor to marry them then, or at

the latest in a few days, when the necessary legalities could be complied with, so that he might leave Andrea as his wife. Upon this point the pastor was obdurate. His practical instinct, born partly of the peasant suspicion of another class, and partly of hard experience, forbade this. Among his parishioners many a wedding had taken place on the eve of parting, and the husband had been swallowed up in that vast new world, while the poor girl at home waited in vain, not knowing whether she was wife or widow.

He liked Gurth in a way, but he was sadly disappointed in his failure to reconcile his mother to the marriage, and, while he believed him sincere at present, he did not know how the separation might affect either of the young people; so he insisted upon delay. If Gurth had established himself by the next Christmas, he might return and marry. If not—well, there were other men who, under the circumstances, would be more suitable for Andrea, though he did not voice his opinion. In reality he had no romance in his nature, and he disbelieved in unequal marriages, especially if money was not coupled with the rank.

If, after a year's trial, Gurth was in a position to come for Andrea,—well and good,—but further than that the pastor could be neither coaxed nor driven.

Moreover, he allowed them little privacy for saying good-by.

“I know how to work, and I like it, but you must learn how,” Andrea whispered, as she clung to him. “But I will be ready, Gurth, and, more, if you can't return, I will go to you!” This understanding was their farewell.

His mother, when she found that he had gone, laughingly told her friends that Gurth had a foolish love affair, and, taking her advice, he had gone away to travel it off.

II

There is nothing that tends so to destroy the conceit of a man little used to the sea, as an ocean voyage in midwinter, especially if it is made on board an emigrant ship. On a good liner he may prop up his flimsy importance in a dozen ways, from feeing stewards to bring him six meals a day while he lies in his berth, to pulling himself together and wearing the distinction of being the only cabin passenger at table during a furious squall. But on an emigrant ship it is impossible to veil or soften stern reality.

Gurth had chosen this way of travel that he might more quickly realize his changed circumstances. For two weeks or perhaps three he must live in this community. Previously he had a theoretical knowledge of the conditions that

surround and make poverty. Now for the first time he saw the reality. His first thought was of the wonderful patience of these people; the next conviction was of their unconquered hope.

A dozen perhaps had settled homes in America and had returned to their native land merely to visit, but the multitude were going, they were not quite sure where, to earn their bread, they did not know how. Doubts did not trouble them, their pink pasteboard tickets seemed the pledge of landing somewhere, and as for the rest, they were used to uncertainty.

The fourth day out, a day when a mild streak and a few hours' sunshine brought all the grotesque animated bundles of clothes from their berths, Gurth took his violin and, without ado, began to play a native ballad, and then another. Silently the people grouped about him, some stealing below to coax up a comrade who was ill.

The intensely earnest look on their faces stimulated him, and he played on and on, grading his music from grave to gay, to suit each in turn, until at last, feeling his wrist failing, he made the national hymn a final effort. Scarcely had the tune taken form than a chorus rose, at first swaying and uncertain, and then gaining power and steadiness, until the last word was reached. The men rubbed their eyes with the backs of horny hands, and women hugged him, and before he realized the situation, one stolid, square-faced man, who had virtually declined to talk to him the day before, was passing around his peaked fur cap to receive a ready shower of small coin, which Gurth could not refuse. So thus he earned his first money. By his violin and its speech, which, however exquisite, no man feels above him, he was admitted to the freemasonry of his companions.

A carpenter who had been home to see his old parents asked Gurth where he was going to settle, and then he realized that he did not know, save what his port was, and that he did not wish to locate far from the sea, nor in a sultry climate. The carpenter drew from him such scant outline of his schemes as he wished to tell—his plan of buying a farm, after he had learned the country's ways. This man told him about the village where he lived, which was near a New England town whose railways offered a market for small fruits, and he advised Gurth to work for his board and lodging with one of the numerous fruit-growers until he learned the craft, saying that as he spoke English well, Waldsen might earn a trifle above his board, but that a man who had never done hard work was not worth much.

III

It was a bitterly cold winter; the wind swept fiercely through the cut between

Sunset and Rocky hills, rushing down the main street at Glen Village, separating the neighbours on either side more effectively than drifts of snow could have done. However deep, there is something cheerful and exhilarating about snow. Children think that it is sent for their special amusement; the shy young man, who drives his sweetheart over to the "Social" in the next village, needs no excuse for putting his arm around her, for light sleighs have been known to upset suddenly without the slightest warning. The old folks are cheerful in their reminiscences of just such episodes, and compare each storm with some long-remembered one in the thirties, noting always the frail and inferior wearing quality of modern snow.

But Wintry Wind is the most exasperating and prying of nature's messengers, whose mission is the uncovering of weaknesses in all things animate and inanimate. It soon discovers if your eyes are sensitive, your hat a size too small, that you are subject to rheumatism, that your breath is short when you walk uphill, and that your knees bend as you go down, and so turns your cloak over your head like an extinguisher. It knows precisely which shingle lacks a nail, and will lay bare spots calculated to make obstinate leaks. It also spies out the blind whose catch is loose, the gate with one hinge, the elm that is split in the crotch, and the particular chimney flue that leads to the room where your most important relation (who suffers from bronchitis) is being entertained at tea, and it gauges accurately which article on the clothes-line you value the most.

It was this sort of weather, combined with his daughter Margaret's delicate health, that made Ezra Tolford, living at the Glen Mill, for which the village was named, resolve to have a hired man.

Now Ezra Tolford had many titles to local distinction. He was Deacon of the First Church, and his parents had been zealous before him, his grandfather having had the hardihood to fly to the woods with the church plate on the approach of the British in 1779, thereby risking his life *via* wild beasts, Hessians, and exposure,—a fact that is brought up in every local historical discourse to this day. Incidentally it might be mentioned that the plucky ancestor (owing to fright and darkness) was never able afterwards to locate the marshy spot where the precious metal was buried; this fact, however, is usually omitted.

Ezra was also Judge of Probate, thanks to a fragmentary law course taken in days when a fond mother had pinched and saved that her only boy might "make his mark." Thirdly, he was the owner of the best mill on the Pequotuck. A mill that, in spite of the sale of flour and meal at the village store, kept its wheel going five days out of seven during nine months of the year, sawing wood when no one wished flour, and turning out middlings for the cattle when the stacks grew low. So swift was the

river that ice very seldom silenced the song the old wheel hummed as it worked.

Lastly, by wise drainage the deacon had turned a dozen acres of protected meadow-land, heretofore regarded as next to useless, into one of the thriftiest fruit farms in southern New England.

All these things made Ezra's daughter Margaret of special importance in many eyes besides his own, and it was for her sake that he resolved to have a man to hook up the team for her, when he was busy in the mill or away in the village, and do a thousand and one little errands that the sturdier daughters of his neighbours accomplished for themselves.

The Mill House, as it was called, stood on a hill between the Pequotuck and a little brook that, curving, joined the river below the dam. It was a placid-looking white house of a style of architecture that might be called New England Restored. It had been Colonial, but a modern bay-window, a piazza, and a lean-to in the rear had hybridized it; yet it still possessed a dignity never seen in the rural interpretations of the Queen Anne villa.

This particular house had a very attractive outlook. Raised well above them, it was bounded on the western side by the river and the mill-pond that always held the sunset reflections until the twilight absorbed them, while the old red mill with its moss-mottled roof focussed the view. Toward the north and east the meadows ran slantwise up a hillside, where, dotted here and there like grazing sheep, you could see the stones of the burying-ground, where the inhabitants of the glen took their final rest, as if their friends had left them as near heaven as possible, and safe from the floods that used once to sweep the valley. To the south the road ran tolerably straight for three miles down to Glen Village itself.

The interior of the house differed but slightly from others of its class, and that difference consisted in the greater genuineness of its fittings. Evidently the woman who presided over it appreciated relative values, for the sitting-room had glowing crimson curtains and a fire of logs in place of the usual "air-tight," while in one corner, in the location usually chosen for the inevitable asthmatic parlour organ, stood an upright piano. On the table was a comfortable litter of books and papers.

By the window, looking down the road, stood Margaret Tolford. At the first glance there was nothing striking about her personality. Medium in height and colouring, her slight frame was wrapped in a soft white shawl that gave her a fragile air. At a second glance the deep gray eyes, that looked from under a brow narrowed by a quantity of smooth, coal-black hair, were magnetic in their intelligent wonder. Her eyes said, "There is much that I would understand, but I cannot;" whereas a shallower nature would have thought, "I am misunderstood!"

The wind whistled in the chimney, and the *pud, pud*, of a heavy flatiron came from the kitchen, with snatches of inharmonious song, as the thick-lipped Polack who was the "help" pummelled the towels and folded them at angles that would have distracted a mathematician. In fact, this very Polack was one of Margaret's lesser problems, a sort of necessary evil who, in summer, bareheaded and barefooted, pervaded the premises, but having with her gay neckerchief a certain sort of picturesque fitness, which, when brought nearer, booted and confined to the winter kitchen, became an eyesore. Other farmers' daughters did the cooking and the lighter work, and only had a woman to help with the washing.

Margaret had never done manual labour; her mother, dead now two years, had stood between this only child and all hardship, and coaxed the Deacon to send her to a collegiate school when her playdays were over. In the summer holidays she was petted and caressed and kept from soiling her hands, and when at eighteen she was coming home for good to mingle as an equal with her parents and learn her part in life, her mother died, and her father closed the one tender spot in his stern heart around his daughter. So she lived shut up within herself, craving a more intellectual companionship than the neighbourhood furnished, and starving unconsciously for demonstrative affection.

Tolford was a silent sort of man, who had been so thoroughly understood by his wife that she seemed to know his unvoiced wishes. Because he showed so few signs of an affection that would have won a hearty response from Margaret, he failed to comprehend the difference between a deeply reserved nature and physical weakness, to which cause he laid her abstraction. His love for her, therefore, took the schooltime form of shielding her from work. He liked to hear her play hymns on Sunday evenings, and was very proud to have her train the children of the Sunday School in their carols, but it never occurred to him to ask her advice in any of his plans, or expect aid from her. She stood apart, not understanding the love her mother had drawn from the stern, lonely man, and while he excused her reserve, and told the neighbours she was delicate and peaky, her only ailment lay in lack of motive.

It grew dark, and points of light appeared here and there in the landscape; an icy slip of a moon pierced the driving clouds. Margaret drew the curtains and sat down by the fire, its light sending a glow to her usually colourless face. A brisk, though heavy, footstep came along the entry from the kitchen, and Ezra Tolford opened the door, and, stopping a moment to adjust his eyes to the fitful light, went toward the fire, rubbing his hands. Margaret immediately arose and, pushing a rocking-chair

towards him, prepared to light the lamp.

“Never mind that now, daughter,” he said; “sit down, I want to talk a bit. You know I said I’d get a hired man to ‘piece out’ with the work? Well, he’s come!”

The Deacon was, in reality, fairly well educated, but since his wife’s death (she had kept him to her standard, for she had been a schoolmistress) his English had relapsed into localisms, and, besides this, at the present moment he seemed ill at ease. Margaret merely understood the announcement as a roundabout question as to whether any accommodations were prepared for the man, and said: “The shed bedroom is just as Hans Schmidt left it last fall; I suppose a bed could be made up now, and Zella can clean the room to-morrow, but it will be very cold unless you give him a stove.”

“Well—er—you see,” said the Deacon, “I don’t suppose that room will do,—em!—hem! You see in the beginning he is to live with me without wages, and—” here the Deacon came to an embarrassed standstill, and Margaret broke in,—“Without wages! If he is as poor as that, he will scarcely object to the shed room without a fire for the night!” She did not say this because she was at all mean or hard-hearted, but from her experience of the servant question, any one who was willing to work for nothing must either be utterly worthless or bereft of reason.

“Not at all, not at all, daughter! You see, the man is not a common workman, but may buy the Hill Farm some day as a home for his sister, and wants me to teach him to grow small fruits, and learn the way of things here while he gets it to rights. I’ve contracted with him for a year—” and as Margaret did not reply, he continued, “You know Peter Svenson, the carpenter, who went home to Denmark last summer to see his folks? Well, he brought this young man back with him. Peter knows all about him, and says he is perfectly honest and speaks good English, but is close-mouthed, and doesn’t like to talk of his affairs, because his family used to be well fixed, but now they are all dead but one sister. He has a few thousand dollars and is going to make a home and bring her over in a year.

“Peter says he can play a fiddle, but isn’t used to hard work, and advised me not to pay him money, but to offer to show him how I work my farm and give him his board for his services.” Then the Deacon continued, giving the account of Gurth that the garrulous carpenter had pieced together to cover his lack of real knowledge. As Margaret still said nothing, he added:—

“Now I think the attic east room might be straightened up,—it won’t take long, and it can be bettered to-morrow.”

Instantly Margaret was divided between extreme wonderment at this strange arrangement on her father’s part, and fierce resentment at the intrusion of a stranger

in the house,—a man who was and was not a servant, who must necessarily eat with them, who would not perhaps leave the room when the meal was finished.

If Margaret had a decided eccentricity, it was her positive resentment of male society, and she bore the reputation of being proud, because, when the village swains drove up in their newly washed buggies with bows of ribbon tied to the whip handles, and with self-satisfied glances asked her to take a drive, the usual rural compliment, she invariably declined, and their irate mothers settled that she either must be in a decline, experiencing religion, or else, woful thought, “engaged to some fellow Northampton way,” where she had been to school.

The truth was that she had, through a wide range of reading and no experience, built up a well-nigh impossible ideal, half mediæval heroism, half modern, intellectual refinement, that was irreconcilable with the type of men with whom she came in contact.

Margaret was thoroughly accustomed to her father’s silent mood and considered him by far (as he was) the best-informed man she knew. He was also fond of reading, not only subscribed to a daily paper, but several weeklies and magazines, and always allowed her to buy any book she fancied, so that their winter evenings, when Margaret read aloud, were comfortably sociable, and sympathetic. It was no wonder, therefore, that she resented the presence of a stranger, and it was with rather a lowering brow that she followed her father to the kitchen.

Deacon Tolford went in first, and said abruptly, but in a tone that Margaret knew was meant to be cordial: “Daughter, this is Gurth Waldsen, who is going to help me out this year; we want to make him feel so much at home that he’ll settle in Glen Village. You’d better tell Zella to hurry supper; I guess we are both of us hungry.”

Margaret added some ordinary words of greeting before she looked at the figure who rose from the settle back of the stove and bowed, without offering to shake hands, as a native would have done. Then she raised her eyes and saw the tall, easy figure with the golden-tipped hair and beard, his dreamy gray eyes looking at her with a directness that was not curious, but almost as of pleading for mercy, while the mouse-coloured corduroy suit that Waldsen wore brought out the clearness of his skin in a degree that was almost startling.

“I hope that I put you not to great trouble,” he said in his soft baritone. “If you will tell me where I may place my things, I can arrange all myself.” The English was musical, and doubly so from the slight hesitation and accent.

What passed through Margaret’s brain she never clearly realized, but she heard her voice as from a long distance asking him to follow her upstairs, and found herself lighting a lamp, and leading the way.

It was strange that she had never noticed before how dreary the attic was. She merely indicated the room, saying that he might leave his things there, and to-morrow he could bring up firewood, while to-night she would give him an extra supply of bedding. As she left, Gurth looked after her and at the bare room, and shivered, but the room seemed less cold to him than the woman. There was no reason that he should expect her to be cordial; doubtless she would have preferred a field hand to whom she need not speak.

He realized that his very disappointment grew from the lack of proper comprehension of his present position. "Oh, Andrea! Andrea! for one sight of her sweet, sympathetic face, one touch only!" A harsh, clanging bell from below waked him to the fact that if he wanted water to wash his hands, he must bring it up himself; he looked at them dubiously, smoothed his hair, flipped off his clothes with his handkerchief, and went down.

He hoped that he might be allowed to eat his meals in the kitchen; it would indicate his position more clearly, and he should be less lonely than with constrained companionship. This was not to be. As he passed the dining room door, he saw a table laid for three, at which Ezra Tolford was already sitting, wrapped in a gaily figured dressing-gown, and collarless, as was his habit when either at ease or at work. He was reading a paper which was propped against a pitcher, and he barely raised his eyes as he asked Gurth to be seated.

Margaret came in with a coffee-pot and a plate of biscuits. She had thrown off her shawl, and her crimson cashmere waist accentuated the depth of her eyes. Gurth unconsciously arose and drew out her chair, waited until she was seated, and pushed it in again. It was a very simple and ordinary act of courtesy, and done as a matter of course without the slightest manner of conferring a favour. Margaret coloured at this hitherto unknown civility, but said "Thank you" as if she were quite accustomed to it, while the Deacon did not notice it at all.

The meal began in silence, but the Deacon finished his paper with the first cup of coffee, and began to discuss the affairs of the farm in a businesslike manner. The ice-cutting must begin to-morrow, it was quite clear, for the last snowstorm had been dry and had drifted away from the pond.

Had Waldsen ever cut ice? No! Well, he could superintend the weighing of it, then. Could he milk? No! The hay must be transferred from the left side of the great barn to the right, as the supports were giving way, and Peter Svenson, the carpenter, must come and straighten them, as well as do some tinkering at the mill. Squire Black at the village needed two tons of hay, so that much could be carted in next morning.

Waldsen fortunately was thoroughly familiar with horses, and was a good deal of a carpenter, having always had a fancy for such work, and, when a boy, he had for amusement built an arbour for his mother in the garden of her country-house. He was able to volunteer to repair the barn and mill, if the Deacon had the necessary tools. The Deacon was too keen to show his surprise, but accepted the offer, and said it would come handy to have some patching up done before it came time to clear the land. He could manage the cows and the mill, if Gurth took charge of the horses and the chores.

The Deacon, having finished his meal, shook the crumbs from a fold of the tablecloth of which he made a sort of apron in his lap, and left the table. Margaret followed him, and Waldsen, hesitating a moment, went to the back entry and began to collect his possessions, taking his violin case and a small box first. When he returned for his trunk, the Deacon appeared, and, as a matter of course, helped him carry it upstairs. The trunk was very heavy, being half full of books. Then the two men went out to feed the horses; the sharp, dry snow blew in like powdered flint when they opened the door, and made rainbows about the lantern as they went down the path.

After the table was clear, Margaret took up the paper, read for a few moments, then dropped it suddenly and went into the kitchen. Zella, who was knitting a skirt of scarlet yarn, seemed very sulky and angry when Margaret bade her take some wood to the attic bedroom. "I no carry for hired man," was her rejoinder. "You will take the wood up to-night," said Margaret, in the quiet, decided tone that was habitual to her; "to-morrow he will carry it himself." In a short time a fire was started in the old, open-fronted wood stove, that sent a welcome glow across the long, low room with its deeply recessed dormer windows. The furniture consisted of an old-fashioned four-posted bedstead and some spindle-backed chairs, discarded long ago from the lower rooms, an old chest of drawers and a table, while a row of wooden pegs behind the chimney did duty as a closet.

Going to the adjoining lumber room, Margaret pulled open a long trunk and took a chintz quilt, some curtains that had originally belonged to the old bed, and three or four carpet rugs. These she dragged into the attic, and then brought from a downstairs room a large rocking-chair, covered with Turkey red, and a blue china bowl and pitcher. The last man who had slept in the attic had washed at the pump. In a few minutes the bare room looked quite habitable, and Margaret returned to her newspaper.

In perhaps half an hour her father returned, and she heard Waldsen's steps going up the creaking back stairs.

“Well, daughter, quite a figure of a man, isn’t he? I know you don’t like to have men folks about, but you see this arrangement will advantage me greatly. If I can sell him the Hill Farm, it will be so much clear gain, besides being a bargain for him, for it’s running down and needs lots of tinkering. And if we get a good neighbour there, it won’t be so lonesome for you when I go over town. I can arrange with him for half-time work in the growing season, so he can get his fruit running. I’ll sell that place for three thousand dollars—and three thousand dollars in hand,—why, Margaret, you might go to Europe next summer with Judge Martin’s folks! He told me yesterday they expected to take a tour, and that if I’d let you go, you’d be good company for Elizabeth. What do you say to that, daughter?”

Going to him and sitting on the arm of his chair, she hid her face on his shoulder, a childish habit of hers, and said: “Dear old dad, I should want you to go with me, and then, besides, it is all so uncertain. This man may not really want to buy a place, or he may have no money, or—or, a great many things may not be true!”

“No, no, child! the man is all right, he wants to have a home of his own by next Christmas. There is some reason why his sister cannot come until then. I like to keep you with me, but my little girl is too lonely; she must see more company, and if she’s too wise and too proud for the folks about home, why, this place isn’t the whole world.”

Meanwhile Waldsen was sitting on his trunk in the attic room in an attitude of dejection. Then, as the fire flickered, he saw the change that had been wrought. Not great in fact, but in the womanly touch, and he was comforted. Taking from his pocket the little case containing Andrea’s portrait, he placed it on the chest of drawers, and, after closing the door, took out his violin.

Margaret and her father were playing their nightly game of backgammon when she started, dropped her checkers with a rattle, and grasped his arm. The Deacon looked up in surprise, and then, as he heard a far-away strain of music that seemed to come from the chimney, said, “Don’t be scared, daughter, it’s only the young man playing his fiddle!” But somehow neither father nor daughter cared to continue their game, and a moment later Margaret opened the door of the sitting-room and one at the foot of the stairs, and stood there listening, in spite of the cold air that swept down. Accustomed at most to the trick playing of travelling concert troupes, who visited the next town, this expressive legato music was a revelation to Margaret, and stirred her silent nature to untested depths. The first theme was pleading and wholly unknown to her, but presently the air changed to the song she had taught the children during the last Christmas season; through it she heard two voices singing,—the violin and the man.

“Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gathering winter fuel.

“Hither page and stand by me
If thou know’st it telling
Yonder peasant, who is he
Where and what his dwelling?”

“Hymn tunes,” said Deacon Tolford, pursing his mouth in a satisfied way. “I forgot to ask him if he is a church member. Perhaps he might help out at the Endeavour Concert next month.” But Margaret, shaking her head impatiently, stood with her finger on her lips.

The Tolford household was more cheerful after Waldsen’s coming. Not that he intruded upon the Deacon and his daughter, merely talking a few minutes after meals, perhaps, and then going to his attic, but little by little the mutual strangeness wore off. Though Waldsen fulfilled to the letter the work that he had engaged to do, he found that it was impossible to keep up the illusion of being a mere labourer, and reconciled himself from the fact that in other farming families the steady male “help” stands placed on a different footing with the household, from the transient field hands who come and go with the crops and seasons. Farmer Elliott’s “help” was his brother-in-law, and Farmer Bryce’s, his wife’s cousin.

The Deacon looked at the whole matter from a commercial standpoint. Here was a likely young man who, though he was unused to many kinds of manual labour, eked out his lack of knowledge with extreme willingness, and asked no wages other than instruction. At the same time he was a prospective purchaser of a house that had been difficult to sell. That was the beginning and end of the matter. That Waldsen was rarely intelligent, and added to their home life, was also an advantage, but secondary.

Every day Gurth held Margaret’s chair, and placed it at the table; there was no longer any restraint between them. He saw in her a sweet, womanly nature, whose best part was evidently held in check, owing to the peculiarities of the community in which she lived, which he could not fathom in spite of freedom from all prejudice. He admitted the beauty of purpose with which she clung to her ideals, but could not help contrasting her reserve with Andrea’s spontaneous cheerfulness, her love of everything that grew from the ground and every bird that flew, while Margaret

seemed but half conscious of the natural beauties that surrounded her.

Waldsen was most contented when employed at the mill. Birds that braved the winter gathered about it for scraps of grain. Nuthatches pried under the mossy shingles, meadow-larks stalked solemnly in the stubbly grass for sweepings, and robins fed upon the berries of many bushes that hedged the pond. Wild geese rested there, and for days at a time flocks of ducks would pass and pause for shelter, and owls roosted nightly in the mill loft, making hearty meals of mice. Many a time he saw the quail coveys far up on the hill running about among the gravestones, and he put a sheaf of rye there for them, and it waved its shadowy pinions above the snow, as if saying to the silent community, "I, too, have slept in the ground; have courage!"

Another sheaf he fastened over the mill door, and, seeing it, the Deacon lectured him upon the folly of gathering a lot of birds that must be shot or scared away in berry season, saying, "It's all very well now, but if you encourage them, where will the profit be when all the biggest berries are bird marked?"

Gurth felt like answering, "I will let the birds have them all, so long as they come to me." But then, where would be the bread for Andrea? He felt beauty so keenly that he could not bear to harness Nature and drive her like a cart-horse for his profit. His needs and his desires were almost irreconcilable, and the consciousness of it well-nigh appalled him. He could not change his temperament in the least degree; even his experiment of passing for a labourer was partly frustrated; he might possibly have masqueraded as a wandering musician, but he began to feel his incapacity for material toil.

Margaret all this time lived in a waking dream; unknown to herself, all the pent-up forces of her affection had crystallized about this stranger. His natural courtesy seemed to her a gentle personal tribute; the mystery he allowed to surround him (being wholly unconscious of the version of his story the carpenter had told), and his poetic personality, made him seem like some one she had met in an old romance. Then the music, too, for often now in the evening he brought his violin and accompanied her when she sang or played, giving her new understanding, while he corrected the hardness of her method so tactfully that she did not realize it. Lending her new music, substituting the "Songs without Words" for the hackneyed "Airs with Variations," and teaching her German and Danish ballads, that lent themselves to her rich contralto voice.

Margaret became a different creature, and rare glints of red touched her cheeks. The Deacon accounted for this arousing in the pleasure she anticipated in going abroad if the Hill Farm was sold. He was so thoroughly convinced of her indifference to men, that he was blind to the awakening of her heart.

Margaret noticed with pleasure the various details and changes in Waldsen's attic, where she went occasionally to dust, and thought that they betokened contentment. The room was no longer bare, festoons of ground pine hung from the rafters and canopied the windows, a half-dozen home-made cages filled the dormer nearest the stove, and sheltered a collection of wild birds rescued from cold and hunger, which chirped from them merrily, while a little screech-owl blinked sleepily from a perch in the corner. Books lay on the table and filled a rough shelf under the eaves. Writing implements and paper also lay about, and traces of bold, irregular characters were on the big sheets of blotting-paper.

It was Andrea's picture, however, that interested Margaret more than anything. She looked at it day after day, trying to trace a resemblance to Gurth. One day she kissed the lips, and then, suddenly remembering that *he* might also do this, fled precipitately to her room, and, locking the door, stayed until dark, when she went down to supper with her face flushed, and a nervous air. So nervous was she that her hand trembled until she almost dropped the cup that she was passing to her father. Gurth grasped it, and thus their hands met for the first time.

IV

The last of February a southerly rain inaugurated the spring thaw. Great cakes of ice came down the river, and barricaded the mill. Then a cold snap followed, and the trees hung thick with fantastic icicles. In the morning the Deacon, Gurth, and several neighbours went up the stream to dislodge, with long poles, cakes of ice that were wedged threateningly between trees, and after dinner, when the two men had been talking of the caprices of the storm, the Deacon said: "It's worth walking up to the Hill Farm, daughter, to see the ice on those white pines, but you must mind your footing. Waldsen's going up there to shovel off the shed roof, and he'll be glad to beau you, I know."

Margaret blushed painfully, but Gurth, totally missing the significance of the word, said, in his precise language, that he was about to ask Miss Margaret, but feared she could not walk so far. So Margaret brought her coat, trimmed with a neck-band and cuffs of fur, and, drawing a dark red tam-o'-shanter over her black hair, set off with Waldsen.

As the Deacon watched them go down the road, dark and fair, slender and tall, both talking with animation, he suddenly gave a long whistle, for an idea, born of the word he had just used, flashed across his matter-of-fact mind, and he said aloud,—"Well, I never! Well, I never! She shan't find her old dad a spoil sport, anyhow!

I've my doubts if he'll ever make out with farming, but I suspect he comes of good folks, and there's a good living at the mill, and Margaret's my only one!" Then he smiled contentedly to himself. The Deacon had loved his wife with a sentiment that was regarded as a weakness by his neighbours, and he was prepared to enjoy the courtship of his only daughter and forward it by all the innocent local ruses. Yes, he would even make errands to town, and at the last moment send Waldsen to drive Margaret in his stead.

The couple crossed the bridge and climbed the steep river bank towards the Hill Farm. Waldsen was in high spirits and hummed and whistled as they struggled and slipped along, steadying Margaret every few steps. Happiness and the bracing air had given her a clear colour, and her eyes were sparkling—she was a different being from the pale, silent girl of two months ago. The mail-carrier, who met them at the cross-roads and handed Gurth some letters, thought what a fine couple they made, and immediately started his opinion as a rumour around the community.

Margaret walked about outside the little brown house, while her companion freed the roof from its weight of ice. Her own home was in sight across the river, and at the left was a lovely strip of hill country that rose and fell until it merged with the horizon. She was so absorbed in the view that she did not realize when the shovelling was finished, until Waldsen stood close beside her. "Has your father told you that I buy this place, and that to-morrow the papers will be signed? Yes, I have bought it for my home; I shall plant the ground and work it, as your father says, to win my living. At evening we shall sit here and look up the river and down to where the sun sets, and then over to your house, thanking you for your kindness to a lonely stranger." The "we" dropped in unawares, but Margaret knew that he meant Andrea, his sister.

"Next Christmas I shall move here, for my best resolves have come on Christmas Day; meanwhile, there is much to be done, and I shall ask your woman's art how best to make my home attractive." Then they talked of the garden and of the house, how it would need a summer kitchen, until he, through the subtilty of woman's sympathy, thought that he could not wait all the long months for Andrea's coming.

That night Waldsen sat a long time pondering over a letter that had that day come from Andrea. At the first, nothing new suggested itself, except that she perhaps was lonely, but on a second reading a note of pain was evident. Carelessly feeling in the pocket of his overcoat before going to bed, he found that he had received two letters, when he thought he had but one, and, re-lighting his lamp, he read the second, which was blotted and tear-stained. It ran thus:—

“The stamp on the last letter that I wrote you, dear Gurth, is hardly dried, yet I must write again and tell you that which for the last month I have tried to conceal. Now it is useless. My father will bring a new wife to fill my mother’s place in two months from now. A hateful woman who has in some strange way gained power over and fascinated him, but who does not wish me in the house, for my father is urging, nay, almost commanding, my betrothal to Hans Kraus, the brewer’s son, whom I have seen hardly twice, and whose mother is arranging the matter for him.

“In vain I protest and remind him of our betrothal. He insists that your mother will surely win you back, as she is making great efforts to discover where you are. He will not hear of my going out to service. I know that you will say, ‘Come to me, and we will be married,’ but knowing your plans and your agreement with your employer, this I will not do until Christmas comes again. One thing is possible, if you will undertake it. You are, of course, known in your village as a working-man. There must be some one there who wishes a young, strong woman to do housework, sewing, anything, in short,—you know my hands are used to work of all kinds. Find some lady who will pay my passage money, to be taken out in service, and I will come. Thus I, too, shall be independent. I can sometimes see you, and when we then marry at Christmas, no one will know that we are not as we seem, and we shall begin on a sure footing. Do not attempt to stop me, dearest. Let me also work.

“Your ANDREA.”

This letter cut Waldsen to the heart as well as stirred his pride, and his first impulse was to return at once to Denmark for Andrea. Then he considered all the threads that must be unravelled, the dispersal of many plans so nicely made, and he paused, perplexed. Andrea clearly did not realize that he was not really a servant even in name, and that he could not allow her to fill a drudge’s place in some farmhouse.

Stop! why should he not consult Margaret? She might suggest something, and, at least, her advice would be in accord with local custom, so that neither he nor Andrea would be criticised in future by those among whom they were to live. He wrote a few comforting lines to his betrothed, which he prepared to post that night that the letter might go by the next day’s steamer, for he had the habit, that a man bred in a large city seldom loses, of noting the coming and going of the iron monsters that bind the continents.

It was after one o'clock when he went downstairs, shoes in hand, and nearly three when he returned from his six-mile walk, after dropping his letter through the well-worn slit in the post-office door. The stairs creaked provokingly as he made his way up. He heard a slight noise and saw a light under Margaret's door, which, as he passed by, opened, and Margaret herself peered out, shading her candle with her hand, and looking down the hall. She almost screamed when she saw Gurth so near, and said quickly, with a catch in her breath: "I heard a noise and thought the stair door had blown open. Are you ill? Can I do anything for you?" He looked at her a moment as she stood there in her loose wool wrapper, her hair hanging in long braids, and it seemed like an answer to his perplexity. His heart whispered, Trust her, consult her, and he said gravely, "I am not ill, I thank you, and you can do something for me, but not to-night."

Then Waldsen slept the sleep of deep fatigue, but Margaret, misunderstanding wholly and wakeful with happiness, threw herself on her knees by her bed and, falling asleep, stayed in this position until the sun cast streaks across the room and scattered the mist that betokened the final breaking up of winter.

The March days flew by rapidly, and it was almost April. The willows were showing yellow stems, and the river swirled under them with new fervour. Hepaticas bloomed in the wood edges, while violets crept along in the sheltered garden border; bluebirds purred about the mill, while the kingfishers quarrelled over the pond. At every meal Waldsen brought the account of some new bird or unknown flower, until the Deacon was almost vexed, and told him in a sternly parental way that he would never make his salt, but fill his farm with brakes and briers, growing strawberries for robins and raspberries for catbirds; but Margaret only smiled, treasuring every leaf he brought, and spent much time out of doors watching the messengers of spring that she never before had noticed, feeling that life was good.

Easter came in middle April, and the little church at Glen Village was to be decorated with flowers. The day before, Gurth went into town with a load of feed, stopping on his way at the post-office, and found a letter from Andrea that made him resolve to act at once.

On his way home he bought two pots of blooming lilies, which he placed on Margaret's table in the sitting-room, as an Easter gift to the home. As she thanked him, bending over the flowers, he said, "Miss Margaret, a while ago I said that you could do something for me. I have come to ask it now, but before I speak there is much that I must tell you, so that you may understand." Margaret, making a gesture of assent, stood clinging to the curtain for support, still bending over the lilies.

Gurth began slowly and hesitatingly with his father's unhappy marriage and his

loveless childhood, speaking deliberately, and choosing his words like a lawyer presenting his case. A puzzled expression gradually spread over Margaret's face, but as he told her of his meeting with Andrea and his love for her, she gave the curtain so sudden a jerk that it tore from its fastenings, and fell in a heap upon her. Gurth, merely thinking that she had stood too long, lifted the curtain, gave her a chair, and continued his narrative, with unconscious egotism. For more than an hour he talked; the Deacon peeped in and hastily withdrew, thinking that the young folks were coming to an understanding.

Margaret did not say a word, but so absorbed was Gurth that he did not notice it. A terrible struggle was rending her, and she could not trust herself to speak. Not only had her life hinged itself upon an impossibility, but the mistake that had made such a thing possible had come from giving credence to the story of the carpenter.

As every detail of the past three months came before her, she realized how innocent of any deception Waldsen had been, and the very advice he was now seeking proved his confidence in her. The secret was her own,—at least she had that comfort. Then a wave of pain passed over her, almost stopping her breath and seizing her throat in an iron grasp. She dimly saw that Gurth was showing her some letters, and gathered herself together only to receive a fresh blow,—his appeal for Andrea. For though he did not ask it in so many words, she knew what was in his mind.

When he had finished and stood expectantly before her, she could no longer contend with herself, and big tears rolled down her cheeks as she said, "I must think before I answer you, but I will do all I can." As she passed him he saw the tears, and, taking her hand, he stooped and kissed it reverently, saying, "God bless you for your sympathy."

The Deacon did not return for tea, having business in town, and Waldsen, much surprised at Margaret's absence, ate his meal alone.

Margaret herself sat in her east window looking at the twilight, and, when it faded, at the stars. The marsh frogs piped monotonously, and the water rushed over the dam, falling below with a hollow thud. Soon Waldsen's violin sounded from his open window,—to-night he played "The Songs without Words," one after another, chancing to end with "Lost Happiness." As Margaret listened, now that the first shock was over, she was soothed. At first she did not think it was possible that she could have Andrea in the house, and then she knew that only by some such object lesson would she realize that Waldsen could not belong to her. Andrea should come, and they would work together. Zella was shiftless and constantly threatening to go. To tell her father and make him comprehend the change was her next task. Puritan in

education and temperament, no other thought but to bend to the seemingly inevitable occurred to her.

On Easter Day no one who heard Margaret sing at church knew of her struggle, and yet her voice moved those plain people as it never had before, and they spoke of it among themselves in walking home. "The Dane must have taught her," they said, "for they do say he can write music."

When Margaret told the Deacon that portion of Waldsen's story relating to Andrea, he did not betray the surprise he felt. He was, however, completely bewildered by this development, though he had long since ceased judging his daughter by ordinary standards. He was both disappointed and glad; he would have raised no objections to Margaret's marriage with the young Dane, yet when he knew the exact facts regarding Gurth and Andrea, he was surprised at the sudden feeling of relief that came over him, for while he liked Gurth as a companion, he had grave doubts as to his permanent contentment in the life that he had now chosen.

But then, if Margaret was not in love with Waldsen, what had caused her increased interest in life, and drawn her from her usual seclusion? He had it now! and blamed himself for having been so blind. Of course, it was the promised trip to Europe that had given her motive, and Waldsen having travelled, what more likely than that they had often talked of the matter? Very well, let Andrea come and marry Waldsen. They could then keep house for him during Margaret's absence. Nothing would be simpler.

When the Deacon, after much patient listening, understood the objections to a marriage before Christmas, he became quite angry. "Such nonsense I never heard before. So he doesn't wish to marry the girl until his own house is ready! and she doesn't wish to marry him until Christmas because she once promised her father that she would not, and he has since practically turned her out of doors! A pretty pair of fools playing at independence!" But when the Deacon saw that Margaret was deeply interested and sympathized with the couple, and when she represented to him how much better it would be to have some one like Andrea to help her with the housework, rather than a mere clumsy animal like Zella, who must be constantly watched, he relented after many grumblings and doubts as to the ability of the two girls to accomplish the work.

"How will it be when you come to feeding the berry hands? You know there's no one to board them at the Hill Farm this season!"

"Mother and cousin Susan were able to do it," replied Margaret, quietly. "I am going to take an interest in the place now, father; I have idled too long." So Andrea was sent for, Margaret writing the letter in a kindly tone, but as a mistress engaging a

helper, making no mention of Waldsen except as of a friend who knew that she wished to come to America. Early in May word came that Andrea's steamer was due the next day, and Gurth went up to meet her.

All the day long Margaret was busy making preparations. "Looks to me as if you expected the Queen, instead of a helper," joked her father, as he saw her putting up muslin curtains in the little room next to her own (Zella had occupied a bit of a place over the wash-house), and then, as she flushed hotly, he added hastily, "I'm glad you're going to have a girl companion, daughter, but don't work too hard; you're getting pale again."

At two o'clock everything was ready, and the train from Bridgeton was not due until half-past four. Margaret sat by her window. Everything outside was spring green; only the mill showed its shingles through the spotted branches of the plane trees, for they leaf out late. A mist of greenery veiled the river, but the pond was a glittering mirror. On the edge of the berry fields the cherry trees were shaking down a rain of petals, and bluebirds were murmuring about in pairs, while the song-sparrows kept up their sweet, persistent song from the meadow bushes.

Margaret tried to fix her thoughts on the scene before her. Would the orioles come back to the elm that touched the roof? She hoped so, for Waldsen was so anxious to see them weave their nest. And the fly-catcher with the leather-coloured back—she wondered if he would again leave snake-skins hanging from his nest-hole in the old apple tree, as he did last year. Gurth had never seen such a nest.

She left the window and walked slowly up and down the room, the fact forcing itself upon her that whatever she did now or had done for the last three months, was for Waldsen's sake.

She had stayed at home and sent for Andrea, to give him pleasure as well as to bring herself to a realization of his betrothal, but she had not understood until this moment exactly what an ordeal she must go through on seeing Andrea and Gurth together for the first time. She wished that she could run away,—that she had gone abroad, anything, anywhere, rather than see their love-making. It was too late. The love that had entered her heart unasked could not be driven out by argument. She must go on living as if nothing had happened; perhaps years hence when the children at the Hill Farm called her aunty, it might be different, but not now—not now!

The train was already in sight when Margaret drove up to the little brown station at Glen Village. She was alone, as at the last moment her father had been obliged to go to the mill. The horses were restless, and they furnished Margaret with an excuse for remaining in the wagon where she could see Andrea from a distance.

The train passed on, a moment of intense silence followed, sparrows quarrelled

under the eaves, and a gentle rain of catkins fell from a maple; it is strange how at such times of tension minute details hold the attention.

Another minute,—Gurth came around the corner and down the long plank walk,—he carried a very small, old-fashioned round-topped trunk on his shoulder, and following him was a young girl who did not look more than sixteen or seventeen, dressed in a black jacket, rather short skirt, and very plain hat that fitted closely over the smooth braids of yellow hair. As she came nearer, Margaret saw that the short dress was responsible for the appearance of extreme youth, for her face was pale, serious, and even careworn, and the big blue eyes were brimming with tears. The strain and uncertainty of the last few months had told upon Andrea, and the loneliness of the voyage had almost paralyzed her, but it was not until she was safely on land and at her journey's end that tears came. Margaret longed to take the poor little thing in her arms and comfort her, for the frightened eyes called upon her strong motherly instinct; but this would never do, so she merely greeted her pleasantly, handing the reins to Gurth, saying, "I will sit on the back seat with Andrea."

For half a mile or so they drove in silence, Margaret wishing to give her companion time to recover herself. Then she began an easy conversation, leading gradually to Andrea herself and her voyage. Andrea understood English as readily as Gurth, but spoke without his literary nicety; yet before they arrived at the Mill Farm they were all three talking easily, though Andrea maintained a sort of diffidence, as if in the presence of a mistress. Noticing this, Margaret, as soon as they reached home, signalled Waldsen to go with the horses, and took Andrea immediately to her room.

Once there, after showing Andrea where to put her very scanty belongings, Margaret drew her to a seat in the window, and, taking her hand, very gently said: "I wrote you that I wanted a girl to help me with my work, and that Gurth Waldsen told me that you wished to come to America. This was true, but I did not write that I also know the story of his life and of yours, also. We thought it best for you to come here first, and, finding yourself among friends, all would seem plain to you."

"He—he has told you about his mother—that we are betrothed, and all?" cried Andrea, her mild eyes blazing, and a crimson spot glowing under each high cheek-bone. "Told it all to a stranger, and you have asked me here from charity? Oh, Gurth! how cruel of you, how could you?" sobbed Andrea, burying her face in her arms.

"I wanted our new life to be real; I thought that we should be working people and have only what we earned, and that there would be no more inequality between us or false positions, and now it is all over,—even our trouble is not our own! It was

cowardly in Gurth! cowardly, I say!”

Margaret was at a loss how to reply to this outburst. Andrea’s fatigue and worry would account for her vehemence, but allowing for this, there was some truth underlying her complaint, which made it difficult to cope with. Andrea’s nature was wholly genuine; when she said she wished to work, she meant it, but with Gurth work was a more abstract idea, a necessity arising from a desire to marry Andrea.

Margaret sat in silence, until finally, as Andrea’s sobs ceased, she drew the girl’s head up so she could look at her. “Think a little before you condemn Waldsen. You are tired and excited, and also unjust to say that I sent for you out of charity. I needed a helper, and I also wished a companion. I was sure, from what we have seen of him during these months, that the woman for whom Gurth Waldsen had left his home and fortune would easily understand his present position, and the feelings that prevented him from allowing her to place herself out as a drudge. The idea of keeping your secret was natural, but impossible; you must accept things as they now are, and thus begin the reality.

“Come, wipe your eyes, do you want Gurth to see them all red and swollen? Put some cool water on them,—there, so. Now I will leave you awhile, but come down in half an hour, for you are to be cook, you know.” Margaret managed to laugh pleasantly, as she went to find Waldsen and arrest any tendency to a misunderstanding that might arise.

He was coming from the barnyard with the milkpails, and his almost boyish look of happiness broke into a smile when he saw Margaret.

“Have you told her? Was she not delighted to know how everything is arranged? I did not say a word, but left the pleasure for you, dear friend, you have so deserved it!”

It seemed a pity to undeceive him; it is always a pity to blast a man’s enthusiasm when he has prepared, what he considers, a pleasant surprise for the woman he loves. Many a separation has started with such a repulse from the thin edge of the wedge.

Margaret gave a rapid summary of Andrea’s feeling, softening and smoothing everything, and adding that the best thing would be to take her up to the Hill Farm after tea. The sight of her future home would do more to reassure her, and give her a feeling of confidence, than any words.

Waldsen had put down his pails and stood looking at Margaret as she spoke. Her face was turned partly towards him, but she was looking past over the hills. She wore a plain, soft, gray woollen gown with a dark red belt and neck-band, and there was a bit of red, her favourite colour, in her hat, while her cheeks were flushed with

the excitement of the scene she had just undergone. He wondered that he had never noticed before how fine her face was, how graceful and well poised her carriage, and he listened to what she said, half bowing as to a superior being.

The first meal passed off happily enough; Andrea, looking very sweet and shy, had added a light blue neckerchief to her almost nunlike black gown, her tears having only given a natural colour to her face. Waldsen beamed upon her in his happiness, occasionally relapsing inadvertently to Danish as they talked, much to the amusement of the Deacon, who seemed quite jovial, and indeed it was a pleasure to him to have three young faces at the table.

After supper Margaret and Andrea washed the dishes and put them away, Margaret saying casually: "Gurth wants you to take a walk with him; he has a surprise for you. I will set the bread to-night and close the house; to-morrow you shall begin and do your half. Go, Andrea; the sun will be down before you are halfway up the hill."

"Will you not come also, Miss Margaret?" said Waldsen's soft voice.

"Not to-night."

The sun disappeared behind the mill, and a whip-poor-will called suddenly from a maple near the house. Rob, the collie, gave an uneasy whine, and coming in, poked his cold nose into Margaret's hand, as if impatient at her revery. She patted him, went to the table, lighted the lamp, and was arranging the backgammon-board just as her father's step sounded on the piazza.

"What! all alone, daughter? This seems like old times," he said, as he sat down to his game. "So the lovers haven't come back yet, eh? How we miss Waldsen!" Looking up, expecting a reply, he saw that Margaret was apparently absorbed in an intricate move.

V

It was a good season. The days were bright, the nights brought plentiful showers, everything thrived at the fruit farm, and at midsummer Ezra Tolford found that he had outdone his best expectations.

Other things prospered besides the products of the soil. Andrea was her plump, rosy self again, radiant with happiness and energy. The life she led was that for which she was born, the life that countless generations of her kindred had lived before her. She loved the daily round of labour, loved to cook, to keep the house neat. She loved the breath of the rich earth, when the plough rent the furrows. She loved the

simple gossip of the neighbours, who ran in to consult with bated breath the wearing possibilities of a dress pattern or a new stitch in knitting. She had no doubts or fears, but was contented.

When she first met Gurth, his world seemed so far from hers, so much above and apart, that she listened to all he said with silent acquiescence, yielding always to his judgment, and never presuming to discuss matters of which she could have no knowledge, all the while adoring him with the idealizing passion of first love.

Now this was changed; he was no longer a knight from dreamland, but a fellow-worker, with whom she might discuss plans into which she had a far more practical insight than he. She loved him as devotedly, but on a rational plane.

As for Gurth, did he like this reversal? He was often worried by his own state of mind. Physically he was well, and, though rather thin, his face wore a healthy sun bronze. All his plans were going forward smoothly, the Hill Farm was nearly ready for its autumn planting of small fruits, and there would be money enough left over to bridge the way for the little household, until the soil yielded its crops,—yet he was not wholly contented.

Andrea's complete satisfaction and identification with her work seemed a reproach to him. Was this vigorous woman the same being as the girl who a year before stood blushing and silent, or else was moved to tears when he read aloud or played his violin to her? She seemed no longer to need protection, but rather to protect him.

His violin, could he have dreamed that he should ever become estranged from it? As his fingers grew stiff from contact with the soil, they stumbled over the strings insensibly, and the vibrating instrument seemed to grow shrill and wail in grief at the rough touch.

Then he would try again and play something more simple with a legato movement, when, perhaps, Andrea would frankly say, "What ails your violin, dearest? It seems out of tune, you do not play it as you used." Then he would put it by.

As for books, there was no time for them, no time for study and dreams. During the early spring he had read almost nightly to Margaret, and often Ezra Tolford joined in the talk that followed. Now Andrea nodded laughingly if he merely suggested reading, and asked him if he supposed she could keep awake to hear him, when she must churn to-morrow. As he rose to go, perhaps, to his attic for a quiet hour, she would twine her arms around his neck and tell him it was not good to spoil his eyes with books on summer nights, and so the days went by.

Gradually it seemed to him that Margaret was the one link that held before him

what he used to be. She said but very little to him usually, but went on with her daily life, keeping herself as ever refined and self-contained. It was through her only now that Waldsen knew that the world still rolled on. It was from her conversation that he gained scraps from books, magazines, and even the daily news, as she talked to interest Andrea as they worked and chatted together. In music, too, it was the same. With exquisite tact she would choose some song that Andrea knew and could sing correctly and ask Gurth to accompany them.

Waldsen went to church with his betrothed every Sunday evening, and all the neighbours found it most right and proper; but it was not prayer or sermon or even the companionship of Andrea that held him through the long session, but Margaret's voice leading the simple hymns. It seemed as if, in singing, she was speaking to him alone, and Gurth was both moved and puzzled by the transformation of her features.

One Sunday she chanced to look in his direction as she was singing and caught his expression as he gazed at her. Next day she told her father that she must rest her voice, and asked him to let Andrea supply her place in the choir for a while. She would like, she said, if possible to go to Glen Village for a week or so to stay with Mrs. Watson, an old friend of her mother's, who was quite ill and needed friendly care. All this seemed most natural to the Deacon, who was quite satisfied that Andrea could manage for that length of time.

Margaret imagined that she was doing a wise thing in going away and leaving the pair wholly to themselves. On the contrary it opened Waldsen's eyes to the position in which he stood, which to be perhaps brutally direct was this—the two women had changed places. He loved Andrea as a merry companion, but through her new competence and force she had lost her hold upon his mystic inner nature, that valued the ideal above the real. The two had not developed in unison and, practically, she had outstripped him. It was to Margaret that his spirit clung. Margaret, the woman he thought without emotion, as distant from him as the evening star, the reticence of whose nature fascinated him.

Waldsen was not morally inconstant. He was paying the penalty of a joint heritage of romance and hot-headed impulse. The blood of his parents did not mingle but contended in his veins.

Acadia was fading in a mist; love for love's sake, the thrill of music and the ideal in Nature were passing away, yet he never for a moment entertained the slightest thought of turning backwards. The soil was there grasping and swallowing; he had pledged his future to wrestling with it for his bread; if he conquered, it might yield him food, and finally—peace. Andrea would be happy, and doubtless he should be content when his neck had become accustomed to the yoke; for, after all, his student

philosophy aided him, and he realized that there is much in habit.

With the autumn came the furnishing of the house at the Hill Farm, and it occupied many of the dull days of early November. Andrea was in her element, and in a state of tranquil elation.

Only four rooms were to be used at first; a sunny kitchen, and sitting-room, and two bedrooms above. One of these was to have a blue paper and the other an old-fashioned chintz pattern sprinkled with bunches of poppies. "The poppies are for your room, Margaret—" said Andrea, when they were in the shop at Bridgeton choosing the household goods. "You like red so much, and you will stay with us often, always when your father goes away, you know."

Margaret smiled at her ardour, but never was impatient or seemed to tire of discussing the little details so dear to the prospective young housekeeper, or of making visits with her to the new home and guiding her somewhat abrupt taste.

As Andrea worked with a will, her enthusiasm infected Waldsen, and he believed himself happy again, until he discovered, as he usually did, that some arrangement which particularly delighted him was a happy thought of Margaret's.

At this time Margaret was often away from home. After her visit to Mrs. Watson, one of her old schoolmates, who had recently married and settled in Bridgeton, begged her to come there for a visit; and she felt also that she must have change, so she promised to stay two weeks with her friend.

"Send for me if you need me for anything, no matter how trifling," she said, when she left home.

Margaret had been at Bridgeton about ten days. It was a rainy evening, and she was sitting by the open fire with her friends, talking about school-days.

The dog, who had been sleeping on the hearth-rug, started suddenly, and, after cocking his ears in a listening attitude, rushed to the door, barking violently. Horses' hoofs sounded on the road with the peculiar sucking thud that rain and mud lend; the gate banged to, and hurried footsteps crossed the piazza. Margaret, without knowing why, went quickly to the door and opened it before her friends comprehended what she was doing, or before any one knocked.

On the threshold, lantern in hand, stood Ezra Tolford. Water was streaming from the limp brim of his felt hat and ran down his rubber coat in little streams.

"I knew it was some one from home! What is it, father?" Margaret cried.

The Deacon had a white, scared look and moistened his lips with his tongue twice before he answered—"Waldsen is very sick; the doctor says it's pneumonia. A lot of neighbours have come in and upset things under pretext of helping Andrea.

Doctor Russell says we must have a nurse if he lasts through to-night, and I thought you'd want to know!"

Margaret did not hear the last words; she was already upstairs and back again, buttoning her thick coat as she came. Her friends protested against her going out on such a night, her father joining them, but not insistently. He seemed ill at ease, as if he had some secret on his mind.

Bidding good-by hastily, in another moment Margaret was in the wagon tucking the wraps around her and trying to hold her umbrella against the wind, while the Deacon turned the horses homeward, so content in having her with him that he forgot to speak. "Tell me all about it, father, and why you did not send for me sooner," she said in an unsteady voice.

"Well, daughter, it all happened so quickly that there was no time for anything. Three days ago Waldsen went into the village with a load of feed, and it came on to rain heavily. He was all in a sweat handling the bags and got sopping wet driving back,—a thing that has happened to me a dozen times."

"The next day he was about as usual, but spoke of a catching in his chest. But yesterday he gave up and the doctor came, and he says that the heart has been overstrained somehow, and he doesn't expect to bring him round!"

"And Andrea, how does she bear it?" whispered Margaret, her throat almost closing when she tried to speak.

"She's a brave woman. She keeps quite still and heats the poultices and measures the medicines, like a regular nurse. You see she does not believe that he will die because he has a good colour, but that's the fever. He is delirious and doesn't know her, and twice he has called for you!"

"For me! Oh, father, when?"

"Last night, but it is nothing but his raving,—he doesn't know what he says; he thought I was his mother!" and the Deacon eyed Margaret anxiously.

It was eleven o'clock before they reached home, and, leaving her wet garments in the kitchen, where she found a neighbour who set about preparing her a cup of tea, Margaret went softly up the stairs.

The fire in the sitting-room had died down and she stirred it up, adding a fresh log, and resting a moment to collect herself, went to the attic chamber.

Outside the door of Gurth's room stood a table with a small oil-stove upon it and a dish-pan full of flaxseed meal; great squares of cotton that had made poultices lay about.

Inside the room a bright fire burned, and the screened lamp showed Andrea sitting on one side of the bed, watching the clock, and father on the other side,

watching the patient, and combining, as often happens in the calling of the country physician, both doctor and nurse.

Gurth was sleeping, if the uneasy tossing could be called sleep. Father was trying to keep the poultices in place, and now and then moistened the dry lips with a bit of ice. On seeing Margaret, Andrea came to the door, and, without saying a word, put her arms about her and laid her head on her shoulder, with a gesture of entire confidence that said, "Now that you have come, all will be right." Already Margaret seemed the elder by years.

"Try to persuade her to lie down an hour, Miss Margaret," said father; "she has not rested for two days, nor scarcely touched a morsel." Andrea yielded, upon the promise that she should be called at the slightest change.

Margaret took the chair opposite father, rising at intervals to hand him what he needed. She felt that in being there now she was infringing no law, social or moral, and that she had a right to the moments that were so precious to her. It was almost one o'clock; Gurth stirred and muttered as father gave him some brandy. Suddenly Margaret became conscious that his eyes were open and fixed upon her with a look that was unmistakable. As she leaned forward, not trusting her sight, Gurth suddenly raised himself upon one arm and stretching the other towards her, grasped her hand, crying "Margaret!" in a joyful voice. The delirium began again, in which he seemed to be going through the last interview with his mother. Andrea was called. In vain she begged him to speak to her, to look at her, but he never again became conscious, and at five o'clock he died.

It was the day after Thanksgiving when Gurth was laid away in the hillside burying-ground, where he had so often scattered food for the hungry birds.

A troop of neighbours followed him there, for he had become a favourite through his varied tastes; he had meant to settle at the Glen, so he was one of them, and all the women felt deep pity for Andrea. On the way back much curiosity was expressed as to what disposition she would make of the farm, for they all took it for granted that it would be hers.

For a day or two Andrea stayed in her room alone, refusing all offers of sympathy and barely tasting food. But one morning when Margaret went down, she found her in the kitchen going about her work the same as usual. Her face was pale and drawn, but wore a look of quiet resolution that was unearthly. She did not mention Waldsen, but when the day's work was done, went silently to his attic and, after feeding the birds, sat looking out, where upon the hillside there was a patch of fresh earth.

Margaret, watching the chance, followed her, and seated herself also by the

window. For a moment neither spoke, and then Andrea laid her head in Margaret's lap and said, great sobs nearly strangling her,—“Love me! Margaret, love me! I have tried not to speak of him and to keep the grief inside, for we have made you so much trouble, but oh, I cannot!” and the two women, clinging to each other, mingled their tears.

When Andrea grew calmer, Margaret spoke of the future, and how she hoped that Andrea would always feel that the Mill Farm was her home.

“It's very good of you, dear Margaret, to want me, and I should like to stay, but I must finish Gurth's work and make the fruit farm a success,—I know that he would wish it.

“These last few days and nights I have thought it out all myself, and I have decided. There is some money, you know; enough, he often said, until the fruit yields a return. I shall hire old Mr. and Mrs. Grigs to live with me, and if, in a year or two, I prosper, I will send for my little brothers (Ernest is twelve already), and then I shall have help enough.

“No, do not try to dissuade me, dear Margaret, you do not understand. When a woman has lost the love that bounded her life, the only thing between her and despair is a home!”

It fell to Deacon Tolford, in his legal capacity, as probate judge, to take the steps necessary for the regulation of Waldsen's affairs. He told Andrea that, as a matter of form, he must look through Waldsen's papers, and she willingly consented, only asking that any letters from herself be left unread.

The Deacon spent a morning in the attic, then, coming to the sitting-room where Margaret was sewing, closed the door gently, sat down, and began drumming on the table with his fingers, his face wearing a distressed look.

Margaret waited for him to speak, which he soon did, abruptly, as if he was beginning in the middle of his thoughts.

“Daughter, I want you to ask Andrea to stop with us as long as she likes. She can't well go back to Denmark, and I hate to think of her facing the world so soon after this trouble.”

“I knew you would wish it, father, so I asked her yesterday to live with us; but she has thought out her future carefully, and I do not see any reason for opposing her.” Then she gave the details of Andrea's plan.

The Deacon sat for some minutes, his head sunk between his shoulders, and then, pulling himself together, said, “I might as well tell you something first as last, Margaret,—a fact that neither of you women seems to think possible. Gurth Waldsen left no will or legal papers of any sort. The farm and money does not

belong to Andrea any more than it does to us! More than this, it is my duty to inform his mother of the facts, as she is his only heir, and appoint an administrator to take charge of the estate, pending its settlement!”

Margaret had risen and was standing with dilated eyes and her hands clasped before her. “Father! father! I never thought of this. Can nothing be done? Can we not arrange in some way? Oh! who will tell Andrea?”

“As Waldsen did not have the foresight to protect her, we can do nothing, daughter. She need not be told for a few weeks, though, until I receive some order from his mother,—but know it she must. If they had married last spring, this trouble would have been avoided. Mark my words, daughter, some niceties of feeling are too good for daily use. Gurth was a dreamer, and dreams always end like this.”

“Let us wait a few weeks,” interrupted Margaret, hastily. “As you say, it may seem less brutal than to tell her now, or his mother, who is so rich, may let Andrea keep the land.”

VI

With December the deep snows came, and there were times when Andrea could not make her daily pilgrimage to the Hill Farm. She regarded her plan of life as settled, and was grateful that she met with no opposition. She had spoken to the Grigses, and was only waiting for Christmas, her marriage day, to go home! Home! She made the most of the magic word, not realizing its emptiness.

She was in an overwrought, exalted state. Feeling that Waldsen was very near, she knew no loneliness. When she was not working, she sat in his room and looked up the hill. Once or twice she took down his violin, and drew the bow across its strings, half expecting it would yield its old music.

To sympathizing neighbours she told her plans freely, and they, marvelling at her courage, wondered among themselves if her head was quite right.

The weeks went on, and Margaret dreaded every mail, lest it should bring the foreign letter. Christmas was drawing near when, on the day before it, the letter came. It was from Mrs. Waldsen’s lawyer, brief and couched in technical language, giving directions for the disposal of the farm and declining peremptorily to make any allowance to “the woman who had brought about the estrangement between mother and son, and had so boldly followed the latter to America, though it was evident, as he had made no provision for her, that he had no intention of marrying her.”

The Deacon handed the paper to Margaret, and then sat looking dumbly at her. The snow blew against the window in great felty masses; it lay so deeply over wood

and field that no one had been able to gather Christmas greens; even the laurels on the hillside were weighed down and hidden. "I cannot tell her," said Margaret; "wait until after to-morrow; she will not try to go to the Hill House as she planned, for the road is drifted over."

There was to be a Christmas tree down at the church at seven o'clock on Christmas Eve, and Margaret had promised to lead the carols with the children, as a matter of course. She looked out at half-past six and shivered at the storm, but a deacon's daughter must not quail in the face of duty,—in a small town she always shares responsibility with the minister's wife, and just now the minister's wife was ill. Soon Andrea came downstairs dressed in the plain black gown that she had worn when Margaret first saw her, and said that she also wished to go to church; and the two women, preceded by the Deacon, and a blinking lantern, felt, rather than saw, their way out to the sleigh.

Once at the church, Andrea hid herself in the corner of an old-fashioned high pew, silently looking at the lights and the children's happy faces. When the singing began, tears ran down her cheeks, and she made no effort to restrain them, or even wipe them away.

The Deacon hurried the girls home as soon as possible, after the exercises were over, for though the storm had ceased, the thermometer had fallen, and the cold was intense.

Margaret begged Andrea to share her room that night, for the house seemed inexpressibly dreary, but she refused gently, and, after kissing Margaret, went up to Waldsen's attic room. There she moved about awhile, and finally Margaret heard her go to her own room, and in a few moments everything was still.

Andrea did not sleep, however, or even undress; the music had excited her imagination. It was Christmas Eve; how many years ago was the last Christmas? She had prepared no present for Waldsen, not even a wreath for his grave. The thought distressed her out of its due proportion.

Then she remembered that, under the eaves in his room, there was a sheaf of rye that he had saved to be the Christmas sheaf for their new home. She would take that up to the hill to him, and all the hungry birds would come there to-morrow for their festival. Presently it seemed to her as if the night lifted and day was dawning.

Andrea found the sheaf, and, pinning a shawl about her head and shoulders, crept softly downstairs. The wind blew so that she could barely close the woodshed door behind her; at her first step she sank knee-deep in the snow. Then a sort of second sight came to aid her, and she chose the places bared by the wind in picking

out her path.

The moon came out brightly and the shadows bowed and beckoned encouragement to her as she struggled on. Could she ever climb the hill? Twice the wind wound her in her shawl and she fell, but, pausing a moment for breath, regained her footing. The sheaf grew like lead in her arms, and the wind fought with her for it.

At last she reached the picket fence that encircled the hill of white stones. The gate held fast until, dropping her burden, she shovelled the snow away desperately with her hands and released it. Was she growing dizzy? No, she felt stronger, better. The few clouds vanished, driven by the moon. A new light shone about the place, and beautiful colours radiated from the blowing particles of snow. The wind hushed its shrillness to soft music, the notes of Gurth's violin. She was in her old home once more, and the little brothers were singing their carol.

How the wind blew! she must hurry now,—only a few steps more. Again the music arose; strange! it seemed to be her own voice that sang to the accompaniment of Gurth's violin,—

“Sire, the night is darker now,
And the wind blows stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how,
I can go no longer!”

She caught hold of a stone to steady herself and turned toward the unmarked mound. Her feet almost refused to move, one final effort! It grew light again! Joy! The sheaf of rye seemed to part and open a way before her, revealing Waldsen standing on the threshold of the Hill House—would he close the door without seeing her? Casting herself forward, she cried, “Wait, beloved, I am coming!” and then all was warmth and light.

In the morning Margaret did not call Andrea when she first awoke. “Day will come to her soon enough,” she said. An hour later she went to the empty room and then, finding the bed untouched, searched the house in vain. Calling the Deacon, he suggested that Andrea might have gone to the Hill House, but there were no footsteps in the snow to guide them, for it had drifted all night.

A party of neighbours quickly formed; the men strode about, probing the drifts with sticks, while the women looked anxiously from their windows.

Margaret went to the attic room, where she could see the country on all sides. Something fluttered above the snow between the white stones on the hill, where the wind had swept bare places. In a moment she had gone out and called the nearest of

the searchers, who chanced to be her father, and together they climbed the hill.

Pillowed by the rye knelt Andrea, her eyes turned skyward, a smile upon her parted lips, while above her the meadowlarks flocked and the buntings murmured as they made their Christmas feast from Gurth's sheaf.

"We need not tell her now," was all that Margaret said.

FINIS

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AT THE TIME APPOINTED. With a frontispiece in colors by J. H. Marchand.

The fortunes of a young mining engineer who through an accident loses his memory and identity. In his new character and under his new name, the hero lives a new life of struggle and adventure. The volume will be found highly entertaining by those who appreciate a thoroughly good story.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *The Open Window*, *Tales of the Months* by Mabel Osgood aka Barbara Wright]