

GIDEON'S BAND

A TALE OF THE MISSISSIPPI

BY

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PART 2

XXVI

ALARM AND DISTRESS

"It's Basile!" she cried. Then, one after another, to the exhorter, to Hugh, to each of the two Gilmores separately: "This is wrong, all wrong! You said we mustn't alarm or distress any one—and we mustn't!" She tried to face her chair round to the bowed head, and Hugh, at a touch from his grandfather, moved to her aid. Mrs. Gilmore too had started but was kept back by others, whispering with her on the edges of their seats.

"It's all wrong," insisted Ramsey to Hugh close at hand, "and we mustn't do it! You said we mustn't!"

The exhorter was gratified, not to say flattered. "H-it ain't none of it wrong, my young sisteh," he called across. "Ef yo' bretheh's distress ah the fear o' damnation it's all right and Gawd's name be pra-aised!"

"Amen!" groaned one or two of the undistressed majority, while old Joy modestly pressed up from the rear.

"Please, good ladies an' gen'lemens," she said as she came, "will you please fo' to lem-me thoo, ef you please? Dat's my young mahsteh, what I done nu's' f'om a baby. Ef you please'm, will you please suh, fo' to lem-me pass, ef you please?" In gentle haste she made her way, many eyes following, and heads swinging right and left to see around the heads that came between. The goal was reached just as Ramsey, in her turned seat, leaned to lay fond hands on her brother's locks. But Hugh interposed an arm.

"No," he said, "we mustn't do that either."

"No!" said Joy, "dat's right! Fo' de Lawd's sake tek heh clean away—ef you kin. An' ef you please, good ladies an' gen'lemens, fo' to squeeze back a leetle mite——?"

They squeezed the mite and she knelt by the boy. The sister knelt too, but as she left her chair Hugh, taking it, put himself between her and her brother. The actor was the only one left standing.

"Sing, will you, please," he said—"and will you all sing

"There is a land of pure delight—'

Mrs. Gilmore, will you raise the tune?"

But the exhorter was too quick for them and "riz" it before the request was fairly uttered. All sang, and over all easily soared the voice of the zealot:

"Thah is a ladnd o' pyo' de-light
Whah saidnts ib-maw-tudl reigdn.
Idn-fidn-ite day dis-pedls the-e night
Adn pleas-u'es badn-ish paidn."

Now he rolled his enraptured eyes and now his quid, spat freely on the rich carpet, beat time on one big palm with the other and on the floor with one vast foot, while through the song like a lifeboat through waves, undisturbed and undisturbing, cleft the steady speech of the nurse to the boy. Regardless of the precaution just urged for Ramsey, her arm fell over his bowed form.

"Thah eveh-last-ign sprign a-bi-dns
Adn nev-eh with-'rign flow-ehs——"

—ran the hymn, and straight through it, heard everywhere, pressed mammy Joy's tearful inquiry:

"Is you got religion, honey boy, aw is you on'y got de sickness? Tell me, honey, which you got? Is you got bofe?"

The lad moaned, shook his head, and suddenly sat up, and cried to his kneeling and gazing sister: "Neither! Great God, I'm not ready for either!"—his words, like old Joy's, cutting squarely across the hymn as it continued:

"Death like a nor-rah streabm di-vi-dns
This heab'-mly ladnd frobm ow-ehs."

Ramsey stood. "Well, don't be alarmed or distressed!" she half laughed, half wept, while the nurse crooned:

"Honey boy, ef you ain't yit got de sickness——"

"I don't know!" he cried, so loudly that only the Methodists and Baptists sang on. He sprang up and glanced round to the judge, the general, the squire, the senator, exclaiming: "I've been right in it!—to get back that infernal petition of yours when I dropped it! I've all but touched the dying and the dead! I've been handled all over by men who'd been handling them! Whatever I've caught from them I'll know is a judgment! For at last I've got a sense of sin! Right down under here behind this boat's engines I got it! I want you-all people to pray for me! I've been an awful sinner for years!"

"So have I!" wept Ramsey aloud.

"Praise de Lawd!" said Joy, from her knees.

Mrs. Gilmore drew Ramsey backward and shared a chair with her. The exhorter and a stout few hung to the hymn—

"Whi-dle Jur-dan ro-dled be-tweedn,"

—and the terrified boy talked on through everything, no one edging away from him as the wise might in these days.

"I'm not fitt'n' to die, Mr. Gilmore," he said. "That petition's not my worst sin—by half—by quarter. But it's opened my eyes. You-all that got it up, and you-all that signed it, it would open yours, one look below; and I want you-all, right here, now, to tell God you take it back, before he lays his curse on me! You can manage that somehow, Mr. manager, can't you? Can't somebody pray it? Or—or can't—can't you vote on it?"

"Yes," broke in Ramsey, clung to by the player's wife but standing and glancing from the player so directly to the senator that all looked at him, "vote! vote!"

He gave the player the sort of nod one gives an auctioneer, and the singers stopped. "I think we can," said the actor, "and that if the senator votes yea so will

every one. All in favor of withdrawing the petition raise the right hand. It is unanimous."

The exhorter was up. "Mr. play-actoh, that's all right. I neveh signed that trick, nohow. So fah so good, fo' a play-acto's church—ef you kin git sich a church into the imagination o' yo' mind! But vot'n' ain't enough!" He pointed to Ramsey, fast in Mrs. Gilmore's arms, and to her brother, in old Joy's. "Vot'n' don't take heh—naw him—out'n the gall o' bittehnness naw the bounds o' iniquity. Oh, my young silk-an'-satin sisteh, don't you want us to pray fo' you?"

Ramsey's courage was tried. Many gazers, but particularly the judge's sister, seemed, by their eyes, crouching to pounce on her whether she answered yea or nay. "I know," she said, in tears again, and unconsciously wringing her hands, "I know I ought to, but—but I—I'm afraid there isn't time. For I want—oh, I—I want to vote again! I want to vote to take up a collection, and a big one, for those people down-stairs that mom-a's with. And then we can pray for her—and for Captain Courteney. Mom-a's a Catholic but it's in her Bible the same as in any: 'Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.'" The last word was but a breath on her quivering lip. Facing the actor she stood and waited. Joy was getting Basile away.

"It is moved by the last speaker," said the player, "and seconded by"—he glanced inquiringly about—"by several—that we make an immediate contribution for the benefit of our deck passengers, who are in dire need, and that——"

"That we make it a big one!" repeated Ramsey.

"All in favor—" he said. "Unanimous. I will ask Mr. Courteney and Miss Hayle to take up the collection."

The dispersal of the meeting found the lady of Milliken's Bend with the judge's sister. The judge, joining them, reported that the laughing Ramsey's collection was double that of the solemn Hugh. The sister's eyes snapped as she put in: "She made me double my contribution." Ramsey passed at a distance. "It's a shame to keep short dresses on a girl of that age and of her—her——"

"Spontaneity?" asked the judge. "I like spontaneity, even exuberance, at times."

"Well, I don't," said the sister.

"No," murmured the judge. These two, who were to get off at Natchez, were just beginning to be enjoyed—as types. The sister was one who had all her life complained of "enlargement of the spleen" and even oftener of a "bitter mouth." On which the judge's only comment was: "Hmm!" Just now, as to Ramsey, he grew daring.

"Her dress," he said, "is longer than it was yesterday."

"It's a mile too short."

"As much as that?"

"I wish you were not going to leave us so soon," said the lady of the Bends, and then bravely added, of Ramsey: "Her dresses are short by her own choice, old Joy says."

"Shouldn't doubt it a moment."

"Yes, she keeps them short to keep her mother young. I think that's right sweet of her, don't you?"

"No," replied the sister, and went to lock her trunks.

XXVII

PILOTS' EYES

Once more the hurricane deck. What space! What freedom! Again from the airy, sun-beaten roof, that felt as thin underfoot as the levelled wing of an eagle, the eye dropped far below to where the tawny waters glided to meet the cleaving prow or foamed away from the smiting wheels. Again the dazzled vision rose into the infinite blue beyond clouds and sun, or rested on the green fringes of half-drowned shores forever passing in slow recession.

Four in the afternoon. Esperance Point rounded and left astern in the east. Ellis Cliffs there too, whitening back to the western sun. Saint Catherine's Bend next ahead, gleaming a mile and a quarter wide where it swung down from the north. And the *Votress* herself! Once again that perfect grace in the faint up-curve, at stem and stern, of the low white rail that rimmed the deck. Again, above the stained-glass skylights of the cabin, the long white texas, repeating the deck's and

cabin's lines in what Ramsey called a "higher octave," its narrow doors overhung with gay scrollwork, and above its own roof, like a coronet, the pilot house, with Watson just returned to the wheel. Once more the colossal, hot-breathing twin chimneys, their slender iron braces holding them so uprightly together and apart, the golden globe—emblem of the Courteney fleet—hanging between them, and their far-stretched iron guys softly harping to one another in the breeze. All these again, and away out beyond the front rail, with a hundred feet depth of empty air between, the jack-staff, high as a pine and as slim for its height as a cane from the brake, its halyards whipping cheerily, the black night-hawk at its middle, a golden arrow at its peak.

John Courteney, coming up into this scene, laid a hand on his solitary chair at the forward rail but then paused. Between the chair and the skylights behind it stood the squire's sister and brother-in-law and Ramsey. Yes, they eagerly agreed with him, the view ahead was certainly dazzling. Ramsey would have asked a question, but the husband remembered the contagion from whose field below the captain had just come, the wife noticed that the presence of ladies would keep the captain standing, and the three, remarking that such a scene was too brilliant to confront, moved aft. As they went, Watson, up at the wheel, and Ned, his partner, lingering by him, had a half-length view of them, their lower half being hid by the cabin roof, close under whose edge their feet passed, where its shadow kept the deck cool. The wife still had her embroidery, the husband his De Bow. By certain changes about Ramsey's throat and shoulders Ned noticed that she was in yet another dress, whose skirt—such part as showed above the cabin roof—was in flounces almost to the waist. He would tell that at home to his wife and daughter, who now and then depended on him for fashions, with striking results. Watson, too, noticed Ramsey, yet his chief attention remained, as steadily as his gaze, on his steering-mark far up in the bight of the sunlit bend, at the same time including, here below, his seated commander.

"Cap' ought to be pooty tol'able tired, Ned."

"Well, now, he jest ought!" The partner dropped back and perched on the visitor's bench, whence he could still see the river though not the closely intervening cabin—and texas roofs; and all the two said later was without an exchange of glances. Watson thought the captain would "rest more now, on watch, than what he did before, off," having got matters running so much smoother down below; though the cholera was "a-growin', straight along."

Ned told of his pleasure in seeing Hugh conduct the senator down to the devotional services: "Lard, they hev done him brown, ain't they?—atween 'em, Hugh and Hayle's girl?"

"With some help," said Watson, modestly. "That petition—ef th's anything else aboard this boat as dead as what it is"—he ran into inelegancies.

Ned offered to bet it was not dead inside the senator, and Watson admitted that the statesman would probably never forgive the "genteel" way he had been euchred; though like euchre, he said, a lot of it was luck.

"But, man! the bluff he *kin* put up! Couldn't believe my eyes when we'd passed the hat an' adjourned an' I see him a-standin' at the fork o' the for'a'd stairs, ag'in the trunk room, same ole bell-wether as ever, a-makin' a *bully* speech to Madame Hayle an' that Marburg chap down in the gangway, foot o' the steps, an' a-present'n' him our 'oblations'—says he—meanin' the swag!"

"An' her a-translat'n' for him!" said Ned, fancying the scene, with the senator, under his mask, "a-gritt'n' his tushes!" and Watson, to heighten it, told of Hugh and the actor at one head of the double stair, and Mrs. Gilmore and Ramsey at the other—"a-chirpin' him on, an' the whole b'iler deck, ladies and gents, takin' it in, solid!"

The senator was long-headed. "Yes, an' yit Hugh's throwed him fair jest by main strength an' awk'ardness."

"I dunno!" said Ned. "It wuz long-headed, too, fo' Hugh an' the play-acto's to give him the job."

"It wuz long-headed in her who put 'em up to it."

"Oh, look here! *She* didn't do that, did she?"

"Less'n I'm a liar," replied Watson, eyes front.

"Hunh! Wonder which! Say, Wats'; on the b'iler deck—did she have on this gownd she's a-wearin' now?"

"No," said Watson, tardily, with eyes still up-stream.

"Not wast'n' yo' words," said the inquirer.

"No."

"A short answer turneth away wrath, I s'pose."

"It turneth away discussion o' ladies' gownds."

"Lard! I don't discuss 'em to excess. Noticed hern—its upper works—an' a flounce or two—an' sort o' wondered as to the rest of it, how much water it's a-drawin'. Anything li-bell-iious about that?"

"No, considerin' the source."

Ned slipped from the bench to go, but Watson looked back with a light beckon of the head and he turned to the wheel. Thence he glanced down over the breast-board, over the forward eaves of the texas, down to the skylight roof and upon several persons. First, the boat's commander. He was leaving his seat at the approach, from the head of a boiler-deck stair, of Madame Hayle and the doctor. On the skylight roof, near the bell, were the two players, just greeting Hugh as from the other side he reached the deck and stepped up to their level. On the same roof, midway between these and the front of the texas, were the squire's sister and her husband returning from their search for shade. And lastly, close after them, came Ramsey, a source of general astonishment. For the gown she was in and whose lower possibilities had aroused Ned's avowed and Watson's concealed interest was her mother's and swept the deck.

Madame Hayle grew more beautiful as with a play of indignation which wholly failed to disguise her pleasure she cried: "By what *per*-mission? by what *per*-mission have you pud—my—clothes?"

The girl would have flown to her arms but the doctor forbade, and for second choice she set up a dainty tripping to and fro athwartships; dipping, rising, skipping, swaying, bridling, like a mocking-bird on a garden wall. It made Ned and Watson themselves worth seeing. Professional dignity set their faces like granite though every vein seethed with a riot of laughter. But the laughter's chief cause was not Ramsey.

"Look at Hugh," muttered Watson, gently drawing down the wheel for the *Votaress* to sweep round into a northward reach at whose head Natchez Island would presently show itself. To look at Hugh took nerve, but in a moment——

"Look at her," said Ned.... "There! she tipped her nose at him!"

"She didn't!"

"She did. Wats', yo' game ain't never goin' to work."

"Ned, y'ain't got the sense of a loon."

"Well, I swear I've got more'n Hugh—or her."

XXVIII

WORDS AND THE "WESTWOOD"

Down on the roof, while Ramsey's mother started with the physician around the skylights for the texas, and Hugh and Gilmore conversed with the captain, Mrs. Gilmore, her hands on Ramsey, said to madame:

"I want her now, to begin to make ready for tomorrow evening. My dear"—to the girl—"I've a dozen dresses that will become you better than this one."

"Long?" cried Ramsey. "I'll take the lot!" She felt Hugh distantly looking and listening.

"We won't trade on Sunday," laughed Mrs. Gilmore; "but you mustn't"—scanning her approvingly—"ever put on a short dress again."

"Ho-oh, I never will!" said Ramsey, with a toss meant for Hugh, who went by, hurrying aft to meet a newcomer. She started after him. Madame Hayle, in that direction, had gone into the sick-room, whence Ramsey's brother Julian, with barely a word to his mother, had come out. Stepping down into the narrow walk between the roofs of cabin and pantry and glancing over his shoulder upon the company about the bell, he winced at sight of his sister's attire. Yet he kept his course and was well started aft before he saw that he was being met by some one in the narrow way, and by whom but Marburg. It was that alien whom Hugh was hastening to reach and on whom Ramsey was staring. He had come up from the engine room through the steward's department, by the unguarded route which Basile's ascent had revealed, and now came face to face with a foe where there was room only for friends to meet and pass. So said the eyes of each to each, but just then a quick footfall on the cabin roof, behind and somewhat above him, caused Julian to face round and he confronted Hugh.

"Mr. Hayle," was Hugh's word, "what will you have, sir?"

"Nothing, sir, of you! What will *you* have of *me*, sir?"

Ramsey glided by both and halted before the exile, whose scowl vanished in a look so grateful and supplicating that her words, clearly meant to justify his presence, caught in her throat: "What will you—have, sir? My mother?—back again?—and the doctor?"

"Yes," he replied, and then added in German with an anguish of gesture which was ample interpretation, "yes, for *my* mother! for my little brother! Ah, God! he is not dead! He is yet alive! His arms are as supple as *these*. There is color still in his cheeks!"

She stood dumb with horror. Yet she woke to action as, close beside her, she heard her brother snarl at Hugh:

"I'll go where I please! Who stops me, God pity him!"

She dropped nimbly from the skylights' overhang to the alien's level and with looks as beseeching as his waved him back a step. Then with the same mute entreaty she faced Julian and Hugh. But there was a ludicrous contrast, visible to all, between Hugh's phlegm and her brother's pomp, and by a flash of feminine instinct she divined the best mood with which to match it. Grimly elated, Hugh saw what was coming. Julian saw, and groaned a wearied wrath. The captain, the commodore—for the commodore had returned—the Gilmores, the Yazoo couple, the pilots overhead, all waited with lively and knowing gaze. She went limp, hid her face, swayed, sank to one knee, and filled the whole width of the narrow passage with arms and draperies, the meanwhile breaking into a laugh so wholly soliloquial that the two players became learners. But again she sprang erect and had hardly thrown her curls back from her blushing face when her mother, the bishop, and the doctor stepped from the sick-room, and madame addressed the immigrant:

"Ah, ritturn, if you ple-ease. Me, I am ritturning!"

"Yes," chimed the bishop and the doctor; "yes, at once!" and the exile, with pleading looks to Ramsey, to the others by turn and to her again, went below. Madame and the physician began to follow.

"How's Lucian?" called Ramsey after them.

"Getting well," replied both. They passed behind the wheel-house and only the pilots knew that at its corner Madame Hayle stopped where she could still see and hear. All others kept their eyes on Julian, who was in a redder heat than ever, and on Hugh, who was addressing him in a depth of tone that amused the Gilmores almost as keenly as it did Ramsey, who had rejoined them at his back. Suddenly he faced around.

"If Miss Hayle," he said, "would as soon go below——"

Miss Hayle sang her reply, bugled it: "She would no-ot."

Hugh stepped down into her brother's path and faced him again: "You have written your father a letter——"

Julian's head flew up but bent in slow avowal.

"To be put aboard the *Antelope*," pursued Hugh——

The head went higher: "Well, sir?"

"To outrun this boat."

"And—if—I—have, sir?"

"Why, yes," murmured the squire's brother-in-law and sister, to the Gilmores, "suppose he has?"

"So have I," said Hugh to Julian. He glanced up to the Yazoo couple and then to the bishop self-isolated near the sick-room door. Ramsey and the couple laughed. Hugh turned her way again: "If Miss Hayle——"

"She wouldn't," said Ramsey, laughing more.

"Well, sir!" drawled the waiting Julian, to Hugh.

Hugh waved a hand toward the bishop: "That gentleman has risked his life for your sick brother."

"Yes," said Ramsey. The bishop scowled up the river. Julian scowled at Hugh.

"Well, sir?" he once more challenged.

"He was told he was wanted as a minister," said Hugh.

"Well, sir?"

"He was wanted merely to get your letter off secretly."

"You lie!"

"Oh!" sighed the Yazoo pair. Ramsey shrank upon Mrs. Gilmore.

"Not at all," said a quiet voice overhead and the eyes of Julian, blazing upward, met Watson's blazing down.

"Come," said the player's wife to Ramsey, "come away."

"I won't," tearfully laughed Ramsey, and Mrs. Gilmore and the squire's sister had to laugh with her.

"The lie," said Hugh, "will keep. Your letter is such that the bishop declines to touch it."

The bishop swelled. Julian recoiled and, glancing behind him, confronted his mother.

"My son," she began, but he whirled back to Hugh.

"You keyhole spy!" he wailed; "you eavesdropping viper!"

Ramsey came tiptoeing along the edge of the pantry roof to light down between them but he imperiously motioned her off, still glaring at Hugh and gnawing his lip with chagrin. "Oh, never mind!" was all he could choke out; "never you mind!" He ceased again, to catch what Hugh was replying to him. Said Hugh:

"I'll take your letter and send it with my own."

"No, sir! No, you grovelling sneak!"

"Mais, yass!" called Madame Hayle from her place, and Ramsey laughed from hers, but a new voice arrested every one's attention. The bishop wheeled round to it with an exclamation of dismay that was echoed even by Julian. In the sick-room door stood Lucian, half dressed and feebly clinging to the jamb.

"Let him do it, Jule!" he cried in a tremulous thin voice. "Take the whelp at his word! Don't you see? Don't you see, Jule? We'll have him in a nine hole. It'll be

hell for him if he puts it through and worse if he slinks it!" He tried to put off the bishop's sustaining arm.

A light of discernment filled Julian's face. There was no time to ponder. He had always trusted Lucian for the cunning insight and did it now though Lucian lay in the bishop's arms limp and senseless. He drew forth the letter. Gayly stooping over the skylights Ramsey reached for it and passed it to Hugh. Julian sprang up to the bishop, who had borne Lucian into the sick-room and now filled its door again, waving a cheerful reassurance.

"A mere swoon," said the bishop; "all right again."

"It may be all right up there," the squire's sister began to say to the actor's wife—and hushed. But Ramsey had heard, as she watched her mother hurry below to the young Marburg brother lying as limp and faintly pink in death as her brother up here in life; heard, and thought of the perils in store for Hugh and his kin and her and hers unless this sweet, wise mother could charm them away as sunlight charms away pestilence. Mr. Gilmore called her:

"Come, we've lots to do."

But how could one come just then? A slight turn of the boat's head was putting Natchez Island close on her larboard bow and, seven miles away, bringing hazily into sight Natchez herself, both on her bluffs and "under-the-hill." Nay, more; abreast the *Votaress* was another fine boat. The *Westwood*, she was named. Her going was beautiful, yet the *Votaress* was gradually passing her. The Yazoo pair knew her well. When they made salute toward two men who stood near her forward skylights, one of them returned it.

"Why should he be so solemn?" asked the wife.

"Why shouldn't he?" laughed Ramsey.

"Because he's a mere passenger, on his wedding tour."

"Humph!" said Ramsey. "Weddings are solemn things. Is that other man the captain?" she asked the husband.

"No, I regret to say, he's only her first clerk."

"Why should you regret to say it?" inquired the girl; but the wife, too, had a question:

"Do you think there's anything wrong?"

"N-no, oh, no."

The *Westwood's* clerk made a sign to Captain Courteney. The captain glanced up to Watson, and the two boats, still at full speed, began to draw sidewise together. But Ramsey's liveliest interest was in the *Westwood's* crew, who, far below about her capstan, were paying their compliments to the newer, larger, speedier boat in song and refrain with stately wavings and dippings of ragged hats and naked black arms. Now the boats' guards almost touched and their commanders spoke so quietly together that she did not hear their words. But she noted the regretful air with which John Courteney shook his head to the *Westwood's* clerk and then to the passenger, and the *Westwood* began again to drop behind. Hugh came near, paused, and glanced around.

"Looking for the commodore?" she asked.

"I thought you went down with Mrs. Gilmore," he replied, "to rehearse your part in the play."

"Commodore's down on the lower deck," she said; "freight deck—with mom-a—and the bishop."

Hugh showed astonishment. "The bishop?"

"Yes, mom-a made him go." She laughed. "Some of the sick folks down there are Protestants and were threatening to turn Catholic. Is anybody sick aboard the *Westwood*?"

"No."

"Then where's her captain?"

Hugh made no reply but to meet her steady gaze with his own till she asked in a subdued voice: "Cholera?"

Hugh nodded. Each knew the other was aware of the song that floated up after them from the boat behind.

"What did the bridegroom want?" asked the girl.

"Wanted to give us a thousand dollars to take his bride—with him or without him—aboard the *Votatress*."

"But when he heard how much worse off we are—" prompted she.

"Yes."

"But, Mr. Hugh——"

"Yes?"

"Anyhow, this boat hasn't got that boat's trouble!"

"No," said Hugh, and knew they were both thinking of his father. Together they stood hearkening to the last of the *Westwood's* song:

"'Ef you git dah befo' I do—
 O, high-low!—
Jest tell 'em I'm a-comin' too—
 John's gone to high-low!"

XXIX

STUDYING THE RIVER—TOGETHER

They did not tie to the wharf-boat at Natchez. At that stage of water there was good landing a few yards below, where the sandy bank was not too wet to walk across to a higher one which floods never reached, close under the bluff. Here had left the boat half a dozen passengers including the judge and his sister. So good-by to that lady. Never would *she* have set foot on the *Votares* had she dreamed she was to be "dumped off" on such a spot. She believed that girl of Gideon Hayle's had laughed as she went up the perilous stage plank. And really there is no proof to the contrary.

Another incident awoke in Ramsey no mirth. Yet she never forgot it. It occurred on the upper, greener level that overlooked, across the river, a great sweep of Louisiana lowlands at that moment bathed in a golden sunset. The same light fell upon the incident itself—the Marburg lad's burial; fell upon the bent mother standing behind the priest and between her elder son and Madame Hayle, surrounded by her fellow exiles, many of whom, with faces hidden like hers, wept more for her bereavement than they had earlier done for their own. So the rude pine coffin descended into the unhallowed ground. From the hurricane-deck Ramsey looked down with wet eyes to the meek mourner returning aboard on the arm of her Otto. Thinking how easily in the play of chance the lost brother might have been saved and her saved brother lost, and recalling the plight of

the *Westwood*, she suddenly realized that no one could tell who might go next—"to high-low." Otto Marburg, glancing up, saw her tears, and would have paused but for the sacred burden on his arm.

At the same time, for eyes, even wet eyes, as lively as Ramsey's there were livelier things to see. Hugh had gone ashore and up to the wharf-boat, crossed it, and boarded the busy *Antelope* with several letters in hand, the twins' letter among them. Said the squire's brother-in-law:

"That boy must know the danger to him there is in that document," and the planter of Milliken's Bend agreed.

So did their wives. There was "everything in it he wouldn't want there and nothing he would want."

He was doing the "brave thing," they all said, and the wives called it too brave. The brave thing, they thought, "ran a slim chance against Hayle's twins."

"My dear ladies," said the planter, "it runs the only chance he has. The brave thing is the only thing those two young fire-eaters have any respect for." He stopped short; Ramsey had overheard. Yet she kept a pretty front.

"Why do you call him 'that boy'?" she laughingly asked.

"Well, really, because," replied the planter, twinkling, "he's so much more than a boy. Don't you think so?"

She gave him a sidelong glance, twitched her curls, and looked down ashore. Her mother was there with the "boy's" grandfather. They were getting into a rickety hack. Now Hugh joined them from the *Antelope*, and they went whipping up the steep road across the face of the bluff and into the "stuck-up" Natchez atop the hill. She guessed their errand.

Meantime the *Westwood* had reached the wharf-boat, put her bridal pair aboard the *Antelope*, and backed out again so promptly that as the *Antelope* cast off and started after her she had rounded Marengo Bend and was showing only her smoke across Cowpen Point. And now reappeared Madame Hayle, the commodore, and Hugh, bringing with them—welcome sight—two sisters of charity. The moment they touched the lower deck the *Votares*, with John Courteney on her roof, backed away, and soon, in the first bend above, any eye could plainly see the *Westwood*, still less than four miles off across country though eight by the river, with the *Antelope* four miles behind her and four ahead

of the *Votaress*. Said the pilot, Ned, to Ramsey, pulling the wheel down to head into the crimson west:

"Four 'n' four's eight, ain't it? Used to be. Can't tell what'll change on this river. When Lake Concordia, over here in Louisiana, was part o' the river, an' Vidal's Island, in its middle, was in the river, this bend wa'n't jest eight mile' round, it wuz twenty. These are *the* bends. F'om here to Cairo we got to run one eternal wriggle o' six hund'd 'n' eighty mile' to make three hund'd 'n' seventy."

"Oh, I'm glad of it! At least—ain't—ain't you?"

He shook his head: "Not this run." The supper bell rang and Ramsey fled, but he repeated: "No, not this run!" He turned and looked back upon Natchez bluff far behind the steamer's wake. "I wished every last Hayle on this blessed boat wuz off o' her an' 'top o' you!"

On that bluff, in colonial days, had stood Fort Rosalie, whose dire tragedy Ramsey, down in the cabin, found Gilmore, at table, recounting to Hugh and others: murder of its French settlers by Natchez Indians and the extermination of the Natchez tribe by the French from New Orleans. He was brief, and for a good ending went on to recall his own first sight of the spot, before the time of steamboats, when Natchez was a village; how, as his low broadhorn came drifting down around this point close above it, the bold rise swung into view, crowned with pines, its lower parts evergreen with the bay magnolia, and its precipitous front lighted up, as now, with the last beams of day. He made it seem so fair and important that Ramsey's native pride and a shame of her previous blindness almost drove her from the board to take a last look at it from the stern guards; but she was again in her mother's seat and again very hungry. He was good company to every one, the actor; always acting, yet always as natural as if acting and nature were one; a quiet education to Hugh, an unfailing joy to his wife, and both to Ramsey.

After supper the players got out an old two-act play for the next evening's entertainment. They cast Hugh and Ramsey for two small rôles, and for two larger ones found a young brother and sister—of Napoleon—at the mouth of the Arkansas—who would have just time to act them before leaving the boat. Supper had prevented its guests from seeing the *Votaress* turn Giles's Bend and Rifle Point and meet another boat as glittering as she and pass Lake Saint John and Fairchild's Bend—where the river widened to three miles about Fairchild's double island. Wherefore the indulgent Gilmores, on Ramsey's pleading, elected to coach first the brother and sister—of Napoleon—letting Hugh ascend to the starlight of the roof and Ramsey follow attended once more by old Joy.

She met Hugh at the foot of the pilot-house steps. "We are postponed!" she said, "you and me—I!"

"Yes. Do you know for what?"

"Yes, because those other two parts are so much bigger than ours, and because—I d'n' know—I believe they think I'm sleepy—ha, ha! I'm glad, for *I* want to study this *river*, all I can, day and night. And you—must, mustn't you?"

"Yes," he said, which was all he was to say in the play.

Half-way up the steps she halted: "You're to be a captain on it yourself as soon as you're fit, ain't you?"

"If that time ever comes."

"Phew! how modest" She stared an instant, turned her back, clasped the rail, and with her forehead on her arms laughed till Hugh was weary—not necessarily long.

He spoke: "Here come the *Westwood* and the *Antelope*."

"Where?" She glanced round, sprang up the steps, and soon was making room for him beside her at a larboard window behind Watson. Looking thence across the long, slim neck of Cole's Point they saw the two boats coming back westward in the upper reach of the fourteen-mile eastern loop they were running to make two miles into the north. Now the *Westwood* passed and now the *Antelope*, their skylights glinting like fireflies through the intervening tree tops, and Watson showed how to tell them apart by night. Presently they turned north again and vanished, leaving the mighty stream to its three students.

"It'll cut off this whole fourteen mile' some day," said Watson; but the other two, in their dim nook, remained silent. He knew that sort of silence. When Ramsey by and by spoke, her words were to Hugh exclusively and in undertone.

"The *Quakeress*—Oh, I didn't mean——!"

"That's all right," said Hugh. "The *Quakeress*——!"

"Oh, I meant the *Antelope*! She'll soon be in the lead again?"

"Yes."

"With both those letters."

"Both."

"Ain't you glad I didn't mean the *Quakeress*?"

"No."

"Well, you're glad I didn't mean Phyllis, ain't you?"

"No."

"Would you really be willing to tell me about Phyllis?"

"I would."

"You wasn't willing—before—was you?—were you?"

"No."

"What's changed your mind?"

"Lawd, missy!" sighed the forgotten Joy.

But Ramsey insisted: "What's changed it?"

"You, chiefly."

"I haven't," very quietly said the girl.

"You have."

Ramsey glanced cautiously at Watson, but the pilot's eyes were a league ahead. Hers returned to Hugh. "Wasn't it my brothers changed your mind—the twins?"

"They helped."

She looked him over absently: "I love my brothers."

"I don't," said Hugh.

She stared again and slowly remarked: "You haven't got to.... You're powerful queer, ain't you?"

"Not by choice."

"I'm queer. Wish I wasn't—wa'n't—weren't—but I am."

"Yes," said Hugh, "you are."

She tilted her chin, stepped to Watson's side, and called down over the breast-board to the Gilmores, who had finished with their two pupils for a time and had taken chairs with a newly found young married pair on the texas roof:

"Oho, down there!"

"Oho!" the group answered.

"Do you want us to stay up here?" asked Ramsey. "'Cause if you do we'll come right down. Or if you'd rather we'd come down we'll stay up here!" It was a new note.

The players laughed. "It's the long dress says that," they observed to the other pair.

"It certain'y is," replied they; which is Southern form for "probably."

XXX

PHYLLIS AGAIN

About eleven o'clock that same Sunday evening the *Votaress*, at full speed, was in a part of the river whose remarkable character sustained the son of John Courteney and the daughter of Gideon Hayle in the theory that their interest in it was all that had brought them to—all that detained them in—the unlighted pilothouse, on the visitors' bench, beside Watson. Below, the passengers were for the most part once more in slumber. The exhorter had loudly sung himself to sleep:

"Mahch-ign thoo Im-madn-uedl's groundnd
Toe fahr-eh wordlds odn high."

Madame Hayle was in her stateroom and berth, deep in sleep under the weight of her toils and assured by the players that Ramsey should go to bed when they did. Basile, too, slept, but talked and tossed in his sleep, while old Joy, sent to him by Ramsey and the Gilmores, crouched outside his door and dozed with an

ear against it. The Yazoo squire, his children, his sister, her husband, the Vicksburgers, and they of Milliken's Bend, purposing to be called up an hour before day to leave the boat at their proper landings, had "retired" early, saying fond good-bys and hoping to meet every one again. The ladies had astonished Ramsey with kisses, given, doubtless, she thought, because her father was a hero and her mother a saint. The squire's brother-in-law had assured her that her brothers, all three—as Southern boys always, or almost always, did—would come out all right—every way; but on being asked for details he had slipped away to give his De Bow to the commodore and his last good-by to Hugh.

The actor and his wife, however, were as broad awake as Watson. Loving the lone starry hours for the hours' own starry sake and having for Hugh and Ramsey a certain zeal unconfessed even to each other, they were yet in view from the pilot's wheel and visitors' bench at this hour of eleven, staying up as willingly as nightingales with the young husband and wife who had agreed with them that somebody's mental radius "certain'y had" lengthened as suddenly as her gown.

This young pair were expecting to go ashore within the next half-hour at "New Carthage," a city of seven houses, nearly opposite another of equal pride called Palmyra, and some four miles above the head of Hurricane Island, whose foot the *Votaress* was then passing. They and the Gilmores were still down at the forward edge of the texas roof, the players finding the Carthaginians very attractive: fluent on morals, cuisine, manners, steamboats, the turf, fashions, the chase; voluble on the burdensomeness of the slave to his master, the blessedness of the master to his slave; but sore to the touch on politics and religion—with their religion quite innocently adjusted to their politics—and promptly going hard aground on any allusion to history, travel, the poets, statistics, architecture, ornithology, art, music, myths, memoirs, Europe, Asia, Africa, homœopathy, or phrenology. It entertained the players just to see how many things the happy lovers knew nothing about and to hear them state in some new form, each time they backed off a sand-bar of their own ignorance, that they had seen the world, sucked the orange, yet found no spot of earth so perfect to live in as New Carthage.

The briefest sittings at such entertainment had been enough for Hugh, too much for Ramsey, and had driven them back, twice and thrice, to that fairer world on high in the pilot-house, where they could study the river undistracted. There and thence, now together, now apart, they had gone and come all through Watson's watch, moved by Hugh's duties or her caprice. Their each new meeting had been by accident, but it is odd how often accidents can occur—"at that stage o' the game," thought the kind pilot, and on each recurrence he noticed that they had got a bit farther on in the story of Phyllis.

"How long is this island, Mr. Watson?" inquired Ramsey, as if islands were all she was sitting up for.

"Two mile 'n' a half. D'd you ask me that before? I don't hear much behind me if it ain't hove right at me." Stalest device of the sentimentalist—the self-sacrificing lie! But Watson cared not for its staleness if it might promote the game. And the game, though as wanderingly as the river, went on. Without strict order of time, now on the bench, now on the roof, early and late, here is how it went:

"You're not afraid of my brothers, are you? I'm not."

"I'm afraid for them. And for my father and grandfather. And for your father and your mother."

"Good gracious!" laughed Ramsey, then mused, and then asked: "Ain't you afraid for me?"

Hugh said nothing, and thenceforth her tone grew more maidenly though her words remained childlike enough.

"I know why you want to tell me about Phyllis," she added more softly. "You think if you don't my brothers will."

"They don't know the facts," murmured Hugh.

"Don't they think they do? And ain't that the trouble?"

"Yes." Hugh thought her insight surprising, while she enjoyed the spiritual largeness she fancied she saw in his immobile features. "Yes," he repeated, "they think they do; that's the trouble, much of it."

"How do you know they don't?"

"By what they believe and by what I know."

"How do you know you know?"

"By my own eyes and Phyllis's own lips."

"Would she tell you things she never told any one else?"

"Yes, things she never dared tell any one else."

Ramsey pondered, laughed, and pondered and laughed again: "Why, most of that time you was—you were—nothing but a little toddler. Didn't she love you?"

"She hated me."

Ramsey flinched but quickly laughed a bright unbelief to the youth's face, a face which might as well have been a wood-carving. "Oh," she cried, "how ridiculous!"

"She used to flog me, cruelly."

Ramsey gasped: "And you never told? Oh, why—why——?"

"She said she'd kill me—and my mother. And she'd have done it, somehow."

"But she's been dead ten years!"

"Has she?"

"Why, of course! Wasn't she on the *Quakeress* when——?"

"So was I."

Ramsey flinched worse and stared away with lips apart, wondering if that was what gave him that look.

"But Phyllis," she resumed, "was lost."

"Was she?"

"Why ... wasn't she? Mammy Joy says my uncle—in the blazing pilot-house—did you know my uncle Dan?"

"Yes. That night, half an hour before the burning——"

"Oh! was it at night?"

"Yes. I was sitting with Phyllis, behind him, with him at the wheel, as we're sitting now behind Mr. Watson."

"Uncle Dan didn't hate you, did he?"

"No, indeed."

"Then why didn't you tell him about Phyllis? He was her master, you know."

"I did. He wormed it out of me. He was like you—in some things."

The questioner flashed and stared but then dropped her eyes. "Did he—have red curls?"

"Yes, redder than yours."

"Humph!" ... She mused.... "I'm tired here. Let's go down by the Gilmores and walk—'thortships!"

They went. "Well?—about Phyllis? What did she whip you for? Being bad?"

"Bad or good was all one to Phyllis."

"Wasn't—weren't—weren't you ever bad, Mr. Hugh?"

"Frequently."

"How were you bad?—steal jam?—eat green plums?"

"Yes; had fights, went in swimming—in snake holes——"

"D'd you tease your sisters?—pull their hair?—let the sawdust out o' their dolls?"

"Yes, yes, all that."

"Hmm! that's nothing. Basile and I—Ain't you going on? Of course, if you don't want to I—I shan't worm. Why did Phyllis—oh, pshaw!"

With the exclamation came such one-sided mirth that Mrs. Gilmore looked round. But her husband said there would never be anything to look round for while "that laugh" kept its quality.

Presently Hugh found himself murmurously "going on" and Ramsey listening. It was a great moment in both lives. If we cannot see it so, no matter; but in still depths of perception below all formulated thought both the youth and the girl were aware, separately, that the story of Phyllis was not the largest fruit of the hour.

Phyllis, Hugh said, had not hated him alone. In her heart had burned a pure flame of wrath against every member—save one—of the fair race to which she belonged by three-fourths of her blood but by not one word of human law. Wronged for the race she disclaimed, she hated the race that disclaimed her. Hated even the mothers of Hugh and Ramsey, who abhorred slavery, a slavery enthralling men, women, children in whose veins ran not four only but eight and sixteen times as much masters' blood as slaves'. She hated them because all their sweet abhorrence found no deliverance or revenge for her. Mitigations there were, but mitigations she loathed. The uncompromising quality of her hatred was one thing that had made dissimulation easy, and through all Hugh's childhood she had practised it perfectly in every relation and direction on every one but him. Another easement had been her indomitable, unflagging triple purpose to be free, to be reunited to her master, and to be revenged.

And a third, craftily won through the trustfulness of Hugh's Quaker mother, had been the opportunity to wreak the frequent overflow of her resentments on him. The fact that he was almost of the exact age of her own lost offspring had forever goaded her, and to him, with each maltreatment, she had told again her heart's whole burden, outermost wrong, innermost rage, thus recovering poise to treat his sisters and brother with exemplary care and tenderly to discuss with their mother Hugh's precocious reticence and gravity. Always she had held a self-command cunningly tempered in the fire of her triple resolve and fitted to the desperate chances with which she unceasingly crossed daggers. She never tired of telling her little white slave that, having herself once got the lash, she was only paying interest on it through him. Him, at least, she would teach to hate slavery as she hated it.

Hugh's listener moved as if to touch him. A boat was coming by. They paused in their "thort-ships" walk and with a slight choke in her voice Ramsey asked: "You know what I hope?" Her voice went lower. "I hope you learned."

"That's the strangest part," said Hugh. "I did."

The boat passed, a cloud of burning gems. "Go on," said Ramsey, "I can see that and hear you at the same time."

But Hugh's mind was too masculine for such legerdemain and though she sighed and sighed again he waited until the vision grew dim astern. Then, as he was about to resume, she interrupted.

XXXI

THE BURNING BOAT

"Where was the commodore all that time?" she asked.

"In Europe. We did business there too. It wasn't all river and boats those days."

"Humph!" She preferred it to be all river and boats.

"But at length," said Hugh——

"What length?"

"Ten years. Grandfather was coming home, to stay. We were all to go up to Saint Louis on the *Quakeress*."

"Phyllis too?"

"Yes, to meet him there and bring him back with us."

"Ten years!" marvelled Ramsey. "Hadn't Phyllis ever heard from my—from Walnut Hills?"

"Now and then, yes; and when those ten years seemed to have worn her, body and soul, to the breaking point——"

"You're strange. You feel tender to her yet."

"Perhaps I do. One day—night—she got word—I heard it from my nursery bed—she got news; news that to her was as good and as bad as news could be."

"That *he* was on the river again!" guessed Ramsey.

"Yes, relearning it—it changes so fast, you know—and that your father had asked my father to employ him; for he didn't want to go with your father."

"No, Hayles will *fight* for Hayles, pop-a says, but they won't work for them."

"Also that he was going to be married. But Phyllis told my mother so meekly that the past was all past——"

"And she'd seemed so good for so long, I suppose."

"Yes—that even my father thought it *was* past, and when we went aboard the boat and it started up the river, there at the wheel was your uncle Dan."

"You didn't dare tell on her?—Oh, you were only ten years old!"

"It wasn't that. I was older than I am to-day. But if I told a word I'd have to tell all, and by that time she'd made me believe that about all the guilt was mine."

"Yours! Well, and then? Was his lady-love on the boat?"

"No, but a passenger who came aboard at Natchez turned out to be the overseer Phyllis had once run away from."

"Oh! oh! the man who lost the child! What a difference that must have made!"

"Difference a wind makes to a fire. And yet for a time things ran along as smoothly as the old boat."

"She wasn't any older than you."

"For a boat she was, several times. Mr. Watson," asked Hugh from the roof between the Gilmores and the pilot, "what's the average age of a boat on this river?"

"Average age? Well, it varies! Say about five year'."

Hugh's voice dropped again. "The overseer being aboard, Phyllis and I, to be clear of him, were allowed free run of the roofs, and I being the captain's son it was so natural to see us often in the pilot-house——"

"And she was so wary, and you were so silent——"

"Yes—that no one noticed anything and the past still seemed past. One day your uncle Dan told me of your twin brothers. They'd spent half a year with him."

"Which mom-a's sorry for to this day. They worship him yet, she says. Go on; skip their visit."

"Well, when we reached Saint Louis I knew that he and Phyllis had agreed on something perfectly joyful to her. I don't know even now—what it was. She was to be set free, but that was only a small part."

"Skip again. The commodore joined you?"

"No, he failed us. We had to turn back without him."

"But with Uncle Dan, of course?"

"Yes, in wedding clothes. And with the overseer and with Phyllis. She'd tried to run away again, in Saint Louis, but she couldn't do it without my mother's help, and my mother, though she declared the laws were shameful, wouldn't break them."

"I'd 've broken them!" whispered Ramsey. "Well, you turned back?"

"Yes, and I saw at once there was something horribly wrong. Day and night Phyllis was frantic. She hid her feelings from others, wonderfully, but she poured them out on your uncle Dan. It was then he suspected how she'd been treating me, and coaxed me to tell him; and when he told her I'd told him and that he would tell she saw she was at the end of everything and I thought that now she would whip me to death."

"Stop! Stop!" The two were again in the pilot-house, but Watson, just then jingling his engine bells, was too busy to heed anything not "hove at him." His big bell had sounded for New Carthage, and John Courteney had appeared down forward of it, but neither Hugh nor Ramsey was enough diverted to answer the parting hail of the town's two residents joyfully going ashore. "I can't stand it!" she ran on. "I won't hear it!"

"But I must tell you," murmured Hugh.

"Why must you?"

"Because of what you have already heard and will hear and because you are you; who you are; what you are."

"Mr. Hugh, I'm the same I was last night when you and your father were talking poetry and trying to get rid of me!"

"Not quite."

"Well, go on; they quarrelled and you thought your hour had come—it seems it hadn't. Go on—if you 'must.'"

"I must," he said, and went on. "I had picked up, that day—it was the third day out and we were down in these bends and had taken on nearly half a load of cotton—I'd picked up, where your uncle Dan had dropped it, a small paper box of fusees—you know?—matches that you can't blow out. Childlike, guiltily, I kept them. In their quarrel, that night, Phyllis ended by imploring your uncle Dan not to tell on her. I never knew what supplication was till then. She wept on her knees, clinging to his. When she had to leave him, to put me to bed, he made her promise never again to do me the least hurt, and swore that if she did he'd sell her to the overseer.

"We went. I was afraid that down in the stateroom she'd find the fusees in my pocket and that I should go to jail as a public thief. But she stood me in the middle of the room, threw herself on my berth, and writhed and hid her face and beat her head and looked at me a hundredfold more murderously than your uncle Dan had ever looked at her. So once, while she lay still a moment, I slipped out onto the guards, and as I lifted my hand to throw the fusees into the river she caught it in hers, it and them. Then for the first time in my life I resisted her. I fought. Do you know what a cow-eat is?"

Ramsey stared. "No. Is it a way of fighting?"

It was not a way of fighting. Cattle often eat deep holes into cotton bales. "Ah, yes!" The tale went on.

"I fought her, and somehow the fusees, the whole box, got lighted and were dropped. Whether she dropped them purposely or not, or I dropped them, I'll never know; but they fell just over the rail, among the cotton bales, and we saw the lint in a cow-eat about three tiers down flash like gunpowder. She snatched me back into the stateroom, shut the door, and stood clutching me wildly and listening. 'Say your prayers,' she said, and knelt with me. She'd never knelt with me before. When I finished she had me go over them again. She did not say them with me, only whimpered and whispered, and fluttered her hands on my head and back. She made me begin once more, but before I was half through we heard the watchman run along the roof close over us and cry: 'Fire!' She lifted me to my feet, whispering, 'Now! Now!' and began to put a life-preserver on me, still saying over and over nothing but 'Now! Now! Now!' until the sounds of alarm were everywhere, and just as she sprang into the next stateroom to rouse the other children my mother came into it from the main cabin. I got my little brother into my room and was dressing him there while my mother dressed one sister and

Phyllis the other, when your father's overseer, who had once followed the river himself, came down the cabin shouting to every one to come out and go forward and was kicking in every door he found locked. At ours he told my mother not to mind the smoke—which had grown thick and choking—but to rush us all straight through it to the boiler deck and down the forward stairs, and on her life not to stop for life-preservers but to go at once. So she and Phyllis ran with the three little ones; but I, childlike again, had got the notion that life-preservers were forbidden and was so long getting mine off that Phyllis turned back for me.

"That delay saved my life, for, as we ran out into the cabin together, the smoke in front of us, forward, turned red and then went all to flame, and right in the midst of it, hurrying toward us, we saw the overseer. He tripped on a hassock or something and fell and the flame literally swallowed him alive. We sprang through an open stateroom and climbed a wheelhouse stair to the hurricane deck. There we saw no one, but through the crackle and roar of the flame, which a light breeze behind us sent straight up into the darkness, I heard the voice of my father, twice, at his post in front of the skylights, and the answer of the engine bells showed that your uncle Dan and the engineers were sticking to their places. We were landing in a strong eddy under a point and didn't have to round to. The boat was wonderfully quiet. I even heard—probably because the shore was so close ahead of us—the first mate—same that's with us here now—heard him ordering the stage run out over the water, as always when about to land. I heard the clerks and others telling the passengers to 'keep cool' and 'not crowd,' saying there was room and time for every one.

"The pilot-house was burning brightly on one side but it was so wrapped in smoke that your uncle Dan was hid from Phyllis and me till the boat hit the bank. Then the breeze gave us a glimpse of him as it curled the whole blaze forward so that it overarched the people who filled the front stairs and gangway, waiting to swarm off across the stage. That brought panic and the panic brought death. Some male passengers—we couldn't see, but our hearing was like sight—had got all the women and children to the front of the crowd and a few even partly out on the stage, over the water, to be the first put ashore.

"When the boat's nose struck the shore the back part of the crowd thought the landing was made and began to push, and there were no men in front to push back—for some of the boat's family, missing Phyllis and me, had run aft to find us—and when that smoke rolled down on every one the push became a rush and suddenly two or three women were screaming at one edge of the stage, with nothing to lay hold on but one another.

"We heard their cries and the cry of the crowd, through the crackling of the fire. My mother tried to save them, with her three children clinging to her, and the whole six fell into the black shadow of the freight guards and the swift eddy drew them under the boat's hull before a thing could be done except that two of our men jumped in and sank with them."

Ramsey covered her face. "What did your father do?"

"He let himself down by one of the derrick posts. As he did so, and when they who had tried to rescue us had failed, the mate, who is a famous swimmer, sprang overboard, as near the larboard wheel as the fire would let him, struck out round it, climbed up on it into the paddle-box, and tried to reach the cabin deck by the kitchen stair. But a sweep of the flames drove him back into the river, and he was just sinking when Mr. Gilmore, you know, drew him into his skiff.

"At the same time your uncle Dan came tumbling down from a pilot-house window and staggered with us back to the stern rail, for all the stairs were burning. It was idle to call for help. The whole thing had lasted but a minute or two. Phyllis didn't want help and we had just that instant to get down in.

"Those who had gone ashore could not see us. The smoke hid us. So did the texas. Your uncle Dan dragged a mattress out of it and dropped it over the stern, away down onto the fantail, scores of feet below. The flames made the boat's shadow as black as ink. We thought the yawl was down there, but some of the crew had swum out from the shore and pulled away in it to pick up the mate—and us, of course, if we were with him.

"Your uncle, though fearfully burnt, took me on his back and showed Phyllis how to climb down beside him by the bracket work and posts and balustrades of the guards, as I could have done, but he wouldn't let me.

"If the wind had been the other way we should have perished right there. But the guards of the ladies' cabin ran round the stern, as they do on this boat, and her fantail, below, stretched still farther aft. So we got down to those guards easily. But in the ladies' cabin the fire had worked aft faster than outside, and on those guards the heat was torture. We could only hang from them and drop. Your uncle went first, then Phyllis and then I, he catching us, for down there he had light enough, looking up, and as we fell the flames shot through the cabin stern windows. He caught us, but then he said, 'I'm gone, Phyllis,' and crumpled down at her feet. Then I cried for help but Phyllis said we didn't need to call, and we didn't. We'd been seen at last, on the guards as we climbed down. They called to us to stick to the boat till swimmers could reach us. But we couldn't. The wind

had turned, the heat was worse than ever, the fire had parted the boat's lines and she was being blown out into the current. Then your uncle struggled half up again and helped Phyllis get the mattress outside the bull railings, where I climbed out and held it. He asked if I could swim and when I said yes he warned me not to swim to the shore as the river was falling and the bank caving, but to float with the mattress and call till I was picked up. So I went over with it. But it twisted away from me. I swam to a floating cotton bale, one with a flicker of fire still on it, as it drifted up-stream in the eddy. At the same time I'd heard your uncle and Phyllis strike the water together, and a moment later I saw them—their heads. She was holding to the mattress with one hand and to him with the other. But presently I heard her give a low wail and saw him slip from her and sink. Then the smoke came down between us, and by and by the returning yawl, whose men had heard my calls and had seen Mr. Gillmore's skiff pick up the mate, found me on the cotton bale and had barely lifted me in when I fainted away."

Ramsey covered her face again. It would have been joy to her to let one of the drops that melted through her fingers fall on Hugh's hand.

Watson cleared his throat. "Sort o' inquirin' fo' one o' you, down on the roof," he said without looking back. He was a man not above repeating himself for a good end. "Third time they've sung out to me, but—up here I off'm don't notice much f'om anywheres 'at ain't hove right at me."

Ned entered and silently took the wheel.

XXXII

A PROPHET IN THE WILDERNESS

Through all the middle watch of Sunday night, with her Ned quite alone in the pilot-house, the *Votaress* came and passed from crossing to crossing, up reaches, through chutes, around points and bends, a meteor in harness. Such she seemed from the dim shores. So came, so passed, before the drowsy gaze of that strange attenuated fraction of humanity which scantily peopled the waters and margins of the great river to win from it the bare elements of livelihood or transit, winning them at a death-rate not far below the immigrant's and in a vagabondage often as wild as that of the water-fowl passing unseen in the upper darkness.

If to the contemplation of the Courteney's, father and son, the fair craft, "with all her light and life, speeding, twinkling on and on through the night," was "a swarm of stars," or "one little whole world," how shall we see her—with what sense of wonder and splendor—through the eyes of the flatboatman or the

swamper, the raftsman, the island squatter, the trading-scow man, the runaway slave in the canebrake, the woodyard man, or the "pirooter"—that degenerate heir, dwarfed to a parasite, of the terrible, earlier-day land-pirates and river-wolves of Plum Point and Crow's Nest Island? To such sorts, self-described as human snapping-turtles and alligators, her peacock show of innumerable lights was the jewelled crown of the only civilization they knew, knowing it only with the same aloofness with which they knew the stars. She woke them with the flutter of her wheels as of winged feet and passed like a goddess using the river's points and islands for stepping-stones, her bosom wrapped in a self-communion that gave no least hint of its intolerable load of grief and strife.

Not until she entered the great bend of Vicksburg did she once come into contrast with anything that could in any degree diminish her regal supremacy. There, as day was breaking, she entered the deep shadow of the southernmost "Walnut Hill." The town on its crest was two hundred feet above her lower deck, and the stiff Yazoo squire, his kindly brother-in-law and sister and the Vicksburg merchant and his wife, waiting down there while she slowed up to the wharf-boat at its foot to let them and others off, were proud of the bluff and of the two miles of sister hills hid by it and the night. Even overproud they were. The two husbands and wives silently wished for that lover of wonders, the sleeping Ramsey, that they might enjoy her enjoyment of the sight, who, though from exalted Natchez, never had beheld so vast an eminence or a city stuck up quite so high.

But Ramsey, far removed in her new, sweet-smelling berth, did not stir from a slumber into which she was throwing all the weight of an overloaded experience. She was paying large back taxes to sleep and had become so immersed in the transaction that her mother's rising, dressing, and stealing away lifted, this time, not one of her eyelashes. In not a sigh or motion did she respond to the long, quaking, world-filling roar of the *Votares's* whistle, nor to John Courteney's tolling of her great bell, nor to the jingle of lesser bells below, nor to any stopping or reversing or new going ahead of her wheels either for landing or for backing out and straightening up the river again. She slept on though these were the very Walnut Hills of her uncle Dan's and Phyllis's dark story; persevered in sleep though John Courteney's son, her profoundest marvel, was once more up and out, with the story still on his heart and "a-happmin' yit." It was one of its happenings that, very naturally, though quite unreasonably, he begrudged the sleeper's absence from texas roof and pilot-house.

The *Votares* was under full headway, with Vicksburg astern, Watson again at the wheel and the captain in his chair. The most northerly of the Walnut Hills were on the starboard bow. Beyond them the sun, rising into thunder-clouds,

poured a dusty-yellow light over the tops of their almost unbroken woods, here and there brightening with a strange vividness the tilled fields and white homestead and slave quarters of some noted plantation. Between the hills and the river lay a mile's breadth or more of densely forested swamp, or "bottom," swarming with reptiles great and small, abounding in deer, bear, and panther, and from which, though the buffalo had been long banished, the wolf was not yet gone. On the skylight roof, close "abaft the bell," as Ramsey would have said, stood the commodore and Hugh. They had just met there and after a casual word or so Hugh was about to say something requiring an effort, when they were joined by the exhorter.

"Mawnin', gentle-men," he said. "Now, what you reckon them-ah po' Gawd-fo'-saken'd Eu-rope-ians down-stahs air a-thinkin' to theyse'v's whilst they view this-yeh lan'scape o'? D'you reckon they eveh, ev'm in they dreams o' heav'm, see sich

"'Sweet fiel's beyond the swellin' flood
Stand deck' in livin' green'?"

"I tell you, gentle-men, as sho' as man made the city an' Gawd made the country, he made this-yeh country last, when he'd got his hand in! You see that-ah house an' cedah grove on yan rise? Well, that's the old 'Good Luck Plantation.' Gid Hayle 'uz bawn thah. His fatheh went to Gawd f'om thah an' lef' it to Dan, the pilot, what 'uz lost on the *Qua'*—Hell! listen at me! As ef *you* didn't know that, which ev'y sight o' you stahts folks a-talkin' about it! But, Lawd! what a country this-yeh 'Azoo Delta is, to be sho'! Fo' craps! All this-yeh Mis'sippi Riveh, you mowt say, fo'm Cairo down, an' th' 'Azoo fo' the top-rail! Fo' craps—an' the money-makin'est craps! An' jest as much fo' game! Not pokeh but wile game; fo'-footen beasts afteh they kind an' fowl afteh they kind. An' ef a country's great fo' craps *an'* game, what mo' kin it be great faw what ain't pyo' Babylonian vanity an' Eu-rope-ian stinch?"

The commodore admitted that game was a good thing and that crops were even better.

"No, sir-ee! Game comes fust! Man makes the craps but Gawd made the game! It come fust when it fust come an' it comes fust yit! Lawd A'mighty! who wouldn't drutheh hunt than plough, ef he could hev his druthehs? But the game ain't what it wuz, not ev'm in this-yeh 'Azoo country an' not ev'm o' the feathe'd kind. Oh, wile turkey, o' co'se, they here yit, by thousan's, an' wile goose, an' duck, an' teal, by hund'eds o' thousan's, an' wile pigeon, clouds of 'em, 'at dahkened the noonday sun. Reckon you see' 'em do that, ain't you? I see' it this

ve'y season. But, now, take the pelikin! if game is a fah' name fo' him—aw heh, as the case may be; which that bird—nine foot f'm tip to tip, the white ones—use' to be as common on this riveh as cuckle-burrs in a sheep's tail!" The jester laughed, or, more strictly, exhaled his mirth from the roof of a wide-spread mouth in a long hiss that would have been more like an angered alligator's if alligators used fine-cut tobacco. It was addressed to the commodore; for Hugh, his grandfather's conscious inferior in human charity, had turned the squarest back—for its height—aboard the *Votares*, to gaze on a wonderful sight in the eastern sky. The exhorter resumed:

"Why, I ain't see' a pelikin sence I use' to flatboat down to Orleans—f'om Honey Islan' an' th' 'Azoo City. 'Pelikin in the wildeh-ness,' says the holy book, but they 'can't stan' the wildeh-ness!' They plumb gone!—vamoost!—down to the Gulf!—what few ain't been shot!" He grew indignant. "An' whahfo' shot? Faw noth'n! Jeemany-crackies! gentle-men, it makes my blood bile an' my bile go sour! Ain't no bounty on pelikins. Dead pelikins ain't useful—naw awnamental—naw instructive, an' much less they don't tas'e good. No, suh, they jess shot in pyo' devil-ment by awngawdly damn fools—same as them on this boat all day 'istiddy a-poppin' they pistols at ev'y live thing they see'—fo' no damn' reason in the heab'ms above aw the earth beneath aw the watehs undeh the earth—Lawd! it mighty nigh makes me swah! An' I feel the heab'mly call—seein' as that-ah tub-shape' Methodis' bishop *h-ain't* feel it—fo' to tell you, commodo', you-all hadn't ought allowed that hell-fi'ud nonsense on Gawd's holy day."

Even to his grandfather's response Hugh paid no visible attention. The eastern sky had become such a picture that down forward at the break of the deck John Courteney rose eagerly from his chair and looked back and up to be sure that his son was one of its spectators. Yes, Hugh was just casting a like glance to him and now turned to invite the notice of his grandfather. The thunder-clouds had so encompassed the sun that its rays burst through them almost exclusively in one wide crater, crimsoning, bronzing, and gilding their vaporous and ever-changing walls. Thence they spread earthward, heavenward, leaving remoter masses to writhe darkly on each other and themselves, in and out, in and in, cloaking this hill in blue shadow, bathing that one in green light, while from a watery fastness somewhere hid in the depth of the forested swamp under the hills, some long-lost bend of the Mississippi or cut-off of the Yazoo, rose into the flood of beams an innumerable immaculate swarm of giant cranes. Half were white as silver, half were black as jet, and from moment to moment each jet magically turned to silver, each silver to jet, as on slowly pulsing wings they wove a labyrinthian way through their own multitude with never a clash of pinion on pinion, up, down, athwart and around, up, down, and around again, now raven black across the sun and now silver and snow against the cloud.

An awed voice broke the stillness and old Joy stood a modest step back from Hugh's side with rapt gaze on hill and sky.

XXXIII

TWINS AND TEXAS TENDER

"Sign f'om de Lawd!" droned the old woman. "It's de souls o' de saints in de tribilatioms o' de worl'!"

But explanation was poor tribute to such beauty. Hugh glanced away to his father, then around to the commodore, up to Watson, and back again upon the spectacle. In a tone of remote allusion the grandfather spoke: "One wants a choice partnership for a sight like that."

Hugh cast back a sudden frown but it softened promptly to a smile which old Joy thought wonderfully sweet.

"Late sleepers," persisted the commodore, "know what they gain but not what they lose."

"Naw yit," audibly soliloquized the nurse, "what dey makes de early riseh lose." She added a soft high-treble "humph!" and gave herself a smile at least as sweet as Hugh's, which he repeated to her as he said:

"Good morning, auntie."

She courtesied. "Mawnin', suh." They need not have been more cordial had they just signed a great treaty.

The *Votaress*, swinging westward, left the picture behind, and the neglected exhorter, caring far less for cranes and clouds than for pelicans and sinners, reopened, this time on Hugh: "But that's anotheh thing 'at rises my bristles, ev'm ef it don't the bishop's."

"What rises them?" asked the solemn Hugh, the commodore's attention wandering.

"Shell I spit it out? Wall, it's folks a-*proj*-eckin' togetheh—church membehs an' non-membehs a-*proj*-eckin' *togetheh*—fo' to drownd Gawd A'mighty's chas-tisements in the devil's delights. *You* know they a-layin' fo' to do that on this boat this ve'y evenin'. You know they a-*proj*-eckin' fo' to raise filthy lucre by fiddlin' an' play-actin' an' a-singin' o' worl'ly songs an', to top all, a-dayncin'!—right oveh the heads o' the sick an' dyin', my Gawd! You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, I'm mixed up in it."

"An' they a-doin' it fo' what? Fo' no betteh reason 'an to he'p them-ah damn' ovehwhelmin' furrinehs to escape the righteous judg-*ments* o' the Lawd! Young brotheh, my name is Jawn. Jawn the Babtiss, I am, an' as sich I p'otess! An' also an' mo'oveh I p'otess ag'in' any mo' leadin's f'om them-ah 'Piscopaliam play-actohs, an' still mo' f'om that-ah bodacious brick-top gal o' Gid Hayle's. Which she made opem spote o' *my* leadin's in 'istiddy's meet'n'! An' o' co'se! havin' a popish motheh."

"Oh!—my!—Lawd!" gasped Joy, and the commodore had begun to meet protest with protest, when Hugh touched him.

"This is too small for you. May I——?"

"Take it," said the grandfather and turned inquiringly to the nurse.

"Yaas, suh," she hurried to say, "my mist'ess ax de honoh to see you at de stateroom o' Mahs' Basile."

Meantime Hugh answered the complainant: "My friend, that young lady—you mustn't call her anything else again—made no sport of you whatever."

"Oh, dat she didn't, boss!" put in old Joy, breaking off from her talk with the commodore.

"Honestly, sir," continued Hugh, "I was afraid some one would, but I happened to see her from first to last, and——"

"Happ'm'd! The hell you happ'm'd! Yo' eyes 'uz dead *sot* on heh when they'd ought to been upraise' in prah!"

Hugh laughed—a laugh so hearty it might have been the brick-top's own. The texas tender enjoyed it as he bore a tray of dishes from the room of the twins. Down beyond the bell it drew the father's smile and up at the wheel the stoical

gaze of Watson. Half of it was for the exhorter and half for a newcomer at tardy sight of whom the exhorter paled, certain that he had been overheard.

"Oh!" he cried, "I ain't meant no offence to nobody naw tuck none!" and eagerly followed the commodore's beckon to go below with him and the nurse. Hugh, still smiling, met the blazing stare of Julian Hayle.

"Good morning," he said, while Hayle was inquiring:

"May I again ask of you a word in private?"

"Oh, this is private enough," said Hugh. "Every private word I've had with you so far, or with your—coterie, has been so unsatisfactory to you—and them, and so tiresome to everybody, I can't see why you should want another. My friend—"

"We are not friends, sir."

"Well, then, let's make friends. Here's my hand. I'm utterly ashamed of this miserable little spat."

Hayle folded his arms. "You'll find it life-size before we're done."

"Nonsense! it's too small for words, private or otherwise. Let's end it, for that reason if for no better."

"That's not your reason, sir. You have another."

"Yes, I simply can't quarrel with you."

"You—crawling—poltroon!"

Hugh's smile vanished at last. He gulped as though a wave had gone over him. But he remembered his father. Beyond doubt his father had heard. He glanced down to him, and what he saw was worth a year of commonplace experience. The father had heard, yet he sat at ease, his knees crossed and his gaze out forward on the boat's course. Watson—but what could Watson matter then? Hugh's eyes burned big on Hayle, his voice deepened, his words came slow. "We can't fight here and now. I can only put you ashore. Don't make me do that. There's trouble enough on this boat as it is. You're having your share. Mr. Hayle, I fear—though I don't know—that Basile has the cholera."

"Damn him and it! You wouldn't fight me if you could."

"True."

"Why? On your father's account—and his father's?"

"On everybody's. Your own father's. Your mother's."

"My sister's?" The question was a threatening sneer.

"Yes, sir." The breakfast bell rang merrily below and Hugh turned to leave. Julian blazed out in curses:

"I forbid you 'that young lady's' company henceforth!"

"And that's the private word you had for me?"

"Yes, damn you! I know who sat up late last night. If you do it again I'll shoot you right on this boat!"

"My private word for you, Mr. Hayle, isn't as public as that. Only I and the Texas tender know it."

"Most fitting partnership!"

"No, it was entirely his own enterprise. While you and your brother were getting your information from him he got your weapons from both of you. I have them in the clerk's safe."

XXXIV

THE PEACEMAKERS

Some four of the *Votress's* "family," one seated, three standing at ease, were allowing their mild, slow conversation its haphazard way under barely enough constraint to hold it in the channel of discretion. It drifted as unpretentiously as a raft or flatboat, now and then merely floating without progress, like a floating alligator; that is, with one small eye imperceptibly open to every point of the compass.

He who sat was the first clerk, a man of thirty-seven or so, and therefore, as age then counted, fairly started on the decline of life. He occupied the high stool in the clerk's office, his limp back against its standing desk. Nearest him the second clerk, standing, leaned on an elbow thrown out upon the desk and rested

one foot on a rung of the stool. A second clerk might do that; a third or "mud" clerk would hardly have made so free. The youthful mud clerk, with his hat under his folded arms, leaned on the jamb of a door that let back into the clerks' stateroom. Opposite him the youngest of the four, latest come among them, stood out in the cabin and hung in over the broad window counter, across which the office did business with the world. Watson's "cub pilot" he was, on the sick list, thin and weak with swamp-fever.

The forenoon watch was half gone. The boat was fluttering along at high speed under a bright but fickle sky, and the clerks and the "cub" hardly needed to glance out the nearest larboard window to know that she was already turning northward into a pleasant piece of river called Nine Mile Reach. A certain Point Lookout was some five miles behind in the east, and the town of Providence, negligibly small, with Lake Providence, an old cut-off, hid in the woods behind it, was close ahead. One of the number mentioned the boat's failure during the night to make the miles expected of her, but the four agreed that the cause was not any lack of speed power but an overplus of landings below Vicksburg—two being for burials—and a long delay at Vicksburg itself, providing for the sick.

This explanation, the second clerk said, had been as gratifying to the planter of Milliken's Bend and his "lady" as their not having to be called up before day. They had taken breakfast in the general company, which, with the commodore at one end of the cabin and Hugh at the other, had sat down when Old River and the mouth of the Yazoo were on the starboard bow, and had risen while passing My Wife's Island. Finally they had gone ashore in great elation, thanking Hugh with high voices and fervent hand-shakings, and his father with wavings from the bank to the roof, for the "most delightful trip anybody ever made"; careless as infants of the hundreds of strangers gazing on them, both native and alien, both woe-stricken and self-content, and, even when the great wheels were backing the boat away, calling fond messages to Hugh for the still invisible "Miss Ramsey" as if she were in his exclusive keeping and all those strangers were trees.

So recounted the second clerk, not to criticise such innocent disdain of the public eye and ear—to him an every-day sight—but with a feeling for the picturesque and in mild humor making the point that such messages, so given, were hardly calculated to make life easier for Hugh. The mud clerk and the cub pilot grunted their accord yet privately envied Hugh. To be message bearer to that young lady would have been rapture to either of them under whatever hardness or peril of life, the more the better. Oddly enough, with Milliken's Bend now forty miles astern the messages had not been delivered.

"No fault of his," said the first clerk, the second said no, and the mud clerk and the cub loyally echoed them. For they knew, at least the three clerks knew, always knew, not by flat inquiry but by trained perceptions and the alligator's eye, whatever was going on in each and every part of the boat. Indeed, the boat's news naturally flowed to them; flowed to and ran forth again from them, aerated and cleansed, as normally as blood to and from the breast of a strong man. By the sound of the steam they knew the water was right in the boilers. By the rhythm of the machinery they knew all was right in the engine room. They could have said, nearly enough, how soon the boat would have to stop again for wood. To them the quiet of the populous boiler deck, where nearly every man sat reading some stale newspaper of Louisville, Saint Louis, or Cincinnati—brought aboard from the Vicksburg wharf-boat—was informational, witnessing a general resigned admission that there was already "trouble enough." Of three notables not there they knew that one, the bishop, was in his berth, very weary, and that the senator and the general had been for some time with Hayle's twins. They could have greeted every cabin passenger by name. They knew who were filling the places lately vacated at the ladies' table, whose was each ubiquitous child selling tickets for the appointed "show," and whose each private servant, however rarely seen: not such as old Joy merely, but the senator's black Cato, the general's yellow Tom, Mrs. Gilmore's theatrically handsome Harriet, or the nearly as white Dora of the young lady from Napoleon. And they knew well that the non-delivery of those messages was no fault of Hugh's.

Miss Ramsey was up, yes; but she had breakfasted in seclusion and was then in a small under-cabin for ladies' maids, close beneath the main one, rehearsing with Mrs. Gilmore and others. Gilmore had been coaching them but was now momentarily out on the boiler deck. Through the extensive glass of the cabin's front they could see him standing before a knot of men: John the Baptist and the man with the eagle eye and the man with the eye of a stallion and the man who knew so slap-bang that the Hayles and Courteney's had all but locked horns when the *Quakeress* burned. They were the only exponents of unrest out there and only the actor wore an air both spirited and kind. No one in the office openly kept an eye on the outer group. In there the gossip lingered on Hugh. Hugh had plenty, it was agreed, of the Courteney stuff and something besides which these four hoped was the very thing with which to meet this new phase so plainly at hand in the Hayle-Courteney contest.

Suddenly the first clerk looked straight out on Gilmore, so obviously at bay, and murmured to the cub pilot: "Go, bring him." While the cub went, the clerk spoke on. Hugh, he said, would one day be the best-liked of his name.

In kindly dissent the second clerk shook his head, but the first would have it so. The liking might be slow coming, he allowed, because of Hugh's oddities, but in the end men would like even the oddities.

The mud clerk named one as if he liked it: "When he's by himself he's got the iron-est phiz——"

The second clerk laughed his appreciation. "And when he's poked up," he said, "it gets ironer and ironer."

"It'll need to mighty soon," observed the first clerk.

"When he runs into Gid Hayle," said the second.

The actor came. His pleased manner was more thankful than inquiring and he insisted on remaining outside the window shelf with the cub.

"Mr. Gilmore," said the first clerk gravely, "we thought you might condescend to inspect our ceiling decorations through fresh foliage."

The player looked puzzled an instant but a smell of mint from the bar cleared his mental vision. Yet again he declined. Later in the day he shouldn't be so coy, he admitted, but one oughtn't to take too long a running start for his jump into bed.

"No, he *might* get there too soon," said the clerk. "My boys, sir, want to ask you a riddle. You know Gid Hayle. How can his daughter, here, be just like him for all the world and yet those twins be just like him for all the same identical world, too?"

"Well put!" was the prompt rejoinder. "My wife and I have been toying with that riddle these twenty-four hours. Those brothers are Gideon Hayle's sons if ever a man had sons; that daughter is his from the ground up; yet the two and the one are as unlike as night and noon."

The clerks and cub pilot agreed so approvingly that the actor, lover of lines, was inspired to go on at more length. He remarked, in effect, that he had never seen so striking an instance of a parent's natural traits growing into—blemishes—in one inheritor and into graces in another. Yet to know Gideon Hayle was to read the riddle. As quick to anger as his sons, as full of mirth as his daughter; open-hearted, wrong-headed, generous, tyrannous, valorous, contemptuous of all book wisdom yet an incessant, keen inquirer with a fantastical explanation of his

own for everything in nature, science, politics, or religion. Implacable in his prejudices, he——

"Yes," interrupted the first clerk, with amazing irrelevancy, "but a man of Henry Clay's experience ought to have known better. Kossuth is a gentleman who—well, general, how are you now? Mr. Gilmore, you know the general? Senator, you know Mr. Gilmore?"

"Assuredly!" The condescending senator had known Mr. Gilmore, "a day by contact but long by fame."

The general was civil but not suave. He remembered the player's hard names for the committee's dead scheme. "Taking care of Henry Clay, too, sir?" he asked him. "With so many pleasanter cares"—that meant Ramsey—"you might let Henry Clay take care of himself."

"That's something," put in the second clerk, flushing defensively, while the senator, with cigar cocked one way and his silk hat another, drew Gilmore aside, "that's something Henry Clay never does."

"Right, young man. He merely tries. Th-there's no one in the nation has t-tried harder or f-failed worse!"

The youth turned to his work at the high desk. "Sir," said the general to the first clerk, who rose, "the senator and I have been up to your texas——"

"Contrary to orders," mildly said the first clerk.

"I admit it, sir, but our intentions were only th-the k kindest. It seems to us, sir, or to me—us or me, sir, as you will—that th-those sons of our old friend Hayle are not getting justice."

"They ought to be mighty glad of that, general."

"S-s-sir, they'd rather have it! We admit, of course,—we or I—I, if you prefer, sir, or if the senator prefers—I admit they are not unbiassed."

"No, I admit they're not."

"Th-they are supe-perbly stiff-necked and illogical young barons from four centuries back, sir, without a f-f-fault that isn't a v-v-virtue overdrawn—or out of date."

The speaker turned to the actor and senator and they to him: "If those boys have the pride of L-l-lucifer, Mr. Gilmore, they have also his intrep-idity. They may be as high-headed as giraffes, sir, but they're as s-s-straightf-f-forward as a charging bull! Mr. clerk, the splendid surge of their imp-pulses should excuse their f-f-foibles even if their s-s-souls were *not* wr-wri-writhing under the lash of a new whip on old sores, sir."

"Will you just make that a little clearer, general?"

"I will," softly put in the senator—"by your leave, general?"

With limp majesty the general waved permission.

"All for peace, however," said the senator smilingly to the clerk. "There's been enough strife."

"Never saw so much aboard boat," said the clerk.

"Well,"—statesman and clerk laid elbows on the shelf and dropped their voices while the actor and the general drew a step aside,—"*this thing can be settled only by the right friends and it's now or never.*" The two exchanged a look but the clerk was mute and the senator spoke on: "You've heard of Dan Hayle—and the girl Phyllis, hmm?"

"I was first clerk on the *Quakeress* when she burned."

"Why, so you *was*. These twins believe, bitterly, that in that mysterious disaster all due search for their uncle was neglected to save the captain's son and that the girl and Dan Hayle were never fully accounted for."

"Shucks! Why—Dan—it was I found Dan's body."

"Yes, but they call it an outrage for him to have been there at all; to give him the wheel and take her aboard on the same trip."

"*Law!* what did she count, with him about to marry?"

"Why, they think that for that very reason John Courteney let his wife—from Philadelphia, you know—abolitionist—bring the girl and Dan together, hoping he'd either set her free or else skip the wedding and somehow disgrace the whole Hayle family. Just those boys' guess but—they believe it. What they *see* is a Hayle killed and no one killed for him."

"Oh, we settled that with their dad ten years ago."

"They say not. And, really, you know, some of the liveliest feuds along this river are founded on less cause. Gid Hayle, they claim, couldn't bring the Courtenays to law at the time because the only men he had to back him were his two in-laws. Now these twins are men and they feel honor-bound to throw down—no, to take up—the gage, thrown down to them every hour they've been on this boat."

"Shoo! They've been treated only too well."

"Tactfully, do you think?"

"Depends on what you call tact. Ordinary tact's the worst thing you could throw at 'em." The clerk spoke with both eyes on the general and the actor. His fellow clerk, second clerk, had nudged him. The general was raising his voice to the actor.

"They f-forbid your lady to chaperon their sister, since you both, last evening, all-lowed young Courteney to give her his account of the b-urning of the *Quakeress*."

"General!" the smiling senator cautioned him, "privately, if you please! more privately!"

But the soldier persisted. "Th-they even suspect you, sir, of s-s-piriting off to Canada their s-s-lave p-roperly, missing after that event."

"Why, gentlemen," began the player, looking very professional but also very handsome, and with a flash of annoyance only when he noticed that the exhorter had joined the group, "I never in my—nonsense! fantastical nonsense! Why, I'll be—I'll see you later! At present, as I've already said, I'm overdue at that rehearsal."

"Yes, Mr. Gilmore," said the first clerk, "you are."

"A moment," interposed the senator. "Purely in the interest of peace, Mr. Gilmore——"

"Oh, senator," the actor amiably laughed, "I don't question your good-will, or the general's; but you don't know, either of you, the interest of peace when you run against it—pardon! I take that back. My annoyance, at quite another thing,

flew off the handle. I take it back. Excuse me, I'll make it a point to see you later." The three bowed. As he started away the exhorter blocked his path.

"Excuse *me*," said the zealot. "Fust tell us: Ef ye *mowt* sperit a niggeh off to Canady would ye aw wouldn't ye?"

For an instant the player stood mute and then he said only, in a preoccupied tone: "Please let me pass." But at the same time he laid his unexpected left hand lightly on the questioner and by some stage trick sent him stumbling aside along a line of chairs and toppling to the floor. The cub and the younger clerks had him up in a twinkling, while a dozen men appeared from the boiler deck as if by magic, and the player walked away down the cabin.

"Now, no more noise here," said the second clerk to the lifted man, restraining both his arms. "No, you stay right here. He didn't do a thing to you, you just stepped a little too spry and sort o' tripped up."

From his window shelf the first clerk, in the tail of his eye, saw the zealot and his group disperse while he, the clerk, talked laughingly to the soldier on one subject and gravely to the statesman on another.

"You can't challenge a man, general," he said, "who apologizes for calling you a poor peacemaker."

"By—! s-sir, I can and I sh-shall!" was the retort.

The clerk ignored it. He and the senator bent heads together again. "No," he said, "Hugh only told him he *feared* it was Basile. In fact, it wasn't. It isn't."

"Who is it, then? It's a passenger and a bad case."

"Will you keep it dark—by the patient's own request—till the show's over to-night?"

The senator nodded. The two heads came closer. The general scorned to listen. The name did not reach him.

"Jove!" gasped the senator. "Come, general." They went.

The first clerk turned to the second clerk's elbow at the high desk, saying dryly: "They came to demand those shooting-irons and couldn't muster the brass."

XXXV

UNSETTLED WEATHER

Again the *Votress* was passing the Westwood and again was but a short mile behind the *Antelope*.

Led by Ramsey, the amateur players, including Hugh, had stopped rehearsing and were on the skylight roof, gathered about the commodore, the Gilmores, and the bell. In their company, though below them on the forward hurricane deck, the first mate leaned bulkily against the roof on which they stood. It was his watch. Ned was up at the wheel.

As early as the evening before, a good hundred and fifty miles back down the river, the *Antelope*, it will be remembered, had been close on the *Westwood's* heels. So Gilmore reminded his wife. So Hugh needlessly reminded Ramsey. From the mate it was further learned that the pursuer had overhauled the pursued between Petit Goufre—which he and the whole company called Petty Gulf—and Grand Gulf; places named before the days of steam for their dangerous eddies. Yet, he went on to tell Ramsey, the swifter boat, with more freight to put ashore and with a larger appetite for cord-wood, had never got clean away. Even now, in full view ahead, she was down at half speed, wooding up from a barge in tow alongside. You could hear her crew singing as they trotted under their great shoulder loads of wood. The amateurs, except Hugh but including Ramsey, caught up their song and were promptly joined by a group around the bell of the *Westwood* as that gallant loser foamed along between the *Votress* and the shore:

"Oh, if I had a scolding wife,
As sure as you are born
I'd take her down to Noo Orleans
And trade her off for corn."

Presently the *Antelope* cast off the emptied flat in midstream, and a redoubled whiteness behind her paddle-boxes showed full speed.

"Now we can give her a square deal!" said a youth.

"And pass her inside of an hour!" declared another.

"In Bunch's Cut-off!" ventured one to the commodore, but the commodore said the *Votress* herself was hungry for wood, and the mate confirmed him by a nod.

"How much wood," some one asked the mate, "will a boat like this use up in twenty-four hours?" It quickened the blood to be up here midway between these turbid waters and yonder passionate sky so joyous in one quarter, so angry in another; particularly to be here while steadily distancing one beautiful boat and overtaking another "amid green islands," as Mrs. Gilmore quoted—one of which, still in sight astern, was that old haunt of flatboat robbers, called Island Ninety-four, Stack's Island, or Crow's Nest. One half forgot the sad state of affairs below. Conversation glided as swiftly as a flock of swallows and in as many directions.

"How much wood?" said the mate. "Well, that sort o' depends. I once part owned a boat that fo' one whole month didn't burn enough wood to dry the sheriff's shoes, but that 'uz 'cause he kep' her tied up to the bank."

Ramsey did not hear this and cared nothing for the laugh it won. She had seen the doctor and the priest slip from the twins' room in the texas and go below aft. "How's mom-a?" she eagerly asked the commodore.

"Very well."

"How's Lucian?"

Lucian was so much better, he told her, that both brothers had been returned to their cabin stateroom.

"Then you've just put a new case into the texas!"

The commodore smiled. "Yes, from the freight deck."

"Freight—humph! That's the lower deck," she reminiscently said, turning to Hugh. "Who is it? Is it—Otto?"

But Hugh's face wore its absurd iron look, which had its usual effect on her. The old man spoke: "Will Miss Ramsey do us all a favor; one that will help the play?"

"Whew, yes! That'll help everything. What is it?"

"It's to make no mention of the new case to any one."

"Till the close of the evening," put in the Gilmores, and Ramsey saw that they knew. Yet——

"All right," she said. "Oh, I know who it is." She tossed her curls. "It's Otto's mother." But both tone and glance lacked conviction. The commodore left them.

Meantime the mate was amusing his half of the company.

"How much wood," he was repeating. "I as't that myself once 'pon a time. D'dy'ever hear the answer? They tell the yarn on lots o' loons but I 'uz the real one 'n' I got the answer f'm Gid Hayle aboard the old *Admiral*."

The names caught Ramsey's ear and drew her gaze. "That *Admiral*," continued the mate, "could eat wood like a harrikin. Says Hayle to me: 'Well, that depends on yo' boat 'n' yo' wood. With the right boat 'n' the right wood—oak, ash, hickory—y'ought to burn f'm sixty to seventy cord' a day. But ef yo' feed'n' this boat cottonwood, why, yo' simply shovellin' shavin's into hell.'"

Ramsey looked sad. Weary of contrasts unflattering to her men-folks, she glanced from the refined actor to the elegant old commodore, blushed to the player's wife and accepted her embracing arm. "Yass," pursued the mate, "s'e jest so: 'Yo' simply shovellin' shavin's——'"

It was not Hugh's motion that cut him short but Ramsey's voice as with a flash she said: "Go on. I don't care! If pop-a said it it's so!"

A raindrop wet her cheek. From the pilot-house Ned, as he pulled the wheel over to chase the hardpressed *Antelope* westward into Bunch's Cut-off, warningly drawled that they were about to run into a shower. At his side Watson's cub was letting down the storm board. A blue-black cloud overhanging the green head of the cut-off had suddenly widened across all that quarter and turned leaden gray. A writhing wind struck the boat fairly in front. The waters ruffled, flattened, and seemed to run faster. On an island close abeam thousands of young cottonwoods, a mantle of unbroken verdure, bent low, paled, reeled, darkened, and whipped. Dead ahead, a flash of lightning dropped from zenith to sky-line, stood blindingly quivering, and scarcely had vanished when the thunder cracked to split the ear.

"Scoot, ladies," said the mate, "or in three shakes you'll be as wet as the river!" A single glance up the stream—though Ramsey must needs take a double one—showed the rain coming, so near and so dense that not a sign of the *Antelope* was visible. The company fled, some to a larboard stair, some to a starboard. Hugh and Ramsey suddenly missed the Gilmores, the Gilmores missed them, each pair turned to find the other, the lashing rain leaped down upon them as if they were all it had come for, and with words lost in a second thunder-clap the mate threw open the captain's room, pressed them in, and began to dry them with a whisk-

broom. The captain, he said, was below. "Off watch didn't mean off watch to John Courteney."

"Nor to Gideon Hayle," prompted Ramsey, and while he ha-haed a cordial assent she asked: "Whereabouts below is he—Captain Courteney?" But the mate had turned away and she asked Hugh: "Where's your father? What's he doing?" Her thought was still on the unmentionable new case.

"I'll tell you," said Hugh in the low voice she liked so well. "Will you look at the river with me?"

He felt her responsive nod and smile even after they had moved to the front window farthest from their three seniors and stood gazing out into the beautiful tempest. Both wind and downpour had somewhat slackened their fury. A bit nearer than before and more to starboard they could faintly make out the *Antelope*, so white that it seemed as if she had gone down and her ghost come up wrapped and whipped in sheets of rain.

"You don't ask me about your mother," said Hugh.

XXXVI

CAPTAIN'S ROOM

"Ah!—when you've been all this time with us!"

"No, once I was away, a good while."

"That's so! And while you was away—were away—" In lively undertone Ramsey ran on to tell of Mrs. Gilmore's having in Hugh's absence called in her maid Harriet to show the young lady from Napoleon how to do a bit of stage business without a hint of the stage. At the tale's end the pair glanced round from the nearing *Antelope* to the Gilmores and back again. "Harriet's talented. You wouldn't think she could be talented. And isn't she handsome!"

"I've yet to see her face," said Hugh abstractedly.

"That's so, too! When she heard you coming back that time, she ran like a kildee." The narrator checked a laugh. "How's mom-a? Oh, she's well or you'd have told me. I just can't imagine mom-a any way but well." But again the tone betrayed incertitude.

"Yes, she's well," said the youth. "So is my father."

"Where is he?"

Hugh's queer solemnity deepened. "He's down in a stateroom with your brothers. The senator and the general have just joined them."

What a freshet of grave information! Ramsey laughed straight at him. "You talk like a trance medium."

"Not at all."

"You do! I heard one once. You're in a trance now."

"Not at all."

"You are! Y'always are." When Hugh laughed, her laugh redoubled. The mate and the players, though busy talking, took time to smile; the mate winked an eye. Suddenly Ramsey sobered. "Is Basile in hot water again? Tell me quick."

"Tell me first," said Hugh, "why his two brothers——"

"Are so wild? Because pop-a won't allow mom-a to hold them in. Pop-a says: 'Oh, let 'em sow their wild oats early, like me; so deep they'll never come up.' Oh, my! they're up now."

"I wasn't going to ask that."

"Well, I can't tell if you don't ask."

"Why do they keep themselves so apart from you?"

"Me? Oh, they just can't stand me!—nor even mom-a."

"That's bad, for all of us."

"All of—who? Oh!... Humph!... Oh, but it's worse for Basile! He goes with them till he's sick of 'em, then tries mom-a and me till he's just as sick of—of me—and himself—and then strays off to whoever he can pick up with!"

"This time," said Hugh, "he's been picked up."

"Oh, *now* what's happened?"

"He sickened of those boys and girls he was selling tickets with and to drown yesterday's recollections he took a hand at cards with two strangers."

Ramsey caught her breath but then laughed joyously. "He couldn't! He had no money!"

"Except from his sale of tickets."

"Oh!" Her tears started. "Oh, where was mammy Joy?"

"Nursing the sick."

"The new—?" She barely escaped breaking her word. "Oh," she moaned, "he didn't use *that* money?"

"He lost it. He was wild to play on and recover it, and his brothers were as eager to have him do it."

"Why, *they* couldn't help him. They tried, yesterday, to borrow from mom-a.... Wait." The last word came softly. The *Gilmores* and the mate drew near to see the *Antelope* overtaken. There she loomed, out on the starboard bow, shrouded in the swirling rain. How unlike the earlier passing, down below Natchez! No touching of guards, no hail by sign or sound. "Like ladies under two umbrell's!" laughed Ramsey to the actor's wife.

Now squarely abreast, stem and stem, wheel and wheel, the two crafts seemed to stand motionless with the tempest rushing aft between them. Then fathom after fathom the *Antelope* fell behind, the mate and the *Gilmores* moved away, Ramsey softly bade Hugh "go on," and his first utterance drew her liveliest look.

"There's another thing makes your brothers wild," he said, "which they're not to blame for."

"What's that?"

"Our starving plantation life," said Hugh, speaking low.

"Why, they call it the only life for a gentleman!"

"That's because they're so starved, so marooned."

"It's so tasteless without high seasoning, Basile says," said Ramsey. She meditated. "Basile loves to eat."

Said Hugh, "It's a life I don't want you to live," and for an age of seconds they looked into each other's eyes.

Then Ramsey—not drooping a lash—"I love the river."

"For keeps?"

She nodded, and still they looked. At length said Hugh:

"I tried hard to make friends with the twins, but——"

"They wouldn't. I know. Mr. Watson told Mrs. Gilmore."

"Yet a while ago, on the strength of it, they sent for me, to ask me to ask my father to indorse their note."

Ramsey gasped: "You declined, of course?"

"Yes, but I told those other two passengers if they cast another card with any of your brothers they'd go ashore, themselves, as quick as the boat could land."

Ramsey turned and gazed out on the subsiding storm. "Why are the senator and the general down there?"

"For quite another matter."

"Weapons. I know. Mr. Watson told Mrs. Gilmore. I thought that was settled."

"It is."

"Then why is your father there?"

"To get the twins away from the senator and the general, and their brother away from them and back to his——"

"Sister!" softly laughed Ramsey. "Oh, not to mom-a! just to me! I'll go—" She started, but Hugh said:

"To you, yes, when my father has put him in a way to cover his loss without telling your mother."

Their eyes met again. Hers were bright and wet with accusal. "Is that *your* proposition?"

"Yes, and my father's too."

She whipped round and gazed out again over the tawny waters. To gaze out beside her he came so near that they almost touched. The shores were once more a clear picture, greener than ever and unvexed by the wind. The rain was slight and fine. The boat was swinging northward toward a small blue rift in the gray. At the room's farther door the mate was leaving the Gilmores for the forecabin.

Without a stir she asked: "Why don't *you* bring Basile?"

"I must stay with our friends here."

The surprised girl glanced across at the players.

Side by side they also were gazing out and speaking low. "I'd like to know why with them."

"And I must tell you."

She faintly tossed, gazing out again: "Why 'must'?"

"Because to you I *can*—tell things."

"Haven't you told your father yet—about—Phyllis? Humph!—had to practise on me first."

"Yes. But there's a better reason—for everything I've ever told you."

She slowly faced him, and he added: "I want your help."

"For what? Not the Gilmores?"

"Yes, for them too now. They're in real danger."

"Fr'—from what? Not—not from—my brothers?"

"The twins, yes, and the general, John the Baptist, and a dozen more. They've guessed it out that the Gilmores——"

"Are—So have I! A, b, ab——"

Hugh was mute. She glanced round at the players' backs and then again at him, asking with soft abruptness:

"Where's the bishop? With mom-a yet?"

Hugh kept silence. "No, you know he's not," she answered for him. In her steady eyes he could see, growing every moment, a new sense of the fearful plight of things and of her relation to them. Her young bosom rose and fell, and when her lips parted to speak again their corners twitched. "He—he's the new case! I will mention it! I've a good right. Why shouldn't I?"

"Only that he didn't want you to know. He wanted you—us—all, without knowing, to go right on with the programme. We must. Even now you will, won't you?"

She could only nod. Just then Mrs. Gilmore's maid, in a long burnoose, with umbrellas and wraps, rose into sight close below, on a stair from the passenger-guards, spread one of her umbrellas and looked eagerly about for her mistress. One glance went up to Ramsey, who beckoned through the glass, but the maid gave no sign of seeing her. The slight rain had momentarily freshened, and she was so muffled to the eyes in the light veil which was always on her head or shoulders in pretty Spanish fashion that when she started forward round the skylights for the other side of the roof Ramsey laughed to Hugh:

"Why, I know it's Harriet by her veil, don't you?"

"I know only the veil. I saw it come aboard."

"The veil of mystery!" she playfully murmured, began to hum a tune and bit her lip on noticing that it was "Gideon's Band." "Don't you think I might omit that to-night?"

"No, it's the best thing you do."

"Humph!—mighty poor reason—Aha! I knew it was Harriet."

The Gilmores were beckoning out their window. The actor opened the door on that side and the maid came warily in. Briefly and in hurried apology under her breath while dealing out her burdens she told of the impatience of those below to resume the rehearsal and of their having driven her to this errand the moment they could. Mrs. Gilmore handed Hugh a shawl for Ramsey and an umbrella for himself, her husband laid a mantle on her shoulders, and the maid reopened the door he had shut; but Hugh called from the one opposite that it was the better way and the players started for it. The younger pair gave them precedence, a breeze swept through, the maid reshut her door, Hugh, holding his, bade her

follow her mistress, she sprang to obey and the "veil of mystery," which caught in the closed door, was stripped from her like a sail from a wreck.



"Stop!... Stop! the safest place for you on this boat now is right where you are standing—Phyllis"

Instantly she crouched and with the swiftness of a wild creature flashed round and snatched open the door by which she had entered; but a form pressed between her and the opening and when she threw up her face she was looking close into the astounded eyes of Hugh Courteney. Her frame recoiled but not her eyes; his own held them. Without turning he shut the door at his back as Ramsey closed the one opposite, and still holding the maid servant's gaze, he followed her slow retreat, and in that droll depth of voice which earlier had been Ramsey's keenest amusement said to the eyes so near his own:

"Stop!... Stop! the safest place for you on this boat now is right where you are standing—Phyllis."

XXXVII

BASILE USES A CANE

There was a gorgeous sunset that day. Many were on the uppermost decks to see or show it, amid a lively social confusion dull to Hugh but delightful to Ramsey. In fact, Hugh had begun to want her and the hurricane-deck to himself.

The actor and his wife were there. And there, indifferent to sunsets but as hungry as ever for company, was Basile. Dinner, at midday, had dissolved the group which the twins had for a time held together. The captain had squared Basile with the ticket treasurer and by some adroitness of Ramsey and Mrs. Gilmore the restless boy had been won from his brothers and given a hand at euchre with the actor, the senator, and a picturesque Kentuckian, late of California, "back East" by way of the Isthmus and about to return by the Plains.

Another of this hurricane-roof assemblage was a young gentleman whom Ramsey told Basile it was not a bit nice to speak of as Watson's cub. And there were all the amateur players, eager for the evening's performance; and there, too, the senator, the general, John the Baptist, and others with whom Ramsey had not made better acquaintance only for lack of moments! One of these was the Californian. Think of it! A man whose shirt-pin was a gold nugget of his own digging, yet a man so modest as to play euchre with Basile, and who stood thus far utterly uncatechised save by John the Baptist. Oh, time, time! A history of this voyage must and should be written with large room given to these last ten hours: "Chronicles of a Busy Life," by "A Young Lady of Natchez."

Captain Courteney stood near the bell. Watson was up at the wheel. His cub—whose attentions to Basile, like the Californian's, only Ramsey could not fathom—told her this was the second dog-watch. He was telling her everything he knew. She was asking him everything he knew not. Indeed, among all there was great giving and getting of information on matters alow and aloft. There was, too, frequent praise of the commodore, the doctor, the priest, the sisters of charity, Madame Hayle—all those heroic ones on the immigrant deck, where the pestilence was making awful headway. But there was so perfect a silence as to the bishop that it was manifest that every one knew about him but was too discreet to tell.

Matters beyond the boat, too, far and near, were much discussed, though some actually saw the sunset they were all there to see. Nowhere within five hundred miles the compass round, the actor said, was there a town of ten thousand souls, if of five thousand. Nowhere within a hundred miles was there a town population of five hundred. Since the morning thundershower the *Votares* had come ninety miles, yet the great Yazoo Delta was still ahead, abeam, astern, on the river's Mississippi side. Some one told two or three, who told four or five, it was a hundred and seventy-five miles long by an average of sixty wide, and covered seven thousand square miles. From zenith to farthest east the clouds that overhung it were pink and ashes-of-roses in a sea of blue. The entire west was one splendor of crimson and saffron, scarlet and gold, with intervals of black and green. Even the turbid river between was an unbroken rosy glow. The vast wooded swamps over on that shore were in Arkansas. Louisiana had been left behind in that vivid moment when Ramsey and Hugh were making their discovery of "Harriet" and when Hugh, we may here add, was handing back her "veil of mystery."

"When I saw you do that," Ramsey had later said to him, "I knew she was safe—and she knew she was!" The laughing girl's mind was brimful yet of the amazing incident, at every pause in her talk, which was now with this one, now with that, and often with the cub.

It was interesting to note the masterful-careless air with which Watson's apprentice more than once endeavored to make it clear to Hugh, concerning this daughter of Gideon, that, whereas the mud clerk, at his desk below, was utterly love-bemired, his, the cub's, liking for her was solely for her countless questions, of which he said that "you never could tell where the next one would hit." No sinned moth he! To prove it he offered Hugh a very blasé query: "What do women ever do with all the answers we men give 'em, hey?"

Hugh could not tell him. Yet to Hugh the riddle was at least as old as his acquaintance with Ramsey. He pondered it as he and Mrs. Gilmore conversed in undertone while gazing on the wonderful changes of the sky, and while Ramsey, near by, visibly studied the exhorter, whom she was cross-examining together with the actor on the lore of the river as they had known it in the days before steam. For she had actually got those two antipodes face to face again in a sort of truce-rampant like that of the lion and the unicorn on the *Votares's* very thick plates and massive coffee-cups. She was not like most girls, Hugh thought. While their interrogations were generally for the entertainment, not to say flattery, of their masculine informants, hers were the outreachings of an eager mind free from self-concern and athirst for knowledge to be stored, honey-like, for future use. Some women have butterfly minds, that merely drink the social garden's

nectar. Others are more like bees. The busy bee Ramsey, Hugh felt assured, was by every instinct a honey gatherer.

But who, at a single cast, ever netted the whole truth as to any one? Even while he so mused—at the same time doing his best to give Mrs. Gilmore his whole attention—Ramsey, with her back turned yet vividly aware of him, willing—preferring—that he should hear alone from that lady what she would later draw from him, and ardently mindful of his word that he "wanted her help," was not merely gathering facts regarding her beloved river but was also deep in diplomacy, endeavoring with all her youthful arts, such as they were, to help him.

Her manœuvres were fairly good. To her it seemed as though this spirit of strife so electrically pervading the *Votares* might yet be tranquilized through a war of wits exclusively and she was using her own with the tactical nimbleness of the feminine mind. She knew the twins were down on the boiler deck again, one faint, yet both pursuing, egged on by him of the stallion's eye and him of the eagle's, and all the more socially and dangerously active because, by strict orders to every one, cut off from the gaming-table and the bar. She could not do a hundred things at once—though she could do six or seven—and it was well to grapple this one task first. Thus she kept Hugh free to confer with the player's wife as to "Harriet."

Her husband, the wife told Hugh, had drawn "Harriet" from the water just as Dan Hayle sank, and husband and wife had concealed her on their flatboat, unable to resist her wild appeal not to be given back into slavery.

"We didn't dream she'd done anything wrong; she didn't tell us that for years. Players, Mr. Hugh, don't meddle much in politics and we'd never thought whether we were for slavery or against it until there was the whole awful question sprung on us in an instant."

"So you took her——?"

"For my maid, yes—on wages, of course—down to New Orleans—we were bound there—and kept her when we went North and ever since."

"And she's always been——?"

"Well-behaved, faithful, kind, and wise. That one terrible deed, which she says you know all about——"

"I do."

"It seemed to change the very foundations of her character, to convert her soul."

"Yes," said Hugh, as if speaking from experience.

"Yet she kept her high spirit. She would never put on a disguise. And really that was safest since she wasn't being looked for by any one. 'I'm no advertised runaway,' she said. Still she's never been foolhardy. She'd never have come—we'd never have brought her—aboard this boat could we have foreseen the mishap to her captain which decided you and your father and grandfather to come on her."

So ran the story hurriedly, but before it had got thus far Hugh's attention, in spite of him, was divided. It was wise, we have implied, for Ramsey to take the exhorter while he was in a manageable humor. He had come to the roof with an improved regard, got by his fall in the cabin, for the "'Piscopalian play-actoh," and with brute shrewdness was glad to make an outward show of good-will to Gilmore, and accepted with avidity every pretty advance of Gid Hayle's "bodacious brick-top gal." Hugh could hear him answering Ramsey's inquiries regarding various pieces of river seen or unseen during the day.

"Spanish-moss Ben'? Why, they calls it that by reason 'at when we-all used to come down the riveh in flatboats, that's whah we al'ays fus' see the moss a-swingin' f'om the trees. Yass, sawt o' like scalps f'om wigwam poles. An' that ho'pe us to know whah'bouts we 'uz at. We knowed we 'uz at Spanish-moss Ben'. Didn' we, Mr. play-actoh?"

The actor would have said yes, but the fountain of information flowed straight on: "Yass, same as at Islan' Ten—aw Twenty—aw any numbeh, we knowed by count we 'uz that many islan's f'om whah the Ohio comes in. Ef that wah the tenth islan' we'd seed then we knowed that 'uz Islan' Ten aw whaheveh it wah, whetheh it wah a' islan' yit aw b'en j'inded on to the main sho' sence it got its numbeh."

They were rounding Cypress Bend and Ramsey had asked another question. "Was this where you first used to see cypress woods?"

"Thundeh, no! This gits h-its name by reason 'at they steals mo' millions o' dollahs wuth o' cyp'ess timbeh f'om the gove'ment out'n this ben' than any otheh on the whole Fatheh o' Watehs, es the Injins say. You know that, Mr. play-actoh. Lawd! all the places ain't name' alike. 'Way back down yondeh whah we met the *Troubado'* this mawnin'——"

"Oh!" moaned Ramsey, "another o' pop-a's boats!"

"Yass, whilst you-all 'uz a-temptin' Provi-dence a-practisin' of a play! Down yondeh by Islan' Ninety, Seary's Islan'—which it ain't be'n a raal islan' these fawty year—you 'membah, Mr. play-actoh, that ole san'-bah jess below it, full o' snags as my granny's mouth, which befo' the earthquake it used to be a reg-lah death-trap fo' flatboats? Well, *you* know h-it didn' git its name by reason 'at anybody fo' the fust time see thah Gen'al Hull's Lef' Leg! No; an' likewise away up yondeh pas' the Tennessee line, at Islan' Thutty-eight, whah the current's so full o' biles an' swells an' snags an' sawyehs 'at they calls it the Devil's Elbow! Now, nobody ain't neveh sho' 'nough see' the devil's identical elbow—in this life. No, suh, you'd ought to know that ef anybody. Oh, no, Devil's Elbow, *President's Islan'*, Paddy's Hen an' Chickens, Devil's Race-groun', Devil's Bake-ov'm, they jess sahcaystic names." He turned to Watson's cub, who with Basile had joined the trio, and was watching to get in a word. "You know that."

The boy assented. "But did you see," he asked Ramsey, "the swarms of birds down around Island Eighty-eight?"

"No!" interposed the exhorter, "she wah still a-temptin' Provi-dence in like manneh as afo'said!"

Basile flashed resentment. "To put it politely," he retorted. But the actor and Ramsey laughed.

"Oh, John the Babtis' wouldn't 'a' putt it no politer. I see' the birds. We 'uz a meetin' the *Southe'n Cross*——"

"Anoth'—!" Ramsey began to wail.

"Anotheh o' Gid Hayle's boats, yass, an' mighty nigh his bes'. Round'n' the foot o' the islan' our whistle bellered howdy to her an' we riz one solid squah mile o' wings; an' when she bellered back, a-round'n' its head, she riz anotheh. Yit them birds wa'n't a pinch naw a patchin' to what I hev see' thah; millions an' millions an' millions *uv* millions o' swan, pelikin, san'-hill crane, geese——"

"Birds of paradise?" asked Brick-top.

"They 'uz all birds o' paradise! the whole kit an' bilin'! by reason 'at this *wah* a paradise them days, this-yeh whole 'Azoo Delta, which you, suh"—the speaker turned to Gilmore with reviving spleen. By opposite stairs, larboard and starboard, the twins, each carrying a sword-cane, as Hugh saw by the double gold

band around it a finger-length from the top, had just reached the roof, and the emboldened orator began to make it plain that despite his "bodacious" criticism of their sister, overheard by Julian, he had at least half righted himself with both brothers and was on their side in whatever was now afoot.

"Which you, suh," he repeated, "hev tuck on yoseff to drap hints 'at it ain't a civilize' country!—by reason 'at it ain't cityfied! Like Paris, I s'pose, my Gawd!—with thah high-heel' shoes an' low-neck' dresses!"

His voice rose as the twins, Mrs. Gilmore, and Hugh came close. "Aw Babylon with thah jeweldry!—rings on thah fingeys an' bells on thah toes! Aw Sodom an' Gomorrah!—with thah staht-neckid statutes! Well, thaynk the Lawd, yo're plumb right, we ain't! Thaynk Gawd we *air* a 'new-bawn civilization'—as says you when you didn' suspicion I wah a-listenin'"—he fell into a mincing mimicry—"a new-bawn civilization with all the chahm an' all the pity o' new-bawn things,' says you to yo' wife—ef she air yo' wife."

The shock of the insult ran through the group and out to a dozen hearers beyond; to the captain and a knot of young people courting his conversation; to Watson, high above; to the stallion-eyed man and the eagle-eyed, who both had come up with the twins and were adhering to the senator, the general, and the Kentuckian from California.

Gilmore paled with anger. Ramsey's merriment, which had begun at the beginning, ceased for a breath and then, to the loathing of the twins, came on worse as she found herself very erect in one of Mrs. Gilmore's gentle arms. The eyes of both the wife and the girl were on the actor and their every nerve was unstrung. Beseechingly he waved them away.

"Come," the wife said, though without moving, "come on."

"Oh, not a step!" laughed Ramsey. "They—they need us! We must help!" She had turned her frank gaze to Hugh in mingled wonder, exultancy, and distress. It seemed a dream that he should be the dull boy of yesterday. He was speaking to the exhorter and appeared not to have her in sight or mind, although, in fact, her untimely levity ran him through like a dart. His absurdly deep voice was rich with a note not of mere forbearance but of veritable comradery, yet his eyes, as they held the offender's, were as big and dangerous as she had ever seen her mighty father's and she laughed on for what laughter might be worth, the only help she could furnish.

"Not that you mean the slightest offence," he prompted.

The exhorter stiffened up. The nearer few packed close. Slender Basile was just at Hugh's left between him and the twins. The exhorter opened his mouth to reply but the words hung in his throat. To help them out he gave his head a disputative tilt, but Basile's hysterical treble broke in:

"Say no! You slang-whanging lick-skillet, say no!"

The man gasped. The boy whirled to his convalescent brother. "Give me that cane!" He snatched it, whipped out its keen stiletto, and with all his light force smote the empty staff, left-handed, across the exhorter's cheek and ear, yelping: "Say no! Say it!"

"No!" said the victim, but the word was equivocal and the boy beside himself. For Hugh had wrenched the staff from him and was holding the hand that gripped the stiletto, while the lad, with streaming tears, plunged, whined and gnashed at the backwoodsman.

"Let me go!" he begged. "I see their game! Let me kill their insulter of ladies!"

The game was not hard to see. At a better moment than this blunderer had chosen, some one was to provoke the actor to an assault which the twins would make their pretext for a combined attack on that political "suspect" and common pest, using the canes as canes until Hugh should be drawn into the fray, when the canes would become swords, dirks, the actor a secondary consideration, and the game—interesting. Hugh saw it but saw it with even less sense of peril than Ramsey, who stood her ground nervously cling-ing to her chaperon, yet flashing and tinkling with a mirth as of some reckless sport; a mirth mildly reflected by her companion and which, for Hugh, suddenly shed a ludicrous light on every one: on himself and Basile; on the pallid Lucian as he peevishly, vainly, ordered Ramsey off the scene; on Julian as he posed in a tragical disdain more theatrical than the actor's—who also saw the game; on the captain's dumfounded young folk; on the senator, the general, and the Californian, standing agaze, and on the two men with them, whose extra—eagle-eyed, stallion-eyed—solicitude told him they were the lenders of the canes. All at once, still holding the anguished Basile, he saw, and observed that the actor saw, the heaped-up nonsense of the affair. Ramsey's mood leaped to both of them like a flame, and they laughed together while Hugh exhorted the exhorter: "Go below! For your life, go!"

The man cast a pleading look on the twins, but when Lucian granted him only a withering smile, and Julian with his cane in his folded arms said majestically, "Go, you hopeless ass," he went—with haste.

Out of the group by the bell John Courteney, apparently as unmoved as if all this were but common routine, answered Watson's silent look with his own while the pilot, taking his ear from a speaking-tube, grasped the bell-rope.

"Wood?" asked the captain.

XXXVIII

THE CANE AGAIN

"Partly, sir."

All marked the qualifying word though at the same time all witnessed the cross-fire of challenge and retort that flashed between the three brothers. Basile had dropped his weapon and ceased to struggle, yet still showed a mental torture, the same he had betrayed at the previous afternoon's worship, and in all hearts, even those of the senator's group, it brought back for him the same tender indulgence as before. Meanwhile Ramsey and the cub pilot had caught up the cane's two parts and laid them in the hands of the actor, who quietly resheathed them while Basile mocked the twins. "So that's the way Hayles," jeered the lad, "stand by a cat's-paw friend, is it?"

"Hayles," said Julian, "never settle difficulties before ladies."

The boy resisted again as his laughing sister half knelt to lay her arms about him soothingly. "Oh, these ladies won't mind," he tearfully sneered. "Come on! Here's your man, with the steel, and three behind each of you to see fair play!" A wave of the hand indicated Lucian and the canes' owners on one side, and himself, the cub pilot, and Hugh on the other. The latter and the players, momentarily together, gave sudden attention, but again the humor of the situation saved it. The laugh was general; the young people about the captain, whom his equanimity and Ramsey's and Mrs. Gilmore's stay had emboldened to linger, drew near; and the three groups became one.

The twins themselves might have made fair actors, though no one ever had dared suggest it. Julian scowled on Gilmore and Hugh and half drew the other cane from his folded arms, but then looked distantly away, while Lucian with an indolent air said to the younger brother:

"Babe! Hayles never line up on two sides."

To retort, the lad had to snatch Ramsey's fingers from his lips and so lost his chance, while under her breath she futilely implored him to desist.

"I'm not!" he wailed back at her. "I'm not ridiculous! You! you'll find judgment-day ridiculous, I don't doubt—oh, good Lordy! stop your eternal titter."

The great bell thundered and he recoiled. "There! wood! 'wood, partly.' And partly what else? d'you know? Another funeral." In spite of her fond restraints he cried out to the company: "With more to follow! The bishop——"

But the sister's fingers were on his lips once more and while she half whispered, half laughed her tender chidings old Joy appeared, coming from the bishop's bedside. Ramsey turned a beseeching look to Hugh but the general had halted the nurse with a private question and now proclaimed:

"Th-the bishop's doing as well's could be exxxpected."

"Expected!" cried Basile, "yes, when he's expected to die. And then it'll be my turn."

"It won't!" exclaimed Ramsey. "It sha'n't!" The boat was rounding to at a wood-yard and most of the company were glad to turn away to the shoreward scene. The boy dropped his head on the black woman's shoulder.

"Oh, mammy, if I was the bishop, or you, or even Ramsey, I wouldn't mind, for I could be ready to go. Oh, God! why can't I get religion?"

"Why, 'caze you done got it, sugah boy. You done got religion 'istiddy." Only the twins smiled. The captain stepped down to the roof's forward edge as the boat neared shore.

"And you're not going to get anything else," said Ramsey, snatching the lad's hands and finding them cold.

He moaned in unbelief: "What do you know about it? Oh, sis', if I could only die doing some fine thing!—in a fight!—or an explosion!—anything but a deathbed!"

"Law'! honey," interposed old Joy, "what you want to do fine things faw? You's done got religion. You on'y ain't got peace. Come to de bishop. Gawd won't let a religious enquireh kitch noth'n'. I 'uz tellin' de bishop 'bout missy an'

you, bofe gitt'n' religion 'istiddy, an' he say, s'e: 'Go, fetch yo' young missy; fetch bofe.'"

"We'll go!" said Ramsey before the willing boy could reply, though from every side came protests.

For once Hugh and the twins were in accord. "You must not!" called Hugh. "You shall not!" said Julian.

She glanced from one to the other, tinkling her prettiest, and suddenly flushed. "We will!"

The twins sent Hugh a hot look which he paid back with a cold one, while Mrs. Gilmore said:

"I'll have to go with you, Ramsey."

For one breath the girl was taken aback, but then:

"Yes," she said, "to the door, that's all."

As they turned after Basile and Joy she added: "'Twas I, you know, that got the bishop sick in the first place."

At the corner of the texas they glanced back but were reassured to see the cub-pilot disappearing on the nearest boiler-deck stair at the outer, depopulated side of the boat, the actor and Hugh moving toward it, and the twins holding the field and scowling after their opponents. Nevertheless, the moment the sister and wife passed from view Julian sturdily, Lucian feebly, pressed after Hugh and the player. The last witness was gone; now was their time.

"Mr. Courteney," said Julian. The other two looked back and paused.

Lucian spoke: "Mr. Gilmore, you have my cane, sir."

The player smiled. "Is this really your cane?"

With a ripping oath Julian put in: "What's that to you, you damned Gypsy? Give him the stick!"

The player let go a stage laugh. Hugh took a step forward with a grave show of self-command hardly justified. "Mr. Hayle," he said, "you don't want to be another 'hopeless ass,' do you?"

"Gawd!" Julian rose to his toes and lifted and brought down his cane. But it never reached its mark. One stride of the actor, one outflash of arm and staff, foiled the blow, and when a second was turned on him the cane flew from Julian's hand he knew not how and dropped ten feet away.

He dared not leap after it but faced the skilled fencer, blazing defiance though fully expectant of the unsheathed dirk. But no dirk was unsheathed. Lucian, forgetting his feebleness, sprang for the cane and had dropped to one knee to snatch it up when Hugh set foot on it.

"No!" said Hugh. The convalescent straightened up, his brow dark with an anguish of chagrin, and before he could find speech Hugh was adding: "Wait. I'll give it to you."

"Don't!" cried Gilmore. "Keep it!"

"No," wearily said Hugh, glaring on the glaring twins, "we're all belittled enough now." He caught up the cane, drew its dagger, snapped it in half on the deck, and resheathed the stump. Then tossing the point into the river he said: "Here, Mr. Gilmore, swap."

With an actor's relish for a scene the actor swapped, and the convalescent wept with rage as Hugh, having treated the second cane like the first, tendered it to him.

"Don't take it!" cried his brother; "don't touch it!" And then to Gilmore: "Don't you hand me that one, either! Don't you dare!"

Yet thereupon the actor dared, saying: "But for—others—I'd trounce you with it like a schoolmaster."

The words were half drowned by Lucian, who snatched from Hugh the cane he tendered, answering the less crafty Julian, "Take it, you fool! take any odds they'll give!" and, while Julian complied, adding to Hugh: "Oh, you'll pay for this—along with the rest of it!"

"You'll pay for this first!" put in Julian, "and with your lives—the pair of you!"

Hugh and Gilmore merely turned again toward the stair, but a voice stopped them though addressed only to the twins.

"Did you say pair?" it inquired.

The boat was at the bank; her great wheels were still. The sun's last ray tipped the oak-leaf caps of her soaring chimneys. Once more from the cook-house rose the incense of coffee, hot rolls, and beefsteak, and from her myriad lamps soft yellow gleams fell upon the wind-rippled water and, out of view on the other side, into the tops of the dense willows. Over there the senator, the general, and the company that had gone with them looked down upon two movements at once. The funeral they could not help but see; the other was the wooding-up. The mud clerk had measured the corded pile, and the entire crew, falling upon it like ants, were scurrying back and forth, outward empty-handed, inward shoulder-laden, while those who stood heaping the loads on them sang as they heaped:

"Do you belong to de Vot'ess' ban'?"

"You don't mean just the pair, do you?" repeated Watson. He looked down loungingly from a side window of the pilot-house. "There's anyhow five on our side," he added. "I'm in that tea party."

Julian had caught breath to retort, when from a new direction a beckon checked him and at the nearest corner of the texas he beheld again Ramsey. Mrs. Gilmore was not with her, but at her back were the nurse and Basile. The boy wore such an air of terror that the player instantly pressed toward him.

Ramsey's beckon, however, was to Hugh. Her bright smile did not hide her mental pain, which drew him to her swiftly despite the twins' deepening frown. The two brothers heard the question she asked him when he was but half-way; perhaps she meant they should. "Can you call through Mr. Watson's speaking-tube to mom-a—and the commodore?"

"Certainly."

"Tell them"—tears suddenly belied her brightness—"to come up to the bishop, quick. I'm 'fraid—afraid——"

A word or two more Hugh failed to hear, but even the twins, at their distance, read them on her lips:

"The bishop's going to die."

She sprang to Gilmore. His arm was about Basile; he was trying his pulse. The twins would have followed but in between came senator—general—all that company, moved by physical foreknowledge of an invitation whose drawing

power outweighed whatever else land, water, sky, or man could offer. Suddenly it pealed in their midst:

"Ringading tingalingaty, ringadang ding——"

The captain stayed by his chair. "Cast off," he said to the mate beneath, and to Watson above: "Back your starboard."

A jingle sounded below. The steam roared from one scape and widened aloft like a magic white tree—twice—thrice. "Stop her." It ceased. She swung. "Go ahead on both." Two white trees shot up together and trembling she went. Down in the quivering cabin, round the shining board, every one's spirit rose with the rising speed.

"Senator, 'twas I sent you them hot rolls, suh."

"Why, thank you! But—don't disfurnish yourself."

"General, them fried bananas——"

"Th-th-thank you, sir, I have a suff-fficient plenty."

Only the seats of the Courteney's, the Gilmores, Ramsey, and Basile stood vacant.

XXXIX

FORTITUDE

"Courage," the slender play was called. It is to be regretted that we cannot fully set it forth, for Gilmore was himself its author.

Also because, whatever it lacked, there was in it a lucky fitness for this occasion, since, conditions being what they were on the decks above and below, the one strong apology for giving it was the need of upholding the courage of its audience.

It was even a sort of kind rejoinder to the various ferments kept up by the truculent twins, the pusillanimous exhorter, and the terrified Basile. Its preachment might well have been less obvious, though lines, its author bade Hugh notice, never overbalanced action, never came till situation called them. It was to the effect, first, that courage is human character's prime essential, without

which no rightness or goodness is stable or real; and, second, that as no virtue of character can be relied on where courage is poor, so neither can courage be trusted for right conduct when unmated to other virtues of character, the chiefest being fidelity—fidelity to truth and right, of course, since fidelity to evil is but a contradiction of terms. "From courage and fidelity," it was the part of one player at a telling moment to say, "springs the whole arch of character," and again, "These are the Adam and Eve of all the virtues." (Adam and Eve were decided to be quite mentionable. Mention was not impersonation.)

Naturally the Gilmores knew every line of the play.

"As perfectly," ventured the two young Napoleonites, "as John the Baptist knows the moral law, don't you?"

"Better, I infer," said Gilmore abstractedly. They were in the ladies' cabin, awaiting its preparation as a stage, behind the curtains that screened it from the gentlemen's cabin, the auditorium. His wife smiled for him.

"Even my Harriet," she said, "knows one or two parts. She's played Miss Ramsey's in emergencies."

Her half-dozen feminine hearers flinched. Yet one said, excusingly: "That's a servant's part, anyhow."

"And Harriet's her very size and shape," said another.

And another, drolly: "They're enough alike to be kin!"

"Harriet's free, isn't she?" asked the first.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Gilmore, without a blush, looking squarely at Hugh, who stood among them silent.

"You'd never notice she was a nigras if you wa'n't told," said another, "or didn't see her with nigras." v But then said a youth, cousin to one of the girls: "Yet after all a nigras she is."

"No such thing!" said his cousin. "After all that's what she isn't. Our own laws say she isn't."

"Well, I say she is. One drop of nigras blood makes a nigras—for me, law or no law."

"Well, that's monstrous—for me."

"Yes, your politics being what they are."

"My pol'—I'm as good a Southerner as you, any day!"

"All right, but I shan't play if that born servant is allowed to take any but a servant's part."

To Hugh a crisis seemed to impend, but he held off for the Gilmores, who seemed to be used to crises.

They had not thought of Harriet, they said, for any part but Miss Ramsey's. Miss Ramsey might find herself too distracted by—other things. Or, even if not, the doctor, or the captain, might think Harriet's contact less contaminating than Miss Ramsey's.

Their smile was not returned. Hugh gravely nodded but the rest shook their heads. Impossible! And suppose it were possible! they were not going to shun Miss Ramsey for refusing to shun "a sacred duty." By duty they meant the bishop, aware of his illness but not of his extremity, and none but Hugh and the Gilmores knowing that only two doors from the bishop lay Basile, also stricken, and that Ramsey and the old nurse were with the boy. The young people fell into pairs confessing their contempt for the besetting peril. Vigil is wearisome and they were almost as weary of blind precautions as, secretly, were Hugh and others. The two Napoleonites "didn't believe doctors knew a bit more than other folks—if as much!" The two cousins so unimpeachably Southern were "convinced that contagion never comes by contact," and two or three said "the cholera was in the air, that's where it was, and whoever was going to get it was going to get it!" They all agreed that "if Miss Ramsey, because of the extra strain she was under, had lost her nerve——"

"She has not," put in Hugh with a very solemn voice and solid look. The girls nudged elbows. "But," he added, to Mrs. Gilmore, "for the better comfort and safety of both sick and well we must let her off."

Must! Ahem! The amateurs lifted their brows. Of which was he sole owner, Miss Hayle or the boat? "Orders!" softly commented one tall youth.

"Yes," said Hugh, facing him with a gaze so formidable, yet to the rest so comical, that the nudgings multiplied.

"Miss Hayle's songs, however," Hugh began to add.

"Yes, how about the songs?" asked some one. "They're no servant's part and they're out before the curtain."

"She must sing them," replied Hugh. "They won't keep her long and they involve no contact."

"Right!" exclaimed one. "Good!" said another, and yet another. "Without them we might as well give up the whole business." From the curtains through which he had been peering the actor glanced back. "Those footlights are capital," he said to his wife, and then, for the joy of all: "We've got a full house!"

The wife looked, turned quickly, and murmured to him: "Hayle's twins in the front row."

"Yes," he said, absently again, "with war in their eyes.... Now, Mr. Hugh, if you'll send for Miss Hayle——"

"Harriet's gone for her," replied his wife.

"Here I am," spoke Ramsey at the door of a stateroom appropriated as a passageway. And assuredly there she was; but by the magic of dress, through the trained cunning of Mrs. Gilmore's mind and "Harriet's" hand, and even more by the imprint of her new weight of experience, she was Ramsey transformed, grown beautiful. An added year was in her face. A chastened tenderness both lighted and shaded it, half veiling yet half reasserting its innocent hardihood. The astonished amateurs hailed her with a clapping of hands, in which, it pleased her deeply to notice, Hugh Courteney, staring, took no share. Beyond the curtain the unseen audience answered with a pounding of heels and canes in good-natured impatience. Gilmore hurriedly waved away all the lads but Hugh, and Mrs. Gilmore all the girls but Ramsey. To her she glided while Hugh and her husband conferred on some last point.

"Well, dear," she said, pressing her backward into the stateroom, "are you ready?"

"No, dear Mrs. Gilmore, please, no, I'm not."

"Ah, yes, you are. You'll go on from"—they passed out and entered the next room forward—"from here. And mark! when you find nothing between you and the people but the footlights, and their glare blinds you, don't stand close over

them trying to see, or they'll make you look scared and pale, and you're not scared the least bit, are you?"

"I don't know," laughed Ramsey, softly, through tears. "I never was, before; never had sense enough, mom-a says. But, oh, I know I'm ashamed. I'm that 'shamed that I wouldn't wonder if I'm scared too. Oh, dear Mrs. Gilmore, Basile's so sick! The doctors are doing all they can for him, and mom-a and mammy Joy are with him; but he's so tortured with pain, and with fright! And the bishop—he's pow'ful weak, as mammy Joy says. One of those sweet sisters—of charity—I got her up through the speaking-tube—oh, you know what I mean—and she's there now talking to him *so* beautifully! And down on the lower deck, freight deck, Madame Marburg's sick too, and her son and the priest and the other sister are with her and with the other sick ones—there's a dozen of them!" The last words were to Gilmore as he and Hugh appeared at the outer door.

The actor stepped inquiringly into the narrow room and began a warning whisper but Ramsey spoke on to wife and husband by turns: "And in the face of all that here we are—or here I am—about to do the silliest, most heartless thing in all my silly, heartless life. No, I'm not ready."

"Tsh-sh!" whispered the husband, with both hands up. "My dear young lady, this isn't you; you've caught this mood of a moment from your brother."

It was not his words, however, that startled Ramsey to silence; the audience was again stamping and pounding. Now she resumed: "Oh, I hear! Mrs. Gilmore, the trouble's not that home song nor the spring song nor the love-song; it's that silly thing you-all say I *must* sing if I get an encore—which I can't believe I'll get!"

"My dear, you'll get several. We've arranged that."

"Arr'—! Why, I've only that one silly thing!"

"The fate of the whole show is in that one silly thing."

"Oh, it's not! It's in you two talented, professional, famous people!"

"Ah, maybe it ought to be, but it's not. That's the way of the stage, my dear. Your silly thing has plenty of verses. Sing only two at a time."

"A sort o' Hayle's twins," laughed the girl. Then despairingly she dropped to the edge of the berth. But Hugh had been pushing in past the players and as he reached her she sprang erect again.

"This is entirely my doing," he said to her. "These two good friends mustn't urge you to sing. They're in danger, you know; greater danger than they'll believe."

Gilmore broke in: "Now, Mr. Hugh, listen to me."

But Ramsey put out a hand. "No, *you* listen—to him," and Hugh went on:

"Should it come to be known by—certain ones——"

"Certain twos," said Ramsey, "go on."

"It would double, or treble, that danger."

"My dear boy—" began the actor again, but his wife restrained him, and Ramsey whispered at him in turn:

"Tsh-sh!" Then she prompted Hugh: "And so——?"

"So you must sing without any urging but mine."

Her lips parted in droll repudiation, but he went on.

"And you'll give the encore."

"Oh, when did you learn to talk? I—w-i-l-l—n-o-t!"

Once more the actor tried to break in, but his wife eagerly whispered: "Let them alone! Let—them—alone!"

"Success hangs on it," persisted Hugh, "and success here means success all over the boat. It will mean their" (the Gilmores') "safety; while failure— Think of it, Miss Ramsey.... Don't you see?"

She stared an instant and then with a sign of distress and aversion gasped: "Go away! Go away!" and dropping to the berth cast her face into its pillow. With gentle speed Mrs. Gilmore pressed Hugh aside and took his place. The stamping and pounding, for a moment suspended, broke forth afresh. "Send him away!" cried Ramsey, her voice muffled by the pillow, one eye fitfully glancing from it,

and one arm waving backward. "All advice rejected! Send him away! Send them both."

With such dignity as they could save, the two outcasts fled, meeting and turning back half the stage company while the actor's wife shut the door.

"Is she ill?" asked the gaping girls. "Is she ill?"

"Not at all," "No," said the actor and Hugh, right and left, the one complacent, the other "ironer" than ever. "She is, eh—she, eh——"

Every head was lifted to hearken. The cabin's applause ceased abruptly for a second or two, or three. Then again there was a stillness broken only by the speeding of the boat; and then, like a perfume from some wilderness garden, came the untrained notes of a song, a maiden's song of her lost German home, and leaning elatedly from the reopened door Mrs. Gilmore loudly whispered:

"She's on!"

XL

RAMSEY AT THE FOOTLIGHTS

The actor stepped to his wife. "Will she do it all?" he inquired, and Hugh, who had started to join the audience by a short cross passage, lingered to hear.

"Heaven knows," laughed the lady, shutting herself out, yet keeping the door; "I too am banished." Her glance drew Hugh nearer. "Miss Ramsey begs us, all three——"

"For her to beg is to command," said Gilmore playfully.

"Yes, and so I've promised for all three——"

"Promised! What?"

Mrs. Gilmore whispered: "To pray for her."

The smiling actor and the unsmiling youth looked at each other. "Why, that's," said Gilmore, "entirely——"

"Practicable," said Hugh. He moved on, and into the passage. Gilmore, following, stopped at its outer end. At the inner stood Hugh, waiting, in shadow

and with downcast eyes, for the song to be done. What unvoiced supplication, if any, may have been behind the lips of either was not for the other to know. Yet it was an hour of formidable besetments and we may pardon the actor if an actor's self-consciousness moved him to reflect that there were thousands of healthy men, some as raw as Hugh, some as ripe as himself, who, for the sake of a promise, a wife or a maiden, or even without them, standing thus, had prayed.

He tiptoed to the youth's side and together they leaned in enough to look down the dimmed cabin, over ranks of silhouetted heads, to the bright stage front and the singer. She was in the centre of its light and the last notes of her simple song called for so little effort that they only helped the eye to give itself wholly and instantly to the mere picture of her, slender, golden, magnified by this sudden outburst into blossom, and radiant with the tenderness of her words as a flower with morning dew. The next moment she was bowing and withdrawing, aglow with gratitude for an applause that came in volume as though for the finish of a chariot-race, and Hugh saw as plainly as the experienced actor, if not with as clear a recognition of Mrs. Gilmore's attiring skill, that the tribute was at least as much to the singer as to the song.

The same perception came to Ramsey in the stateroom to which she had returned and in which she stood alone, hearkening and trembling. She noiselessly laughed for joy to be, however unworthily, the daughter of Gideon Hayle, never doubting it was for his name, his blood, his likeness, she stood thus approved. The conviction gave her better heart for the task yet before her. She glided to the rear door, locked it, and dropped to her knees.

"Oh, Lord 'a' mercy!" she murmured. "Oh, Basile, my brother! And oh, mom-a, dear, brave mom-a!" She did not name her father, though his figure was central in her imagination, broad, overtowering, intrepid, imperious.

The applause persisted. Now it sank but at once it rose again, easy overflow of a popular mind glad of all unrestraint and always ready—as even she discerned—for the joy of exaggeration. She sprang up and moved toward it, her eyes sparkling responsively. Yet her tremor was piteous and in mute thought she said again, at high speed:

"My brother, oh, my brother! I'll be back in a minute. This ain't for my own silly self, you know, honey. It's for them that need it; for all the people, up stairs and down, and for—for the boat!—as any of her—owners—would do for any of our boats. You said you wished *you* could do some fine thing for somebody—in a fire—or explosion, and this is just as awful only not so sudden, and I'm doing this in your place, honey boy; yes, I am, this is just as if you did it yourself!"

The applause was still summoning her as she ended. A hand, probably Mrs. Gilmore's, had tried the locked door. From the lower deck leaked up the sad "peck, peck" of the carpenter driving his nails, and close outside the door sounded sharp footsteps and the mingled voices of the pilot's cub and the actor calling with suppressed vehemence to one of the pantrymen: "Here, boy! Here! Go below like a shot and tell 'Chips' to stop that pounding this instant! He can saw if he must but he mustn't hammer!"

Then as if carried there by some force not her own she found herself again in the bewildering sheen of the footlights, smiling merrily to the hushed, half-seen assemblage, and suddenly aware of every throb of the *Votaress's* bosom, every fall of her winged feet, every tinkle of her cabin's candelabra, and, most vivid of all, horribly out of time with all, the still insistent "rap, tap, tap" of the carpenter's hammer.

At the same time, unconfessedly, the eager audience took note of quite another group of facts, emphasized by the appearance of Hugh in a back row of seats, by the presence of Hayle's twins in the dusk of the front row, with war even in the back of their heads, and by the illuminated form of the singer just drawing a last breath of preparation to exhale it in melody. Hardly in the gathering was there one who had not by this time learned the whole state of affairs between all Hayles, all Courtenays, and all those others whom its schemings, aggressions, discomfitures, tirades, and prophetic threats had entangled with them. Every one thought he knew precisely both Hugh's and Ramsey's varied relations to each and all those persons, his and her effects upon them, and his and her ludicrously dissimilar ways of getting those effects. They knew this warfare was still on and was here before them now. In every phase of it in which Ramsey had taken part she had come off victor and in every instance had done so by the sheer power of what she, with fair accuracy, called nonsense. So now they were ready to see her, at any juncture the twins or accident might spring, show the same method and win an even more lustrous triumph in keeping with her own metamorphosis. Nay, they were more than ready to lend a hand toward such an outcome. Like Watson, they had sentimentally matched Hugh and Ramsey, prospectively, in their desire, and saw that such a union must sooner or later be, if it was not already, a paramount issue in the strife. In such expectancy sat the throng, keenly aware of the twins at their front and Hugh at their back, as Ramsey's indrawn breath began to return in song, its first notes as low as her voice could sink, its time slow, its verbal inflections those of the freight-deck negro:

"Do you belong toe Gideon's ban'?"

So far it got before it was drowned in a deluge of laughter and applause. She had made, as Gilmore said to his wife behind the curtain, a "ten-strike." Her hearers did not pause an instant to determine whether the utterance was wit or humor or pure inanity. It fitted their mood; fitted it better than the actor or Hugh had believed it could. To the company's notion it was good nonsense offsetting and overpowering an otherwise invincible bad nonsense and snatching from it all right of argument, sympathy, or judicial appeal; laughing it out of court, to remain out at least until the completion of this voyage should give this jury, these hearers, an honorable discharge. The shrewd good sense of it, in their judgment, was the most fun of all, and while in her heart Ramsey was gratefully giving the credit of that to the actor and Hugh, the people naturally gave it to her and laughed and clapped and pounded again on second thought.

Now abruptly they hushed and let her resume:

"Do you belong toe Gideon's ban'?
Here's my heart an' here's my han'.
Do you belong toe Gideon's ban'?
Fight'n faw yo' home!"

Again the audience broke in.

"Fighting for your home!" they laughed to one another as they clapped. Home was the catchword of the times. Jenny Lind was singing nightly:

"Midt bleasures undt balaccess——"

and three fourths of all the songs not of the opera were of home and its ties. What the word might exactly signify in this case made little matter; on her lips, from her breast, it meant human kindness, maiden innocence, young love; meant courage, fidelity, the right, the true, the beautiful, the good; meant anything, everything, which she herself, shining there above the footlights like a star in the sunset, their darling of the hour, could be fancied to stand for; meant, anyhow, the twins' war-song turned into a peace-and-joy song.

"Tsh-sh-sh! let her go on!" And she went on: she, Noah's ark, and the *Votaress*, all three, together:

"Den come de buck-ram and de ewe——"

"What? what's that?" They leaned and whispered right and left. "New words! new words!"

"Den come de buck-ram and de ewe——"

"Why—she must 'a' made those words, herself!"

Not she. She knew no better than to believe them the improvisations of the Gilmores.

"Den come de buck-ram and de ewe
De ole nirosceinos and de gnu——"

Pun! a pun! a real pun!

"Do you belong toe Gideon's ban'?"

Yes, verily! They clapped, ha-haed, leaned around one another to see the dark upturned heads of the twins, and stole backward glances on the immovable features of the captain's son. At his side sat the Californian just then gravely murmuring to him, but he remaining as motionless as a Buddha. The refrain pressed on to its close, and the applause redoubled, but stopped as she prepared for another verse.

"Nex' come de mule and den de quail——"

Laughter! Mule and quail! royal pair of the cotton field, rightly thrice heralded!

"Nex' come de mule and den de quail,
Nex' come de mule and den de quail,
Nex' come de mule and den de quail,
De monkey-wrench and de wiggletail."

The senator clapped yea, the general thumped his cane. Half-a-dozen voices began to chime with her, "Here's my heart and——" till Julian looked round, when they stopped so short that the laugh swelled again and Julian resumed his seat. Only two or three saw Hugh and the Californian softly pass out together.

"No, no, no!" cried several, but that was to Ramsey for trying to get away. "No, you don't! Another verse! sing anoth'— Tsh-sh-sh!" She sang:

"Den come de man-drake and de moose,
Den come de man-drake and de moose,
Den come de man-drake and de moose,
De hickory-pottamus and de goose.
Do you belong——?"

Belong? How could they help but belong? Was ever anything such fun? Not itself, maybe, but she! And no more could Ramsey help belonging to them, though thoughts of the Texas and of the immigrant deck—where the carpenter's saw played an interlude to her every verse—pierced her heart at each throb of her pulse and of the boat's pulse and at every glimpse of the scowling twins, dimly visible to her just beyond the footlights. Silence fell once more as she moved a step forward with a light in her eyes, a life in her poise, that made her a pure joy, albeit an instinct warned her that her tide was at the flood and she must make her exit on this wave. So with a light toss as if to say, "Positively last appearance," she sang:

"Den d'rattlesnake and de antidote,
De rattlesnake and de antidote,
De rattlesnake and de antidote,
De rangitang and de billy-goat.
Do you belong——?"

The applause was as lively as ever and increased with each step of her bowing retreat. Near the stateroom door, chancing to look across the cabin to the one opposite, she saw within two or three of the amateurs clapping and the actor approvingly waving her off. Then finding herself alone she threw open the rear door and was in Mrs. Gilmore's embrace. "How's Basile?" she demanded—"and the bishop—and Marburg's mother? All this time——"

"My dear, you've sung only six minutes."

"It seems a week," she laughed. Hugh appeared in the outer door. She listened to the insistent applause. "I can't go back, Mrs. Gilmore. I don't need to, do I?"

"No.... Let go of me, dear!" The applause ceased. The curtain was about to "rise." The servant who was to draw the rear half of it reached in from the cabin and closed their door. "No, dear, you won't sing again till after this act, anyhow."

"Oh, not even then! I just must stay with Basile. I've sung all the verses but one, you know."

"We've got some more new ones," replied the lady, smiling to Hugh, who was moving to let her pass out.

"Got them!" cried the girl. She turned to Hugh. "They've made them! Didn't you know Mr. and Mrs. Gilmore made every line I've sung? Oh, Mr. Hugh, what can't genius do?"

Hugh solemnly dissented. "Those lines," he said, "could never have been made by mere genius!"

She stared at him a moment and then at Mrs. Gilmore, who was escaping by the outer door and who replied: "My dear, every line made for you has been made by Mr. Hugh." She vanished while the two stood dumbly face to face, but on second thought was back again just in time to see and hear Ramsey say, still gazing:

"Well, of—all—things! You! That frightful rubbish! You've got to sing the rest, yourself! Oh, Mrs. Gilmore, make him do it! It'll tickle 'em all to death—to hear *him* sing Gideon's Band!—and I can stay with Basile."

"Preposterous!" rumbled Hugh, and again, "preposterous!"

"Why—happy thought!" said Mrs. Gilmore. "Why, the very thing, Mr. Hugh, the very thing! Come. First we'll take this young lady up-stairs——" As they started the Californian appeared, laying a caressing hand on Hugh.

XLI

QUITS

"Wait here," slowly said Hugh in response to the gold-hunter's touch. "I'll—see you presently."

The modest adventurer waved assent, yet looked so disappointed that Mrs. Gilmore, moving to take his arm, asked:

"Can't Mr. So-and-so go with us?"

Oh, kind, quick wit! Three is a crowd, four is only twice two!

"Certainly," said Hugh, and to Ramsey added: "We'd better lead the way."

As they led she softly inquired: "Does he want to know something about the twins?"

What arrows were her questions, and how straight they struck home! Yet with that low voice for their bowstring they gave him comfort. Her forays into his confidence not only relieved the loneliness of his too secretive mind but often, as

now, involved a sweet yielding of her confidence to him. Yet now a straight answer was quite impossible.

"He wants to know something about you," was the reply.

She let the palpable evasion pass. On the hurricane roof there was a new sight. The breeze was astern and moved so evenly with the boat as to enfold her in a calm. Looking up for the stars, one saw only the giant chimneys towering straight into the darkness and sending their smoke as straight and as far again beyond, spangled with two firefly swarms of sparks that fell at last in a perpetual, noiseless shower.

"Why do we go this way?" she asked, meaning forward around the skylight roof instead of across it.

"Because this way's longer."

"Humph!" was the soft response. Presently she added, "We get more fresh air this way," and called back to their two followers: "This is to avoid the sparks."

"Um-hmm!" thought kind Mrs. Gilmore, and, "Oh, ho!" mused the Californian, not quite so unselfishly.

Around in front of the bell both youth and maiden observed how palely the derrick posts loomed against the spectral chimneys and their smoke, and silently recalled their first meeting, just here, in the long ago of two days earlier. The captain's chair was occupied.

"Well, father," said Hugh.

"Good evening," twittered Ramsey.

"Good evening, Miss Ramsey. Be back this way, Hugh?"

"In a moment, sir." They passed on. Ramsey looked behind at the Californian.

"What does he want to know about me?" she asked.

"He says," said Hugh, "he's nursed this sickness at sea and at Panama and hasn't the slightest fear of it."

"Humph!... That's not about me."

"Yes, it—was. He's taken a great fancy——"

"To Basile."

"To several of us, including Basile."

"Yes, because he and Basile played cards together."

"Not entirely for that," said Hugh, looking at her so squarely that she had to smooth back her curls. "But he'd like to help take care of him if you—and your mother, of course—are willing."

"Oh, how good—and brave! And he wants to ask me?"

"No, he's too bashful. I'm asking for him."

"Too—!" Ramsey pondered. They stepped more slowly. The other pair turned back; the play demanded Mrs. Gilmore. The sick-room door was so near that Ramsey knew her mother was inside it, by her shadow on its glass. Suddenly, just as Hugh was about to say she need not hurry in—whereupon she would have vanished like a light blown out—she faced him. "D'you ever suffer from bashfulness—diffidence?"

He answered on a droll, deep note: "All its horrors."

She looked him over. He barely smiled.

"You never show it," she said.

"No." To the fanciful girl the monosyllable came like one toll from a low tower. She laughed.

"Basile says there's another thing you suffer from."

"'Suffer'? From what do I 'suffer'?"

"From everybody else on the boat having a better chance to do things—big things—than you have."

He smiled again. "If I did, no one should know it; least of all you."

She ignored the last clause. "Aha! I said so. I told him—and mammy Joy told him—there's nothing bigger than to wait your turn and *then take it*. And there ain't—there isn't, is there?"

"Well—even that can be small. Nothing a man is big enough for looks big to him."

"Hoh!—after he's done it," laughed Ramsey.

"True—" said Hugh reflectively, "or suffered it," and both of them began to see that we can rarely lift more than our one corner of the whole truth at a time. "In your way," he added, still musing, "you're larger than I."

"Oh, I'm no—such—thing!" Her speech was soft, yet she looked up warily to Watson's pilot-house window, but Watson too thoroughly approved to be looking down. "I'm not half or third or quarter as large." She eagerly turned his attention up the river. Visible only by the lights of her cabin and the sparks from her unseen chimneys, a boat was coming round the next bend. As she entered the reach and breasted the breeze which so calmly accompanied the *Votaress*, her two spangled plumes of smoke swept straight astern as if two comets raced with her, or——

"The Golden Locks of Berenice," whispered Ramsey.

"Come," Hugh softly responded. The *Votaress* had signalled the usual passage to starboard and unless they went forward the shining spectacle would at once be lost. As they gained the front of the texas the distant craft, happening to open a fire-door, cast a long fan of red light ahead of her, suddenly showing every detail of her white forecastle, illumining her pathway on the yellow waters and revealing in their daylight green the willows of an island close beyond. Then the furnace was shut and again her fair outlines were left to the imagination, except for the prismatic twinkle and glow of her cabin lights.

"That was like you when you laugh," murmured Hugh, and before she could parry she was smitten again by an innocent random shot from the darkness round the bell.

"Do you make her out, Mr. Watson?" asked Hugh's father, and she flinched as if Watson were peering down on her.

"Yes, sir," said the pilot, "she's Hayle's *Wild Girl*."

Not waiting to hear that she was known by her "front skylights standin' so fur aft of her chimbleys," Ramsey wheeled to fly. But instantly she recovered and went with severe decorum, saying quiet nothings to Hugh as he followed, until at the sick-room door again she turned.

"I'm willing he should help us, Mr. Hugh, if mom-a and Basile are. I'll send him word by mammy Joy. Mr. Hugh—what is it he wants to know about the twins?"

Hugh was taken aback. "Why, it's nothing—now. It was as pure nonsense as those verses. Ask him. He can tell if he chooses; I can't." There was a pause. Her eyes gave him lively attention, but one ear was bent to the door.

"I hope Basile is better," he added.

"I'm sure he is; he's so much quieter." She felt a stir of conscience, loitering thus, yet—"Mr. Hugh, do you think diffidence is the same as modesty?"

"Certainly not."

"I'm—" She meditated.... "I'm glad of that.... I never was diffident a moment in my life."

"You never had need to be," said Hugh very quietly.

"They go together, don't they, diffidence and modesty?"

"Not as often as diffidence and conceitedness."

"Why, Mr. Hugh!"

"One thing that makes me so silent is my conceit."

"Oh, you! you're not conceited at all! You're modest! You little know how great you are! You're a wonder!" Her tone was candor itself till maiden craft added, while she tinkled her softest and keenest: "You're a poet!"

With a gay wave, which dismissed him so easily that she resented his going, she turned, stepped warily into the cramped room, and stood transfixed with remorse for her tardiness and appalled and heart-wrung. The foot of the berth was by the door. There old Joy stood silently weeping. At its head knelt her mother in prayer and on it lay her playmate brother peacefully gasping out his life. A flash of retrospection told her he must have had the malady long before he had

confessed it and that something—something earlier than her singing—yes, and later—not twins nor Gilmores nor river—oh, something, what was it?—had kept her—these two long, long days—blind.

"Ah, you! *you!*" she dumbly cried, all at once aflame with the Hayle gift for invective. "You stone image! 'To help you,' indeed! *You!* As if you—as if I—I won't, you born tyrant! 'Help you'—against my own kin! I will not—ever again. We're *quits* for good and all."

XLII

AGAINST KIN

"Ramsey," said the boy, his voice gone to a shred, "you're good—to come back in—in time. Ain't you going—to laugh? It'd be all right. Oh, sis"—the sunken eyes lighted up—"it's come to me, sissy, it's come. I've got religion, Ramsey. I'm going straight to the arms of Jesus. Sissy dear, I wish"—he waited for strength—"I could see the—twins—just a minute or two——"

"Why, you shall, honey. I'll go bring 'em."

"Wish you would—and Hugh Courteney. It's the last——"

"Honey boy, th'ain't room for so many at once. And it ain't your last anything; you' going to get well."

His eyes closed, his brows knit. The tearful mother rose and looked at her. The glance was kind, yet remorse tore the girl's heart again. "Go," said her mother. "Joy, she'll go with you. Bring the three."

"My last"—the boy whispered on—"last chance—to do some'—something worthy of"—he faintly smiled to his mother—"of Gideon's Band."

The door opened and closed and the two were alone. At his sign she knelt, took his clammy hand, and bent close that he might flutter out his hurried words with least effort.

"She sang it finely!" he whispered. "She'd 'a' known we heard it if she'd 'a' thought. Wish you'd sing a verse of it. It's a hymn, you know—or was. The chorus is—yet. Anyhow, it's our song. Oh, I'd like to live on and be a real true Hayle—a Gideon! I hope—hope Hugh Courteney'll—live. Just think! he was on

the *Quakeress* when Uncle Dan—.... He's going to do big things some day. Mother—want to tell you something." She bent closer. He whispered on:

"I wish Hugh Courteney'd live and—marry sis'."

His eyes reclosed and the mother drew back, but he whispered on with lids unlifted: "Sing—a verse or two—or just the chorus, won't you?"

As softly as to an infant fallen asleep she sang, in her Creole accent, with eyes streaming:

"Do you billong to Gideon' ban'?
Yere's my 'eart an' yere's my 'an'."

Outside, meantime, before old Joy had quite left the closed door, another, the second aft of it, opened and the Texas tender stepped out. A fellow servant within shut it, and he started for a near-by stair, but checked up, amazed, to let Ramsey hasten on for the same point.

But Ramsey halted. "How's the bishop?" she asked him.

"Good Lawd!" he gasped, and then tittered at himself. "I ax yo' pahdon, miss, I *neveh* know de Hayles twins 'uz *double* twins, male 'n' female. You ax me——?"

"The bishop; how is he now?"

"Well, Miss Hayles—you is Miss Hayles, ain't you? Yit, my Lawd! miss, ain't I dess now see you down in de cabin a-playin' in de play, an' a hund'ed people sayin': '*tis* her, 'cose it is'?"

"Humph! no, I left as the curtain rose. How's the——?"

"Bishop? Oh, de bishop, he, eh—'bout five-six minute' ago—aw it mowt be ten—whilse I 'uz down dah—de bishop—I'm bleeds to say—breave his las'."

"While I—!" She tossed both arms.

"Ummmm, hmmmm!" droned old Joy; "gone to glory!"

"Yass, de good bishop gone to his good bishop!"

"Oh, who was with him?" cried the girl.

"Why, eh"—the three moved on their way—"de doctoh, he 'uz dah, and de bofe sis' o' charity; yass'm."

"The commodore—wasn't?—Nor the senator—nor——?"

"Oh, yass'm, de commodo', he 'uz dah—faw a spell. He didn' stay till de—finish. He couldn'. He git slightly indispose', hisseff, an' have to go to his own room."

The nurse made a meek show of despair and Ramsey turned upon her. "Now, mammy, this is no time—*now—don't—cry.*"

The old woman braced up superbly. "Yass'm," persisted the waiter, "he dah now, in bed; slightly indispose'."

A rumble close below broke in upon the rhythm of the boat. "What's that?" demanded Ramsey.

"Oh, dat's on'y de aujience a-stompin' de actohs."

The next moment, a step or two down the stair, with the skylight roof still in sight as much as hidden tears would let her see it, she stopped again, to stare anxiously at another trio, coming from the bell to the captain's room.

"Da'—dat's all right," the white-jacket reassured her. "Dat's dess de cap'm, wid Mr. Hugh an' a passengeh."

"Kentucky passenger?"

"Yass'm, 'zac'ly; f'om Ca'fawnia; dat's him."

She sprang back to the deck, and the servant went his way down the stair. Hugh had left his father to proceed on the arm of the Californian and was approaching. He murmured only a preoccupied greeting and would have taken the stair, but old Joy motioned eagerly to the girl. She spoke. He stopped. "Yes, Miss Ramsey?"

"Go on," she said, "we're going that way."

Down on the cabin guards the two paused at the bottom step, the old woman lingering at the top. "Mr. Hugh," said Ramsey, "mom-a's sending me for the twins." She drew a breath. "You know about the commodore?"

"Yes, Miss Ramsey."

"And the—the bishop?"

"I know, Miss Ramsey."

"Mr. Hugh, is your father—taken?"

"Yes, Miss Ramsey."

"Where are you going?"

"To bring the first clerk."

"The boat's command doesn't fall to him, does it?"

"It falls to the first mate."

"I don't see why. Who'll it fall to next? You?"

"No, the first clerk."

Double disappointment. "But you; you'll still look after us passengers and help him, too, won't you?"

"I may."

She knew it! Somehow he was to share with the mate and the clerk the command of the boat!

"Mr. Hugh"—they moved on, with Joy at a discreet distance—"you're in a hurry—so am I; but I ought to tell you, though of course it's just ridiculous for us—for me—to think I've ever helped you or can help you in any of these things or in anything—I—oh—I can't help you, or play help you, any more."

Cruel word in a cruel moment. She felt it so and expected him to show the same feeling. But instead he halted in the lamplight of a passageway to the cabin and confronted her with the widest, most formidable gaze, not her father's, she had ever met. He seemed absolutely majestic. It was very absurd for one so young and—stumpy—to seem majestic, yet there he stood, truly so. Partly for that reason she could not so much as smile; but partly, too, it was because she felt herself so guiltily frivolous, having anything to say to him, or even standing in

his gaze, gazing into it, while his father, her brother, and the bishop lay as they were lying in their several rooms so close overhead.

"You *can* help me," he said in his magisterial voice, so deep yet so soft. "You will. You must. I cannot spare you."

Did any one ever! She tossed a faint defiance: "I can't. No. I won't—can't—ever again, against my own kin."

"There are things stronger than kin."

"I'd like to know what!"

"Truth. Justice. Honor. Right. Public welfare."

She waved them all away as wholly immaterial. "Hoh!"

With a kindness far too much like magnanimity to suit her, Hugh, drawing backward, smiled, and replied, not as pressing the argument but as dropping it:

"One can be against one's kin, yet not against them. Basile knows that. He proved it to-day."

"Basile—oh, Mr. Hugh, Basile wants to see you. Mom-a's sent me as much for you as for the twins. Basile's asked for you. But of course if your father——"

"I'll come, the moment I can be spared. Is your brother really better?"

Ramsey flinched as from pain. She leaned on the shoulder of the nurse—who had come close—and sadly shook her head. But then she straightened smilingly and said: "If you're coming at all——"

She might have finished but for a faint sound that reached her from directly underfoot, a sound of sawing. She faced sharply about, passed into the cabin, and found the Gilmores and the amateurs in the midst of their play.

XLIII

WHICH FROM WHICH

This world of tragic contrasts and cross-purposes, realities and fictions, this world where the many so largely find their inspiration in the performances of the few, was startlingly typified to Ramsey as, out of the upper night and the

darkness of her troubles, she came in upon the show; the audience sitting in their self-imposed twilight of a few dimmed lamps, designedly forgetful of the voyage for which all were there, and the players playing their parts as though the play were the only thing real.

If the prefigurement was at any point vague it was none the less arresting. As the *Votaress*—or Gideon Hayle's *Wild Girl*—might, in full career, strike on hidden sands, so Ramsey struck on the thought—or call it the unformulated perception—that whoever would really live must, by clear choice and force of will, keep himself—herself—adjusted to this world as a whole; as one great multitudinous entity with a stronger, higher claim on each mere part's sympathy, service, sacrifice, than any mere part can ever hold on it.

In a word, Hugh Courteney, baby elephant, born tyrant, egotist—or egoist, whichever it was—self-confessed egotist, stone-faced egoist—with his big-wig airs and big-fiddle voice—was nearer right than she would *ever* submit to confess to him: there *were* things stronger than kin, bigger every way; and other things bigger than those bigger things, and yet others still bigger than those, and so on and on to the world's circumference. Staggering discovery. Yet how infinitely old it looked the moment she clearly saw it: old, obvious, beautiful, and ugly as the man in the moon. It chanced that right there and then she was forced to accept its practical application. A white-jacket said to her in a muffled voice:

"Ef you please—to not to move up to'a'ds de stage whilse de play a-goin' on."

"Oh, but I must," she explained. "I'm on business; business that can't wait any longer. I've already been delayed—" Her last word faltered. Something occurring on the stage held her eyes, while two or three auditors who had turned on her a glance of annoyance changed it to a gaze of astonishment. The cub pilot came to her on tiptoe.

"Oh, Mr. So-and-so," she smilingly whispered as she edged on, "I want my twin brothers. Mom-a wants them, right away, up-stairs."

He nodded at each word and began softly to say that this act would be finished in a minute; but she broke in, still inching along: "I can't wait a minute. I've no right to be this late. Basile wants the twins and he's so sick that—that he can't, he mustn't wait."

"Missy," pleadingly whispered old Joy at their backs, "missy!" But neither she nor the cub pilot could stop the messenger. Nor did she heed the growing number of those seated all about her whose attention she attracted, though now they were

a dozen, a score, glancing, in a suppressed flutter, from her to the stage and from the stage to her and one another.

Yet she stopped. For on the stage, in the play, in the part that was to have been hers, she beheld "Harriet" doing that part so well, and winning such lively approval, that doing it better would have distorted the play. Rouged and coifed to reduce her apparent age as much as Ramsey's was to have been increased, she was at all points so like what Ramsey would have been that the bulk of the audience had mistaken her for Ramsey and had made her more and more a favorite at each brief reappearance.

Fearful moment. Beyond sight only to the outer eye, the bishop, whom she herself had pushed into the grapple of the pestilence, lay dead. Basile was dying. Two of the Courteney's were plague stricken, and the third, for whom she felt a special, inexplicable accountability, was, with Gilmore and Watson, in constant mortal peril from her twin brothers, and the twins therefore from them. Before her eyes, so near she could have tossed a flower to her, was Phyllis, a spectre from an awful past, the destroyer of the *Quakeress*, liable herself, within any hour, should the truth be discovered, to be burned like a witch. There she was, "the slave girl Phyllis," as the runaway advertisement would have had it, a culprit, and a property no way superior, in popular regard, to the blackest African, yet by Hayle blood so near of kin—kin! kin to her!—that with no other aid than a few touches of paint and pencil she was being enthusiastically acclaimed as Ramsey Hayle by an assemblage which has just applauded her, Ramsey, in the blaze of those same footlights. Fearful moment! that aged her as no earlier moment ever had; yes, and for the instant, at least, threw into her face a maturity that heightened the unhappy resemblance.

She stopped because her presence seemed about to precipitate a terrible mischief, and she stood because flight would but leave that mischief to do its worst. Through this glaring show of likeness she seemed to be in the keenest danger of betraying back into slavery on the spot this poor, intrepid "Harriet," identified as the Phyllis supposed these ten years to be under the floods of the Mississippi. At that moment, on the stage, in Ramsey's rôle of a housemaid, the rôle from which Ramsey bitterly remembered she had been excused through Hugh Courteney's urging, "Harriet" chanced to be acting a ludicrous dismay before a transient dilemma in which, as in Ramsey's, staying threatened disaster yet good faith said stay—Ramsey's own present actual case except that Harriet's was comic. A hundred beholders laughed, and then turning and peering at the dim, central figure of Ramsey suddenly redoubled the laugh and presently redoubled it again.

Yet it yielded a certain relief. While there is mirth there is hope. Even now the player of the part was recognized only as Mrs. Gilmore's maid. Her resemblance to Ramsey was passing for pure accident. That the whole thing was visibly offensive to Hayle's twins made it all the more amusing, and Ramsey's pause in the aisle seemed the most natural thing she could do on finding herself in two places at the same time. So for a moment, in which she rejoiced that at any rate the twins had never seen Phyllis as Phyllis. But then the demonstration broke short off. At different points three men stood up at once. In the front row appeared Julian. A few seats behind him loomed the exhorter. The third rose just at Ramsey's elbow, offering her his seat, yet counting it but courtesy still to keep his attention mainly on the play. It was the first clerk, he who had once been clerk on the *Quakeress*, where he had known Phyllis as Hugh's nurse, and whose scrutiny "Harriet" had until now somehow escaped. Whether in thanking him Ramsey accepted or declined she hardly knew, for just then the gaze he still bent on "Harriet" showed a gleam of recognition. Ramsey's heart rose into her throat. She murmured a hurried word, which she had to go over a second time before it took effect on him:

"Mr. Hugh's looking for you, out forward. The commodore and the captain are both sick."

As the announcement drew his quick glance she almost waved him to go. Yet what was done was done; with Phyllis recognized, it might be far better for him to remain, and she turned her dismissing gesture into one of detention.

"I'm Miss Hayle," she whispered, while both looked again toward Julian and "Harriet." "That's my old mammy back yonder. I want my twin brothers. Mom-a wants them, up in the texas, as quick as—never mind, here they come."

XLIV

FORBEARANCE

Ramsey was mistaken—her brothers were staying. The play's first act was done, there was great clapping and thumping and the curtain was falling—or closing, in two parts from opposite sides, eased over sticking-points by nimble efforts behind it; but though Julian—who evidently had been getting through the general's courtesy the indulgence denied him at the bar—had moved a step or so from his chair, Lucian remained seated. Next them sat the general and the senator, and the four were debating together. Oddly enough, the twins were in disaccord, and while Lucian had the senator's approval the general's went to his brother. The applause died out prematurely and the whole company gave its

attention to the debate, Ramsey sinking into the clerk's seat and laughing merrily—since it was laugh or perish.

"No, gentlemen," she heard Julian say, "this is the last-st st-straw. A nigger wench made up to counterfeit a member of our family, and the part given her which that member of our family was to have played! ... Overlook—oh, good God, sir, we've done nothing but overlook, every hour of day and night since we started."

From the other three came responses too quiet to be understood. Ramsey half rose toward the clerk and sank again, begging him to carry her errand on to the brothers, and he had softly moved forward as far as to the exhorter when that person, still on his feet, called to Julian:

"Yass! an' thah ah cause to believe said niggeh——"

Two small interruptions came at once, provoking a general laugh: Julian, staring at him in heavy abstraction, said dreamily, "Ho—ho—hold your tongue," while the clerk, at "John the Baptist's" side, gently grasped between the shoulders a fold of his coat, mildly suggested, "Have a seat," and put him so suddenly off his balance that he plumped heavily into his chair—quite enough to rouse the mirth of a company already a trifle nervous. And now Julian was heard again:

"No, Luce, you can stay, I'll go alone—or with—thank you, general! Oh, senator, we are not blind, sir, though every time we overlook some insult they think we are. Good Lord! do you reckon we don't see that all this laugh is at us, got up at our expense, and has been at us since the first turn of this boat's wheels at Canal Street? We saw—and overlooked—that vile attempt to take our two ladies up the river without us, starting the instant they got aboard and leaving us at the water's edge a laughing-stock for passengers, crew, and pantry boys!"

Both senator and general coaxed him to sit down, but the most he would concede was to drop his voice as he continued: "You know, gentlemen, and they know, that any true man would as soon be slapped in the face and spit upon as to be laughed at.... No, I—" His words became indistinguishable.

Ramsey was in anguish. She would have glided forward with her tidings and summons but for the clerk blocking the path half-way. A stir of annoyance ran through the gathering, here grave, there facetious, but it stopped short as a new figure moved quietly past Ramsey and stood beside the clerk. It was Hugh, and the general interest revived. He exchanged a word or two with the clerk, who turned and left the cabin while Hugh stayed with the exhorter.

Julian, without seeing the newcomer, once more broke forth, this time plainly intending to make every one his listener: "No, we don't interrupt and we shall not."

"Oh, no," daringly put in an ironical hearer, "Hayle's twins, they never interrupt an innocent pleasure!"

"How air it innercent?" called John the Baptist, at Hugh's side, rising again and gesticulating. "No theayter play kin be innercent an' much less this-yeh one, by reason 'at they ah cause to believe that-ah servant-gal——"

He was pulled down again with even less ceremony than before, though by friendlier hands, hands of the two lenders of the sword-canes, who fell to counselling him in crafty undertones. But Julian was talking dead ahead, ignoring all distractions and not even yet discovering Hugh:

"We didn't more than whisper, general, till the curtain fell. Now, did we? When it rises again—what, sir?... My dear senator! it's our fellow passengers who don't see—that their kind intentions are being made part of a put-up game to torment us to leave the boat.... Oh, no, they—why, sir, the dastards set it a-going the moment they'd persuaded our ladies to stay and risk their priceless lives nursing those damned Dutch on the lower deck."

The senator ached to be the steamer's length removed but saw no way of dignified escape. Several listeners, remembering Ramsey's tactics and their success, gayly laughed, but two or three gasped an audible dismay; two or three men said, "Sh-sh-sh!" two or three said, "Ladies present," "Remember the ladies," and some one droned out in a mock voice: "The stage waits."

And plainly it did so; waited on the audience, with Mrs. Gilmore peeping through the curtain, whose rise would reveal "Harriet" alone; a terrible risk if the exhorter should get in the bolt he was trying to launch.

"Oh, where is Mr. Gilmore?" thought Ramsey, and, "Why don't they call again for 'Gideon's Band'? Yet who would sing it?" Her distressed lips were silently asking many such questions when she sprang up and halted the Californian, who had come in at her back on his way to Hugh.

"How's the captain?" she whispered in smiling agitation.

With low affirmative bows, so enraptured to be speaking with her as to be all but speechless, he murmured: "Get'—getting on—so far." He waved an oddly delicate hand—backward from the wrist, girlishly—"He's all—hunkadory."

"And Basile?" Anxious as she was, she yet saw while she spoke—and he saw—that Julian had at length sighted Hugh and that at least three-fourths of the audience, the whole male portion, was eying that pair with the alertness of man's primitive interest in man-to-man encounter. At her mention of the sick boy the gold hunter ceased to nod. His countenance fell.

"Oh," she whispered, "won't *you* go and tell them, all three, Mr. Courteney and both twins, how bad off he is, and that he sent me, and mom-a says come quick?"

He went. Forgetting to sit down, she watched him go and let Gilmore pass her as Hugh had done. Now, what was his errand? The actor and the Californian reached Hugh together. The three drew a step back from the exhorter and his advisers and conferred in the aisle while Julian's tirade went straight on as completely ignored by them as though it were the most normal sound of the boat's machinery. The sight so amused the audience that laughter came again and then clapping and pounding, in a succession of outbreaks, each coming so close after one of Julian's utterances that his dizzy head took it for approval, though to every one else, and especially to Ramsey, the meaning was weariness of him and impatience of Gilmore's delay.

He spoke with his face to his associates but with his voice addressed to those other three in the aisle: "We were invited on this boat in pure cowardly malice." (Applause.) "To have our weapons stolen from us by servants and locked up by underlings and to have the boat's ordinary refreshments forbidden us." (Laughter and applause.) "To be thrust into contact with a deadly pestilence and to be insulted or assaulted by hired blackguards on one or another of every deck from fore-castle gangway to pilot-house." (Long and loud applause.) "And all this, sirs, we have overlooked; but to be made a public laughing-stock we will not endure if I have to pull every Courteney's nose to stop it!" (Loud laughter and prolonged applause.) Amid the din Ramsey recognized the voice of old Joy moaning with grief and consternation in the gloom behind her, and caught the words of the cub pilot, said for his soul's relief, not dreaming she would hear: "If you two ornery cusses wa'n't Gid Hayle's boys we'd clap you in irons quicker'n you could lick out your tongue."

But amid the same din what, she laughingly, painfully wondered, were the three standers in the aisle so privately, calmly saying together—with the actor as chief speaker, Hugh grim, and the Californian mostly a nodding listener? Was

Hugh—whose big eyes and stone visage so drolly fitted each other yet seemed so sadly unfitted to this big emergency—was he insisting that it would be idle for him to go to Basile without the twins, as was only too true? Or that John the Baptist and his two disciples must first be disposed of? Or was it his word that the most pressing need was for the actor, long trained to perceive just what would capture an audience in such a stress, to step between footlights and curtain, tell the people that honest facts had never been more crazily twisted into falsehood and slander, and explain the true situation in a brief, apt speech, dignified and amusing? Certainly something had to be done and done this instant. But not that, ah, no! Or if that, not done by him, the actor. She could never imagine such a manœuvre attempted on a boat of her father's, whose sole way of mastery was by pure lordship and main force. Yet here, with these Courteney's, who, he had always said, outmastered him by their clever graciousness, and dealing here not with subordinates but with passengers—a living nerve of the river's whole public—talk treatment might be the cleverest, wisest kind to give, if only Hugh—oh, if only Hugh!—could give it. But of course he could not, with that face, that visage, so much *too* lordly and forceful—and hard—and glum—for a clever task.

Julian ceased. His high head went a shade higher; the Californian was advancing straight upon him. With a pang Ramsey remembered that she had failed to charge the gold hunter not to let the twins know that their brother's summons included Hugh, lest that should keep them away. But surely he would see that necessity; and in fact he did. Hugh stood still, looking in the opposite, her, Ramsey's, direction, where the actor was coming toward her. The old nurse had stolen to her side. The player went by without a glance at her. It was so much like asking why she stood there doing nothing that she granted the old woman's whispered prayer and sat down. Behind her he spoke busily for a second to the cub pilot and passed out by a side exit. The pilot's cub came by, had a word or two with the exhorter, and stayed there as if on guard.

Now, for all these small things to happen in the one moment and to happen in the midst of a waiting audience made its show of suspense more vivid than ever; excitement was in all eyes; every chin was lifted. The Californian seemed to tell Julian a startling thing or two. The general rose, the senator helped Lucian to his feet. The four came close about the news bearer and he told more. Ramsey could almost feel his mention of the bishop and then of Basile. Lucian asked a question or two and the five came down the aisle, one pair leading, the other following, and Julian between, alone, overpeering all sitters, with a splendid air of being commander and in the saddle.

APPLAUSE

Diffidence! Hugh had spoken of diffidence—in himself—in the twins. Could Julian really be hiding such a thing behind such a mask? Ramsey wondered.

Every eye was on him and again the floor thundered, shaming her, flattering him. As he came on, the exhorter began to put out an arm, to speak and to rise, but the cub pilot blandly intervened and Julian ignored him. For there both brothers came face to face with the first mate. He had entered where Gilmore went out, and now passed them with a stare like their own, fire for fire, and at close quarters began to accost the exhorter and his two adherents.

They rose, and with evident change of meaning thunder came again, though not for them. The departing twins and their triple escort; the exhorter and the four about him; Ramsey, Joy, and the returned Gilmore, who just then touched her shoulder and whispered something to which she replied with quick nods of consent—all these groups lifted their gaze, with the whole company's, to the curtained stage.

Diffidence! oh, where *was* diffidence? Hugh had stepped in behind the footlights and was standing and looking out across them as foursquare and unsmiling as a gravestone.

Their light was on his brow, whose frown smote her with foreboding. Half folded he held a slip of paper as if about to give official notice of some grave matter, and his aggressive eyes, that seemed to her to look a greater distance away from a greater distance within than ever before, were fixed on one man. Absolute silence fell. And thereupon, to the open-mouthed amazement of the audience, with his stare yet on that one face, and in a voice that seemed octaves below hers, he began to sing straight at the exhorter:

"Do you belong to Gideon's ban'?"

A shout of laughter, a rain of clappings, a thunder of canes and feet. Sitters bumped up and down. They were safe home again in nonsense and were glad. Ramsey's laugh was like a dancer's bells though under cover of the dusk she let the tears roll down. Old Joy moaned and shook her head. John the Baptist had begun to retort but withered before a ferocious muffled threat from the mate while following him into the aisle. "Bucked and gagged," was the mate's odd phrase, at which a dozen or so nearest him laughed again, a bit nervously. They looked back to see if the twins had heard it, and were just in time to catch from Julian and the general a last glare of scorn as the group of five left the cabin.

Then again came silence, except behind the footlights, where the sphinx-like singer bore straight on through the refrain and came to the new lines. Sing them out, sphinx; the more senseless the better.

"Nex' come de 'coon and de cockatoo,
Nex' come de 'coon and de cockatoo,
Nex' come de 'coon and de cockatoo,
De hawg and de whoopeddoodendoo.
Do you belong——?"

The inquiry was drowned in applause, which swelled as the mate and the exhorter went out with the latter's two backers—more eagle-eyed and stallion-eyed than ever—and with Watson's cub at the rear. A number stretched up for a glimpse of Ramsey but she too—and the actor—and Joy—were gone. There was another waiting hush, and the droll singer, so droll because so granite solemn, resumed:

"Den turkle-dove an' blue-bird blue,
Den turkle-dove an' blue-bird blue,
Den turkle-dove an' blue-bird blue,
De merry-go-roun' and de hullabaloo.
Do you belong——?"

Applause! Was that the end? Not if the applauders could help it! The day was coming when a boiler-deck and pilot-house tradition, heard by many with hearty enjoyment, by many with silent disdain, would be this: that aboard the old *Votares* on her first up trip—late spring of '52—cholera on every deck—mutiny hotly smouldering—the unreason of fear and of wrath were beaten in fair fight by the unreason of mirth, and men's, women's, children's lives—no telling how many—were saved, through the cleverness of some play-actors and first the youngest of all the Hayles and then the youngest of all the Courteney's singing a nonsense song! Sing it! sing on!

He sang on:

"Den de grizzly-b'ah and den de mole,
De grizzly-b'ah and den de mole,
De grizzly-b'ah and den de mole,
De terrapintime and de wrigglemarole.
Do you belong——?"

The plaudits were at their height and Hugh still on the interrogative line when there came from behind the curtain a voice skilfully thrown to reach only him:

"Give them one verse more and we'll be ready!"

He gave it:

"Las' de cattlemaran and de curlicue,
De cattlemaran and de curlicue,
De cattlemaran and de curlicue,
De daddy-long-legs and de buggaboo.
Do you belong——?"

He stepped quickly from the "stage." The curtains drew apart. The scene revealed was a drawing-room. In it stood alone, as if playfully listening for something, the housemaid; not "Harriet" but Ramsey. (Laughter and applause.)

XLVI

AFTER THE PLAY

Neither Hugh nor Ramsey slept a moment that night. And no more did the Gilmores or "Harriet" or John the Baptist or even the senator or the Californian. The play, second act, was cut without mercy and rushed to a close to let its hero and heroine off at Napoleon, which Ned called a "future city" but which, some years later, became a former city, by melting into thin air, or thick water, and leaving not so much behind as a candle-end or a broken bottle.

It was not far above there that these unsleeping passengers began to remark a fresh rise in the river's flood, which her "family" and crew had noticed much earlier by a difference in the nature and quantity of its driftwood. Near the mouth of White River, about an hour's run above Napoleon, a great floating tree stump, with all its roots, was caught on the buckets of the "labboard" wheel—"like a cur on a cow's horn," said Gilmore—and carried clear over it with a sudden hubbub in the paddle-box, tenfold what ten curs could have made, bringing to his feet every passenger not abed, and scaring awake every sleeping one. Neither Ramsey nor Hugh ever forgot it, for it evoked the last stir in the supine form of Basile, and a faint spasm in his cold grasp on Hugh's fingers. Under his freer hand, on his all but motionless breast, lay his mother's crucifix. Shortly before, while waiting for Hugh's tardy coming, he had held a hand of his sister, whose other held her mother's. On the edge of the berth, at his feet, sat Lucian, very pale, with

Julian standing by him. Both betrayed deep feeling yet kept a brave look that was good to see even with eyes as prejudiced as Hugh's. Only Basile himself was without tears.

How fashions change! There are styles even in death-bed scenes. This one was of the old fashion, bearing a strong tinge of fatalism; no hopeful make-believe to the dying that death was other than death; no covert, diligent, desperate economies of the vital spark; but a frank, helpless reception of the dread angel as a royal guest, and a pious, inert consent to let the dying die. Before either Hugh or Ramsey could come from the cabin the twins had reached the bedside and had been received with a final lighting up of the boy's spent powers, which his mother made no effort to restrain. In a feeble, altered voice, without heat, scorn, or petulance, with a mind stripped of all its puerilities and full of fraternal care and faithfulness, and with a magisterial dignity far beyond his years, he slowly poured out a measured stream of arraignment and appeal which their hardened hearts were still too young to withstand unmoved.

His conversion, he told them, had come to him with a great light, "on the road to Damascus," and by that light he saw, as he implored them to see, the hideous deformity of the life he and they and the young fellows of their usual companionship had been living. Even Ramsey knew, he continued as she and their old nurse silently reappeared, that by the plainest laws of the land, they were not too good for the penitentiary. An overweening pride in their lawlessness did not justify or excuse it; the devils had that, in hell. They, the twins, were not Christian gentlemen. They were *not gentlemen at all*. They'd shoot a man down in his tracks for saying so, or for calling them liars, yet they'd turn the truth wrong side out every day in the year. These last two days they'd done it right along. At this moment they had a fixed design to kill Hugh Courteney on the first good chance and didn't care a continental whether they did it in face-to-face murder or from behind a bush. Lying at death's door, he said, and in jealousy for the same Hayle name they professed to be so jealous for, he demanded their oath to abandon that design; to stop it, drop it, "right here and now," and never to seek the life of any Courteney but in clear defence of some other life. His own seemed almost to fade out at that point, yet presently:

"Hold up your right hands," he gasped, trying to raise his. The mother lifted it for him while giving the twins a tearful flash of command. Unconsciously Ramsey put up hers as Lucian's left suddenly caught Julian's right and he held up both it and his own.

But neither the boy nor Ramsey nor the old nurse felt assured, and all three were glad when the mother asked:

"You swear?"

Julian stood mute but, "With that provision," said Lucian, "we swear."

"So help you God?" insisted the mother, and while she spoke and the twins bowed, the narrow door let some one in.

"Is that Hugh Courteney?" asked the boy. "You're just in time, Hugh. The feud's off."

"Oh, there's no feud, Basile," tenderly murmured Hugh.

"No, it's off, thank God. I got it off. The twins have just sworn it off. Shake hands, boys. Come, you first, Jule."

But Lucian led, with a certain alacrity, Julian following with less.

"Now take my hand, Hugh." The voice was failing but once more it rallied. "Give it to him, sis'.... Thank you.... Keep it, Hugh Courteney. I love a brave man's hand. We heard you singing, Hugh. My! but you've got grit. I wish you belonged to Gideon's band yourself. You're braver than most men, though most men'll always think they're braver than you."

Hugh could only dry the damp from the cold brow. He grew fiercely ashamed not so much of his tears, which those around him were too tearful to observe, as of the boy's praises, before which he could only stand dumb.

"He's brave, sis'," Basile went on, "and he's clean, and he's square, mother, boys. You were on the *Quakeress* when she burned, wa'n't you? Ah, me!—wish I'd known you then. I'd be a different man now. I don't believe I'd be dying. My heavenly Father wouldn't 'a' had to call me in out of the storm."



"My heavenly Father wouldn't 'a' had to call me in out of the storm"

His mother sank to her knees against the berth's side, covered her face, and shook with grief. The daughter sank too, weepingly caressing her, yet was still able so to divide her thought as yearningly to wish Hugh, for his own sake, well away, as she saw his hand softly endeavor to draw free from Basile's. But it was on that instant that the great tree root came thundering up through the wheel-house and the dying clasp tightened. The shock of surprise revived him. "Hugh—do something for me?... Thank you. Bishop's gone, you know. Read my burial service. I don't want the—play-actor—though he's fine; nor the priest, though he's fine, too. Mom-a'd be a saint in any—persuasion, and pop and us boys are Methodists, if anything, and I—I didn't get religion in Latin and I don't want to be buried in it." He waited. Hugh was silent.

The Creole mother, still kneeling, drew closer. "Yass," she said, "he shall read that."

But plainly there was one thing more though the tired eyelids sank. "Let down your ear," murmured the lips.

Hugh knelt, bent, waited. The distressed twins watched them. The hold on his hand relaxed. He lifted and looked.

"What do he say?" tearfully asked old Joy, pressing in.

"Nothing," said Hugh; and then to the twins: "He's gone."

Out in the benign starlight and caressing breeze Hugh hastened to his father's door.

XLVII

INSOMNIA

Down in the cabin, in one of its best staterooms, where all were choice, the senator wooed slumber.

In vain. Sounds were no obstacle. They abounded but they were normal. Except—"Peck-peck-peck" and so on, which the steady pulse of normal sounds practically obliterated. The peck-pecking was not for him.

An unwelcome odor may keep one awake, but the senator's berth was fragrant of fresh mattresses and new linen, the wash-stand of jasmine soap, and the room at large of its immaculate zinc-white walls and doors and their gilt trimmings. Nor could the cause be his supper of beefsteak and onions, black coffee, hot rolls, and bananas, for every one about him had had those, and every one about him was sound asleep. It could not be for lack of the bath; he had already slept well without it too many nights hand-running. Nor could it be a want of special nightclothes; he had won his election over a nightshirt aristocrat, as being not too pampered to sleep, like the sons of toil, in the shirt he had worn all day and would wear again to-morrow. Nor yet was it nicotine or alcohol, the putting of which into him was like feeding cottonwood to Hayle's old *Huntress*. Such, at least, was his private conviction. Oh, he knew the cause! He believed he could drop into sleep as this boat's sounding-lead could drop to the river's bottom, if for one minute he could get his mind off that singularly old, contemptibly young poker-face.

Recalling that face and the grandfather's as he had confronted them together earlier in the journey, they were a double reminder of the Franklinian maxim—he kept a store of such things for stump use—that an old young man makes a young old man. But maxims didn't bring sleep; he turned the pillow and damned the maxim and the men, with Benjamin Franklin to boot.

It tossed him from his right side to his left, to think of his own part in this two days' episode, and of the flocks of passengers stepping ashore at various landings who, as sure as—hmm!—would at every step drop that story into the public ear as corn is dropped into the furrow. It tossed him back again, to think how his adversaries in the political game, where cunning was always trumps, would light down on that story like crows behind the plough. He mixed his metaphors by habit; the people loved them mixed. Another maxim, his own invention, was, Take care of your character and your reputation will take care of itself. The —— it will! You've got to take *at least* as much care of reputation. But here both were concerned. He could not, for the sake either of his character *or* his reputation, let himself be made a fool of by any one, however small, anywhere. He had got to recover a personal importance solemnly pilfered from him by a half-grown Shanghai still in his pin-feathers. Against Hayle's girl he was excusably helpless, but him he had got to get the upper hand of and get it quick. Memphis in the morning! More passengers to be dropped there and the whole town's attention to be attracted by the burial of the bishop. Good Lord! That "verbatim report for the newspapers"! And of all papers the Memphis papers! *Avalanche—Appeal*—it was all one, he happening to be at the moment equally at odds with both. It, the "report," would not take a defensive attitude. Poker-face was too sharp for that. It would take the offensive from the start and it would take the start. Gentlemen of the jury, in a war of words there's just one word better than the last, and that's the first! And moreover! the brief "report's" main theme would not be he, the senator, nor his vanished committee of seven. No, sir-ee, it would be the cholera, and he would be dished up in a purely casual way; as the French say "on, pass on."

He rubbed his head and sat up. There was a chance that he might find Hugh awake and on duty. If so his cast-iron lordship might yet be browbeaten, or wheedled, into inaction. Or if sleeping he might yet be circumvented. Was he worth circumventing? How absurdly troubles magnify on a waking pillow. Despise your enemy and sleep! Well—hardly. Let *him* do that, especially when *you can't*.

He threw off the light cover, rose, and dressed. He began to see a way to win. He would countermine. He would raise a counter-issue—"Harriet." Loitering by the twins' door he listened and rightly judged they were asleep, Lucian being so feeble and Julian so full. The office was open but empty. Its clock read two. The

card-tables were vacant. The bar was closed. Out on the dim boiler deck he found only the two who had fleeced Basile. They sat at the very front, elbow to elbow, with their feet up on the rail. Their quiet talk ceased as he came near and stood looking out over the gliding bow and the waters beyond, which were out of their banks and stretched everywhere off into the night, a veritable deluge.

"A good forty miles wide, no doubt," he remarked to the pair, and they assured him he was right.

"What piece of river is this?" he inquired, and was told that they were in the long, winding, desolate sixty-mile stretch between White River and Horseshoe Bend; that they had just put Islands Sixty-two and Sixty-three astern and would be more than two hours yet in reaching Helena.

"Arkansas your State?" he asked. "Helena your town?"

"No," they said, they were of the "hoop-pole State," meaning Indiana. He knew better but changed the subject. "The Ohio," he remarked, "must be up on her hind legs."

"Yes, everything was up: the Saint Francis, the Tennessee, Cumberland, Illinois, Wabash, Kentucky, Miami, Scioto—" The pair did not talk like men narrowly of the hoop-pole commonwealth. Modestly speaking on, they seemed to know the whole great valley quite by heart.

So the senator, to show how quite by heart he knew this whole little world, said affably: "The pan-fish ain't biting so very lively this trip."

The reply was as flawless for candor as though they had the same hope to use him which he had to use them. Said one:

"No, we ain't paying expenses."

And his mate: "We've caught a few little flappers."

"Captain's son make it hard to do business?"

"Oh, he—we've all got our prejudices, you know."

"Yes, you ought to have some against him by now."

"Maybe so. You've got yourn, senator, we've noticed."

"I? No! I admire him. The way he runs this cabin——"

"Makes her keep up with the boat," they admitted.

"I never saw his like," laughed the statesman.

"Wouldn't want to, would you?"

"N-no, he makes big mistakes. But—he's got a future!"

"So mind his heels," said one of the pair. They were enjoying their politician. He saw that by their gravity. In their world men looked gravest when amused, and saved their smiles for emergencies. While he offered, and they accepted, cigars he spoke absently:

"The young gentleman's making a mistake right now that he ought to be saved from."

"Another?" they dryly asked as they used his cigar for a light. So far had he fallen in the general esteem.

He chose not to hear. "I wish," he insisted, "we could save him from it."

"Why, yes!—wish you could. But 'we' ain't us. We sporting men, we're mighty bashful, you know."

"Naturally," admitted the senator.

"Yes, glass, with care. But there's another mistake maker we wish you wished you could save. We ev'm might help."

"Aha!" thought the senator. He was right, after all. He had felt confident that these men, treated by Hugh as they had been, would privately "have it in for him"; that they would be glad of any safe chance to "get away with him"—not so utterly as to imperil their necks, yet not too lightly for their spiritual comfort the rest of their days—and that they saw their chance just where he saw his.

"Ye-es?" He mused. They let him muse. The exhorter, he reflected, having picked up the trail and opened the cry—trail which the headlong twins had so witlessly overrun—these older dogs were on it hot; trail of the Gilmores and "Harriet." Somewhere on that trail the captain's son would show up, and when the game should be treed they would be able, in the general mix-up, to "go and see Hugh" and "cook his goose."

The musing ceased. "You mean the actor?"

The pair warmed up. "Yes, sir-ee, him. *That* fellow's making a mistake we might help you to handle. God! sir, he's a nigger-stealer. His wife has got a stolen nigger wench with her now. Had her these ten years. Save *him*. Save *them*."

"Our friend John the Baptist suggests that," began the senator.

"Adzac'ly!" was the facetious affirmation. "Smelt 'em out at the show. That's how come the mate has locked him up."

The senator stiffened. "Oh, you must be mistaken!"

"Want to bet? Pull out. Go you a thousand they've jugged him and them two Arkansas killers. Yes, sir, to stay jugged till they leave us, at Helena."

"Who!—have done that?"

"Same as you're thinking; they; them; him; that believes he's bossing the boat—which maybe he is."

"Where is he?"

"Up on the roof, with a select few, both sexes."

"Gentlemen, he must let them go at once!"

"Senator, not with money, but just on your word, you sort o' bail 'em out. If they cut up, nobody'll blame you."

"I'll do it! We don't want an owner of the finest boat on Southern waters to have any part in *that sort* of mistake, whatever his youth."

"Youth!" (Profanity.) "That boy's forty year' old. Oh, he's all right; if he thinks he'd ought to protect every galoot on his boat, why, maybe he'd ought. What you know is that that white nigger's *got* to be took away from them two barnstormers instanter and restored back to her own Hayle folks. That's a mistake you ain't never got to ask nobody's leaves to save nobody from."

"You don't mean to-night?" Capital disguise for eagerness—the cigar. The senator puffed. The pair puffed.

"We mean now; when the right men can be woke up and the others—and the ladies—sleep on. Now, straightaway, while the shouter's still aboard—and the two shooters. If we wa'n't sporting men we'd like to sit into that game ourselves. Maybe we can if it's kept—dignified."

"Even if there's resistance?"

"Who'll resist? The boat's people? Only thing they dassen't resist. Couldn't never run another trip on this river. Resist! Couldn't ever resist, any time; but now? Look at their fix. Sweet time to set everybody a-kicking like steers. Bishop dead, chief Dutch woman ditto, that nice young Hayle boy that they took away from us when he wanted to stay like a man, ditto——"

"Oh, not dead? My God! I hadn't heard that."

"No, it ain't been properly advertised. But Hamlet knows it—I mean your actor. The way him and his wife—or lady—are buzzing around, you'd think they was the undertakers. Maybe they are. *He* won't resist. He knows how well resistance would suit you—oh, not yourself, no more'n us, but—the crowd; men like them three that's locked up and must be turned loose first thing. He knows if he lifts a finger, or so much as gives anybody any of his lip—and maybe anyhow—he'll be took ashore and lost in the woods, first time we stop to bury some more Dutch; say daybreak."

"Ah, but we mustn't let that happen, either."

"Oh, no! we mustn't let that happen, either."

"Well"—the senator put on a bustling frown—"I'll see Hugh. I wish—I wonder if that Californian has——"

"Put up his shutters? No, he's on the roof. Why?"

"He might help wake up the right men, as you say."

One of the pair, without rising, tapped the senator caressingly. "You—let—California—sweat. Trust in Providence. The right men'll get woke up somehow, beginning with the general. That right?... All gay, but don't you take no California in yourn to-night."

"No? Very well. But—I wonder if you gentlemen really recognize the seriousness of this affair."

"Look a-here, senator, you go up-stairs and save Mr. Innocence from running his boat into this mistake." The sleek pair rose, evidently to begin their part.

The senator rummaged his mind for a word that would give him creditable exit but had to hurry off without it. Turning, the two exchanged a calm gaze and one luxurious puff, which meant that the "old sucker's" use of them would suit them exactly. They rummaged for no words; had no more need for words than two leopards.

Before falling to work they glanced out over the flood. This was Horseshoe Cut-off. Kangaroo Point was just astern in the west. Yonder ahead, under the old moon, came Friar's Point. In these hundred miles between Napoleon and Helena they were meeting one by one the Saturday evening boats out of Saint Louis. Now one came round the upper bend, four days from Cincinnati. They knew her; the Courteney's fine old *Marchioness*. The young *Votaress* swept by her saluting and saluted like the belle of a ball, a flying vision of luxury, innocence, and joy.