

JOHN MARCH

SOUTHERNER

BY GEORGE W. CABLE

PART 3

LVI.

CONCERNING SECOND LOVE

When the train stopped at a station they talked of the book in her hand, and by the time it started on they were reading poems from the volume to each other. The roar of the wheels did not drown her low, searching tones; by bending close John could hear quite comfortably. Between readings they discussed those truths of the heart on which the poems touched. Later, though they still read aloud, they often looked on the page together.

In the middle of one poem they turned the book face downward to consider a question. Did Miss Garnet believe—Mr. March offered to admit that among the small elect who are really capable of a divine passion there may be some with whom a second love is a genuine and beautiful possibility—yet it passed his comprehension—he had never seen two dawns in one day—but did Miss Garnet believe such a second love could ever have the depth and fervor of the first?

Yes, she replied with slow care, she did—in a man's case at least. To every deep soul she did believe it was appointed to love once—yes—with a greater joy and pain than ever before or after, but she hardly thought this was first love. It was almost sure to be first love in a woman, for a woman, she said, can't afford to let herself love until she knows she is loved, and so her first love—when it really is love, and not a mere consent to be loved——

"Which is frequently all it is," said John.

"Yes. But when it is a real love—it's fearfully sure and strong *because* it has to be slow. I believe when such a love as that leaves a woman's heart, it is likely to leave it hope-less-ly strand-ed."

"And you think it's different with a man?"

"Why, I hope it's sometimes different with a woman; but I believe, Mr. March, that with a man the chances are better. A man who simply must love, and love with his whole soul——"

"Then you believe there are such?"

"Yes, there must be, or God wouldn't create some of the women he makes."

"True!" said John, very gallantly.

"But don't you think, Mr. March, a man of that sort is apt to love prematurely and very faultily? His best fruit doesn't fall first. Haven't you observed that a man's first love is just what a woman finds it hardest to take in earnest?"

"Yes, I have observed that! And still—are you too cynical to believe that there are men to whom first love is everything and second love impossible?"

"No," said Barbara, with true resentment, "I'm not too cynical. But——" she looked her prettiest——"still I don't believe it."

John turned on her a hard glance which instantly softened. It is a singular fact that the length and droop of a girl's eyelashes have great weight in an argument.

"And yet," she resumed, but paused for John to wave away the train-boy with his books.

"And yet what?" asked March, ever so kindly.

"And yet, that first love is everything, is what every woman would like every man to believe, until he learns better." Her steadfast gaze and slow smile made John laugh. He was about to give a railing answer when the brakeman announced twenty minutes for dinner.

"What! It can't——" he looked at his watch. "Why, would you have imagined?"

O yes; her only surprise—a mild one—was that he didn't know it.

At table she sat three seats away, with her Northern friends between; and when they were again roaring over streams, and through hills and valleys, and the commercial travelers, whose number had increased to four, were discussing aërial navigation, and March cut short his after-dinner smoke and came back to resume his conversation, he found Miss Garnet talking to the Fairs, and not to be

moved by the fact—which he felt it the merest courtesy to state—that the best views were on the other side of the car.

Thereupon he went to the car's far end and wrote a short letter to his mother, who had exacted the pledge of one a day, which she did not promise to answer.

In this he had some delay. A woman with a disabled mouth, cautiously wiping crumbs off it with a paper napkin, asked him the time of day. She explained that she had loaned her watch—gold—patent lever—to her husband, who was a printer. She said the chain of the watch was made of her mother's hair. She also stated that her husband was an atheist, and had a most singular mole on his back, and that she had been called by telegraph to the care of an aunt taken down with measles and whose husband was a steamboat pilot, and an excellent self-taught banjoist; that she, herself, had in childhood been subject to membranous croup, which had been cured with pulsatilla, which the doctor had been told to prescribe, by his grandmother, in a dream; also that her father, deceased, was a man of the highest refinement, who had invented a stump-extractor; that her sisters were passionately fond of her; that she never spoke to strangers when traveling, but, somehow, he, March, did not seem like a stranger at all; and that she had brought her dinner with her in a pasteboard shirt-box rather than trust railroad cooking, being a dyspeptic. She submitted the empty box in evidence, got him to step to the platform and throw it away, and on his return informed him that it was dyspepsia had disabled her mouth, and not overwork, as she and her sisters had once supposed.

Still March did finish his letter. Then he went and smoked another cigar. And then he came again and found the four traveling men playing whist, Mr. and Mrs. Fair dozing, and Miss Garnet looking out of a window on the other side in a section at the far end of the car, the only one not otherwise occupied.

"I'm in your seat," she said.

"O don't refuse to share it with me; you take away all its value."

She gradually remarked that she was not the sort of person wilfully to damage the value of a seat in a railroad car, and they shared it.

For a time they talked at random. He got out a map and time-table and, while he held one side and she the other, showed where they had had to lie five hours at a junction the night before. But when these were folded again there came a silent interval, and then John sank lower in his place, dropped his tone, and asked,

"Do you remember what we were speaking of before dinner?"

Barbara dreamily said yes, and they began where they had left off.

Three hours later, on the contrary, they left off where they had begun.

LVII.

GO ON, SAYS BARBARA

Miss Garnet said she ought to rejoin her friends, and John started with her.

On their way the dyspeptic stopped them affectionately to offer Barbara a banana, and ask if she and the gentleman were not cousins. Miss Garnet said no, and John enjoyed that way she had of smiling sweetly with her eyes alone. But she smiled just as prettily with her lips also when the woman asked him if he was perfectly sure he hadn't relations in Arkansas named Pumpkinseed—he had such a strong Pumpkinseed look. The questioner tried to urge the banana upon him, assuring him that it was the last of three, which, she said, she wouldn't have bought if she hadn't been so lonesome.

Barbara sat down with her, to John's disgust, a feeling which was not diminished when he passed on to her Northern friends, and Mr. Fair tried very gently to draw him out on the Negro question! When he saw Mrs. Fair glancing about for the porter he sprang to find and send him, but lingered, himself, long among the mirrors to wash and brush up and adjust his necktie.

The cars stopping, he went to the front platform, where the dyspeptic, who was leaving the train, turned to thank him "for all his kindness" with such genuine gratitude that in the haste he quite lost his tongue, and for his only response pushed her anxiously off the steps. He still knew enough, however, to reflect that this probably left Miss Garnet alone, and promptly going in he found her—sitting with the Fairs.

Because she was perishing to have Mr. March again begin where he had left off, she conversed with the Fairs longer than ever and created half a dozen delays out of pure nothings. So that when she and John were once more alone together he talked hither and yon for a short while before he asked her where the poems were.

Nevertheless she was extremely pleasant. Their fellow-passenger just gone, she said, had praised him without stint, and had quoted him as having said to her, "It isn't always right to do what we have the right to do."

"O pshaw!" warmly exclaimed John, started as if she had touched an inflamed nerve, and reddened, remembering how well Miss Garnet might know what that nerve was, and why it was so sore.

"I wish I knew how to be sen-ten-tious," said Barbara, obliviously.

"It was she led up to it." He laughed. "She said it better, herself, afterward!"

"How did she say it?"

"She? O she said—she said her pastor said it—that nothing's quite right until it's noble."

"Well, don't you believe that principle?"

"I don't know! That's what I've asked myself twenty times to-day."

"Why to-day?" asked Miss Garnet, with eyes downcast, as though she could give the right answer herself.

"O"—he smiled—"something set me to thinking about it. But, now, Miss Garnet, is it true? Isn't it sometimes allowable, and sometimes even necessary—absolutely, morally necessary—for a fellow to do what may look anything but noble?"

He got no reply.

"O of course I know it's the spirit of an act that counts, and not its look; but—here now, for example,"—John dropped his voice confidentially—"is a fellow in love with a young lady, and——Do I speak loud enough?"

"Yes, go on."

He did so for some time. By and by:

"Ah! yes, Mr. March, but remember you're only supposing a case."

"O, but I'm not only supposing it; it's actual fact. I knew it. And, as I say, whatever that feeling for her was, it became the ruling passion of his life. When circumstances—a change of conditions—of relations—made it simply wrong for him to cherish it any more it wasn't one-fourth or one-tenth so much the unrighteousness as the ignobility of the thing that tortured him and tortured him, until one day what does he up and do but turn over a new leaf. Do I speak too low?"

"No, go on, Mr. March."

"Well, for about twenty-four hours he thought he had done something noble. Then he found that was just what it wasn't. It never is; else turning over new leaves would be easy! He didn't get his new leaf turned over. He tried; he tried his best."

"That's all God asks," murmured Barbara.

"What?"

"Nothing. Please don't stop. How'd it turn out?"

"O bad! He put himself out of sight and reach and went on trying, till one day—one night—without intention or expectation, he found her when, by the baseness—no, I won't say that, but—yes, I will!—by the baseness of another, she was all at once the fit object of all the pity and the sort of love that belongs with pity, which any heart can give."

"And he gave them!"

"Yes, he gave *them*. But the old feeling—whatever it was——" John hesitated.

"Go on. Please don't stop."

"The—the old feeling—went out—right there—like a candle in the wind. No, not that way, quite, but like a lamp drinking the last of its oil. Where he lodged that night——"

"Yes——"

"—He heard a clock strike every hour; and at the break of day that—feeling—whatever it was—with the only real good excuse to live it ever had—was dead."

"And that wasn't true love? Don't you believe it was?"

"Do you, Miss Barbara Garnet? Could true love lie down and give up the ghost at such a time and on such a pretext as that? Could it? Could it?"

"I think—O—I think it—you'll forgive me if——"

"Forgive! Why, how can you offend *me*? You don't imagine——"

"O no! I forgot. Well I think the love was true in degree; not the very truest. It was only *first* love; but it was the first love of a true heart."

"To be followed by a later and truer love, you think?"

"You shouldn't—O I don't know, Mr. March. What do you think?"

"Never! That's what I think. He may find refuge in friendship. I believe such a soul best fitted for that deep, pure friendship so much talked of and so rarely realized between man and woman. Such a heart naturally seeks it. Not with a mere hunger for comfort——"

"O no."

"—But because it has that to give which it cannot offer in love, yet which is good only when given; worthless to one, priceless to two. Sometimes I think it's finer than love, for it makes no demands, no promises, no compacts, no professions——"

"Did you ever have such a friendship?"

"No, indeed! If I had—oh pshaw! I never was or shall be fit for it. But I just tell you, Miss Garnet, that in such a case as we've spoken of, the need of such a heart for such a friendship can't be reckoned!"

He smiled sturdily, and she smiled also, but let compassion speak in her eyes before she reverently withdrew them. He, too, was still.

They were approaching a large river. The porter, growing fond of them, came, saying:

"Here where we crosses into Yankeedom. Fine view fum de rear platfawm—sun jes' a-sett'n'."

They went there—the Fairs preferred to sit still—and with the eddies of an almost wintry air ruffling them and John's arm lying along the rail under the window behind them, so as to clasp her instantly if she should lurch, they watched the slender bridge lengthen away and the cold river widen under it between them and Dixie.

Their silence confessed their common emotion. John felt a condescending expansion and did not withdraw his arm even after the bridge was passed until he thought Miss Garnet was about to glance around at it, which she had no idea of doing.

"I declare, Miss Garnet, I—I wish——"

She turned her eyes to his handsome face lifted with venturesome diffidence and frowning against the blustering wind.

"I'm afraid"—he gayly shook his head—"you won't like what I say if you don't take it just as I mean it." He put his hand over the iron-work again, but she was still looking into his face, and he thought she didn't know it.

"It wouldn't be fair to take it as you don't mean it," she said. "What is it?"

"Why, ha-ha—I—I wish I were your brother!—ha-ha! Seriously, I don't believe you can imagine how much a lone fellow—boy or man—can long and pine for a sister. If I'd had a sister, a younger sister—no boy ever pined for an older sister—I believe I'd have made a better man. When I was a small boy——"

Barbara glanced at his breadth and stature with a slow smile.

He laughed. "O, that was away back yonder before you can remember."

"It certainly must have been," she replied, "and yet——"

"And yet—" he echoed, enjoying his largeness.

"I thought all the pre-his-tor-ic things were big. But what was it you used to do? I know; you used to cry for a sister, didn't you?"

"Yes. Why, how'd you guess that?"

"I can't say, unless it was because I used to cry for a little brother."

"And why a little one?" he asked.

"I was young and didn't know any better."

"But later on, you——"

"I wanted the largest size."

"D'd you ever cry for a brother of the largest size?"

"Why, yes; I nearly cry for one yet, sometimes, when somebody makes me mad."

"Miss Garnet, I'm your candidate!"

"No, Mr. March. If you were elected you'd see your mistake and resign in a week, and I couldn't endure the mor-ti-fi-ca-tion."

John colored. He thought she was hinting at fickleness; but she gave him a smile which said so plainly, "The fault would be mine," that he was more than comfortable again—on the surface of his feelings, I mean.

And so with Barbara. The train had begun a down-grade and was going faster and faster. As she stood sweetly contemplating the sunset sky and sinking hills, fearing to move lest that arm behind her should be withdrawn and yet vigilant to give it no cause to come nearer, an unvoiced cry kept falling back into her heart—"Tell him!—For your misguided father's sake! Now!—Now!—Stop this prattle about friendship, love, and truth, and tell him his danger!"

But in reality she had not, and was not to have, the chance.

The young land-owner stood beside her staring at nothing and trying to bite his mustache.

He came to himself with a start. "Miss Garnet——"

As she turned the sky's blush lighted her face.

"That case we were speaking of inside, you know——"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, as I said, I knew that case myself. But, my goodness, Miss Garnet, you won't infer that I was alluding in any way to—to any experience of my own, will you?"

She made no reply.

"Law! Miss Garnet, you don't think I'd offer anybody a friendship pulled out of a slough of despond, do you?"

Barbara looked at him in trembling exaltation. "Mr. March, I know what has happened!"

He winced, but kept his guard. "Do you mean you know how it is I am on this train?"

"Yes, I know it all."

"O my soul! Have I betrayed it?"

"No, sir; the train conductor—I led him on—told us all about it before we were twenty miles from Suez."

"I ought to have guessed you'd find it out," said John, in a tone of self-rebuke.

"Yes," she replied, driving back her tears with a quiet smile, "I think you ought."

"Why—why, I—I—I'm overwhelmed. Gracious me! I owe you an humble apology, Miss Garnet. Yes, I do. I've thrust a confidence on you without your permission. I—I beg your pardon! I didn't mean to, I declare I didn't, Miss Garnet."

"It's safe."

"I know it. I'm surer of that than if you were anyone else I've ever known in my life, Miss Garnet."

"It shall be as if I had never heard it."

"O no! I don't see how it can. In fact—well—I don't see why it should—unless you wish it so. Of course, in that case——"

"That's not a con-tin-gen-cy," said Barbara, and for more than a minute they listened to the clangorous racket of the rails. Then John asked her if it did not have a quality in it almost like music and she brightened up at him as she nodded.

He made a gesture toward the receding land, bent to her in the uproar and cried, "It scarcely seems a moment since those hills were full of spring color, and now they're blue in the distance!"

She looked at them tenderly and nodded again.

"At any rate," he cried, holding his hat on and bending lower, "we have Dixie for our common mother." His manner was patriotic.

She glanced up to him—the distance was trivial—beaming with sisterly confidence, and just then the train lurched, and—he caught her.

"H-I conscience! wa'n't it lucky I happened to have my arm back there just at that moment?"

Barbara did not say. She stood with her back against the car, gazing at the track, her small feet braced forward with new caution, but she saw March lapse into reverie and heave another sigh.

However, she observed his mind return and rightly divined he was thinking her silence a trifle ungracious; so she lifted her hand toward a white cloud that rose above the vanished hills and river, saying:

"Our common mother waves us farewell."

"Yes," he cried with grateful pleasure. Seeing her draw her wrap closer he added, "You're cold?" And it was true, although she shook her head. He bent again to explain. "It'll be warmer when we leave this valley. You see, here——"

"Yes," she nodded so intelligently that he did not finish. Miss Garnet, however, was thinking of her chaperone and dubiously glanced back at the door. Then she braced her feet afresh. They were extremely pretty.

He smiled at them. "You needn't plant yourself so firmly," he said, "I'm not going to let you fall off."

O dear! That reversed everything. She had decided to stay; now she couldn't.

Once more the Northern pair received them with placid interest. Mr. Fair presently asked a question which John had waited for all day, and it was dark night without and lamplight within, and they were drawing near a large city, before the young man, in reply, had more than half told the stout plans and hopes of this expedition of his after capital and colonists.

Mrs. Fair showed a most lively approval. "And must you leave us here?"

Barbara had not noticed till now how handsome she was. Neither had John.

"Yes, ma'am. But I shan't waste a day here if things don't show up right. I shall push right on to New York."

Barbara hoped Mr. Fair's pleasantness of face meant an approbation as complete as his wife's, and, to hide her own, meditatively observed that this journey would be known in history as March's Raid.

John laughed and thanked her for not showing the fears of Captains Champion and Shotwell that he would "go in like a lion and come out like a lamb."

They hurried to the next section and peered out into the night with suppressed but eager exclamations. Long lines of suburban street-lamps were swinging by. Banks of coke-furnaces were blazing like necklaces of fire. Foundries and machine-shops glowed and were gone; and, far away, close by, and far away again, beautifully colored flames waved from the unseen chimneys of chemical works.

"We've neither of us ever seen a great city," Miss Garnet explained when she rejoined her protectors. John had been intercepted by the porter with his brush, and Barbara, though still conversing, could hear what the negro was saying.

"I lef' you to de las', Cap. Seem like you 'ten'in' so close to business an' same time enjoyin' yo'seff so well, I hated to 'sturb—thank you, seh!" The train came slowly to a stand. "O no, seh, dis ain't de depot. Depot three miles fu'theh yit, seh. We'll go on ag'in in a minute. Obacoat, seh? Dis yo' ambreel?"

John bade his friends good-by. "And now, Miss Garnet"—he retained her hand a moment—"don't you go off and forget—Dixie."

She said no, and as he let go her hand she let him see deeper into her eyes than ever before.

A step or two away he looked back with a fraternal smile, but she was talking to Mrs. Fair as eagerly as if he had been gone three days. The train stood so long that he went forward to ask what the delay signified and saw the four commercial travelers walking away with their hand-bags. The porter was busy about the door.

"Big smash-up of freight-cyars in de yard; yass, seh. No seh, cayn't 'zac'ly tell jis how long we be kep' here, but 'f you dislikes to wait, Cap, you needn'. You kin teck a street-cyar here what'll lan' you right down 'mong's' de hotels an' things; yass, seh. See what; de wreck? No, seh, it's up in de yard whah dey don't 'llo you to pa-ass."

Out in the darkness beside the train March stood a moment. He could see Miss Garnet very plainly at her bright window and was wondering how she and her friends, but especially she, would take it if he should go back and help them while away this tiresome detention. If she had answered that last smile of his, or if she were showing, now, any tendency at all to look out the window, he might have returned; but no, howdy after farewell lacked dignity. The street-car came along just then and Barbara saw him get into it.

LVIII.

TOGETHER AGAIN

March did not put up at the most famous and palatial hotel; it was full. He went to another much smaller and quieter, and equally expensive. When he had taken supper he walked the dazzling streets till midnight, filled with the strangeness of the place and the greater strangeness of his being there, and with numberless fugitive reflections upon the day just gone, the life behind it, and the life before, but totally without those shaped and ordered trains of thought which no one has except in books.

Sometimes tenderly, sometimes bitterly, Fannie came to mind, in emotions rather than memories, and as if she were someone whom he should never see again. Once it occurred to him that these ghost walkings of thought and feelings about her must be very much like one's thoughts of a limb shattered in some disaster and lately cut off by a surgeon. The simile was not pleasant, but he did not see why he should want a pleasant one. Only by an effort could he realize she was still of this world, and that by and by they would be back in Suez again, meeting casually, habitually, and in a much more commonplace and uninteresting way than ever they had done in the past. He shuddered, then he sighed, and then he said ahem! and gave himself the look of a man of affairs. On men who stared at him he retorted with a frown of austere inquiry, not aware that they were merely noticing how handsome he was.

For a time he silently went through minute recapitulations of his recent colloquies with Miss Garnet, who seemed already surprisingly far away; much farther than any railroad speed could at all account for. He wished she were "further!"—for he could quote five different remarks of his own uttered to her that very day, which he saw plainly enough, *now*, nobody but a perfect fool could have made.

"Oh! Great Scott! What did possess me to drag her into my confidence?"

He "wondered if mesmerism had anything"—but rejected that explanation with disdain and dismissed the subject. And then this strange thing happened: He was standing looking into a show-window made gorgeous with hot-house flowers, when a very low voice close at hand moaned, "O Lord, no! I simply made an ass of myself," and when he turned sharply around no one was anywhere near.

He returned to his room and went to bed and to sleep wishing "to gracious" he might see her once more and once only, simply to show her that he had nothing more to confide—to her or any similar soft-smiling she!—The s's are his.

He did not rise early next morning. And in this he was wise. Rejoice, oh, young man, in your project, but know that old men, without projects, hearing will not hear—until they have seen their mail and their cashier; the early worm rarely catches the bird. John had just learned this in Pulaski City.

At breakfast he was again startled by a low voice very close to him. It was Mr. Fair.

"Mr. March, why not come over and sit with us?"

The ladies bowed from a table on the far side of the room. Mrs. Fair seemed as handsome as ever; while Miss Garnet!—well! If she was winsome and beautiful yesterday, with that silly, facing-both-ways traveling cap she had worn, what could a reverent young man do here and now but gasp his admiration under his breath as he followed his senior toward them?

Even in the lively conversation which followed he found time to think it strange that she had never seemed to him half so lovely in Suez; was it his over-sight? Maybe not, for in Suez she had never in life been half so happy. Mrs. Fair could see this with her eyes shut, and poor Barbara could see that she saw it by the way she shut her eyes. But John, of course, was blind enough, and presently concluded that the wonder of this crescent loveliness was the old, old wonder of the opening rose. Meanwhile the talk flowed on.

"And by that time," said John, "you'd missed your connection. I might have guessed it. Now you'll take—but you've hardly got time——"

No, Mrs. Fair was feeling rather travel weary; this was Saturday; they would pass Sunday here and start refreshed on Monday.

In the crowded elevator, when March was gone, Barbara heard Mrs. Fair say to her husband,

"You must know men here whom it would be good for him to see; why don't you offer to——" Mrs. Fair ceased and there was no response, except that Barbara said, behind her smiling lips,

"It's because he's in bad hands, and still I have not warned him!"

March did not see them again that day. In the evening, two men, friends, sitting in the hotel's rotunda, were conjecturing who yonder guest might be to whose inquiries the clerk was so promptly attentive.

"He's a Southerner, that's plain; and a gentleman, that's just as certain."

"Yes, if he were not both he would not be so perfectly at home in exactly the right clothes and yet look as if he had spent most of his life in swimming."

"He hasn't got exactly the right overcoat; it's too light and thin."

"No, but that's the crowning proof that he's a Southerner." It was John.

They hearkened to the clerk. "He's just gone to the theatre, Mr. March, he and both ladies. He was asking for you. I think he wanted you to go."

"I reckon not," said John, abstractedly, and in his fancy saw Miss Garnet explaining to her friends, with a restrained smile, that in Suez to join the church was to abjure the theatre. But another clerk spoke:

"Mr. March, did you—here's a note for you."

The clerk knew it was from Miss Garnet, and was chagrined to see John, after once reading it, dreamily tear it up and drop it to the floor. Still it increased his respect for the young millionaire—Mr. March, that is. It was as if he had lighted his cigar with a ten-dollar bill.

John wrote his answer upstairs, taking a good deal of time and pains to give it an air of dash and haste, and accepting, with cordial thanks, Mr. and Mrs. Fair's cordial invitation to go with them (and Miss Garnet, writing at their request) next day to church. Which in its right time he did.

On his way back to the hotel with Miss Garnet after service, John was nothing less than pained—though he took care not to let her know it—to find how far astray she was as to some of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. For fear

she might find out his distress, he took his midday meal alone. And indeed, Miss Garnet may have had her suspicions, for over their ice-cream and coffee she said amusedly to Mrs. Fair, and evidently in reference to him,

"I am afraid it was only the slightness of our acquaintance that kept him from being pos-i-tive-ly pet-u-lent."

She seemed amused, I say, but an hour or so later, in her own room, she called herself a goose and somebody else another, and glancing at the mirror, caught two tears attempting to escape. She drove them back with a vigorous stamp of the foot and proceeded to dress for a cold afternoon walk among the quieted wonders of a resting city, without the Fairs, but not wholly alone.

LIX.

THIS TIME SHE WARNS HIM

As Miss Garnet and her escort started forth upon this walk, I think you would have been tempted to confirm the verdict of two men who, meeting and passing them, concluded that the escort was wasting valuable time when they heard him say,

"It did startle me to hear how lightly you regard what you call a memorized religion."

But this mood soon passed. A gentleman and lady, presently overtaking them, heard her confess, "I know I don't know as much as I think I do; I only wish I knew as much as I don't." Whereat her escort laughed admiringly, and during the whole subsequent two hours of their promenade scarcely any observer noticed the slightness of their acquaintance.

Across the fields around Suez their conversation would have been sprightly enough, I warrant. But as here they saw around them one and another amazing triumph of industry and art, they grew earnest, spoke exaltedly of this great age, and marvelled at the tangle of chances that had thrown them here together. John called it, pensively, a most happy fortune for himself, but Barbara in reply only invited his attention to the beauty of the street vista behind them.

Half a square farther on he came out of a brown study.

"Miss Barb"—It was the first time he had ever said that, and though she lifted her glance in sober inquiry, the music of it ran through all her veins.

"—Miss Barb, isn't it astonishing, the speed with which acquaintance can grow, under favorable conditions?"

"Is it?"

"Oh, well, no, it isn't. Only that's not its usual way."

"Isn't the usual way the best?"

"Oh—usually—yes! But there's nothing usual about this meeting of ours. Miss Barb, my finding you and your friendship is as if I'd been lost at midnight in a trackless forest and had all at once found a road. I only wish"—he gnawed his lip—"I only wish these three last days had come to me years ago. You might have saved me some big mistakes."

"No," Barbara softly replied, "I'm afraid not."

"I only mean as a sister might influence an older brother; cheering—helping—warning."

"Warning!" murmured Barbara, with drooping head and slower step. "You don't know what an evil gift of untimely silence I've got. If I've failed all my life long as a daughter, in just what you're supposing of me——"

"O come, now, Miss——"

"Don't stop me! Why, Mr. March"—she looked up, and as she brushed back a hair from her ear John thought her hand shook; but when she smiled he concluded he had been mistaken—"I've been wanting these whole three days to warn you of something which, since it concerns your fortunes, concerns nearly everyone I know, and especially my father. Is it meddlesome for me to be solicitous about your ambitions and plans for Widewood, Mr. March?"

"Now, Miss Garnet! You know I'd consider it an honor and a delight—Miss Barb. What do you want to warn me against? Mind, I don't say I'll take your warning; but I'll prize the friendship that——"

"I owe it to my father."

"Oh, yes, yes! I don't mean to claim—aha! I thought that tolling was for fire! Here comes one of the engines!—Better take my arm a minute—I—I think you'd better—till the whirlwind passes."

She took it, and before they reached a crossing on whose far side she had promised herself to relinquish it, another engine rushed by. This time they stood aside under an arch with her hand resting comfortably in his elbow. It still rested there when they had resumed their walk, only stirring self-reproachfully when John incautiously remarked the street's restored quietness.

Barbara was silent. When they had gone some distance farther John asked,

"Have I forfeited your solicitude? Will you not warn me, after all?" He looked at her and she looked at him, twice, but speech would not come; her lips only parted, broke into a baffled smile, and were grave again.

"I suppose, of course, it's against measures, not men, as they say, isn't it?"

"It's against men," said Barbara.

"That surprises me," replied John, with a puzzled smile.

"Why, Mr. March, you can't suppose, do you, that your high ambitions and purposes——"

"Oh, they're not mine; they're my father's. The details and execution are mine——"

"But, anyhow, you share them; you've said so. You don't suppose your associates——"

"What; share them the same way I do? Why, no, Miss Barb; it wouldn't be fair to expect that, would it? And yet, in a certain way, on a lower plane—from a simply commercial standpoint—they do. I don't include your father with them! I only wish I could reflect the spirit of my father's wishes and hopes as perfectly as he does."

"Mr. March, don't men sometimes go into such enterprises as yours simply to plunder and ruin those that go in honestly with them?"

"Oh, undoubtedly. You see, in this case——"

"Mr. March——"

"Yes, Miss Barb——"

"I believe certain men are in your company with that intention."

"But you don't know it, do you? Else you would naturally tell your father instead of me. You only——" He hesitated,

"I only see it."

"Oh—oh! have you no other evidence—only an intuition?"

"Yes, I have other evidence."

"Ah!" laughed John. "You've got higher cards, have you?"

Her eyes softly brightened in response to his. The next instant the hand in his arm awoke, but lay very still, as four men passed, solemnly raised their silk hats to March, and disappeared around a corner. They were the commercial travelers!

Her hand left his arm to brush something from her opposite shoulder, and did not return, but hid somewhere in her wrap, tingling with a little anguish all its own, in the realization that discovery is almost the only road to repentance. At the same time it could hear, so to speak, its owner telling, with something between a timorous courage and a calm diffidence, how, in Suez, she had drawn out a business man, unnamed, but well approved and quite disinterested, to say that she might tell Mr. March that, in his conviction, unless he got rid of certain persons—etc.

"I can tell you who it was, if you care to know. He said I might."

"No," said John, thoughtfully. "Never mind." And they heard their own footsteps for full two minutes. Then he said, "Miss Barb, suppose he is disinterested and sincere. Say he were my best friend. The thing's a simple matter of arithmetic. So long as your father and Jeff-Jack and I hang together there are not enough votes in the company to do anything we don't want done. I admit we've given some comparative strangers a strong foothold; but your father trusts them, and, if need be, can watch them. Does anybody know men better than Jeff-Jack does? But he knew just what we were doing when he consented to take charge of the three counties' interests; however, I admit that doesn't prove anything, Miss Barb, I know who said what you've told me, and I esteem and honor and love him as much as you do—wait, please. O smile ahead, if you like, only let me finish. You know we must take some risks, and while I thank him—and you, too, even if you do speak merely for your father's sake—I tell you the best moves a man ever makes are those he makes against the warnings of his friends! 'Try not the pass, the old man said,' don't you know?"

"This wasn't an old man."

"Wasn't it General Halliday?"

"No, sir, it was the younger Mr. Fair."

"Henry Fair," said John very quietly. He slackened his pace. He did not believe Fair cared that much for him; but it was easy to suppose he might seize so good a chance to say a word for Miss Garnet's own sake.

"Miss Barb, I don't doubt he thinks what he says. I see now why he failed to subscribe to our stock, after coming so far entirely, or almost entirely, to do it. He little knows how he disappointed me. I didn't want his capital, Miss Barb, half as much as his fellowship in a beautiful enterprise."

"He was as much disappointed as you, Mr. March; I happen to know it."

John looked at his informant; but her head was down once more.

"Well," he said, cheerily, "I'll just have to wait till—till I—till I've shown"—a beggar child was annoying him—"shown Fair and all of them that I'm not so green as I——" He felt for a coin, stood still, and turned red. "Miss—Miss Barb——" A smile widened over his face, and he burst into a laugh that grew till the tears came.

"What's the matter?" asked Barbara anxiously, yet laughing with him.

"Oh, I—I've let somebody pick my pockets. Yes, every cent's gone and my ticket to New York. I had no luck here yesterday, and I was going on to New York tomorrow." He laughed again, but ceased abruptly. "Good gracious, Miss Barb! my watch!—my father's watch!" The broad smile on his lips could not hide the grief in his eyes.

LX.

A PERFECT UNDERSTANDING

As they resumed their way Barbara did most of the talking. She tried so hard to make his loss appear wholly attributable to her, that only the sweetness of her throat and chin and the slow smoothness of her words saved her from seeming illogical. She readily got his admission that the theft might have been done in that archway as the engine rushed by. Very good! And without her, she reasoned, he would not have stopped. "Or, if you had stopped," she softly droned, with her eyes on her steps, "you would have had——"

"Oh, now, what would I have had?"

"Your hands in your pockets."

"That's not my habit."

"Oh, Mr. March!"

"My d-ear Miss Barb! I should think I ought to know!"

"Yes, sir; that's why I tell you." They laughed in partnership.

Mr. March was entirely right, Barbara resumed, not to tell his mishap to the Fairs, or to anyone, anywhere, then or thereafter. "But you're cruel to me not to let me lend you enough to avoid the rev-e-la-tion." That was the utmost she would say. If he couldn't see that she would rather *lose*—not to say lend—every dollar she had, than have anyone know where her hand was when his pocket was picked, he might stay just as stupid as he was. She remained silent so long that John looked at her, but did not perceive that she was ready to cry. She wore a glad smile as she said:

"I've got more money with me than I ought to be carrying, anyhow."

"Why, Miss Barb, you oughtn't to do that; how does that happen?" He spoke with the air of one who had never in his life lost a cent by carelessness.

"It's not so very much," was her reply. "It's for my share of Rosemont. I sold it to pop-a."

"What! just now when the outlook for Rosemont—why, Miss Barb, I do believe you did it to keep clear of our land company, didn't you?"

"Mr. March, I wish you would let me lend you some of it, won't you?"

"No, I'll be—surprised if I do. Oh, Miss Barb, I thank you just the same; but my father, Miss Barb, gave it to me, as a canon of chivalry, never to make a money bargain with a lady that you can't make with a bank. If I'm not man enough to get out of this pinch without—oh, pshaw!"

In the hotel, at the head of the ladies' staircase, they stood alone.

"Good-by," said John, unwillingly. "I'll see you this evening, shan't I, when I come up to say good-by to your friends?"

Barbara said he would. They shook hands, each pair of eyes confessing to the other the superfluity of the ceremony.

"Good-by," said John again, as if he had not said it twice already.

"Good-by. Mr. March, if you want to give securities—as you would to a bank—I—I shouldn't want anything better than your mother's poems."

He glowed with gratitude and filial vanity, his big hand tightening on hers. "Oh, Miss Barb! no, no! But God bless you! I wonder if anyone else was ever so much like sunshine in a prison window! Good-by!" She felt her hand lifted by his; but,

when she increased its weight the merest bit, he let it sink again and slide from his fingers.

He was gone, and a moment later she was with the Fairs, talking slowly, with soft smiles; but her head swam, she heard their pleasant questions remotely as through a wall, and could feel her pulse to her fingers and feet. He had almost kissed her hand. "The next time—the next time—sweet heaven send this poor hand strength to resist just enough and—and not too much." So raved the prayer locked in her heart, or so it would have raved had she dared give it the liberty even of unspoken words.

Meanwhile, John March lay on his bed with the back of his head in his hands.

"I've offended her! There was no mistaking that last look. This wouldn't have happened if she hadn't let her hand linger in mine. Oh, I wish to heaven girls were not so senselessly innocent and sisterly! Great Cæsar! I'd give five hundred dollars not to have drooled that drivel about being her brother! George! She ought to know that only a fool or a scamp could make such an absurd proposal. I wonder if she still wants to lend me her money! I'd rather face a whole bank directorate with an overdrawn account than those Fairs this evening. I know exactly how they'll look. For it will be just like her to tell Mrs. Fair, who'll tell her husband, and they'll bury the thing right there with me under it, and 'Miss Garnet' will excuse herself on the plea of fatigue, and the conversation will drag, and I'll wish I had cut my throat in Pulaski City, and"—a steeple clock tolled the hour—"Oh, can it be that that's only six!"

At tea he missed them. Returning to his room, he had hardly got his hands under his head again, trying not to think of his financial embarrassments because it was Sunday, when a new idea brought him to his feet. Church! Evening service! Would she go? He had not asked her when she had intimated that the Fairs would not. In his selfish enjoyment of her society he had quite forgotten to care for her soul! He ought to go himself. And all the more ought she, for he was numbered among the saved now, and she was not. She *must* go. But how could she unless he should take her? His Christian duty was clear. He would write an offer of his services, and by her answer he would know how he stood in her regard.

Her reply was prompt, affirmative, confined to the subject. And yet, in some inexplicable way it conveyed the impression that she had never suspected him of the faintest intention to carry her hand to his lips.

The sermon was only so-so, but they enjoyed the singing; particularly their own. Both sang from one book, with much reserve, yet with such sweetly persuasive voices that those about them first listened and then added their own very best. The second tune was "Geer," and, with John's tenor going up every time

Barbara's soprano came down, and *vice versa*, it was as lovely see-sawing as ever thrilled the heart of youth with pure and undefiled religion. They sang the last hymn to "Dennis." It was,

"Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love!"

and they gratefully accepted the support of four good, sturdy, bass voices behind them. But it was the words themselves, of the fourth and fifth stanzas, that inspired their richest yet softest tones, while the four basses behind them rather grew louder:

"When we asunder part
It gives us inward pain,
But we shall still be joined in
heart
And hope to meet again.

"This glorious hope revives
Our courage by the way,
While each in expectation
lives
And longs to see the day."

On the sidewalk the four basses again raised their four silk hats and vanished. They were the commercial travelers.

As the two worshippers returned toward their hotel, Barbara spoke glowingly of Mr. and Mrs. Fair; their perfect union; their beautiful companionship. John, in turn, ventured to tell of the unbounded esteem with which he had ever looked upon Barbara's mother. They dwelt, in tones of indulgent amusement, on the day, the hour, the scene, of John's first coming to the college, specially memorable to him as the occasion of his first real meeting of the Rose of Rosemont. Barbara said the day would always be bright to her as the one on which she first came into personal contact with Judge March. John spoke ardently of his father.

"And, by the bye, that day was the first on which I ever truly saw you."

"Or Johanna!" said Barbara. "Johanna's keeping Fannie Ravenel's new house. She's to stay with her till I get back." But John spoke again of Barbara's mother, asking permission to do so.

"Yes, certainly," murmured his companion. "In general I don't revere sacred things as I should," she continued, with her arm in her escort's, and "Blest be the tie"—still dragging in their adagio footsteps; "but my mother has all my life been so sacred to me—not that she was of the sort that they call otherworldly—I don't care for otherworldliness nearly as much as I should——"

"Don't you?" regretfully asked John; "that's one of my faults too."

"No; but I've always revered mom—a so deeply that except once or twice to Fannie, when Fannie spoke first, I've never talked about her." Yet Barbara went on telling of her mother from a full heart, her ears ravished by the music of John's

interjected approvals. They talked again of his father also, and found sweet resemblances between the two dear ones. Only as they re-entered the hotel were both at once for a moment silent. Half way up the stairs, among the foliage plants of a landing ablaze with gas, they halted, while John, beginning,

"Two hearts that love the same fair things"—

recited one of his mother's shorter poems.

"Why, Mr. March!" His hearer's whisper only emphasized her sincere enthusiasm. "Did your mother—why, that's per-fect-ly beau-ti-ful!"

They parted, but soon met again in one of the parlors. Mrs. Fair came, too, but could not linger, having left Mr. Fair upstairs asleep on a lounge. She bade Barbara stay and hear all the manuscript poems Mr. March could be persuaded to read, and only regretted that her duty upstairs prevented her remaining herself. "Good-by," she said to John. "Now, whenever you come to Boston, remember, you're to come directly to us."

John responded gratefully, and Barbara, as the two sat down upon a very small divan with the batch of manuscript between them, told him, in a melodious undertone, that she feared she couldn't stay long.

"What's that?" she asked, as he took up the first leaf to put it by.

"This? Oh, this is the poem I tried to recite to you on the stairs."

"Read it again," she said, not in her usual monotone, but with a soft eagerness of voice and eye quite new to him, and extremely stimulating. He felt an added exaltation when, at the close of the middle stanza, he saw her hands knit into each other and a gentle rapture shining through her drooping lashes; and at the end, when she sighed her admiration in only one or two half-formed words, twinkled her feet and bit her lip, his exaltation rose almost to inebriety. He could have sat there and read to her all night.

Yet that was the only poem she heard. The title of the next one, John said as he lifted it, was, "If I should love again;" but Barbara asked a dreamy question of a very general character; he replied, then asked one in turn; they discussed—she introducing the topic—the religious duty and practicability of making all one's life and each and every part of it good poetry, and the inner and outer conditions essential thereunto; and when two strange ladies came in and promptly went out again John glanced at the mantel-clock, exclaimed his surprise at the hour, and gathering up the manuscript, rose to say his parting word.

"Good-by." His hand-grasp was fervent.

"Good-by," replied the maiden.

"Miss Barb"—he kept her hand—"I want a word, and, honestly—I—don't know what it is! Doesn't good-by seem to you mighty weak, by itself?"

"Why, that depends. It's got plenty of po-ten-ti-al-i-ty if you give it its old sig-nif-i-ca-tion."

"Well, I do—every bit of it! Do you, Miss Barb—to me?"

She gave such answer with her steady eyes that her questioner's mind would have lost its balance had she not smiled so lightly.

"Still," he responded, "good-by is such unclaimed property that I want another word to sort o' fence it in, you know."

The maiden only looked more amused than before.

"I don't want it to mean too much, you understand," explained he. The hand in his grew heavier, but his grasp tightened on it. "Yet don't you think these last three days' companionship deserves a word of its own? Miss Barb, you've been—and in my memory you will be henceforth—a crystalline delight! The word's not mine, it's from one of my mother's sweetest things. Can't I say good-by, thou 'crystalline delight'?"

"Why, Mr. March," said Barbara, softly pulling at her hand. "I don't particularly like the implication that I'm per-fect-ly trans-par-ent."

"Now, Miss Barb! as if I—oh pshaw! Good-by." He lifted her hand. She made it very light. He held it well up, looking down on it fondly. "This," he said, "is the little friend that wanted to help me out of trouble. Good-by, little friend; I"—his lips approached it—"I love you."

It flashed from his hand like a bird from the nest. "No-o!" moaned its owner.

"Oh, Miss Gar—Miss Barb!" groaned John, "you've utterly misunderstood."

"No"—Barbara had not yet blushed, but now she crimsoned—"I've not misunderstood you. I simply don't like that way of saying——"

"I didn't mean——"

"I know it, Mr. March. I know perfectly well you don't expect ever to mean anything to anybody any more; you consider it a sheer im-pos-si-bil-i-ty. That's the keystone of our friendship."

John hemmed. "I wouldn't say impossibility; I'd say impracticability. It's an impracticability, Miss Barb, that's all. Why, every time I think of my dear sweet little mother——"

"Oh, Mr March, that's right! She *must* have your whole thought and care!"

"She shall have it, Miss Barb, at every cost! as completely as I know your father has and ought to have yours!" He took her hand. "Good-by! The understanding's perfect now, isn't it?"

"I think so—I hope so—yes, sir."

"Say, 'Yes, John.'"

"Oh, Mr. March, I can't say that."

"Why, then, it isn't perfect."

"Yes, it is."

"Well, then, Miss Garnet, with the perfect understanding that the understanding is perfect, I propose to bid this hand good-by in a fitting and adequate manner, and trust I shall not be inter—!—rupted! Good-by."

"Oh, Mr. March, I don't think that was either fair or right!" Her eyes glistened.

"Miss Barb, it wasn't! Oh, I see it now! It was a wretched mistake! Forgive me!"

Her eyes, staring up into his, filled to the brim. She waved him away and turned half aside. He backed to the door and paused.

"Miss Barb, one look! Oh, one look, just to show I'm not utterly unforgiven and cast out! I promise you it's all I'll ever ask—one look!"

"Good-by," she murmured, but could not trust herself to move.

He stifled a moan. She gave a start of pain. He thought it meant impatience. She took an instant more for self-command and then lifted a smile. Too late, he was gone!

LXI.

A SICK MAN AND A SICK HORSE

"Thank you, no," said Miss Garnet at the door of Mrs. Fair's room, refusing to enter. "I rapped only to say good-night."

To the question whether she had heard all the poems read she replied, "Not all," with so sweet an irony in her grave smile that Mrs. Fair wanted to tell her she looked like the starlight. But words are clumsy, and the admirer satisfied herself with a kiss on the girl's temple. "Good-night," she said; "dream of me."

Several times next day, as the three travelers wound their swift course through the mountains of Pennsylvania, Mrs. Fair observed Barbara sink her book to her lap and with an abstracted gaze on the landscape softly touch the back of her right hand with the fingers of her left. It puzzled her at first, but by and by—

"Poor boy!" she said to herself, in that inmost heart where no true woman ever takes anyone into council, "and both of you Southerners! If that's all you got, and you had to steal that, you're both of you better than I'd have been."

When about noon she saw her husband's eyes fixed on Barbara, sitting four seats away, she asked, with a sparkle: "Thinking of Mr. March?"

"Yes, I've guessed why he's stayed behind."

"Have you? That's quick work—for a man."

"It looks to-day as if he were out of the game, doesn't it?"

The lady mused. This time the husband twinkled:

"If he is, my dear, whom should we congratulate: all three or which two?"

"I don't know yet, my love. Wait. Wait till we've tried her in Boston."

At this hour John March was imperatively engrossed by an unforeseen discovery. Tossing on his bed the night before, he had decided not to telegraph to Suez for money until he had searched all the hotels for some one from Dixie who would exclaim, "Why, with the greatest pleasure," or words to that effect. In the morning he was up betimes and off on this errand, asking himself why he had not done it the evening before, but concluding he must have foreborne out of respect for the Sabbath.

At the first hotel his search had no reward. But in the second he found a Pulaski City man, whose acquaintance he had never previously prized, yet from whom he now hid four-fifths of his surprised delight and still betrayed enough to flatter the fellow dizzy. John took him back to his own hotel for breakfast, made sure he had only to ask a loan to get it, and let him go at last, unable to get the request through his own teeth.

He went to a third hotel, but found only strangers. Then he went to a fourth, explored its rotunda in vain, turned three or four leaves of its register, and was giving a farewell glance to the back page, when he started with surprise.

"I see," he said to the clerk, "I see you have—will you kindly look this way a moment? Are these persons still with you?"

"They are, sir," said the clerk, gazing absently beyond him, and took March's card. "Front! I'll have to send it to the lady, sir; Colonel Ravenel's sick. What? Oh, well, sir, if *you* think pneumonia's slight—Yes, sir, that's what he's got." He was turning away contemptuously, but John said:

"Oh!—eh—one moment more, if you please."

"Well, sir, what is it?" The man gave his ear instead of his eye; but he gave both eyes, as John giving both his, asked deferentially:

"Do you own all the hotels in this town, sir, or are you merely a clerk of this one?"

The card went, and a bell-boy presently led the way to Fannie's door. It stood unlatched. The boy pushed it ajar, and John met only his frowning image reflected full length in the mirror-front of a folding-bed, until a door opened softly from the adjoining room and closed again, and Fannie, pale and vigil worn, but with ecstasy in her black eyes, murmured:

"Oh, John March, I never knew I could be quite so glad to see you!"

She pressed his hand rapturously between her two, dropped it playfully, and saw that there had come between them a nearness and a farness different from any that had ever been. John felt the same thing, but did not guess that this was why her smile was grateful and yet had a pang in it. There was a self-oblivious kindness in his murmur as he refused a seat.

"No, I mustn't keep you a moment. Only tell me what I can do for you."

She explained that she would have to go back into the sick-room and return again, as the physician was in there, and Jeff-Jack was unaware, and ought probably to be kept unaware, of any other visitor's presence.

John said he would wait and hear the doctor's pronouncements and her commands. When she came the second time this person appeared with her. Beyond a soft introduction there were only a few words, and the two men went away together. As Fannie returned and bent cheerily over the bridegroom's bed, she was totally surprised by his feeble, bright-eyed request.

"When John March comes back with the medicine I want to see him."

The man to whom Fannie had introduced John was of a sort much newer to him than to travelers generally—a typical physician-in-ordinary to a hotel. He wore a dark-blue overcoat abundantly braided and frogged; his sheared mustaches were dyed black, and his diamond scarf-pin, a pendant, was chained to his shirt. As they drove to a favorite apothecary's some distance away, John told why he had come North, and the doctor said he had a cousin living at the hotel who had capital, and happened just then to be looking for investments. It would be no trouble at all to drive Mr. March back from the apothecary's and make him acquainted with Mr. Bulger. Was Mr. March fond of horses? Good! Bulger owned the fastest span in the city, and drove them every morning at ten.

In fact, before they quite reached the hotel again they came upon the capitalist, ribbons in hand, just leaving a public stable behind such a pair of trotters that John exclaimed at sight of them and accepted with alacrity a seat by his side. As for the medicine, the physician himself took it to Mrs. Ravenel, explained that John would be along in an hour or two, and said, "Yes, the patient could see Mr. March briefly, but must talk as little as possible."

Four or five times during the next seven or eight hours the sick man's eyes compelled Fannie to say: "I don't know why he doesn't come." And at evening with an open note in her hand, a smile on her lips, and a new loneliness in her heart, she announced: "He says he will be here early in the morning."

Mr. Bulger was large, heavy, and clean-shaven, as became a capitalist; but his overcoat was buff, with a wide trimming of fur, and his yellow hair was parted in the back and perfumed. March did not mind this, but he was truly sorry to notice, very quickly, that his companion's knowledge of horses was mostly a newspaper knowledge. While Mr. Bulger quoted turf records, John said to himself:

"Wonder how far he'll drive before he sees his nigh horse is sick."

But very soon the owner of the team remarked: "The mare seems droopy."

"Yes, Mr. Bulger," replied John, almost explosively, "she's going to be a very sick animal before you can get her back to the stable, if you ever get her back at all. If we don't do the right thing right off, you'll lose her. I wouldn't stop them, sir. My conscience! don't let her stand here, or she'll be so stiff, directly, you can't make her go!"

"Yes, I guess you're right," said Bulger, moving on. "If I can just get her home and out of harness and let her lie down——"

"If you do, sir, she'll never get up again."

"By Jo!" exclaimed the owner of the horse. "I don't want that!" He looked grimly on the gentle sufferer. "See her," he presently said; "why, I never saw anything get sick so fast. Why, Mr. March, I'm afraid she's going to die right here! Half an hour ago I wouldn't 'a' sold that mare for two thousand dollars! Mr. March, if you can save her you may have all the doctors you want, and I'll pay you a hundred dollars yourself as quick as I'd pay you one!"

"Give me the reins," was John's response. "Where's the very nearest good stable?"

There was one not far away. He turned and soon reached it. As they stopped in its door the beautiful creature in his care was trembling in all her flesh, and dripping sweat from every pore. The ready grooms helped him unharness.

"I'll send for a doctor, shan't I?" said Bulger, twice, before John heard him.

"Yes, if you know a real one; but I'll have everything done before he gets here. Here, you, fetch a blanket. Somebody bring me some fine salt—oh, a double handful—a tumblerful—to rub her back with—only be quick!"

In a moment the harness had given place to halter and blanket, and the weak invalid stiffly followed John's firm leading over the sawdust.

Three hours later Bulger said, "She's a good deal better, ain't she?" and when March smiled fondly on her and replied that he "should say so," her owner suggested luncheon.

"No," said John, "you go and eat; I shan't leave her till she's well. She mustn't lie down, and I can't trust anyone to keep her from doing it."

Two or three times more Bulger went and came again, and the lamps were being lighted in the streets when at last John remarked,

"Well, sir, you can harness her up now and drive her home. Nice gyirl! Nice gyirl! Did you think us was gwine to let you curl up and die out yond' in the street? No, missie, no! you nice ole gyirl, doggone yo' sweet soul, no!"

"Mr. March," said Bulger, "I said I'd pay you a hundred dollars if you'd cure her, didn't I? Well, here's my check for half of it, and if you just say the word I'll make another for the other half."

John pushed away the proffering hand with a pleased laugh. "I can't take pay for doctoring a horse, sir, but I will ask a favor of you—in fact, I'll ask two; and the first is, Come and have dinner with me, will you?"

And when John called on Fannie the next morning, Mr. Bulger had taken a train for Suez, expecting to return in three days subscriber for all the land company's stock left untaken through the prudence of the younger Fair. John had treated himself to a handsome new pocketbook.

LXII.

RAVENEL THINKS HE MUST

"So you'll be leaving us at once!" said Fannie, as the two sat by Ravenel's bed.

"No, not till Mr. Bulger gets back. I can be up to my neck in work till then on the colonization side of the business." They bent to hear the bridegroom's words:

"Wish you wouldn't go East till Friday evening, and then go with us."

"Why Jeff-Jack Ravenel," exclaimed Fannie, with a careworn laugh, "what are you talking about?"

"Not much fun for John," was the languishing reply, "but big favor to us."

"But, my goodness!" said the bride, "the doctor won't even let you get up."

"Got to," responded the smiling invalid. "Got to be in Washington next Sunday."

"That's simply ridiculous," laughed Fannie, with a pretty toss, and sauntered into the next room, closing the door between. The sick man's smile increased:

"She's going in there to cry," he softly drawled.

"You can't go, Ravenel," said March. "Why, it'll kill you, like as not."

"Got to go, John. Politics."

"Oh, the other fellows can work it without you."

"Yes," replied the smiling lips, "that's why I've got to be there."

The subject was dropped. That was Tuesday morning. John called twice a day until Thursday evening. Each time he came Fannie seemed more and more wan and blighted, though never less courageous.

"She'll be sick herself if she doesn't hire a nurse and get some rest," said the doctor to John; but her idea of a hired nurse was Southern, and she would not

hear of it. John was not feeling too honest these days. On the evening of Thursday he came nerved up to mention Miss Garnet, whom, as a theme, he had wholly avoided whenever Fannie had spoken of her. But the moment he met Fannie, in the outer room, he was so cut to the heart to see how her bridal beauty had wasted with her strength that he could only beg her to lie down an hour, two, three, half the night, the whole of it, while he would watch and tend in her place. He would take it unkindly if she did not.

"Oh, John," she laughingly replied, "you forget!" He faintly frowned.

"Yes, Miss Fannie, I try to." He did not add that he had procured assistance.

Her response was a gleam of loving approval. John noticed seven or eight minute spots on her face and recognized for the first time in his life that they were freckles.

"John, did the doctor tell you it was my fault that Jeff-Jack got this sickness?"

"No, and I shouldn't have believed it if he had."

"Thank you, John"—her lifted eyes filled—"thank you; but it was; it was my fault, and nobody shall watch him in my place." It would have made a difference to several besides herself, had she known that the doctor on both his last two visits had forgotten to say that no one need any longer sit up all night.

John called again Friday morning. School himself as best he could, still an energy in his mien showed there was news from Suez.

"What is it, old man," asked the slow-voiced invalid, "have they made the new slate?"

"Yes, and the bill's passed empowering the three counties to levy the tax and take the stock. Oh, Garnet's a wheel-horse, yes, sir-ee!—and Gamble and Bulger are a team! Bulger isn't coming back for a while at all; they've made him secretary."

A perceptible shade came over Ravenel's face, although he smiled as he said,

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Have they made you vice-president?"

"Yea, they have! I no more expected such a thing—I knew Gamble, of course, would be president and Champion treasurer; but—Well, they say I can push things better as vice-president, and I reckon that's so;" said John, and ceased without adding that his salary was continued and that Bulger would draw none.

"Where does Major Garnet come in?" asked Fannie.

"Oh, he still declines any appointment whatever, but he's made up another company; a construction company to take our contracts. Proudfit's president. It's not strongly officered; but, as Garnet says, better have men we can dictate to than men who might try to dictate to us. And besides, except Crickwater, they're all Suez men. Mattox is treasurer; Pettigrew's secretary."

Fannie wanted to say that Proudfit had no means except his wife's, but was still because a small rosy spot on either cheek-bone of the invalid was beginning to betray the intensity of his thought. She would have motioned to John to tell no more, if she could have done so unseen by Ravenel. However, the bridegroom himself turned the theme.

"Are you going down there before you go East?"

"No, Garnet and Bulger both urge me to go straight on. I'm mighty sorry I can't wait till you're well enough to go; but——"

On the pallid face in the pillow came the gentlest of smiles. Its fair, thin hand held toward Fannie a bunch of small keys, and their owner said,

"I wish, while you're getting your fare and berth tickets, you'd get two of each for us, John, will you?" He still smilingly held out the keys.

Fannie sat still. She tried to smile but turned very pale. "Jeff-Jack," she gasped, "you can't go. I beg you, don't try. I beg you, Jeff-Jack."

"Got to, Fannie." He sat up in the bed. John thrust a pillow behind him.

"Well, I——" her bloodless lips twitched painfully—"I can't let you go. The doctor says he mustn't, John."

Ravenel smiled on. "Got to, Fannie. Come, take these and get John my pocketbook."

Fannie rose. "No, I tell you the solemn truth, even if you could go, I can't. I shouldn't get there alive. You certainly wouldn't——" she tried to speak playfully—"leave me behind, would you?"

"Have to, Fannie. State interest—simply imperative. Leave you plenty money." He gave the keys a little shake. Her eyes burned through him, but he smiled on.

She took the keys. As she passed through the door between the two rooms she supported herself against the jamb. John rose hurriedly, but stood dumb. In a few seconds she returned. As she neared him she seemed to trip on the carpet, staggered, fell, and would have struck the floor at full length but for John's quick arms. For an instant he held her whole slight weight. Her brow had fallen upon

his shoulder. But quickly she lifted it and with one wild look into his face moaned, "No," and pushed herself from him into a rocking-chair.

The pocketbook lay on the floor. He would have handed it to her, but she motioned for him to give it to her husband. Ravenel drew from it three bank-notes, saying, as he passed them to John—"Better engage two berths, but buy only one ticket. Then we can either——"

March, busy with his own pocketbook, made a sign that he understood. His fingers trembled, but when he lifted his eyes from them there was a solemn calm in his face and his jaws were set like steel. He handed back one of the notes, and with it something else which was neither coin nor currency.

"Does this mean——" quietly began Ravenel.

"Yes," said John, "I sell you my ticket. I shan't leave town till Miss Fannie's fit to travel."

"Why, John!" For a single instant the sick man reddened. In the next he had recovered his old serenity. "Why that's powerful kind of you."

"Oh, no," said March, with a boyish smile to Fannie, who was rising to move to a lounge, "it's a mighty old——" He was going to say "debt," but before Ravenel could more than catch his breath or John start half a step forward she had struck the lounge like a flail.

March sprang to her, snatched up a glass of water, and seeing Ravenel's hand on the bell-pull at the bed's head cried, "Ring for the maid, why don't you? She's fainted away."

"Keep cool, old man," said the bridegroom, with his quiet gaze on Fannie. Her eyes opened, and he withdrew his hand.

At seven that evening Ravenel, sitting in his sleeping-car seat, gave March his hand for good-by.

"Yes," said John, "and if the nurse I've got her isn't tip-top—George! I'll find one that is!"

"I'll trust you for that, John."

But John frowned. "What right have you got to trust me this way at all?"

"Because, old man, this time you're in love with another girl."

"No, sir! No, sir!" said March, backing away as the train began to move. "Don't you fool yourself with *that* notion."

"I shan't," drawled the departing traveler.

LXIII.

LETTERS AND TELEGRAMS

No one ever undertook to argue anything with Ravenel unless invited to do so, and very few ever got such an invitation. Fannie had not intended to be left behind. Out of her new care of him she had made her first and last effort to bend his will to hers, and even while she burned under the grief and shame of his treatment she would have gone with him at his beckon though death threatened her at every step.

At any rate so she felt as she came out of her faint and bravely resumed her care of him, retaining it even when the doctor declared she had a fever and ought to be in bed. But she felt also that Jeff-Jack knew he had only to beckon; and when he did not do so, either by hand or tone, she saved herself the idle torture of asking him to take a sick bride on a journey from which a sick bride could not deter him.

Yet she made one mistake, when she took at its face value the equal absence of fondness and resentment with which the bridegroom had behaved throughout. It was easy enough to read John March's deep indignation under the surface of his courteous silences; but neither she nor John guessed that the bridegroom's only reason for not being vexed with both of them was that he was not of the sort to let himself be vexed. Each had disappointed him seriously; Fannie by setting up domestic love and felicity as a purpose instead of an appliance, squandering her care and strength in a short-sighted devotion to his physical needs, and showing herself unfit to co-operate with him in the things for which he thought it no great matter to risk his life; and John by failing so utterly to discern the true situation in Suez that the only thing to do with him was to let him alone until time and hard luck might season him to better uses than anyone could make of him yet.

If Ravenel were going to allow himself the luxury of either vexation or chagrin, he had far more profound occasion in quite another person. Probably never before in their acquaintance had he been so displeased with Garnet. Some hours

before he rose to dress for the train he had filled out two telegraph blanks. The contents of the first he read to Fannie and with her approval sent it to her father by wire. It read:

"Have been sick. Much better now. Fannie tired out, nursing. Wants Johanna. Send her in care Southern Express Company.

R."

He did not read to her the second missive. But when he had made it ready—for the mail, not the telegraph,—getting her to address it in one of her envelopes and seal it with her own new seal, he said, with a pensive smile that made him very handsome, "Garnet will think it's from a woman—till he opens it."

It read as follows:

"Your Construction Company smells. *Courier* mum—but firm—money all got to stay in Three Counties, no matter who's on top. Last man one Yank too many. *Courier* may have to combine with Halliday.

"Yours to count on, J. J."

John did not see Fannie that evening on his return from the station. He only received at second hand her request to call in the morning. She had gone to bed and taken her medicine, and was resting quietly, said the nurse. But when John asked if the patient was asleep, the nurse confessed she hardly thought so. She might have told how, listening kindly at the patient's door, she had heard her turn in bed and moan, "Oh, God! why can't I die?" But she had often heard such questions asked by persons with only a headache. And besides, there is always the question, To whom to tell things. Where did this most winning young man stand? The only fact quite clear either to her, the clerks, bell-boys or chambermaids, was that when he stood in front of the bridegroom he completely hid him from view.

Though lost to sight, however, Fannie was still a tender care in the memory of John March—if we may adapt one of his mother's gracefulest verses. He went to his hotel fairly oppressed with the conviction that for Fannie's own sake it was his duty to drop a few brief lines to Barbara Garnet—ahem! Mr. March's throat was absolutely sound, but sometimes, when he wasn't watching, it would clear itself that way. To forestall any rumor that might reach Miss Garnet from Suez, it was but right to send her such a truthfully garbled account of the Ravenels and himself that she would see at a glance how perfectly natural, proper and insignificant it was for him to be lingering in a strange city with a sick bride whom he had once hoped to marry, the bridegroom being sick also and several hundred miles away. At the same time this would give him opportunity to explain

away the still mortifying awkwardness of his last parting with Miss Garnet—without, however, really alluding to it. No use trying to explain a thing of that sort at all unless you can explain it without alluding to it.

He was ready, early in the evening, to begin; but lost some time trying to decide whether to open with Miss Garnet, or My Dear Miss Garnet, or Dear Miss Garnet, or My Dear Miss Barbara, or My Dear Miss Barb, or Dear Miss Barb, or just Dear Friend as you would to an ordinary acquaintance. He tried every form, but each in turn looked simply and dreadfully impossible, and at length he went on with the letter, leaving the terms of his salutation to the inspiration of the last moment. It was long after midnight when he finished. The night sky was inviting, and the post-office near by; he mailed the letter there instead of trusting the hotel. And then he stood by the mute slot that had swallowed it, and because he could not get it back for amendment called himself by as large a collection of flaming and freezing invectives as ever a Southern gentleman—"member in good standing of any Evangelical church"—poured upon himself in the privacy of his own counsels. He returned to his hotel, but was back again at sunrise smiling his best into a hand hole, requesting so-and-so and so-and-so, while he pencilled and submitted examples of his hand-writing. To which a voice within replied,

"Oh, yes, the watchman; but the watchman told you wrong. I tell you again, that mail's gone."

"How long has—? However!—Oh, that's all right, sir; I only wanted—ahem!" The applicant moved away chewing his lip. What he had "only wanted" was to change the form of his letter's salutation. In the street it came to him that by telegraphing the post-master at the other end of the route he could—"Oh, thunder! Let it go!" He had begun it, "Dear Miss Barb."

And so it went its way, while he went his—on a business of whose pure unselfishness it is to be feared he was a trifle proud—I mean, to see how Mrs. Ravenel was and ask what more he could do for her. He was kindly received by a sweet little woman of thirty or so, who lived in a small high room of the hotel, taught vocal music in an academy, and had nothing to do on Saturdays and Sundays—this was Saturday. Through the doctor, who was her doctor, too, she had found access to Fannie's bedside and even into her grateful regard. Her soft, well-trained voice was of the kind that rests the sick and weary. The nurse, she said, was getting a little sleep on the lounge in Mrs. Ravenel's room. "Satisfactory?" Yes, admirable every way, and already as fond of Mrs. Ravenel as she herself.

"Isn't she lovely?" she exclaimed in melodious undertone, and hardly gave Mr. March time for a very dignified yes. "When she sat up in her pillows half an hour

ago, with her breakfast, so delicate and tempting, lying before her forgotten, and she looking *so* frail and yet *so* pretty, with that look in her eyes as if she had been seeing ghosts all night, she seemed to me as though she'd just finished one life and begun another. How long has she had that look, Mr. March? I noticed it the morning she arrived, though it wasn't anything like so plain as it is now. But it only makes her more interesting and poetical. If I were a man—hmp!—I'd wish I were Colonel Ravenel, that's all! No, I don't know that I should, either; but if I were not, I'm afraid I should give him trouble." John thought she watched him an instant there, but—

"Mr. March," she went on, "I wish you could hear the beautiful, tender, winning way in which she boasts of her husband. She's as proud of him for going and leaving her as she is of you for staying! Fact is, *I* can't tell which of you she's proudest of." She gave her listener a fascinated smile, with which he showed himself at such a loss to know what to do that she liked him still better than before.

"Mrs. Ravenel asked me to tell you how grateful she is. But she also——"

A bell-boy interrupted with two telegrams, both addressed to Fannie.

"She also what?" asked John, mantling.

"Mr. March, do you suppose either of these is bad news?"

"No, ma'am, one's probably from Suez to say the black girl's coming, and the other's from her husband; but if it were not good news, he was to send it to me."

She took the telegrams in and was soon with him again. "Oh, Mr. March, they're just as you said! Mrs. Ravenel says tell you she's better—which is true—and to thank you once more, but to say that she can't any longer—" the little musician poured upon him her most loving beams—"let you make the sacrifice you're——"

John solemnly smiled. "Why, she hasn't *been* letting me. She never asked me to stay and she needn't ask me to go. I gave my word to *him*, and I shall keep it—to myself." His manner grew more playful. "That's what you'd do, wouldn't you, if you were a man?"

But at that moment his hearer was not fancying herself a man; she was only wishing she were a younger woman. A gleam of the wish may have got into her look as she gave him her hand at parting, for somehow he began to have a sort of honey-sickness against feminine interests and plainly felt his land company's business crowding upon his conscience.

LXIV.

JUDICIOUS JOHANNA

One thing that gives play for sentiment concerning a three hours' belated railway train is the unapologetic majesty with which at last it rolls into a terminal station.

There had been rain-storms and freshets down in Dixie, and a subdued anxiety showed itself on Johanna's face as she stepped down from the crowded platform; but she shone with glad astonishment when she found John March taking her forgotten satchel from her hands and her checks from the express messenger.

A great many people looked at them, once for curiosity and again for pleasure; for she was almost as flattering a representative of her class as he of his, and in meeting each other they seemed happy enough to have been twins. The hotel's conveyance was an old-fashioned stage-coach, but very new and blue. It made her dumb with delight to see the owner-like serenity with which Mr. March passed her into it and by and by out of it into the gorgeous hotel. But to double the dose of some drugs reverses their effect, and her supper, served in the ladies' ordinary and by a white man-servant, actually brought her to herself. As she began to eat—blissfully, for only a yard or so away sat Mr. March smilingly holding back a hundred inquiries—she managed, herself, to ask a question or two. She grew pensive when told of Miss Fannie's sickness and of the bridegroom's being compelled to go to Washington, but revived in reporting favorably upon the health of Mrs. March, whom, she said, she had seen at a fair given by both the Suez churches to raise money to repair the graveyard fence—"on account o' de hawgs breakin' in so awfm."

"And you say everybody was there, eh?" indolently responded John, as he resharpened his lead-pencil. "Even including Professor Pettigrew?"

"No, seh, I observe he not 'mong's' de comp'ny, 'caze yo' maw's Jane, she call my notice to dat."

"I wonder how my mother likes Jane. Do you know?"

Johanna showed a pretty embarrassment. "Jane say yo' maw like her. She say yo' maw like her 'caze she always done tole yo' maw ev'thing what happm when yo' maw not at home. Seh? Oh, no, seh," the speaker's bashfulness increased, "'tis on'y Jane say dat; same time she call my notice to de absence o' Pufesso' Pedigree—yass, seh."

John gave himself a heartier manner. "I reckon, Johanna, you'd be rather amazed to hear that I traveled nearly all the way from Pulaski City with yo' young missie and stayed at the same hotel here with her and her friends a whole Saturday and Sunday, wouldn't you?"

Johanna's modest smile glittered across her face as she slowly replied, "No-o, seh, I cayn't 'zac'ly fine myseff ama-aze', 'caze Miss Barb done wrote about it in her letteh."

"Psheh!" said John, playing incredulous, "you ain't got air letter from Miss Barb."

The girl was flattered to ecstasy. "Yass, seh, I is," she said; but her soft laugh meant also that something in the way he faltered on the dear nickname made her heart leap.

"Now, Johanna," murmured John, looking more roguishly than he knew from under his long lashes, "you' a-foolin' me. If you had a letter you'd be monst'ous proud to show it. All you've got is a line or two saying, 'Send me my shawl,' or something o' that sort."

Johanna glanced up with injured surprise and then tittered, "Miss Barb wear a shawl—fo' de Lawd's sa-ake! Why, Mr. March, evm you knows betteh'n dat, seh." Her glow of happiness stayed while she drew forth a letter and laid it by her cup of coffee.

"Oh!"—the sceptic tossed his head—"seein's believin'; but I can't see so far off."

Johanna could hardly speak for grinning. "Dass heh letteh, seh, writ de ve'y same night what she tell you good-by."

"She wrote it"—John's heart came into his mouth—"that same night?"

"Dass what it saay, seh. D'ain't nothin' so ve'y private in it; ef yo' anterness encline you to read it, why——"

"Thank you," said the convert as his long arm took the prize.

There were three full sheets of it. He found himself mentioned again and again, but covertly drew his breath through his clenched teeth to see how necessary he had made himself to every page of her narrative and how utterly he was left out when not so needed. "She'll not get the same chance again," he thought as he finished.

"Johanna, have you—never mind, I was——" And he began to read it again.

Sitting thus absorbed, he was to the meek-minded girl before him as strong and fine a masculine nature as she had ever knowingly come near. But his

intelligence was only masculine at last—a young man's intelligence. She kept her eyes in her plate; yet she had no trouble to see, perfectly, that her confidence was not ill-advised—a confidence that between the letter's lines he would totally fail to read what she had read.

One thing was disappointing. As often as read to her, the letter had seemed to sparkle and overflow with sweet humor and exquisite wit to that degree that she had to smother her laughter from beginning to end. Mr. March was finishing it a second time and had not smiled. Twice or thrice he had almost frowned. Yet as he pushed its open pages across the table he said ever so pleasantly,

"That's a mighty nice letter, Johanna; who's going to answer it for you?"

"Hit done answe'd, seh. I ans' it same night it come. My fatheh writ de answeh; yass, seh, Unc' Leviticus."

"Oh, yes. Well, you couldn't 'a' chosen better—Oh! Miss Barb says here"—Mr. March gathered up the sheets again—"write me all you hear about the land company.' That's just so's to know how her father gets on, I reckon, ain't it?" He became so occupied with the letter that the girl did not have to reply. He was again reading it through. This time he repeatedly smiled, and as he folded it and gave it up he said once more,

"Yes, it's a nice letter. Does Miss Barb know where to mail the next one to you?"

"I ain't had no chaynce to sen' her word, seh."

"Why, that's a pity! You ought to do that at once, Johanna, and let her know you've got here safe and well—if only for her sake! I'll do it for you to-night, if you'd like me to."

Johanna thankfully assented.

Mr. March did not ponder, this time, as to what the opening phrase of the letter should be; and as he sealed the "hurried note" he did so with the air of a man who is confident he has made no mistake. It began, "Dear Miss Barb."

LXV.

THE ENEMY IN THE REAR

A new week came in with animating spring weather. On Monday Fannie sat up, and on Tuesday, when John called, her own smile surprised him at the door, while Johanna's reflected it in the background.

He felt himself taken at a disadvantage. His unready replies to her lively promptings turned aimlessly here and there; his thoughts could neither lead nor follow them. The wine of her pretty dissembling went to his head; while the signs of chastening in her fair face joined strangely with her sprightliness in an obscure pathetic harmony that moved his heartstrings as he had felt youthfully sure they were never to be moved again. His late anger against Ravenel came back, and with it, to his surprise, the old tenderness for her, warmed by the anger and without the bitterness of its old chagrin. He found himself reminded of his letters to Johanna's distant mistress, but instantly decided that the two matters had nothing to do with each other, and gave himself rich comfort in this visible and only half specious fulfilment of his youth's long dream. The daily protection and care of this girl, her welcome, winsome gayeties and thanks, were his, his! with no one near to claim a division of shares and only honor to keep account with. His words were stumbling over these unconfessed distractions when she startled him by saying,

"I've telegraphed Jeff-Jack that I can travel."

His response was half-resentful. "Did the doctor say you might?"

She gave her tone a shade of mimicry. "Yes, sir, the doctor said I might." But she changed it to add, "You'll soon be free, John; it's a matter of only two or three hours." Her playfulness faded into a smile of grateful affection. Johanna, who was passing into the next room, could not see it, but she easily guessed it by the slight disconcertion which showed through the smile he gave back.

He dropped his eyes pensively. "To be free isn't everything."

"It is for you just now, John, mighty nearly. You've got a great work before you, and——"

"Oh, yes, so I've heard." He laughed apologetically and rose to go.

"You don't need to be reminded as badly as you used to," said Fannie, retaining his hand and looking into his face with open admiration. "You'll start East to-day, won't you?"

"That depends."

"Now, John, it doesn't do any such thing. It mustn't!"

"I'll let you know later," said John, freeing his grasp. The pressure of her little hand had got into his pulse. He hurried away.

"She's right," he pondered, as he walked down the populous street, beset by a vague discomfort, "it mustn't depend. Besides, she's pretty sure not to stay here. It wouldn't be Jeff-Jack's way to come back; he'll wire to her to come to him at once. Reckon I'll decide now to go on that Washington express this evening. I can't afford to let my movements depend on F-Fannie's—hem! Heaven knows I've taxed the company's patience enough already."

He told the regretful clerks at his hotel that this was his farewell day with them, and tried to feel that he had thus burned the last bridge between himself and indiscretion. He only succeeded in feeling as you and I—and Garnet—used to feel when we had told our purpose to others and fibbed to ourselves about the motive. But Garnet had got far beyond that, understand.

So Vice-President March went to the day's activities paying parting calls from one private office to another in the interest of Widewood's industrial colonization. He bought his railroad ticket—returnable in case any unforeseen—

"Oh, that's all right, President March: yes, sir; good-day, sir."

At his hotel shortly after noon he found a note. He guessed at its contents. "She takes the same train I do." He forced himself to frown at the amusing yet agreeable accident. But his guess was faulty; the note read:

"I return immediately to Suez, where Jeff-Jack will arrive by the end of the week."

And thereupon John had another feeling known to us all—the dull shame with which we find that fate has defrauded us for our own good. However, he hurried to Fannie and put himself into her service with a gay imperiousness delightful to both and apparently amusing to the busy Johanna. By and by the music-teacher helped also, making Fannie keep her rocking-chair, and, as Mr. March came and went, dropped little melodious, regretful things to him privately about his own departure. Once she said that nothing gave her so much happiness as answering pleasant letters; but John only wondered why women so often talk obviously without any aim whatever!

"Well," at length he said to Fannie, "I'll go now and get myself off. Your train starts from the same station mine does; I'll say good-by there."

He packed his valise and hand-bag, and had given them to the porter, when he received a letter.

"My George!" was his dismayed whisper to himself, "a duelist couldn't be prompter." He walked to the door, gazing at the superscription. "It feels like my letter sent back. Ah, well! that's just what it ought to be. Confound the women, all; I wonder how it feels for a man just to mind his own business and let them"—he rent the envelope—"mind—theirs!"

He read the missive as he rode to the station. It wasn't very long, and it did seem to him a bit too formal; and yet it was so gravely sweet that he had to smooth the happiness off his face repeatedly, and finally stole a private laugh behind the hand that twisted his small mustache, as he fondly sighed.

"Doggone your considerate little soul, you're just a hundred ton nicer and better than your father or anybody else is ever going to deserve!" But he read on:

"For you remember, do you not? that I was free to speak of yours and papa's ambitions and plans for Widewood? And so I enclose a page or two of a letter just received from our Johanna at home, because it states things about Colonel Proudfit's new construction company which Cornelius seems to have told your mother's black girl, Jane. They may be pure inventions; but if so, they must be his, not hers, although I should never have thought he would be so reckless as to tell such things to such a person——" Etc.

John unfolded the fragments of Johanna's letter with a condescending smile which began to fade before he had read five lines. A chill ran down his back, and then an angry flush mounted to his brow.

There is a kind of man—Mr. Leggett was such a one, Samson was another—who will tell his own most valuable or dangerous secrets to any woman on whose conquest he is bent, if she only knows how to bid for them. And there are "Delijahs" who will break any confidence and risk any fortune, nay, their own lives, to show a rival she has been eclipsed. There are also women, even girls, who are of such pure eyes they cannot discern obliquity anywhere. And there are others just as pure—the lily's own heart isn't purer—who, nevertheless—but why waste time or type. In short, Johanna first, and then Barbara, had seen how easily Daphne Jane's tittle-tattle might be serious news to John March; which it certainly was if the dark cloud on his face was a true sign.

He found Fannie on her train and well cared for by Johanna and the music-teacher. In the silence which promptly followed his greeting, these two moved aside and Fannie murmured eagerly,

"What on earth's the matter?—Yes, there is, John; something's wrong; what is it? I saw you slip a letter into your pocket at the door. What does it mean?"

"Why, Fannie—it means I've got to go straight back to Suez."

She made a rapturous gesture. "And you're going on this train?" she whispered.

"No."

"Now, why not? John, you're foolish!—or else you think I am. You mustn't! You must go on this train. John, I—I want you to." She smiled up at his troubled gaze.

"Johanna," he said, and beckoned the maid a step aside. "Miss Barb has sent me that part of your letter to her that tells about the construction company."

"Yaas, seh," murmured Johanna. Her heart throbbed.

"You say, there, that Cornelius says its officers are mere tools in the power of men who have put them there; that Gamble's behind Crickwater, Bulger's behind Mattox, and he, Leggett, is behind Pettigrew—yes—don't interrupt, there isn't time—and that Colonel Proudfit got the money to buy stock enough to elect himself president, by persuading his wife to mortgage everything she has got. Yes; but you don't tell who Cornelius says is behind Colonel Proudfit. Didn't he say?"

"Please, seh, Mr. March, ef Majo'——"

"That's all, Johanna, I'm much obliged to you. It may be, you know, that there isn't a word of truth in the whole thing; but in any case you'll never—No, that's right." He turned to Fannie. "I must change my ticket and check; I'm going with you."

LXVI.

WARM HEARTS, HOT WORDS, COOL FRIENDS

About that same hour the next day John stepped off the train at Suez and turned to let Fannie down; but a pair of uplifted arms came between the two, and Launcelot Halliday, with the back of his velvet coat close to the young man's face, said, "I'll take care of my daughter, John; you can look after any business of your own that may need you."

"Why, Pop!" exclaimed Fannie. The color flushed up to her brows. John gazed at him in haughty silence.

"Come on, Johanna," said the old General, heartily. "Good-by, John. When can I see you in your office?"

"Whenever I'm there, and not too busy!" replied March as he strode away.

"We'll go to the old house for to-night, Johanna," said Fannie, and did not speak again until she began to draw off her gloves in her father's parlor. Her face was white, her dark eyes wide; but her voice was slow and kind.

"Yes, Johanna, go along to my room. I'll be there directly." She shut the door and folded her gloves, smiling like a swordsman rolling up his sleeves.

"Pop, I've owed you a-many an explanation that I've never paid. You never owed me one in your life till now; but"—her eyes flashed—"you owe it this time to the roots of your hair."

"Fan, that's a mighty poor beginning for the explanation I expect from you."

His tone was one of forbearance, but before he could finish she was as red as a flower. "I belong to my husband! When I've anything to explain I'll explain to him."

"Fannie Halliday——"

"Ravenel, if you please, sir."

He smiled severely. "Have a chair, Mrs. Ravenel. Fan, you're married to a man who never asks an explanation."

The two gazed upon each other in silence. His accustomed belief in her and her ardent love for him were already stealing back into their hearts. Nevertheless——
—

"O, sir!" she exclaimed, "tell me something I don't know! Yes! But I'm married to a man who waits for things to explain themselves."

"Or till they're past all explanation, Fan."

"Yes, sir; yes! But more! I'm married to a man who knows that nothing can explain conduct but conduct. That's the kind of explanation you still owe me, Pop, till you pay it to John March."

"Well, then," he replied with new warmth, "I'll owe it a long time. If he ever again shows his carelessness of conventional——"

Fannie laid a pale hand on her father's arm. "It wasn't his. He showed carefulness enough; I overruled it. It was his duty to come, Pop; and I had let him neglect duty for me long enough."

The General started. "Why, Fan." But when he looked into her sad eyes his soul melted. She smiled with her face close to his.

"Pop, you never meddled in my affairs before. Don't you reckon I'll manage this one all right."

"Why, yes, Fan. I was only anxious about you because——"

"Never mind your becauses, dear. Just say you'll make it all right with John."

"Go to bed, Fannie; go to bed; John and I will take care of ourselves."

When the General reached his office the next day the forenoon was well advanced. He was still there when at midday John March entered.

"John, howdy? Have a chair."

"Thank you, sir." But the young man continued to stand.

"Oh, take a seat, John; you can get up again if what I say doesn't suit you."

The speaker came from his desk, took a chair and pushed another to his visitor.

"John, I had a short talk with Fannie last night, and a long one again this morning. If my manner to you last evening impugned your motives, I owe you an apology."

"That's all I want to hear, General," said John, accepting the old soldier's hand.

"Yes, my boy; but it's not all I want to say. Fannie tells me you've been taking some business risks, so to speak, for her sake." John scowled. "Now, John, when she asked you to come home on her train she knew that was to her a social risk, and she took it for your sake in return. Not improper? I don't say it was. It was worse than improper, John; it was romantic! The gay half of Suez will never forget it, and the grim half will never forgive it! Oh, it was quite proper and praiseworthy if Pussie and Susie would just not misconstrue it, as they certainly will. Only a few months ago, you know, you were making it almost public that you would still maintain your highly poetical line of conduct and sentiment toward Fan after she should be married."

"General Halliday, I——"

"Let me finish, John. We didn't run you out of town, did we?"

March smiled a strong sarcasm and shook his head. The General went on.

"No, sir, we took you good-naturedly and trusted to your sober second thought. Well, Fan's scarcely ten days married, Jeff-Jack's a thousand miles away, and here you come full of good intentions, hell's pavement, you know—O John, the more I think of it the more amazed I am at all three of you. I don't blame Jeff-Jack for leaving Fan as he did——"

"As he did! By George! General Halliday, that's all I do blame him for!"

"Why, do you mean—But never mind; that's probably none of my business; I don't see how you could ever think it was any of yours. Oh, now, please keep your seat! No, at least, I don't blame him merely for leaving her; a politician's a soldier; he can't stop to comfort the sick. But he should have declined your offer to stay with her, in *italics*, John, and sent for me!"

"Sent for—Oh, imagine him! Besides, General Halliday, Jeff-Jack knew my offer was to myself; not to him at all, sir! But he saw another thing—about me—as plainly as I did; yes, plainer!"

"I could do that myself, John. What was it—this time?"

"He saw my sober second thought had come!"

"H—, I wish I had his eyes! Did he say so? Wha'd he say?"

"He said what wasn't true."

The old warrior smiled satirically. "What was it?"

"Ever mind what it was! I'm talked out."

"My dear fellow, so am I! John, honestly, I thank you for the—pardon me—the unusual patience with which you've taken my hard words." The speaker gripped his hearer's knee. "And you really think you've finished your first great campaign of mistakes—eh?"

"Yes!" They rose, laughing. "Yes, and I've every reason to hope it's my last." The General proposed drinks, but John hadn't time, and they only swapped cigars.

"I hear you leave us again this evening," said the General.

"No; they'd like me to go, but I'm—I'm very tired and anyhow——"

"You're wha-at? Tired! Why, John—O no, you don't mean tired, you mean insane! Why, sir, that's going straight back on everything you've been saying! John, we're not going to stand this." The General grew red.

"Whom do you mean by 'we,' General?" Both men were forgetting to smoke.

"Everybody, sir! everybody in Suez with whom you have any relations? Why, look at it yourself! For a week running you neglect your own interests and your company's business to do—what? Just what you'd do if you were still under an infatuation which you've openly confessed for years!"

"But which, General Halliday, I tell you again——"

"Telling won't do, sir, when doing tells another story. Here are your directors astonished and vexed at you for coming back with not a word as to why you've come. O, how do I know it? It's the talk o' the town! They bid you go back to the field of work you chose yourself, and you tell *them*—business men—financiers—that you're 'tired and anyhow——' By Jupiter! John March——"

"General, stop! I'll manage my own business my own way, sir! It's no choice of mine to speak so to you, General Halliday, but I swear I'll not widen my confidences—no, nor modify my comings and goings—to provide against the looks of things. It's the culpable who are careful, sir."

"Yes—yes—and 'the simple pass on and are punished.' I don't ask you to widen your confidences to include me, John."

"Shan't widen them to include anyone, under pressure, General. But it's a pity when you know so much about these things, you don't know more."

"I do, John. I know that when Jeff-Jack left here he left his proxy—at your solicitation—with John Wesley Garnet!"

"Which, he gave me to understand, was just what he intended to do, anyhow."

"O, gave you to understand, of course! But it wasn't, John. Jeff-Jack's still got too many uses for Garnet, to cross him without a good excuse. But he knows what Gamble's influence is, and a different request from you would have put his proxy in safer hands. He would have saved you, John, if you hadn't yourself rushed in and spoken for Garnet."

"And why should you assume that Garnet's holding the proxy has made——"

"Oh, bah! Why, John, d'ye reckon I don't see that he and Bulger have gone over to Gamble, and are out-voting you—hauling you in hand over fist? It's written in large letters and hung up where all Susie can read it—except yourself!"

"Where?"

"In your face. And now you're staying here to stare at a lost game. O, John, for your own sake, get away! Clear out to-night! You can at least hide your helplessness. If you will, I'll call you back as soon as you can gain anything by coming. Yes, and I'll turn in and fight these fellows for you in the meantime!"

"Thank you, General, but you're mistaken; the game *isn't* lost. The moment Jeff-Jack and I——"

"Ah! John, the moment's gone! Ask yourself! Will Jeff-Jack ever join the forlorn hope of a man who won't dance to his fiddle? *His* self-sacrifices are not that sort."

"And yet that's the very sacrifice you think I ought to let you make for me!"

"By Joe! sir, it wouldn't be a sacrifice! If it will just get you out of town it will suit me perfectly!"

"Then, sir, you'll not be suited! I'm going to stay here and see what my enemies are up to; and if they're up to what I think they are, I'll break their backs if I have to do it single-handed and alone! Good-day, sir."

"Good-day, John; that's the way you'll have to do it, sir."

"Devil take him," added the General as he found himself alone, "*he's* crossed the bar. It's his heart that's safe. O, Fan, my poor child!"

LXVII.

PROBLEM: IS AN UNCONFIRMED DISTRUST NECESSARILY A DEAD ASSET?

John went away heavy and bitter. Yet he remembered, this time, to take more care of his facial expression. He met Shotwell and Proudfit coming out of the best saloon. They stopped him, complimented his clothes and his legs, asked a question or two of genuine interest, poked him in the waistband, and regretted not meeting him sooner. Proudfit suggested, with the proper anathema, to go back and take a *re-invigorator* with Vice-President March. But the pleasant Shotwell said:

"You forget, Colonel, that ow a-able young friend belongs to Gideon's ba-and, now, seh."

Proudfit made a vague gesture of acknowledgment. "And anyhow"—his tongue thickened and his head waggled playfully—"anyhow, Shot, a ladies' man's just *got* to keep his breath sweet, ain't he?"

Shotwell looked as though the rolling earth had struck something. March paled, but he took the Captain's cigar to light his own as he remarked:

"I don't get the meaning of that expression as clear as I wish you'd make it, Colonel."

Shotwell pretended to burst with merriment. "Why, neither does the Colonel! That was only a sort o' glittering generality to hide his emba'assment—haw, haw, haw!"

Proudfit smiled modestly. "Shot, you're right again! He's right again, John. It was only one o' my grittlin' gen—my grilterin' geren—aw! Shot, hush yo' fuss! you confu-use me!"

John was laughing before he knew it. "Gentlemen, I've got to get along home. I slept at Tom Hersey's hotel last night, and haven't seen my mother yet. O—eh—Captain——"

Shotwell left Proudfit and walked away with March. Persons rarely asked advice of the ever-amiable Captain; they went by him to Charley Champion, whom he revered as well as loved. And so he was thoroughly pleased when John actually let Champion pass them and asked him, in confidence, what he thought of Proudfit's construction company.

"Well, of co'se, John, you know how fah Proudfit is fum being an a-able man; and so does he. He's evm fool enough to think he can sharpen his wits with whiskey, which *you* know, March, that if that was so I'd myself be as sharp as a ra-azor. But *I* don't suspicion but what everything's clean and square—Oh, I wouldn't swear nobody does; you know, yo'self, what double-ba'lled fools some men ah. I reckon just about everybody likes the arrangement, though; faw whetheh one company aw the otheh, aw both, make money, the money sta-ays. Yes, of co'se, we know he owes it to Garnet's influence, but I suspicion Garnet done as he did mo' to gratify Miz Proudfit's ambitions than fum any notion o' they being big money in it faw anybody; you know how fawnd Garnet's always been of both of 'em, you know. Oh, no, whateveh the thing is, it's square! You might know that by Pettigrew bein' its seccata'y; faw to eh is *human*—which Pettigrew *ain't*."

John mounted a horse and started for Widewood. He had to stop and shake hands with Parson Tombs over his front palings, and make an honest effort to feel annoyed by the old man's laughter-laden compliments on his energy, enterprise, and perspicacity. At the Halliday cottage he saw Fannie clipping roses from the porch trellis for Martha Salter, who stood by. She waved her hand.

"John March, I do believe you were going to gallop right a-past us without stopping!" said Fannie, as he tardily wheeled and rode slowly up to the low gate.

He answered awkwardly, and when she gave him a rose, looked across at Miss Salter, whose gravity increased his discomfort. A dash up the slope beyond the Academy was a partial relief only while it lasted, and at the top, where his horse dropped into a trot, he lifted the flower as if to toss it over the hedge, but faltered, bent forward, and stuck it into the animal's head-stall. As he straightened up he found himself in the company of a tall rider going his way, whom he had passed on the slope—the president of Suez University.

"I believe you're not often overtaken, once you're in the saddle, Mr. March."

John "reckoned that was so," and said that as he came up the hill he had been so busy thinking, that he had not recognized the quiet gray man in time to salute him. The poverty-chastened gentleman had "seen how it was," and began to speak of the great changes impending over Widewood and in Suez, principally due, he insisted with a very agreeable dignity, to Mr. March's courageous and untiring perseverance.

"It's true you couldn't have succeeded without some support from such resolute and catholic spirits as Major Garnet and President Gamble; but when I lately spoke to them they said emphatically that, in comparison with you, they had done nothing; and Mr. Leggett, who was present, confirmed them and included himself. He had brought them to me to urge me to take a few shares which were for the moment available. The holder, I believe, was the lady who teaches French here in the Academy, Mademoiselle Eglantine; yes. I have no money to invest, however, and Mr. Leggett tells me she has changed her mind again and will keep the stock, which I am sure is wise. The Construction Company?—I think it an excellent idea; admirable! I mustn't detain you, Mr. March, though I have a request to make. Possibly you know that our more advanced students gather for an hour or so once a week in what we've named our Social Hall, for various forms of profitable entertainment? Now and then we have the good fortune to have some man of mark address us informally, and if you, Mr. March, would do so, there's no one else in this region whom our young people would be so pleased to hear."

John thanked the president for the honor. If there was only something, anything, on which he was really qualified to speak—but——

"Mr. March, speak on the imperative need of organized effort harmoniously combined, for the accomplishment of almost all large undertakings! Or on the growing necessity men find to trust their interest in one another's hands! Oh! you can hardly be at a loss for a theme, I'm sure; but those are points which, it seems to me, our state of society here makes it especially needful to emphasize. Don't you think so, Mr. March?"

Mr. March thought so; ahem! There was a pause, and then they talked of the loveliness of the season. The temperature, they decided, must be about seventy-seven. And what a night the last one had been! Mr. March had attended a meeting of the land company's board, which did not adjourn until very late, but he simply had to take a long walk in the starlight afterward, and even when that was done he stayed up until an absurd hour writing a description of the glorious Southern night to a friend in New England who was still surrounded by frozen hills and streams.

"I hardly know an easier way to delight a New Englander's fancy at this time of year," said the gray president. "Or is your friend a Southern man?"

"Oh—eh—no, sir, she's a Southern girl. I—well, I had to write her on business, anyhow, and I just yielded to the impulse—wrote it, really, more to myself than——"

Mr. March dreamed a moment and presently spoke again.

"It's barely possible I shall have to leave town to-morrow or next day, sir; if I don't I'll try to meet your wish. Well, sir, good-day." He galloped on.

John had often before left Suez and crossed the old battle-field benumbed with consternation and galled with doubts of himself; but he had always breathed in new strength among the Widewood hills. Not so to-day. When once or twice he let his warm horse walk and his thought seek rest, the approbations of Proudfit and Shotwell, Parson Tombs, the president of Suez University, and such—Oh! they only filled him with gaspings. He tried to think what man of real weight there still was with whose efforts he might "harmoniously combine" his own; but he knew well enough there was not one who had not, seemingly through some error of his, drifted beyond his hail.

As the turnings of the mountain road led him from each familiar vista to the next, more and more grievously bore down upon his spirit the sacred charge which he had inherited along with this majestic forest. His father's presence and voice seemed with him again as at one point he halted a moment because it had been the father's habit to do so, and gazed far down and away upon Suez and off in the west where Rosemont's roof and grove lay in a flood of sunlight.

"Oh, son," he could almost hear the dear voice say again, as just there it had once said, "I do believe it's fah betteh to get cheated once in a while than to be afraid to trust those who're not afraid to trust us. Why, son, we wouldn't ever a-been father and son at all, only for the sweet trustfulness of yo' dear motheh. Think o' that, son; you an' me neveh bein' any relation to each otheh!"

The rider's bosom heaved. But the next moment he was hearkening. A distant strain of human mirth came softly from farther up in the wooded hills; one and no more, as if those who made it had descended from some swell of the land into one of its tangled hollows. He listened in vain. All he heard was that beloved long-lost voice saying once more in his lonely heart, "Make haste and grow, son." He put in the spur.

Down a long slope, up a sudden rise, over a level curve where a fox-squirrel leaped into the road and scampered along it; up again, down into a hollow, across the ridge beyond—so he was going, when voices sounded again, then hoofs and wheels, and flashing and darkling in the woodland's afternoon shadows came a party of four, two under hats, two under bonnets, drawn by Bulger's handsome trotters in Garnet's carryall. Garnet drove. Beside him sat Mrs. March luminous with satisfaction, and on the back seat with Bulger was a small thin woman whose flaxen hair was flattened in quince-seed waves on her pretty temples, and whom John knew slightly as Mrs. Gamble. Bulger and the ladies waved hands. Only Garnet's smile showed restraint.

In the board meeting of the night before, though surprise and annoyance at John's presence and attitude were obvious, only the Major and he had openly struck fire. When Gamble, Garnet, and Bulger were left alone, Bulger, who had all along been silent, remarked to Garnet:

"I never drive with a whip. There's lots of horse in a young fellow like March, and I never blame a horse for not liking what he don't understand. I give him lump-sugar. If he's vicious, that's another thing; but when he's only nervous—Got a match, Gamble?—Thanks. Now, I'll tell you what let's do first thing to-morrow morning." And this, with one or two happy modifications suggested by Garnet and Gamble, was now being done.

LXVIII.

FAREWELL, WIDEWOOD

John was lost in a conflict of strong emotions. Sore beset, he forced them all aside for the moment and yielded only to a grateful wonder as he looked upon his pretty mother with her lap full of spring flowers. For the first time in their acquaintance her shapely ear was not waiting to receive, nor her refined lips to reject, his usual rough apologies. Her tone of resignation was almost playful as

she said that the first news of his return had come to her through her present kind companions.

Mrs. Gamble put in that she had induced Mrs. March to join them, on their return from their mountain drive, by telling her that her son was so full of his work in his, her, and their common interest, that she could not expect him to come to her.

"And you all were bringing mother in to see me?" exclaimed John.

"Certing!" said blithe Mrs. Gamble, while Garnet faltered a smiling disclaimer, and the son wondered what hidden influence was making endurable to his mother the company of a woman who declared he would soon have this wilderness turned into a "frewtful garding." But as Mrs. Gamble turned from him and engaged Mrs. March's and Bulger's attention, Garnet gave him a beckoning nod, and as he came round, the Major leaned out and softly said, with a most amiable dignity:

"We were really looking for you, too. Don't you want, just for three or four hours, to forget last night's discord and come along with Sister March and us? We've got a pleasant surprise for her, and we'll enjoy it more, and so will she, if you take part in it."

"Why, Major Garnet—hm!—I can forget; I only can't recede, sir. But——"

"Better speak a little lower."

"Yes, sir. Where's mother going with you, sir? I suppose she knows that, of course?"

"O yes, she knows that. President Gamble and his wife have invited a few of us—the two Miss Kinsingtons, Mademoiselle, Brother and Sister Tombs, Proudfit, Sister Proudfit, Launcelot Halliday, and Fannie——"

"Professor Pettigrew?" asked John.

"No, just a few of us—to a sort of literary evening. But Sister March doesn't know that I've been asked to read a number of her poems; you'll be expected to recite others, and the evening will close with the announcement that we—that is, Mrs. Gamble, Bulger, and I—I'm afraid you'll think we've taken a great liberty in your absence, Brother March; I——"

"What have you been doing, Major Garnet?"

"Why, John, we've outrun your intended efforts and—partly by mail, partly by telegraph—the news only came this morning—we've found Sister March a publisher."

"Why, Major Garnet!" whispered John, with girlish tenderness. Tears sprang to his eyes.

"They're a new house, just starting," continued Garnet, "but they'll print the poems at once."

"In Boston or New York?" interrupted John.

"Pittsburg."

"But how did they decide, Major, without seeing the poems?"

"They didn't; Sister March loaned me some of her duplicates."

"I hope you got good terms, did you?"

"Excellent. Thirty-three and a third per cent. royalty after the first five thousand. Why, John, Dixie alone will want that many."

John "reckoned so" and backed his horse. Mrs. Gamble ratified the Major's invitation, and the horseman replied to the smiling four that he must go home for one or two matters, but would make haste to join them in Suez. As Garnet lifted the reins Mrs. March settled herself anew at his side with a sweet glance into his face which disturbed her son, it seemed so fondly personal. But this disquietude quickly left him as he rode away, when he remembered the Major's daughter having lifted just such a look at himself, for whom, manifestly, she cared nothing, except in the most colorless way.

Daphne Jane, at Widewood, swinging on the garden-gate and cackling airily to a parting visitor, slipped to the ground as Widewood's master suddenly appeared, although just then the first light-hearted smile of that day broke upon his face. It was the parting visitor, also mounted, whose presence pleased him in a degree so unexpected even to himself that he promptly abated his first show of delight.

"Why, Johanna, you important adjunct! To what are we indebted for"—the tone grew vacant—"this—pleasure?" His gay look darkened to one of swift reflection and crushing inference. "Do—do you want to see me?" he blurted, and somewhere under her dark skin Johanna blushed. "No, of course you don't."

As he dismounted—"Jane," he said, "you no need to come in; finish your confab." Upstairs he tried to recall the errand that had brought him there, but Barbara's maid filled all his thought. He saw her from a window and silently addressed her.

"You're not yourself! You're your mistress and you know it! You're she, come all the way back from the land of snow to counsel me; and you're welcome. There's balm, at least, in a sweet woman's counsel, womanly given. Balm; ah, me! neither she nor I have any right—O! what am I looking for in this drawer?—No, I'll take just this word from her and then no more!" Down-stairs he paused an instant in passing his mother's portrait. "No, dear," he said, "we'll mix nothing else with our one good dream—Widewood filled with happy homes and this one, with just you and me in it, the happiest of them all!"

On the gate Daphne Jane still prattled, but after half a dozen false starts Johanna, for gentle shame's sake, had felt obliged to go. Her horse paced off briskly, and a less alert nature than Daphne Jane's would have fancied her soon far on her way. As John came forth again he saw no sign that his mother's maid, slowly walking toward the house with her eyes down, was not engaged in some pious self-examination, instead of listening down the mountain road with both ears. But she easily guessed he was doing the same thing.

"Well, Jane," he said as he loosed his bridle from the fence, "been writing something for Johanna?" and when she said, "Yass, seh," he knew the bashful lie was part of her complicity in a matter she did not understand, but only hoped it was some rascality. A secret delight filled her bosom as he mounted and walked his horse out of sight. She stopped with lifted head and let her joy tell itself in a smiling whisper:

"Trott'n'!" She hearkened again; the smile widened; the voice rose: "Gallopin'!" Her eyes dilated merrily and she cried aloud:

"Ga-allopin', ga-allopin', lippetty-clip, down Zigzag Hill!" Her smile became a laugh, the laugh a song, the song a dance which joined the lightness of a butterfly with the grace of a girl whose mothers had never worn a staylace, and she ran with tossing arms and willowy undulations to kiss her image in Daphne's glass.

With a hundred or so of small stones rattling at his horse's heels John reached the foot of "Zigzag Hill," turned with the forest road once or twice more, noticed, by the tracks, that Johanna's horse was walking, and at another angle saw her just ahead timorously working her animal sidewise to the edge of the way.

"Johanna," he began as he dashed up—"O!—don't get scared—didn't you come out here in hopes to somehow let me know"—he took on a look of angry distress—"that the Suez folks are talking?"

The girl started and stammered, but the young man knitted his brows worse. "Umhm. That's all right." His horse leaped so that he had to look back to see her, as he added more kindly:

"I'm much obliged to you, Johanna—Good-by."

The face he had thus taken by surprise tried, too late, to smile away the signs that its owner was grieved and hurt. A few rods farther on John wheeled around and trotted back. Her pulse bounded with gratitude.

"Johanna, of course, if I stay here I shall keep entirely out of Mrs. Ravenel's sight, or——"

The girl made a despairing gesture that brought John's frown again.

"Why, what?" he asked with a perplexed smile.

"Law! Mr. Mahch, you cayn't all of a sudden do dat; dey'll on'y talk wuss."

"Well, Johanna—I'm not going to try it. I'm going to take the express train this evening." He started on, but checked up once more and faced around. "O—eh—Johanna, I'd rather you'd not speak of this, you understand. I natu'ly don't want Mrs. Ravenel to know why I go; but I'm even more particular about General Halliday. It's none o' his—hm! I say I don't want him to know. Well, good-by. O—eh—Johanna, have you no word—of course, you know, the North's a mighty sizable place, and still it's just possible I might chance some day to meet up with—eh—eh—however, it's aft' all so utterly improbable, that, really—well, good-by!"

A while later Johanna stopped at that familiar point which overlooked the valley of the Swanee and the slopes about Rosemont. The sun had nearly set, but she realized her hope. Far down on the gray turnpike she saw the diminished figure of John March speeding townward across the battle-field. At the culvert he drew rein, faced about, and stood gazing upon Widewood's hills. She could but just be sure it was he, yet her tender spirit felt the swelling of his heart, and the tears rose in her eyes, that were not in his only because a man—mustn't.

While she wondered wistfully if he could see her, his arm went slowly up and waved a wide farewell to the scene. She snatched out her handkerchief, flaunted it, and saw him start gratefully at sight of her and reply with his own. Then he wheeled and sped on.

"Go," she cried, "go; and de Lawd be wid you, Mr. Jawn Mahch, Gen'lemun!—O Lawd, Lawd! Mr. Jawn Mahch, I wisht I knowed a nigger like you!"

IN YANKEE LAND

It was still early May when Barbara Garnet had been six weeks in college. The institution stood in one of New England's oldest towns, a place of unfenced greenswards, among which the streets wound and loitered, hunting for historic gambrel-roofed houses, many of which had given room to other sorts less picturesque and homelike. In the same search great elms followed them down into river meadows or up among flowery hills, casting off their dainty blossoms, putting on their leaves, and waving majestic greetings to the sower as he strode across his stony fields.

Yet for all the sudden beauty of the land and season Miss Garnet was able to retain enough of her "nostalgia" to comfort her Southern conscience. She had arrived in March and caught Dame Nature in the midst of her spring cleaning, scolding her patient children; and at any rate her loyalty to Dixie forbade her to be quite satisfied with these tardy blandishments. Let the cold Connecticut turn as blue as heaven, by so much the more was it not the green Swanee? She had made more than one warm friendship among her fellow-students, but the well-trimmed lamp of her home feeling waxed not dim. It only smoked a trifle even in Boston, that maze of allurements into which no Southerner of her father's generation ever sent his brother, no Southernness her sister, without some fear of apostasy.

Barbara had made three visits to that city, where Mrs. Fair, the ladies said, "did a great deal for her." Yet when Mrs. Fair said, with kind elation, "My dear, you have met Boston, and it is yours!" the smiling exile, as she put her hand into both hands of her hostess, remembered older friends and silently apologized to herself for having so lost her heart to this new one.

At that point came in one who was at least an older acquaintance—the son. Thoroughly as Barbara had always liked Henry Fair, he seemed to her to have saved his best attractiveness until now, and with a gentleness as masculine as it was refined, fitted into his beautiful home, his city, the whole environing country, indeed, and shone from them, in her enlivened fancy, like an ancestor's portrait from its frame. He came to take her to an exhibition of paintings, and thence to the railway station, where a fellow-student was to rejoin her for the trip back to college. Mrs. Fair had to attend a meeting of the society for something or other, of which she was president.

"These people make every minute count," wrote Barbara to Fannie; "and yet they're far from being always at work. I'm learning the art of recreation from them. Even the men have a knack for it that our Southern men know nothing about."

"You might endorse that 'Fair *versus* March,'" replied Ravenel to his wife, one evening, as he lingered a moment at tea. She had playfully shown him the passage as a timorous hint at better self-care; but he smilingly rose and went out. She kept a bright face, and as she sat alone re-reading the letter, said, laughingly, "Poor John!" and a full minute afterward, without knowing it, sighed.

This may have been due, in part at least, to the fact that Barbara's long but tardy letter was the first one Fannie had received from her. It told how a full correspondence between the writer's father and his fellow college president had made it perfectly comfortable for her to appear at the institution for the first time quite unescorted, having within the hour parted from Mr. and Mrs. Fair, who, though less than three hours' run from their own home, would have gone with her if she could have consented. She had known that the dormitories were full and that like many other students she would have to make her home with a private family, and had found it with three very lovable sisters, two spinsters and a widow, who turned out to be old friends—former intimates—of the Fairs. And now this intimacy had been revived; Mrs. Fair had already been to see them once, although to do so she had come up from Boston alone. How she had gone back the letter did not say. Fannie felt the omission.

"I didn't think Barb would do me that way," she mused; and was no better pleased when she recalled a recent word of Jeff-Jack's: that few small things so sting a woman as to disappoint her fondness and her curiosity at the same time. Now with men—However! All Barbara had omitted was that Mrs. Fair had gone back with her son, who on his way homeward from a trip to New York had been "only too glad" to join her here, and spend two or three hours under spring skies and shingle roof with the three pleasant sisters.

This was in the third of those six weeks during which Barbara had been at college. About half of the two or three hours was spent in a stroll along the windings of a small woodland river. The widow and Mrs. Fair led the van, the two spinsters were the main body, and Henry and Barbara straggled in the rear stooping side by side among white and blue violets, making perilous ventures for cowslips and maple blossoms, and commercing in sweet word-lore and dainty likes and dislikes.

When the procession turned, the two stragglers took seats on a great boulder round which the stream broke in rapids, Barbara gravely confessing to the spinsters, as they lingeringly passed, that she had never done so much walking in her life before as now and here in a place where an unprotected girl could hire four hacks for a dollar.

The widow and Mrs. Fair left the others behind. They had once been room-mates at school, and this walk brought back something of that old relation. They talked about the young man at their back, and paused to smile across the stream at some children in daring colors on a green hillside getting sprouts of dandelion.

"Do you think," asked the widow, "it's really been this serious with him all along?"

"Yes, I do. Henry's always been such a pattern of prudence and moderation that no one ever suspects the whole depth of his feelings. He realizes she's very young, and he may have held back until her mind—her whole nature—should ripen; although, like him, as you see, she's ripe beyond her years. But above all he's a dutiful son, and I believe he's simply been waiting till he could see her effect on us and ours on her. Tell me frankly, dear, how do you like her?"

The Yankee widow had bright black eyes and they twinkled with restrained enthusiasm as she murmured, "I hope she'll get him!"

"Ah!" Mrs. Fair smiled gratefully, made a pretty mouth and ended with a wise gesture and a dubious toss, as who should say, "I admit he's priceless, but I hope he may get her."

Whereupon the widow ventured one question more, and Mrs. Fair told her of John March. "Yes," she said at the end, "he happened to be in Boston for his company last Saturday when Miss Garnet was with us, and Henry brought him to the house. I wasn't half glad, though I like him, quite. He's a big, handsome, swinging fellow that everybody invites to everything. He makes good speeches before the clubs and flaunts his Southern politics just enough to please our Yankee fondness for being politely *sassed*."

"Why, dear, isn't that a rather good trait in us? It's zest for the overlooked fact, isn't it?"

"O!—it has its uses. It certainly furnishes a larger feeling of superiority to both sides at once than anything else I know of."

"You say Henry brought him to the house while Miss Garnet was with you——"

"Yes; and, my dear, I wish you might have seen those two Southerners meet! They didn't leave us any feeling of superiority then; at least *he* didn't. Except that they're both so Southern, they're not alike. She moved right in among us without the smallest misstep. He made a dozen delicious blunders. It was lovely to see how sweetly she and Henry helped him up and brushed him off, and the boyish manfulness with which he always took it. I couldn't tell, sometimes, which of the three to like best."

Those behind called them to hearken to the notes of a woodlark, and when Mrs. Fair asked her son the hour it was time to get to the station. Barbara would not say just when she could be in Boston again; but the classmate she liked best was a Boston girl, and by the time this college life had lasted six weeks her visits to the city had been three, as aforesaid. In every instance, with an unobtrusiveness all his own, Henry Fair had made her pleasure his business. On the second visit she had expected to meet Mr. March again—a matter wholly of his contriving—but had only got his telegram from New York at the last moment of her stay, stating that he was unavoidably detained by business, and leaving space for six words unused. The main purpose of her third visit had been to attend with Mrs. Fair a reception given by that lady's club. It had ended with dancing; but Mr. Fair had not danced to suit her and Mr. March had not danced at all, but had allowed himself to betray dejection, and had torn her dress. Back at college she had told the favorite classmate how she had chided Mr. March for certain trivial oversights and feared she had been severe; and when the classmate insisted she had not been nearly severe enough she said good-night and went to her room to mend the torn dress; and as she sewed she gnawed her lip, wished she had never left Suez, and salted her needle with slow tears.

Thus ended the sixth week—stop! I was about to forget the thing for which I began the chapter—and, anyhow, this was not Saturday, it was Friday! While Barbara was so employed, John March, writing to Henry Fair from somewhere among the Rhode Island cotton-spinners, said:

"To-night I go to New York, where I have an important appointment to-morrow noon, but I can leave there Monday morning at five and be in Springfield at ten-twenty-five. If you will get there half an hour later by the train that leaves Boston at seven, I will telegraph the Springfield men to meet us in the bank at eleven. They assure me that if you confirm my answers to their questions they will do all I've asked. Please telegraph your reply, if favorable, to my New York address."

About three o'clock of Saturday March was relieved of much anxiety by receipt of Fair's telegram. It was a long time before Monday morning, but in a sudden elation he strapped his valise and said to the porter—"Grand Central Depot."

"Back to Boston again?"

"Not much! But I'm not going to get up at four o'clock Monday morning either."

In Boston that evening a servant of the Fairs told one of their familiar friends who happened to drop in, that Mr. Fair, senior, was in, but that Mr. Henry had gone to spend Sunday at some Connecticut River town, he was not sure which, but—near Springfield.

LXX.

ACROSS THE MEADOWS

Next morning, John March, for the first time in his life, saw and heard the bobolink.

"Ah! you turncoat scoundrel!" he laughed in a sort of fond dejection, "you've come North to be a lover too, have you? You were songless enough down South!"

But the quivering gallant went singing across the fields, too drunk with the joy of loving to notice accusers.

On the previous evening March had come up by rail some fifteen miles beyond the brisk inland city just mentioned and stopped at a certain "Mount"—no matter what—known to him only through casual allusions in one or two letters of—a friend. Here he had crossed a hand-ferry, climbed a noted hill, put up at its solitary mountain house—being tired of walls and pavements, as he had more than once needlessly explained—and at his chamber window sat looking down, until most of them had vanished, upon a cluster of soft lights on the other side of the valley, shining among the trees of the embowered town where one who now was never absent from his thoughts was at school.

The knowledge that he loved her was not of yesterday only. He could count its age in weeks and a fraction, beginning with the evening when "those two Southerners" had met in Mrs. Fair's drawing-room. Since then the dear trouble of it had ever been with him, deep, silent, dark—like this night on the mountain—shot with meteors of brief exultation, and starlighted with recollections of her every motion, glance, and word.

At sunrise, looking again, he saw the town's five or six spires, and heard one tell the hour and the college bell confirm it. Care was on his brow, but you could see it was a care that came of new freedom. He was again a lover, still tremorous with the wonder of unsought deliverance from his dungeon of not-loving. And now the stern yet inspiring necessity was not to let his delivering angel find it out; to be a lover, but not a suitor. Hence his presence up here instead of down in the town beyond the meadows and across the river. He would make it very plain to her and her friends that he had not come, ahead of his business appointment, to thrust himself upon her, but to get a breath of heaven's own air—being very tired of walls and pavements—and to—to discover the bobolink!

Of course, being so near, he should call. He must anyhow go to church, and if only he could keep himself from starting too early, there was no reason why he should not combine the two duties and make them one pleasure. Should he ride or drive? He ordered the concern's best saddle-horse, walked mournfully half round him, and said, "I reckon—I reckon I'll drive. Sorry to trouble you, but——"

"Put him in the shafts, Dave," said the stable-keeper, and then to the guest, "No trouble, sir; if a man doesn't feel safe in a saddle he'd better not monkey with it."

"I dare say," sedately responded John. "I suppose a man oughtn't to try to learn to ride without somebody to go along with him."

The boy had just finished harnessing the animal, when March started with a new thought. He steadied himself, turned away, drew something from his pocket, consulted and returned it—it was neither a watch nor a weapon—and rejoining the stable-keeper said, with a sweet smile and a red face:

"See here, it's only three miles over there. If you'll let me change my mind——"

"You'll walk it—O all right! If you change your mind again you can let us know on your return."

John took a way that went by a bridge. It was longer than the other, by way of a ferry, but time, for the moment, was a burden and either way was beautiful. The Sabbath was all smiles. On the Hampshire hills and along the far meanderings of the Connecticut a hundred tints of perfect springtide beguiled the heart to forget that winter had ever been. Above a balmy warmth of sunshine and breeze in which the mellowed call of church-bells floated through the wide valley from one to another of half a dozen towns and villages, silvery clouds rolled and unrolled as if in stately play, swung, careened, and fell melting through the marvellous blue, or soared and sunk and soared again. Keeping his eyes much on such a heaven, our inexperienced walker thought little of close-fitting boots until he had to sit down, screened from the public road by a hillock, and, with a smile of amusement but hardly of complacency, smooth a cruel wrinkle from one of his very striped socks. Just then a buckboard rumbled by, filled with pretty girls, from the college, he guessed, driving over to that other college town, seven miles across the valley, where a noted Boston clergyman was to preach to-day; but the foot-passenger only made himself a bit smaller and chuckled at the lucky privacy of his position. As they got by he stole a peep at their well-dressed young backs, and the best dressed and shapeliest was Barbara Garnet's. The driver was Henry Fair. It was then that the bobolink, for the first time in his life, saw and heard John March.

LXXI.

IN THE WOODS

The sun mounted on to noon and nature fell into a reverent stillness; but in certain leafy aisles under the wooded bluffs and along that narrow stream where Mrs. Fair some three weeks earlier had walked with the widow, the Sabbath afternoon was scarcely half spent before the air began to be crossed and cleft with the vesper hymns and serenades of plumed worshippers and lovers.

It was a place to quicken the heart and tongue of any wooer. The breezes moved pensively and without a sound. On the middle surface of the water the sunshine lay in wide bands, liquid-bordered under over-hanging boughs by glimmering shadows that wove lace in their sleep. Between the stream and the steep ground ran an abandoned road fringed with ferns, its brown pine-fallings flecked with a sunlight that fell through the twined arms and myriad green fingers of all-namable sorts of great and lesser trees. You would have said the forest's every knight and lady, dwarf, page, and elf—for in this magical seclusion all the world's times were tangled into one—had come to the noiseless dance of some fairy's bridal; chestnut and hemlock, hazel and witch-hazel, walnut and willow, birches white and yellow, poplar and ash in feathery bloom, the lusty oaks in the scarred harness of their winter wars under new tabards of pink and silver-green, and the slim service-bush, white with blooms and writhing in maiden shame of her too transparent gown. In each tangled ravine Flora's little pious mortals of the May—anemone, yellow violet, blood-root, mustard, liverwort, and their yet humbler neighbors and kin—heard mass, or held meeting—whichever it was—and slept for blissful lack of brain while Jack-in-the-pulpit preached to them, under Solomon's seal, and oriole, tanager, warbler, thrush, up in the choir-loft, made love between the hymns, ate tidbits, and dropped crumbs upon wake-robin, baby-toes, and the nodding columbine.

Was it so? Or was it but fantasy in the mind of Henry Fair alone, reflected from the mood of the girl at whose side he walked here, and whose "Herrick" he vainly tried to beguile from her in hope that so she might better heed his words? It may be. The joy of spring was in her feet, the colors of the trees were answered in her robes. Moreover, the flush of the orchards and breath of the meadows through which they had gone and come again were on her cheek and in her parted lips, the red-brown depths of the stream were in her hair and lashes, and above them a cunningly disordered thing of fine straw and loose ribbons matched the head and

face it shaded, as though all were parts together of some flower unspoiled by the garden's captivity and escaped again into the woods.

To Barbara's ear Fair's speech had always been melodious and low. Its well-tempered pitch had her approval especially here, where not only was there the wild life of grove and thicket to look and listen for, but a subdued ripple of other girls' voices and the stir of other draperies came more than once along the path and through the bushes. But there are degrees and degrees, and in this walk his tones had gradually sunk to such pure wooing that "Herrick" was no protection and she could reply only with irrelevant pleasantries.

At length he halted, and with a lover's distress showing beneath his smile, asked:

"Why cannot you be serious with me—Barbara?"

In make-believe aimlessness she swept the wood with a reconnoitring glance, and then with eyes of maidenly desperation fixed on him, said, tremblingly:

"Because, Mr. Fair, I know what you want to say, and I don't want you to say it."

He turned their slow step toward a low rock in an open space near the water's edge, where no one could come near them unseen. "Would you let me say it if we were down in Dixie?" he asked. "Is it because you are so far from home?"

"No, Mr. Fair, I told you I really have no home. I'm sorry I did; I'm afraid it's led you to this, when everything I said—about taking myself into my own care and all—was said to keep you from it."

The lover shook his head. "You cannot. You must not. To be that kind is to be unkind. Sit here. You do not know exactly what I have to say; sit here, will you not? and while I stand beside you let me do both of us the simple honor to seal with right words what I have so long said in behavior."

Barbara hesitated. "O Mr. Fair, what need is there? Your behavior's always borne the seal of its own perfection. How could I answer you? If you only wanted any other answer but just the one you want, I could give it—the kindest answer in the world, the most unbounded praise—O I could give it with my whole heart and soul! Why, Mr. Fair"—as she sadly smiled she let him gaze into the furthest depth of her eyes—"as far as I can see, you seem to me to be ab-so-lute-ly fault-less."

The young man caught his breath as if for some word of fond passion, but the unfaltering eyes prevented him. As she began again to speak, however, they fell.

"And that's not because I can't see men's faults. I see them so plainly, and show so plainly I see them, that sometimes I wonder—" She left the wonder implied while she pinched lichens from the stone. He began in a tender monotone to say:

"All the more let me speak. I cannot see you put away unconsidered——"

She lifted her eyes again. "O! I know what I'm putting away from me; a life! a life wider, richer than I ever hoped to live. Mr. Fair, it's as if a beautiful, great, strong ship were waiting to carry me across a summer sea, and I couldn't go, just for want of the right passport—the right heart! If I had that it might be ever so different. I have no other ship ever to come in. I say all this only to save you from speaking. The only thing lacking is lacking in me." She smiled a compassionate despair. "It's not you nor your conditions—you know it's none of those dear ones who love you so at home—it's only I that can't qualify."

They looked at each other in reverent silence. Fair turned, plucked a flower, and as if to it, said, "I know the passion of love is a true and sacred thing. But love should never be all, or chiefly, a passion. The love of a mother for her child, of brother and sister for each other, however passionate, springs first from relationship and rises into passion as a plant springs from its root into bloom. Why should not all love do so? Why should only this, the most perilous kind, be made an exception?"

"Because," softly interrupted Barbara, glad of a moment's refuge in abstractions, "it belongs to the only relationship that comes by choice!"

"Are passions ever the best choosers?" asked the gentle suitor. "Has history told us so, or science, or scripture, or anybody but lovers and romancers—and—Americans? Life—living and loving—is the greatest of the arts, and the passions should be our tools, not our guides."

"I believe life *is* an art to you, Mr. Fair; but to me it's a dreadful battle." The speaker sank upon the stone, half rose again, and then sat still.

"It hasn't scarred you badly," responded the lover. Then gravely: "Do you not think we may find it worth the fight if we make passions our chariot horses and never our charioteers?"

No answer came, though he waited. He picked another flower and asked: "If you had a brother, have you the faintest doubt that you would love him?"

"No," said Barbara, "I couldn't help but love him." She thrust away the recollection of a certain railway journey talk, and then thought of her father.

Fair dropped his voice. "If I did not know that I should not be here to-day. Barbara, kinship is the only true root of all abiding love. We cannot feel sure

even of God's love until we call ourselves his children. Neither church, state, nor society requires lovers to swear that they love passionately, but that they will love persistently by virtue of a kinship made permanent in law."

Law! At that word Barbara inwardly winced, but Fair pressed on.

"These marriages on the American plan, of which we are so vain, are they the only happy ones, and are they all happy? When they are, is it because love began as a passion, or has it not been because the choice was fortunate, and love, whether from a large or small beginning, has grown, like that of Isaac and Rebecca, out of a union made stronger than the ties of blood, by troth and oath? Barbara, do you not know in your heart of hearts that if you were the wife of a husband, wisely but dispassionately chosen, you would love him with a wife's full love as long as he loved you? You do. You would."

Barbara was slow to reply, but presently she began, "Unless I could commit my fate to one who already loved me consumingly——" She gave a start of protestation as he exclaimed:

"I love you consumingly! O Barbara, Barbara Garnet, let that serve for us both! Words could not tell my joy, if I could find in you this day a like passion for me. But the seed and soil of it are here to my sight in what I find you to be, and all I ask is that you will let reason fix the only relationship that can truly feed the flame which I know—I *know*—my love will kindle."

"O Mr. Fair, I begged you not to ask!"

"Do not answer! Not now; to-morrow morning. If you can't answer then——"

"I can answer now, Mr. Fair. Why should I keep you in suspense?"

Such agitation came into the young man's face as Barbara had never thought to see. His low voice quivered. "No! No! I beseech you not to answer yet! Wait! Wait and weigh! O Barbara! weigh well and I will wait well! Wait! O wait until you have weighed all things well—my fortune, love, life, and the love of all who love me—O weigh them all well, beloved! beloved one!"

Without warning, a grosbeak—the one whose breast is stained with the blood of the rose—began his soft, sweet song so close overhead that Barbara started up, and he flew. She waited to catch the strain again, and as it drifted back her glance met her lover's. She smiled tenderly, but was grave the next moment and said, "Let us go back."

Nevertheless they went very slowly, culling and exchanging wild flowers as they went. On her doorstep she said, "Now, in the morning——"

"How soon may I come?" he asked.

"Immediately after chapel."

LXXII.

MY GOOD GRACIOUS, MISS BARB

"Good-by," said Fair, with an ardent last look.

"Good-by," softly echoed Barbara, with eyelids down, and passed in.

According to a habit contracted since coming to college she took a brief glimpse of the hat-rack to see if it held any other than girls' hats. Not that she expected any visitor of the sort that can't wear that kind, but—you know how it is—the unexpected does sometimes call. Besides, Mr. Fair had told her whom he was to meet in Springfield next day. But the hat-rack said no. Nevertheless she glanced also into the tiny parlor. The widow sat there alone, reading the *Congregationalist*. She looked up with sweet surprise, and Barbara, not giving her time to speak, said:

"The woods are so per-fect-ly fas-ci-nat-ing I'm neg-lect-ing my cor-re-spond-ence."

She dangled her hat at her knee and slowly mounted to her room, humming a dance, but longing, as some sick wild thing, for a seclusion she had no hope to find.

The two college mates who had driven with her in the morning were lolling on her bed. They recognized the earliness of her return by a mischievous sparkle of eyes which only gathered emphasis from the absence of any open comment.

"Barbara," said one, as she doubled a pillow under her neck and took on the Southern drawl, "par-don my in-quis-i-tive-ness, but if it isn't an im-per-ti-nent ques-tion—or even if it is—how man-y but-ter-cups did you pro-cure, and alas! where are they now?"

"Heaow?" softly asked Barbara. But the other school-fellow cried:

"Barbara, dear, don't you notice that girl, she's bad. I'll give you a nice, easy question. I ask merely for information. Of course you're not bound to answer unless you choose——"

"I want to know!" murmured Miss Garnet.

"Of course you do; you don't want to criminate yourself when you haven't got to.

"And now, Miss Garnet—if that is still your name——"

"Don't call me Miss Garnet," said Barbara, with her chin in her hands, "call me honey."

"Honey," came the response, "where's our 'Herrick'?"

Barbara sprang to her feet with a gasp and vacancy of eye that filled the room with the laughter of her companions, and the next moment was speeding down the stairs and across the doorstep, crowding her hat on with one hand and stabbing it with the other as she went. Down from the streets into the wood she hastened, gained the path, ran up it, walked by three or four pretty loiterers, ran again, and on the stone by the water-side found the volume as she had left it.

Then she lingered. As she leaned against the rock and gazed into the shaded depths of the mill-stream her problem came again, and the beautiful solitude whispered a welcome to her to revolve and weigh and solve it here. But when she essayed to do so it would no more be revolved or weighed by her alone than this huge boulder at her side. Her baffled mind drifted into fantasy, and the hoary question, Whether it is wiser for a maiden to love first, hoping to be chosen accordingly, or to be chosen first and hope to love accordingly, became itself an age-worn relic from woman's earlier and harder lot, left by its glaciers as they had melted in the warmth of more modern suns.

She murmured a word of impatience at such dreaming and looked around to see if she was overheard; but the only near presence was two girls sitting behind and high above her, one writing, the other reading, under the pines. They seemed not to have heard, but she sauntered beyond their sight up the path, wondering if they were the kind in whom to love was the necessity it was in her, and, if so, what they would do in her case. What they would advise *her* to do depended mainly, she fancied, on whether they were in their teens or their twenties. As for married women, she shrank from the very thought of their counsel, whichever way it might tend, and mused on Fannie Ravenel, who, with eyes wide open, had chosen rather to be made unhappy by the one her love had lighted on than to take any other chance for happiness. She stopped her listless walk and found her wrists crossed and her hands knit, remembering one whom Fannie could have chosen and would not.

Burning with resentment against herself for the thought, she turned aside and sat down on the river's brink in a shade of hemlocks. "Come," her actions seemed to say, "I will think of Henry Fair; gentle, noble Henry Fair, and what he is and will

and might be; of how I love his mother and all his kindred; of how tenderly I admire him; and of his trembling words, 'I love you consumingly!'"

Her heart quickened gratefully, as though he spoke again; but as she gazed down at the bubbles that floated by from a dipping bough she presently fell to musing anew on Fannie, without that inward shudder which the recollection of Fannie's course and fate commonly brought. "At least," she thought to herself, "it's heroic!" Yet before she could find a moment's comfort in the reflection it was gone, and she started up and moved on again, knowing that, whatever it may be for man, for true womanhood the better heroism is not to give a passionate love its unwise way at heroic cost, but dispassionately to master love in all its greatness and help it grow to passion in wise ways.

"If I take this step," she began to say to herself audibly as she followed the old road out into a neglected meadow, "I satisfy my father; I delight my friends; I rid myself at once and forever of this dreadful dependence on him." She bit her lip and shut her eyes against these politic considerations. "He tells me to weigh the matter well. How shall I, when there's nothing to weigh against it? Fannie could choose between the one who loved her and the one she loved. I have no choice; this is the most—most likely it is all—that will ever be offered me. There's just the one simple sane question before me—Shall I or shall I?" She smiled. "We make too much of it all!" she thought on. "A man's life depends upon the man he is, not on the girl he gets; why shouldn't it be so with us?" She smiled still more, and, glancing round the open view, murmured, "Silly little country girls! We begin life as a poem, we can't find our rhyme, we tell our mothers—if we have any—they say yes, it was the same with our aunts; so we decide with them that good prose will do very well; they kiss us—that means they won't tell—and—O Heaven! is that our best?" She dropped upon a bank and wept till she shook.

But that would never do! She dried her tears and lay toying with her book and sadly putting into thought a thing she had never more than felt before: that whatever she might wisely or unwisely do with it, she held in her nature a sacred gift of passion; that life, her life, could never bloom in full joy and glory shut out from wifehood and motherhood, and that the idlest self-deceit she could attempt would be to say she need not marry. Suddenly she started and then lay stiller than before. She had found the long-sought explanation of her mother's tardy marriage—neither a controlling nor a controlled passion, but the reasoning despair of famishing affections. Barbara let her face sink into the grass and wept again for the dear lost one with a new reverence and compassion. She was pressing her brow hard against the earth when there came from the far end of the meadow two clear, glad notes of nature's voice, that entered her soul like a call from the pastures of Rosemont; a missing rhyme sent to make good the failing poetry of love's declining day. She sprang to the top of the rise with her open

hand to her hat-brim, the dew still in her lashes, her lips parted fondly, and her ear waiting to hear again the whistle of the quail. Many a day in those sunny springtimes when she still ran wild with Johanna had she held taunting parley with those two crystal love-notes, and now she straightened to her best height, pursed her lips, whistled back the brave octave, and listened again. A distant cowbell tinkled from some willows in another meadow across the river, a breeze moved audibly by, and then the answer came. "Bob—Bob White?" it inquired from the top of a pine-covered bluff, round which the stream swept down in boulder-strewn rapids to its smoother course between the two meadows. It may be the name was not just that, but it was certainly two monosyllables! The listener stepped quickly to the nearest bush, answered again, and began to move warily from cover to cover in the direction of the call. Once she delayed her response. A man and wife with three or four children, loitering down the river bank, passed so close to her as to be startled when at last they saw her, although she was merely sitting at the roots of a great tree deeply absorbed in a book. A few steps farther put a slight ridge and a clump of bushes between the couple and the student; and the man, glancing back, had just noticed it, when—

"Hear that quail!" he exclaimed, and stopped his wife with a touch.

"What of it?" asked the helpmate, who was stoop-shouldered.

"Why, we must have passed in a few feet of it! It's right there where we saw that girl!"

The woman's voice took on an added dreariness as she replied: "We might 'a' seen it if you hadn't been so taken up with the girl. James, come back! you know 'tain't that bird you're peekin' after. O land o' love! men *air* sich fools!"

The man found neither girl nor quail; the grassy seat beneath the tree was empty. But just as he was rejoining his partner—"Hark!" he said; "there he is again, farther up the river. Now if we listen like's not we'll hear another fellow answer him. Many's the time I've lain in the grass and called one of them right up. There! that was the answering challenge, away off yonder between here and that hill with the pines on it. There's going to be a beautiful little fight when those two birds meet, and that college girl's going to see it. I wish I—There's the other one again; they get closer each time! Didn't you hear it?"

The wife replied, mainly to herself, that she did not; that if he had her backache he wouldn't hear a brass band, and that her next walk would be by herself.

The partner did not venture to look back after that, but as they sauntered on, rarely speaking except when the mother rebuked the children, he listened eagerly, and after a silence of unaccountable length, finally heard the two calls once more,

up near the rapids and very close to each other. He dared not prick his ears, but while he agreed with his wife that if they were ever going home at all it was time they were about it, he could not but think the outcome of a man's life depends largely on the sort of girl he gets.

At the upper end of the meadow, meantime, Barbara Garnet, with "Herrick" in one hand and her hat pressed against the back of her skirts in the other, was bending and peering round the trunk of an elm draped to the ground in flounces of its own green. The last response to her whistle had seemed to come from a spot so close in front of her that she feared to risk another step, and yet, peep and pry as she might, she could neither spy out nor nearer decoy the cunning challenger. In a sense of delinquency she noted the sky showing yellow and red through the hill-top pines, and seeing she must make short end of her play, prepared to rush out upon the rogue and have an old-time laugh at his pretty panic. So!—one for the money, two for the show, three to make ready, and four for to—"Ha, ha, ha!"—

"Good gracious alive!" exclaimed the quail, leaping from his back to his feet, and standing a fathom tall before the gasping, half-sinking girl. "Good gra'—why—why, my good gracious, Miss Barb! why—why, my good gracious!" insisted John March.

LXXIII.

IMMEDIATELY AFTER CHAPEL

There was a great deal of pleasure in the house of the three sisters that evening. The widow asked March to stay to tea, and when he opened his mouth to decline, the wrong word fell out and he accepted. He confided to Barbara his fear that in so doing he had blundered, but she softly scouted the idea, and with a delicious reproachfulness in her murmur, "wondered if he supposed they"—etc.

At table he sat next to her, in the seat the sisters had intended for Henry Fair. Neither Miss Garnet nor Mr. March gave the other's proximity more than its due recognition; they talked with almost everyone about almost everything, and as far as they knew said and did nothing to betray the fact that they were as happy as Psyche in a swing with Cupid to push and run under.

Nobody went to evening service. They sang hymns at the piano, selecting oftenest those which made best display of Miss Garnet's and Mr. March's voices.

Hers was only mezzo-soprano and not brilliant, but Mr. March and a very short college girl, conversing for a moment aside, agreed that it was "singularly winsome." Another college girl, very tall, whispered to Barbara that his was a "superb baritone!" The young man entered deeper and deeper every moment into the esteem of the household, and they into his. The very best of the evening came last, when, at the widow's request, the two Southerners sang, without the instrument, a hymn or two of the Dixie mountaineers: "To play on the golden harp" and "Where there's no more stormy clouds arising." Being further urged for a negro hymn, John began "Bow low a little bit longer," which Barbara, with a thrill of recollection and an involuntary gesture of pain, said she couldn't sing, and they gave another instead, one of the best, and presently had the whole company joining in the clarion refrain of "O Canaan! bright Canaan!" Barbara heard her college mates still singing it in their rooms on either side of her after she had said her prayers with her cheek on John March's photograph.

To her painful surprise when she awoke next day she found herself in a downcast mood. She could not even account for the blissful frame in which she had gone to bed. She had not forgotten one word or tone of all John March had said to her while carried away from his fine resolution by the wave of ecstasy which followed their unexpected meeting, but the sunset light, their thrilling significances, were totally gone from them. Across each utterance some qualifying word or clause, quite overlooked till now, cast its morning shadow. Not so much as one fond ejaculation of his impulsive lips last evening but she could explain away this morning, and she felt a dull, half-guilty distress in the fear that her blissful silences had embarrassed him into letting several things imply more than he intended. Before she was quite dressed one of her fellow-students came in with an anguished face to show what a fatal error she had made in the purchase of some ribbons.

Barbara held them first in one light and then in another, and at length shook her head over them in piteous despair and asked:

"How *could* you so utterly mistake both color and quality?"

"Why, my dear, I bought them by lamplight! and, besides, it was an auction and I was excited."

"Yes," said Barbara, and took a long breath. "I know how that is."

Down in town two commercial travelers, one of whom we have met before, took an after-breakfast saunter.

"She was coming," said the one we remember, "to New England. I didn't know where or for what, and I don't know yet; but when my house said, 'Old boy, we'd like to promote you, just say what you want!' says I, 'Let the salary stand as it is, only change my district; gimme New England!'"

"That's the college," he continued, as they came up into Elm Street. "Those are the students, just coming out of the chapel: 'sweet girl graduates,' as Shakespeare calls them."

He clutched his companion's arm. Their eyes rested on one of the dispersing throng, who came last and alone, with a slow step and manifestly under some burdensome preoccupation, through the high iron gateway of the campus. She passed them with drooping eyelashes and walked in the same tardy pace before them. Presently she turned from the sidewalk, crossed a small grassplot, and stood on the doorstep with her hand on the latch while they went by.

"Her?" said the one who thought he had quoted Shakespeare, "of course it's her; who else could it be? Ah, hmm! 'so near and yet so far!' Tom, I believe in heaven when I look at that girl—heaven and holiness! I read Taylor's 'Holy Living' when a boy!"

Presently they returned and passed again. She was still standing at the door. A few steps away the speaker looked over his shoulder and moaned:

"Not a glimpse of me does she get! There, she's gone in; but sure's you live she didn't want to!" They walked on. In front of their hotel he clutched his companion again. A young man of commanding figure stood near, deeply immersed in a telegram. The drummer whispered an oath of surprise.

"That's him now! the young millionaire she rejected on the trip we all made together! What's he here for?—George! he looks as worried as her!"

"How do you know she rejected him?"

"How do—Now, look here! If I didn't know it do you s'pose I'd say so? Well, then! Come, I'll introduce you to him—O he's all right! he's just as white and modest as either of us; come on!" March proved himself both modest and white, and as he walked away,

"This's a stra-a-ange world!" moralized the commercial man. "'Tain't him I'm thinking of, it's her! She's in trouble, Tom; in trouble. And who knows but what, for some mysterious reason, *I* may be the only one on earth who can—O Lord!—Look here; I'm not goin' to do any business to-day; I'm not goin' to be fit; you needn't be surprised if you hear to-night that I've gone off on a drunk."

Meantime Barbara had lifted the latch and gone in. No hat was on the rack, but when she turned into the parlor a sickness came to her heart as she smiled and said good-morning to Henry Fair. He, too, smiled, but she fancied he was pale.

They mentioned the weather, which was quite pleasant enough. Fair said the factories that used water-power would be glad of rain, and Barbara seemed interested, but when he paused she asked, in the measured tone he liked so well:

"Who do you think took us all by surprise and spent last evening with us?"

Fair's reply came tardily and was disguised as a playful guess. "Mister—"

"Yes—"

He sobered. "March!" he softly exclaimed, and let his gaze rest long on the floor. "I thought—really I thought Mr. March was in New York."

"So did we all," was the response, and both laughed, without knowing just why.

"He ought to have had a delightful time," said Fair.

Barbara meditated pleasedly. "Mr. March always lets one know what kind of time he's having, and I never saw him more perfectly satisfied," she said, and allowed her silence to continue so long and with such manifest significance that at length the suitor's low voice asked:

"Am I to understand that that visit alters my case?"

"No," responded Barbara, but without even a look of surprise. "I'm afraid, Mr. Fair, that you'll think me a rather daring girl, but I want you to be assured that I know of no one whose visit can alter—that." She lifted her eyes bravely to his, but they filled. "As for Mr. March," she continued, and the same amusement gleamed in them which so often attended her mention of him, "there's always been a perfect understanding between us. We're the very best of friends, but no one knows better than he does that we can never be more, though I don't see why we need ever be less."

"I should call that hard terms, for myself," said Fair; "I hope—" And there he stopped.

"Mr. Fair," the girl began, was still, and then—"O Mr. Fair, I know what to say, but I don't know how to say it! I admit everything. All the good reasons are on your side. And yet if I am to answer you now—" She ceased. Her voice had not faltered, but her head drooped and he saw one tear follow quickly after another and fall upon her hands.

"Why, you need not answer now," he tenderly said. "I told you I would wait."

"O Mr. Fair, no, no! You have every right to be answered now, and I have no right to delay beyond your wish. Only, I believe also that, matters standing as they do, you have a perfect right to wait for a later answer from me if you choose. I can only beg you will not. O you who are so rational and brave and strong with yourself, you who know so well that a man's whole fate cannot be wrapped up in one girl unless he weakly chooses it so, take your answer now! I don't believe I can ever look upon you—your offer—differently. Mr. Fair, there's one thing it lacks which I think even you overlook."

"What is that?"

"It—I—I don't know any one word to describe it, unless it is turn-out-well-a-bit-i-ty."

Fair started with astonishment, and the tears leaped again to her eyes as she laughed, and with new distress said: "It isn't—it—O Mr. Fair, don't you know what I mean? It doesn't make good poetry! As you would say, it's not good art. You may think me 'fresh,' as the girls say, and fantastical, but I can't help believing that in a matter like this there's something wrong—some essential wanting—in whatever's not good—good——"

"Romance?" asked Fair; "do you think the fact that a thing is good romance——"

"No! O no, no, no! I don't say being good romance is enough to commend it; but I do think not being good romance is enough to condemn it! Is that so very foolish?"

The lover answered wistfully. "No. No." Then very softly: "Barbara"—he waited till she looked up—"if this thing should ever seem to you to have become good poetry, might not your answer be different?"

Barbara hesitated. "I—you—O—I only know how it seems now!"

"Never mind," said Fair, very gently. They rose and he took her hand, speaking again in the same tone. "You really believe I have the right to wait for a later answer?"

Her head drooped. "The right?" she murmured, "yes—the right——"

"So also do I. I shall wait. Good-by."

She raised her glance, her voice failed to a whisper. "Good-by."

Gaze to gaze, one stood, and the other, with reluctant step, backed away; and at the last moment, with his foot leaving the threshold, lover and maiden said again, still gaze to gaze:

"Good-by."

"Good-by."

LXXIV.

COMPLETE COLLAPSE OF A PERFECT UNDERSTANDING

The door closed and Barbara noiselessly mounted the stairs. At its top an elm-shaded window allowed a view of some fifty yards or more down the street, and as she reached it now the pleasantness of the outer day furnished impulse enough, if there had been no other, for her to glance out. She stopped sharply, with her eyes fixed where they had fallen. For there stood John March and Henry Fair in the first bright elation of their encounter busily exchanging their manly acknowledgments and explanations. Lost to herself she stayed, an arm bent high and a knuckle at her parted teeth, comparing the two men and noting the matchless bearing of her Southerner. In it she read again for the hundredth time all the energy and intrepidity which in her knowledge it stood for; his boyish openness and simplicity, his tender belief in his mother, his high-hearted devotion to the fulfilment of his father's aspirations, and the impetuous force and native skill with which at mortal risks and in so short a time he had ranked himself among the masters of public fortune. She recalled, as she was prone to do, what Charlie Champion had once meditatively said to her on seeing him approach: "Here comes the only man in Dixie Jeff-Jack Ravenel's afraid of."

After an instant the manner of the two young men became more serious, and March showed a yellow paper—"a telegram," thought their on-looker. "He's coming here, no doubt; possibly to tell me its news; more likely just to say good-by again; but certainly with nothing—nothing—O nothing! to ask." For a moment her hand pressed hard against her lips, and then her maiden self-regard quietly but strenuously definitely rebelled.

The telegram seemed to bring its readers grave disappointment. March made indignant gestures in obvious allusion to distant absentees. Now they began to move apart; Fair stepped farther away, March drew nearer the house, still making gestures as if he might be saying—Barbara resentfully guessed——

"You might walk slow; I shan't stop more than a minute!"

She left the window with silent speed, saying, in her heart, "You needn't! You shan't!"

As March with clouded brow was lifting his hand toward a tortuous brass knocker the door opened and Barbara, carrying a book and pencil in one hand, while the other held down her hat-brim, tripped across the doorstep.

The cloud vanished. "Miss Barb—good-morning!"

"O!—Mr.—March." Her manner so lacked both surprise and pleasure that he colored. He had counted on a sweet Southern handshake, but she kept hold of the hat-brim, let her dry smile of inquiry fade into a formal deference, and took comfort in his disconcertion.

"I was just coming," he said, "I—thought you'd let me come back just to say good-by—but I see you're on your way to a recitation—I—"

Her smile was cruel. "Why, my recitations are not so serious as that," she drawled. "Just to say good-by ought not to con-sti-tute any se-ri-ous de-ten-tion."

John's heart sank like a stone. Scarcely could he believe his senses. Yet this was she; that new queen of his ambitions whose heavenly friendship had lifted first love—boy love—from its grave and clad it in the shining white of humility and abnegation to worship her sweet dignity, purity, and tenderness, asking for nothing, not even for hope, in return. This was she who at every new encounter had opened to him a higher revelation of woman's worth and loveliness than the world had ever shown him; she to whom he had been writing letters half last night and all this morning, tearing each to bits before he had finished it because he could see no life ahead which an unselfish love could ask her to live, and as he rent the result of each fresh effort hearing the voice of his father saying to him as in childhood days, "I'd be proud faw you to have the kitt'n, son, but, you know, she wouldn't suit yo' dear motheh's high-strung natu'e. You couldn't ever be happy with anything that was a constant tawment to her, could you?"

These thoughts filled but a moment, and before the lovely presence confronting him could fully note the depth of his quick distress a wave of self-condemnation brought what seemed to him the answer of the riddle: that this was *rightly* she, the same angelic incarnation of wisdom and rectitude, as of gentleness and beauty, to whom in yesterday's sunset hour of surprise and ecstatic yearning he had implied things so contrary to their "perfect understanding," and who now, not for herself selfishly, but in the name and defence of all blameless womanhood, was punishing him for his wild presumption. O but if she would only accuse him—here—this instant, so that contrition might try its value! But under the shade of her hat her eyes merely waited with a beautiful sort of patient urgency

for his parting word. The moment's silence seemed an hour, but no word did he find. One after another almost came, but failed, and at last, just as he took in his breath to say he knew not what—anything so it were something—he saw her smile melt with sudden kindness, while her lips parted for speech, and to his immeasurable confusion and terror heard himself ask her with cheerful cordiality, "Won't you walk in?"

It would have been hard to tell which of the two turned the redder.

"Why, Mr. March, you in-ti-ma-ted that you had no ti-i-ime!"

They stood still. "Time and bad news are about the only things I have got, Miss Barb. Wrapped up in your father's interests as you are, I reckon I ought to show you this." He handed her the telegram doubled small. "Let me hold your book."

Barbara unfolded and read the despatch. It was from Springfield, repeated at New York, and notified Mr. John March that owing to a failure of Gamble to come to terms with certain much larger railroad owners for the reception of his road into their "system," intelligence of which had just reached them, it would be "useless for him," March, "to come up," as there was "nothing more to say or hear." She read it twice. Her notions of its consequences were dim, but she saw it was a door politely closed in his face; and yet she lingered over it. There was a bliss in these business confidences, which each one thought was her or his own exclusive and unsuspected theft, and which was all the sweeter for the confidences' practical worthlessness. As she looked up she uttered a troubled "O!" to find him smiling unconsciously into her book where she had written, "I stole this book from Barbara Garnet." It seemed as if fate were always showing her very worst sides to him at the very worst times! She took the volume with hurried thanks and returned the telegram.

"It would have been better on every account if you hadn't come up at all, wouldn't it?" she asked, bent on self-cruelty; but he accepted the cruelty as meant for him.

"Yes," he meekly replied. "I—I reckon it would." Then more bravely: "I've got to give up here and try the West. Your father's advised it strongly these last three weeks."

"Has he?" she pensively asked. Here was a new vexation. Obviously March, in writing him, had mentioned the rapid and happy growth of their acquaintance!

"Yes," he replied, betraying fresh pain under an effort to speak lightly. "It may be a right smart while before I see you again, Miss Barb. I take the first express to Chicago, and next month I sail for Europe to——"

"Why, Mr. March!" said Barbara with a nervous laugh.

"Yes," responded John once more, thinking that if she was going to treat the thing as a joke he had better do the same, "immigrants for Widewood have got to be got, and they're not to be got on this side the big water."

"Why, Mr. March!"—her laugh grew—"How long shall you stay?"

"Stay! Gracious knows! I must just stay till I get them!—as your father says."

"Why, Mr. March! When did—" the questioner's eyes dropped sedately to the ground—"when did you decide to go? Since—since—yesterday?"

"Yes, it was!" The answer came as though it were a whole heart-load.

The maiden's color rose, but she lifted her quiet, characteristic gaze to his and said, "You're glad you're going, are you not?"

"O—I—why, yes! If I'm not I know I ought to be! To see Europe and all that is great, of course. It's beyond my dreams. And yet I know it really isn't as much what I'm going to as what I'm going from that I ought to—to be g-glad of! I hope I'll come back with a little more sense. I'm going to try. I promise you, Miss Barb. It's only right I *should* promise—you!"

"Why, Mr. Mar—" Her voice was low, but her color increased.

"Miss Barb—O Miss Barb, I didn't come just to say good-by. I hope I know what I owe you better than that. I—Miss Barb, I came to acknowledge that I said too much yesterday!—and to—ask your pardon."

Barbara was crimson. "Mr. March!" she said, half choking, "as long as I was simple enough to let it pass unrebuked you might at least have spared me your apologies! No, I can't stay! No, not one instant! Those girls are coming to speak to me—that man"—it was the drummer—"wants to speak to you. Good-by."

Their intruders were upon them. John could only give a heart-broken look as she faltered an instant in the open door. For reply she called back, in poor mockery of a sprightly tone: "I hope you'll have ever so pleasant a voyage!" and shut the door.

So it goes with all of us through all the ungraceful, inartistic realisms of our lives; the high poetry is ever there, the kingdom of romance is at hand; the only trouble is to find the rhymes—O! if we could only find the rhymes!

LXXV.

A YEAR'S VICISSITUDES

It was during the year spent by John March in Europe that Suez first began to be so widely famous. It was then, too, that the *Suez Courier* emerged into universal notice. The average newspaper reader, from Maine to Oregon, spoke familiarly of Colonel Ravenel as the writer of its much-quoted leaders; a fact which gave no little disgust to Garnet, their author.

Ravenel never let his paper theorize on the causes of Suez's renown or the *Courier's* vogue.

"It's the luck of the times," he said, and pleasantly smiled to see the nation's eyes turned on Dixie and her near sisters, hardly in faith, yet with a certain highly commercial hope and charity. The lighting of every new coke furnace, the setting fire to any local rubbish-heap of dead traditions, seemed just then to Northern longings the blush of a new economic and political dawn over the whole South.

"You say you're going South? Well, now if you want to see a very small but most encouraging example of the changes going on down there, just stop over a day in Suez!" Such remarks were common—in the clubs—in the cars.

"Now, for instance, Suez! I know something of Suez myself." So said a certain railway passenger one day when this fame had entered its second year and the more knowing journals had begun to neglect it. "I was an officer in the Union army and was left down there on duty after the surrender a short while; then I went out West and fought Indians. But Suez—I pledge you my word I wouldn't 'a' given a horseshoe-nail for the whole layout! Now!—well, you'd e'en a'most think you was in a Western town! The way they're a slappin' money, b' Jinks, into improvements and enterprises—quarries, roads, bridges, schools, mills—'twould make a Western town's head swim!"

"What kind of mills?" asked his listener, a young man, but careworn.

"O, eh, saw-mills—tanbark mills—to start with. Was you ever there?"

"Yes, I—before the changes you speak of I——"

"Before! Hoh! then you've never seen Lover's Leap coal mine, or Bridal Veil coal mine, or Sleeping Giant iron mine, or Devil's Garden coke furnaces! They're putting up smelting works right opposite the steamboat landing! You say you're going South—just stop over a day in Suez. It'll pay you! You could write it up!—call it 'What a man just back f'm Europe saw in Dixie'—only, you don't want to wave the Bloody Shirt, and don't forget we're dead tired hearing about the

'illiterate South.' *I* say, let us have peace; my son's in love with a Southern girl! Why, at Suez you'll see school-houses only five miles apart, from Wildcat Ridge—where the niggers and mountaineers had that skirmish last fall—clean down to Leggettstown! School-houses, why,"—the speaker chuckled at what was coming—"one of 'em stands on the very spot where in '65 I found a little freckled boy trying to poke a rabbit out of a log with an old bayon——"

"No!" exclaimed the careworn listener, in one smile from his hat to his handsome boots.

He would have said more, but the story-teller lifted a finger to intimate that the bayonet was not the main point—there was better laughing ahead. "Handsome little chap he was—brave eyes—sweet mouth. Thinks I right there, 'This's going to be somebody some day.' He reminded me of my own son at home. Well, he clum up behind my saddle and rode with me to the edge of Suez, where we met his father with a team of mules and a wagon of provisions. Talk about the Old South, I'll say this: I *never* see so fine a gentlemen look so *techingly* poor. Hold up, let me—now, let me—just wait till I tell you. That little rat—if it hadn't been for that little barefooted rat with his scalp-lock a-stickin' up through a tear in his hat, most likely you'd never so much as heard—of Suez! For that little chap was John March!"

The speaker clapped his hands upon his knees, opened his mouth, and waited for his hearer's laughter and wonder; but the hearer merely smiled, and with a queer look of frolic in the depths of his handsome eyes, asked,

"How lately were you in Suez?"

"Me? O—not since '65; but my son's a commercial tourist—rattling smart fellow—you've probably met him—I never see anybody that hadn't—last year he was in New England—this year he's tryin' Dixie. He sells this celebrated 'Hoptonica' for the great Cincinnati house of Pretzels & Bier. Funny thing—he's been mistaken for John March. A young lady—Southern girl—up in New England about a year ago—it was just for an instant—O of course—Must you go? Well, look here! Try to stop over a day in Suez—That's right; it'll pay you!"

The two travelers parted. The Union veteran went on westward, while the other—March by name—John March—was ticketed, of course, for Suez.

Some ten days before, in London, having just ended a four weeks' circuit through a region of the Continent where news of Suez was even scarcer than emigrants for Widewood, he had, to his astonishment, met Proudfit. The colonel had just arrived across. He was tipsy, as usual, and a sad wreck, but bound for Carlsbad, bright in the faith that when he had stayed there two months he would go home

cured for life of his "only bad habit." March was troubled, and did not become less so when Proudfit explained that his presence was due to the "kind pressu' of Garnet and othe's." He knew that Garnet, months before, had swapped his Land Company stock to Proudfit for the Colonel's much better stock in the Construction Company and succeeded him as president of the latter concern.

"As a matteh of fawm—tempora'ily—du'ing my ill health," said the Carlsbad pilgrim, adding, in an unfragrant stage-whisper, that there was a secret off-setting sale of both stocks back again, the papers of which were in Mrs. Proudfit's custody. Mrs. Proudfit was not with her husband; she was at home, in Blackland.

John knew also how nearly down to nothing the price of his own company's first-mortgage bonds had declined; but the Colonel's tidings of a later fate fell upon him like a thunderbolt. He stood before his informant in the populous street, now too sick at heart for speech, and now throbbing with too resolute a resentment for outward show, but drawn up rigidly with a scowl of indignant attention under his locks that made him the observed of every quick eye. The matter—not to follow Proudfit too closely—was this:

The Construction Company, paid in advance, and in the Land Company's second-mortgage bonds, for its many expensive and recklessly immature works, had promptly sold those bonds to a multitude of ready takers near and far, but principally far. When the promised inpour of millers and miners, manufacturers and operatives, so nearly failed that the Land Company could not pay, nor half pay, the interest on its first-mortgage bonds and they "tumbled," these second-mortgage bonds were, of course, unsalable at any figure. The smallest child will understand this—and worse to follow—at a glance; but if he doesn't he needn't. At this point Ravenel, who had kept his paper very still, "persuaded" Gamble and Bulger to buy, at the prices their holders had paid for them, all that smaller portion of these second-mortgage bonds, as well as all small lots of the Land Company's stock, held in the three counties. "The *Courier*," he said, with his effectual smile, "couldn't afford to see home folks suffer," and he presently had them all well out of it, Parson Tombs among them.

"Thank God!" rumbled March. "And then what?"

Then Ravenel, as trustee for the three counties—Uncle Jimmie Rankin was the other, but shrewdly let Jeff-Jack speak and act for him—privately combined with the Construction Company, which, Proudfit pathetically reminded John, was a loser by the Land Company in the discounts at which it had sold that Company's second-mortgage bonds. They went on a still hunt after the first-mortgage bonds, "bought," said Proudfit, "the whole bilin' faw a song," foreclosed the mortgage,

and at the sale of the Land Company's assets were the only bidders, except Senator Halliday and Captain Shotwell, whom they easily outbid.

"Right smart of us suspicioned those two gentlemen were bidding faw you, John."

March, who was staring aside in fierce abstraction, started. "I reckon not," he said, and stared in the other direction. "So, then, Widewood and all its costly improvements belong half to the three counties and half to Garnet's construc—"

"John"—the Colonel lifted his pallid hand with an air of amiable greatness—"my construc', seel view play! Not Garnet's. *I*—Proudfit—am still the invisible head of that comp'ny. Garnet acknowledges it privately to me. He and I have what you may call a per-perfect und-und-unde'standing!"

"Perfect und'—O me!" interrupted March, with a broken laugh and a frown. Proudfit liked his air and tried to reproduce it, but got his features tangled, rubbed his mouth, and closed his eyes. March stared into vacancy again.

The tippler interposed with moist emotion. "John, we're landless! My plantation b'longs t' my wife. I can sympathize with you, John. As old song says, 'we're landless! landless!' *We* are landless, John. But you have price—priceless 'dvant'ge over me in one thing, vice-president; you've still got yo' motheh!"

"O!" groaned March, blazing up and starting away; but Proudfit clung.

"My dea' boy! let me tell you, that tendeh little motheh's been a perfect hero! When I told her—in—in t-tears—how sorry I—and Garnet—and all of us—was,—'O Curl Prou'fit,' says she—with that ca'm, sweet, dizda-ainful smile of hers, you know—it's no supprise to me; it's what I've expected from the beginning."

LXXVI.

AGAINST OVERWHELMING NUMBERS

During the boom Tom Hersey's Swanee Hotel—repaired, enlarged, repainted—had become Hotel Swanee. At the corner of the two streets on which it fronted he had added a square tower or "observatory." But neither guests nor "residenters" had made use of it as he had designed. Its low top was too high to be reached

with that Southern ease which Northern sojourners like, and besides, you couldn't see more than half the earth anyhow when you got up there.

Early, therefore, it had been turned into an airy bed-chamber for Bulger. He, however was gone. He had left Suez for good and all on the same day on which John March arrived from abroad, being so advised to do by Captains Champion and Shotwell, who loved a good joke with a good fat coward to saddle it on, and who had got enough of Bulger on the day of the skirmish mentioned a page or two back. The tower room he left came to be looked upon as specially adapted for the sick, and here, some eleven or twelve months after the wreck of the Three Counties Land and Improvement Company, Limited, John March lay on his bed by night and sat on it by day, wasted, bright-eyed, and pale, with a corded frown forever between his brows save in the best moments of his unquiet sleep.

On the hither side of one of the two streets close under him, his office—the old, first one, reopened on his return—stood closed, the sign renovated and tacked up once more, and the early addendum, *Gentleman*, still asserting itself, firmly though modestly, beneath the new surface of repair. In and from that office he had, for these many months, waged a bloodless but aggressive and indomitable war on the men who, he felt, had robbed, not merely him, but his mother, and the grave of his father, under the forms and cover of commerce and law; yet from whom he had not been able to take their outermost intrenchment—the slothful connivance of a community which had let itself be made a passive sharer of their spoils. Now, in that office his desk was covered with ten days' dust. "If you don't shut this thing up straight off and go, say, to Chalybeate Springs," the doctor had one day exclaimed, "you'll not last half through the summer." March had answered with jesting obduracy, and two nights later had fainted on the stairs of Tom Hersey's hotel. For twenty-four hours afterward he had been "not expected to live." During which time Suez had entirely reconsidered him—conduct, character, capacity—and had given him, at the expense of his adversaries, a higher value and regard than ever, and a wholly new affection. It would have been worth all the apothecary's arsenic and iron for someone just to have told him so.

A Suez physician once said to me—I was struck with the originality of the remark—that one man's cure is another's poison. Not even to himself would March confess that this room, so specially adapted for the average sick man, was for him the worst that could have been picked out. It showed him constantly all Suez. Poor little sweating and fanning Suez, grown fat, and already getting lean again on the carcass of one man's unsalable estate!

"Come here," said Fannie Ravenel behind the blinds of her highest window, to one who loved her still, but rarely had time to visit her now, "look. That's John

March's room. O sweet, how's he ever again to match himself to our littleness and sterility without shriveling down to it himself? And yet that, and not the catching of scamps or recovery of lands, is going to be his big task. For I don't think he'll ever go 'way from here; he's just the kind that'll always feel too many obligations to stay; and I think his sickness will be a blessing straight from God, to him and to all of us who love him, if it will only give him time to see what his true work is—God bless him!" The two stood in loose embrace looking opposite ways, until the speaker asked, "Don't you believe it?"

"I don't know," said the other, gently drawing her away from the window.

Fannie yielded a step or two and then as gently resisted. "Sweetheart," she cried, with a melting gaze, "you don't suppose—just because I choose to remember what he is and what he is suffering—you can't imagine—O if *you* mistake me I shall simply perish!"

"I know you too well, dear," caressingly murmured the guest, and they talked of other things—"gusset and band and seam"—for it was Saturday and there was to be a small occasion on the morrow. But that same night, long after the house's last light was out, the guest said her prayers at that window.

The windows of March's chamber, albeit his bed's head was against the one to the east, opened four ways. The one on the west looked down over the court-house square and up the verdant avenue which became the pike. Here on the right stood the *Courier* building! There was Captain Champion going by it; honest ex-treasurer of the defunct Land Company. His modest yet sturdy self-regard would not even yet let him see that he had been only a cover for the underground doublings of shrewder men. Yonder was the tree from which Enos had been shot by his own brother—who was dead himself now, killed, with many others, in that "skirmish" which John could never cease thinking that he, had he but been here, might have averted. Over there were the two churches, and one window of Ravenel's house. March had not been in that house a fourth as many times as he had been prettily upbraided for not coming.

"Fannie's grea-atly cha-anged!" Parson Tombs said, with solemn triumph.

John had dreamily assented. The change he had noticed most was that the old zest of living was gone from her still beautiful black eyes, and that her freckles had augmented. He had met her oftenest in church. She had the Suez Sunday-school's primary class, and more than filled the wide vacancy caused by Miss Mary Salter's marriage to the other pastor. These two wives had grown to be close friends. On the Sunday to which we have alluded they had their infants baptized together. Fannie's was a girl and did not cry. Johanna, in the gallery, did, when Father Tombs, with dripping hand, said,

"Rose, I baptize thee."

Tears had started also in the eyes of at least one other: Fannie's guest, as we say, whose presence was unusual and had not escaped remark. "The wonder is," Miss Martha had said, "that she has time, or any strength left, to ever come in to town-church at all, with that whole overgrown Rosemont on her hands the way it is! If I had a sister no older than she is—with that look on her face every time she falls into a study"—she stopped; then sharply—"I tell you, that man Garnet"—and stopped again.

From the tower's south window there was a wide view up and down the Swanee and across the bridge, into Blackland. March never looked that way but he found himself staring at those unfinished smelting works. Smart saplings were growing inside the roofless walls, and you could buy the whole plant for the cost of its brick and stone.

The north window view hurt still worse. The middle distance was dotted with half a dozen "follies" "for sale," each with its small bunch of workmen's cottages, some empty, some full, alas! and all treeless and grassless under the blazing sun. Far beyond to the right, shading away from green to blue, rose the hills of Widewood—lost Widewood!—hiding other "tied-up capital" and more stranded labor. For scattered through those lovely forests were scores, hundreds, of peasants from across seas, to every separate one of whom the scowling patient in this room, with fierce tears perpetually in his throat, believed he owed explanation and restitution.

Garnet!—owned half of Widewood! March's confinement here dated from the night when he had at length unearthed the well-hid truth of how the stately Major had acquired it. No sooner had Ravenel and Garnet got the Land Company into its living grave, than Gamble and Bulger, with Leggett looming mysteriously in their large shadows, forced the Construction Company into liquidation by a kind demand upon Mattox, Crickwater, and Pettigrew for certain call loans of two years' standing, accepted in settlement their shares of the Widewood lands wrested from the Land Company, and then somehow privately induced Garnet to take those cumbersome assets off their hands at a round cash price. That was the day before March had got home and Bulger had cleared out. Gamble had departed much more leisurely. Whenever money was at stake Gamble had the courage of a bear with whelps. Whenever he said, "I can't afford to stay here," it meant that his milk-pail was full and the cow empty. This time it meant he had, as Shotwell put it, "broken the record of the three counties—pulled the wool over Jeff-Jack's eyes;" for he had sold his railroad to a system hostile to the fortunes of Suez.

The other half of Widewood was public domain.

"Thank Heaven for that!" said March, lying dressed on his bed.

"Suez thanks Mr. Ravenel," melodiously responded his mother. Parson Tombs had brought her up here and slipped out again on creaking tiptoe.

"Why, mother, it was I made it so in my original plan!"

"O my beloved boy, it was in Mr. Ravenel's original plan when he lent your poor father the money to send you to school. I have it on good authority."

The son gave a vexed laugh. "O, as to that, why Cornelius Leggett suggested it when——"

"John! forbear!" Mrs. March was not prejudiced. She could admit the name of a colored person in a discussion; but *that* miscreant had lured her trusted Jane to the altar and written back that she was one of the best wives he had had for years.

John forbore. He was profoundly distressed, but tried to speak more lightly. "Law! mother, one reason urged by Major Garnet for our privately reserving that trifling scrap of sixty acres on the west side of the creek was so's to make each half of the company's tract an even fifty thousand acres, one for the three counties and the other—O! there's another thing. I never thought to tell you because it was hardly worth remembering. On Major Garnet's suggestion, and so's to never get it mixed up with the Company's lands—you know how carelessly our county records are kept—I made a relinquishment to you of my half of your and my joint interest in those sixty acres. I never supposed I was going to make it one day the only piece of Widewood left you."

"Ah!" sighed the hearer, "half as many dollars would be far better for a helpless widow."

John was scowling in another direction and did not see her pretty blush. His voice deepened with indignation. "I'll give you double—right here—now—cash!"

"Will you write the receipt for me to sign?" she sweetly asked.

He started up, wrote, paid, and smiled as he shut his empty purse. His mother sighed in amiable pensiveness, saying, "This is a mystery to me, my son."

"No more than it is to me," dryly responded John, angered by this new sting from his old knowledge of her ways. It was her policy always to mystify those who had the best right to understand her. "I shall try to solve it," he added.

"I should rather not have you speak of it at once," she replied, almost hurriedly. "You'll know why in a few days." Her blush came again. This time John saw it and marvelled anew. He tossed himself back on his bed, fevered with irritation.

"Mother"—he fiercely shifted his pillows and looked at the ceiling—"the chief mystery to me is that you seem to care so little for the loss of our lands!"

"I thought you told me that Major Garnet considered those sixty acres as almost worthless."

"I believe he does."

Her voice became faint. "I would gladly explain, son, if you were only well enough to hear me—patiently."

He lay rigidly still, with every nerve aching. His hands, locked under his head, grew tight as he heard her rise and draw near. He shut his eyes hard as she laid on his wrinkling forehead a cold kiss moistened with a tear, and melted from the room.

"Mother!" he called, appeasingly, as the door was closing; but it clicked to; she floated down the stairs. He turned his face into the pillow and clenched his hands. By and by he turned again and exclaimed, as from some long train of thought, "'Better off without Widewood than with it,' am I? On my soul! I begin to believe it. But if you can see that so clearly, O! my poor little unsuspecting mother, why can't you even now understand that they were thieves and robbed us? Who—who—*what*—can have so blinded you?"

He left the bed and moved to his most frequent seat, the north window. Thence, in the western half of the view, he could see the three counties' "mother of learning and useful arts," fair, large-grown Rosemont, glistening on her green hills in each day's setting sun, a lovely frontispiece to the ever-pleasant story of her master's redundant prosperity. Her June fledglings were but just gone and she was in the earliest days of her summer rest. "Enlarged and superbly equipped and embellished," the newspapers said of her in laudatory headlines, and it was true that "no expense had been spared." Not any other institution in Dixie spread such royal feasts of reason and information for her children, at lavish cost to herself, low price to them, and queenly remuneration to the numerous members of the State Legislature who came to discourse on Agriculture, Mining, Banking, Trade, Journalism, Jurisprudence, Taxation, and Government.

How envied was Garnet! Gamble and Bulger were thrifty and successful, but Gamble and Bulger had fled and envy follows not the fleeing. Halliday had attained his ambition; was in the United States Senate; but the boom had sent him there, "regardless of politics," to plead for a deeper channel in the Swanee, a

move that was only part of one of Ravenel's amusing "deals," whereby he had procured at last the political extinction of Cornelius Leggett. Moreover, for all the old General's activities he had kept himself poor; almost as poor as he was incorruptible; who could envy him? And Ravenel; Ravenel was still the arbiter of political fortune, but it was part of his unostentatious wisdom never to let himself be envied. But Garnet, amid all this business depression upon which March looked down from his sick-room, wore envy on his broad breast like a decoration. There were spots of tarnish on his heavy gilding; not merely the elder Miss Kinsington, but Martha Salter as well, had refused to say good-by to Mademoiselle Eglantine on the eve of her final return to France; Fanny Ravenel had, with cutting playfulness, asked Mrs. Proudfit, as that sister was extolling the Major's vast public value, if she did not know perfectly well that Rosemont was a political "barrel." And yet it was Garnet who stood popularly as the incarnation of praiseworthy success.

John March, begrudged him none of his triumphs—at their price. Yet it was before *this* window-picture his heart sunk under the heaviest and cruelest of his exasperations. Other bafflements tormented him; here alone stood the visible, beautiful emblem of absolute discomfiture. For here was the silent, lifted hand which forbade him pursue his defrauders. Follow their man[oe]uvres as he might, always somewhere short of the end of their windings he found this man's fortune and reputation lying square across the way like a smooth, new fortification under a neutral flag. Seven times he had halted before them disarmed and dumb, and turned away with a chagrin that burnt his brain and gnawed his very bones.

There came a footstep, a rap at the door, and Parson Tombs entered, radiant with tidings. "John!" he began, but his countenance and voice fell to an anxious tenderness; "why, Brother March, I—I didn't suspicion you was this po'ly, seh. Why, John, you hadn't ought to try to sit up until yo' betteh!"

"It rests me to get out of bed a little while off and on. How are you, these days, sir? How's Mrs. Tombs?"

"Oh, we keep a-goin', thank the Lawd. Brother March, I've got pow'ful good news."

"Is it something about my mother? She was here about an hour ago."

"Yass, it is! The minute she got back to ow house—and O, John, it jest seems to me like her livin' with us ever since Widewood was divided up has been a plumb providence!—I says, s'I, 'Wha'd John say?' and when she said she hadn't so much as told you, 'cause you wa'n't well enough, we both of us, Mother Tombs and me, we says, s'I, 'Why, the sicker he is the mo' it'll help him! Besides, he's sho' to hear it; the ve'y wind'll carry it; which he oughtn't never to find it out in that hilt-

skilta wa-ay! Sister March, s'I, 'let me go tell him!' And s'she, jestingly, 'Go—if you think it's safe.' So here I am!" The old man laughed timorously.

"Well?" John kept his hands in his lap, where each was trying to wrench the fingers off the other. "What is it?"

"Why, John, the Lawd has provided! For one thing and even that the smallest, Sister March's Widewood lands air as good as hers again!"

"What has happened?" cried the pale youth.

"O, John, the best that ever could! What Mother Tombs and I and the Sextons and the Coffins and the Graveses and sco'es o' lovin' friends and relations have been a hopin' faw all this year an' last! Sister March has engaged her hand to Brother Garnet!"

"I think I'll lie down," said John, beginning to rise. The frightened Parson clutched him awkwardly, he reeled a step or two, said, "Don't—trouble"—and fell across the bed with a slam that jarred the floor. The old man moaned a helpless compassion.

"It's nothing," said March, waving him back. "Only my foot slipped." He dragged himself to his pillow. "Good-by, sir. I prefer—good-by!" He waved his visitor to the door. As it closed one of his hands crept under the pillow. There it seemed to find and rest on some small thing, and then a single throe wrenched his frame as of an anguish beyond all tears.

At Rosemont, as night was falling, Doctor Coffin, March's physician, the same who had attended him in boyhood when he was shot, stood up before the new Rose of Rosemont, in the greatly changed reception-room where in former years Bonaparte had tried so persistently to cross the Alps. She had left the room and returned and was speaking of Johanna, as she said, "She'll go with you. Have your seat, Doctor; she's getting ready and will be here in a few minutes."

The Doctor made a glad gesture. "I know how hard it must be for you to do without her," he said, "but if you can get along somehow for three or four days, why—you know she's away yonder the best nurse in the three counties—it'll make a world of difference to my patient."

"I hope he'll like her ways," replied the young mistress. "There's so much in that."

"Don't fear!" laughed the Doctor. "He hasn't looked so pleased since he first took sick as he did when I told him I was going to fetch her. By the bye, how do you sleep since I changed yo' medicine this last time; no better? Ain't yo' appetite improved any? I still think the secret of all yo' trouble is malaria; I haven't a

doubt you brought it with you from the North! I wish I could find as good an explanation of yo' father's condition.—I just declare it's an outrage on the rights of a plain old family chills-and-fever doctor, for a lot of you folks to be havin' these here sneakin' nerve and brain things that calomel an' quinine can't—O! here's Johanna."

On his way through town again, with the black maid beside him in his battered top buggy, he paused at the Tombeses' gate, hailed by the fond old Parson. "You haven't got her? Why, so you have!—'Howdy, Johanna, you're a bless'n' here to-night,' as the hymn says. Doctor, I hope an' trust an' pray Sister Proudfit's attack won't turn out serious——?"

The Doctor was surprised. "*I ain't been called to her; didn't know she was sick.*"

"Well, I say!" exclaimed the Parson. "Why, it's all over town that you *wuz*, and that you found her so prostrated with relaxation of the nerves that her husband couldn't hold her still! You've heard, of co'se, that he's got back at last? Isn't it pathetic? I've been talkin' about it to Brother Garnet—you passed him just now, didn't you?—and as he says, her husband goes off, a walkin' ruin, to be gone three months, stays twelve, and arrives back totally unexpected on this mawnin's six-o'clock train, a-callin' himself *cu'ud*! Brother Coffin, *you* don't believe that, *do* you? Why, as Brother Garnet says, the drinkin' habit is as much a moral as a physical sickness, and the man that can make common talk of it in his own case to ev'y Tom, Dick, and Harry, evm down to the niggehs, ain't so much as tetched the deepest root uv his trouble, much less *cu'ud*! Why, Doctor, Brother Garnet see him, himself!—a-tellin' that C'nelius Leggett!—and pulled him away! Po' Brother Garnet! Johanna, I wish, betwixt the Doctor an' you, you could make him look betteh. His load of usefulness is too great. I declare, Brother Coffin, he was that tiud this evenin' that evm here, where you'd expect him to seem fresh and happy in his new joy, he looked as if, if it wa'n't faw the wrong of the thing, he'd almost be willin' to call upon the rocks and the mountains to fall on him and hide him.—But I mustn't detain you!"

The physician drove on, and by and by was leaving directions with Johanna and her protectors, Tom Hersey and his wife. "And, Tom, mind you, *no visitors*. It's his own wish. Good-night.—O!—that young Mr. Fair. March tells me he's expecting him any time within the next few days, to help lay the corner-stone of this new building up at the colored college; Fair Hall, yes. Whenever he comes take him right up to see March. I promised John you would!"

LXXVII.

"LINES OF LIGHT ON A SULLEN SEA"

From the first hour of Johanna's attendance March began to mend. Whence she came, whither she went, as she moved in and out so pleasantly, he never thought to ask, and never found out that her bed was a pallet laid on the stair-landing just at his door.

The young bloods down in the street were keenly amused. "Doctor, if he was anybody but John March aw she anybody but Johanna"—the rest was too funny for words. "How is he to-day, anyhow? Improving rap'—well! good fo' that! Come, gentlemen, let's—Come, Shot. Doctor, won't you—" And as they went they all agreed that the dark maiden's invincible modesty was like some "subtle emana-tion," as Shotwell expressed it, which charmed all evil out of the grossest eye.

True it was in the convalescent's case, that while Johanna's mere doings had their curative value, her simple presence had more. Yet her greatest healing was in her words; in what she told him. She only answered questions; but these he lightly plied on any and every trivial matter that promised to lead up—or around—to one subject which seemed to allure him without cessation. Yet always at her first pause after entering upon any phase of this topic, he would say, "But that's not what—hem!—I was speaking of," and starting once more, at any distance away, would begin to steal yet another approach toward the same enticing theme.

So the brief time of her appointed service came to its end, neither the Doctor, nor the convalescent, nor even her young mistress, for one moment imagining what dear delight, yet withal what saintly martyrdom to Johanna, this three days' task had been.

In its last hour, when she, to end all well, prepared and brought up the captive's evening meal, she found him sitting up in bed talking to Henry Fair.

"Doctor thinks I can go down to my office Monday. Yes, I knew what ailed me better than he did. I began to recover the moment I quit trying to convince the Lord that He ought to run this world in my private interest. Ah! Johanna, so this is the last, is it? I'm pow'ful sorry! Mr. Fair, you remember Johanna, don't you?"

Mr. Fair remembered, the maid courtesied, and March, a trifle unduly animated, ran on—"Johanna's the salt of the earth, Mr. Fair. Don't often see best salt that color, do you?" Then dropping his tone—"O! you know, if my chief concern were still, as it was at first, to recover my fortunes, or even to vindicate my abilities, I reckon I could make out to accept defeat—almost. For, really, I'm just

about the only sufferer—outwardly, at least. Of course, there's an awful shrinkage here, but all our home people have made net gains—unless it is Proudfit; I—eh—Johanna, you needn't stay in here; only don't go beyond call."

The maid closed the door after her, took her accustomed rocking-chair and needle on the stair-landing, and being quite as human as if she had been white, listened. Fair's words were very indistinct, but March's came through the thin door-panels as clean as rifle-balls. "O! yes," was one of his replies, "I know that with even nothing left but the experiences, I'm a whole world richer, in things that make a real manhood and life, than when I was land-poor with my hundred thousand acres. As far as *I* am concerned, I can afford to deny myself all the reprisals, and revenges too, that litigations could ever give me. I've got sixty acres of Widewood to begin over with—By Jo! Garnet, himself, began with less!" He let go a feverish laugh.

"If I come to that," he added, "I've got, besides, a love of study and a talent for teaching, two things he never had." Fair asked a question and he laughed again. "O! no, it was only a passing thought. If anybody 'busts Rosemont wide open' it'll have to be Leggett. O! no, I——" He played with his spoon.

Fair's response must have been complimentary. "Thank you," said March; "why, thank you!" Then the visitor spoke again and the convalescent replied:

"Ah! a 'diligent and vigilant patience'—yes, I don't doubt it would serve me best—provided, my dear sir, it didn't turn out simply a virtue of impotency; or, worse yet, what I once heard called 'the thrifty discretion of a short-winded courage!'"

When Fair responded this time March let him speak long. Johanna bent her ear anxiously. Her patient seemed to be neglecting his food; but as he began to reply she resumed her needle.

"Fair," she heard him say, "—why—why, Fair, that's a mighty handsome offer to come from such a prudent business man as you. My George! sir, men don't often put such valuable freight into a boat that's aground. Why—why, you spoil my talk; I positively don't know what—what to say!" There was a choke in his voice. Fair made some answer which March gratefully cut short.

"O! I wish I could! It hurts me all over and through to decline it. But I must; I've got to! 'Think it over'—O! I've thought it over probably before you ever thought of it at all! I know my capabilities. I'm not in such a fierce hurry for things as I used to be, but I've got what brains I ever had—and spine, too—and I know that even without your offer there's a better chance for me North than here. But—O! it's no use, Fair, I just can't go! I mustn't! Yes. Yes. O! yes, I know all that, but,

my dear sir, I can't afford—You know, this Suez soil isn't something I can shake off my shoes as you might. George! I'm part of it! I'm not Quixotic—not a bit! I'm only choosing between two sorts of selfishness, one not quite so narrow as the other; but—I've got to stay here."

Fair, after a short silence, asked if this was his only reason.

"Only reason? Why—why, yes, that's my only reason! To be sure, there's a sense in which—why, conscience! isn't it enough? O! of course, I could *think up* other considerations, but they're not reasons—I don't allow them to bias me at all! Fact is, I was never before quite so foot-free. Why did you ask? Did you fancy I might be contemplating marriage? O, go 'long! why, my good gracious, Fair, I—it's an honest fact—I haven't even *been to see* one marriageable girl since I came back from Europe! No, the reason I give is *the* reason. It covers everything else.

"O! if you are thinking of debts, I could cancel them at least as fast if I went as if I stayed. They're not large, the money debts. O! no; it's—Fair—I spent a year in Europe coaxing men to leave their mother-country for better wages in this. Of course, that was all right. But it brought one thing to my notice: that when our value is not mere wages, it isn't every man who's got the unqualified right to pick up and put out just whenever he gets ready. Look out that window. There's the college where for five years I got my education—at half price!—and with money borrowed here in Suez! Look out this one. Mr. Fair, right down there in those streets truth and justice are lying wounded and half-dead, and the public conscience is being drugged! We Southerners, Fair, don't believe one man's as good as another; we think one man in his right place is worth a thousand who can't fill it. My place is here!—No! let me finish; I'm not fatigued at all! How I'm to meet this issue God only knows, but who'll even try to do it if I don't? Halliday's too far off. Ravenel looks on as silent as a gallows! Proudfit—poor old Proudfit hasn't been sober since the day he got home. Father Tombs has grown timid and slow-sighted, and the whole people, Fair, the whole people! have let themselves be seduced in the purse and are this day betrayed as foully in their fortunes as in their souls!" The speaker ended in a high key. He was trembling with nervous exhaustion. In an effort to jerk higher in the pillow his knee struck the tray, the crockery slid and crashed, and Johanna found him in the middle of the room, fiercely shaking the skirt of his dressing-gown.

"O! never mind me; get the milk out of the bed!"

She saw how overwrought he was, yet turned to obey. Fair, to aid her, snatched away the pillows. A small thing from under them fluttered out upon the carpet and lay before the three. With a despairing murmur the invalid picked it up, and the two men stood facing each other. Fair colored slightly, March slowly

crimsoned. Then Fair smiled. March smiled too, but foolishly. Johanna made herself very busy with the bed, but she saw all. Fair pushed forward a rocking-chair, into which March sank. Then with gentle insistence he drew from March's hand the worn photograph—for such it was—leaned against a window and gazed on it, while March turned his brow into the cushioned back of his chair and wept as comfortably as any girl.

Johanna took out the tray and its wreck, and in a moment was back with fresh sheets. March had lain down on the bare mattress and, with his cheek on a pillow, was smiling in mild amusement at Fair's account of a brief talk he had had with Leggett while the train waited at Pulaski City.

"Yes," said March, moving enough to let the bed be made, "he pretends to keep a restaurant there now; but where he gets all the money he spends is more than I can make out, unless it's from men who can't afford to let him tell what he knows."

A servant of the house tapped at the door and said Major Garnet was in the office, waiting for Johanna. March rose to his elbow and gave her a hand.

"Why, I shan't ever know how to be sick without you any mo'!" he said, as her dark fingers slipped timidly from his friendly hold. "Johanna!—now—now, don't you go tellin' things you'd oughtn't to; will you?"

"No, seh," came from the maid slowly, yet with a suspicious readiness quite out of keeping with the limp diffidence of her attitude.

"Hold on a moment, Johanna," he called, as she turned to go. "Just wait an instant—sounds like——" He rose higher. Fair stepped to the west window. Loud words were coming from the sidewalk under it. March started eagerly. "That's Proudfit's——" Before he could finish the bang of a pistol rang, evidently in the office door, another, farther within, roared up through the house, and a third and fourth re-echoed it amid the wailings of Johanna as she flew down the stairs crying:

"Mahs John Wesley! O Lawdy, Lawdy! Mahs John Wesley! Mahs John Wesley!"

At the same instant came Tom Hersey's voice, remote, but clear:

"Stop! Great God! Stop! Don't you see he's dying?"

Fair was already on the staircase and March was whipping on his boots, when Shotwell, coming up by leaps, waved them back into the room. "It's all ova, Mr. Fair. Po' Proud's gone, John. He fi-ud an' missed, and got Garnet's first bullet in

his heart an' the othe's close to it. Garnet's locked himself into Tom Hersey's private room an' sent for Fatheh Tombs, to——"

"Fair!" interrupted March, "go! Go tell her he's safe and will not be—interfered with! I'll make your word good; go, Fair, go!"

But Fair answered with hardly less emotion, "I cannot, March! It isn't a man's errand! It isn't a man's errand!"

"Take Mrs. Ravenel!" cried March, and read quick assent in his friend's face. "But make her go dressed as she is; you've got to outrun rumor! Captain, go tell Tom to give him Firefly, won't you? She's mine, Fair," he continued, following to the stairs; "she's the mare I cured for Bulger; perfectly gentle, only—Fair!—don't touch her with the whip!"

"If you do," drawled Shotwell to Fair, as they hurried down into the lamplight, "you'll think the devil's inside of her with the jimjams. Still, she's lovely as long as you don't. Ah me! this is no time to jest! Po' Proudfit! He leaves a spotless characteh!"

Through the unnatural bustle, amid which Crickwater at the door of the closed office stood answering or ignoring questions and showing his intimates where Proudfit's wild shot had chopped out a large lock of his hair, they went to Hersey's door and so on to the stable. "Garnet's the man to pity, Mr. Fair. I couldn't say it befo' March, who's got family reasons—through his motheh—faw savin' Garnet whateveh he can of his splendid reputaation, but I'm mighty 'fraid they won't be a rag of it left, seh, big enough for a gun-wad! Mr. Fair, you've got a hahd drive befo' you, seh, an' if you'll allow me to suggest it, seh, I think it would be only wise, befo' you staht, faw us to take a drink, seh."

"Thank you," said the Northerner, "I hardly think—Do you suppose Major Garnet's firing those last two shots after——"

"Will ruin him? O Lawd, not that! We all know, and always have, that he's perfectly cra-azy when he's enra-aged. No, my deah seh, Miz Proudfit has confessed! She says——"

"Are you not surprised that Major Garnet was armed?" Fair interrupted.

"O! no, seh, Colonel Proudfit was too much of a gentleman to be lookin' faw a man, with a gun, an' not send him word! And, besides, Miz Proudfit's revela-tions——"

But the horse and buggy were ready, and at last March—to whom, as he stood at his window fully dressed, the few moments had seemed an hour—saw Fair drive swiftly by and fade into the gloom. Charlie Champion came toward the hotel,

bringing Parson Tombs. March put on his hat, but for many minutes only paced the darkening room. Finally he started for the stairs, and half way down them met the Doctor.

"Why, bless my soul, John," he good-naturedly cried, "this is quite *too* fast."

"I reckon not, Doctor; I believe I'm well. I don't understand it, but it's so." He endured the Doctor's hand for a moment on his wrist and temples.

"Why, I declare!" laughed the physician with noisy pleasure, "I believe yo' right!" As they descended he explained how such recoveries are possible and why they are so rare, citing from medical annals a case or two whose mention John thought very unflattering.

"I should like to know what's become of Johanna," said March at the foot of the stairs.

"Johanna? O they say she ran all the way to Fannie Ravenel's, and they harnessed up the fast colt and put off for Rosemont, Johanna driving!"

"Why, of course! I might have known it! But"—John stopped—"Why, then, where's Fair?"

"O I saw him. He drove on to overtake 'em. He'll have a job of it!"

"Firefly can do it," said March, picturing the chase to himself. "But I—I wonder what—This is no time—Why—why, what did he want to do it for?"

"O he may have had the best of reasons," said the amiable Doctor, and departed.

Outside a certain door—"Why, John March!" murmured Tom Hersey. The voices of Garnet and Parson Tombs could be heard within. They ceased as the landlord modestly rattled the knob, and when he gave the visitor's name Garnet's voice said:

"Ask him in."

As March entered, only Parson Tombs rose to meet him. He had a large handkerchief in his fingers, his eyes were very red, and he gave his hand in silence. Garnet, too, had been weeping. He shaded his downcast eyes from the lamp. March had determined to give himself no time for feelings, but his voice was suddenly not his own as he began, "Major Garnet," and stopped, while Garnet slowly lifted his face until the light shone on it. March stood still and felt his heart heave between loathing and compassion; for on that lamp-lit face one hour of public shame had written more guilt than years of secret perfidy and sin, and the question rushed upon the young man's mind, Can this be the author of all

my misfortunes and the father of?—he quenched the thought and driving back a host of memories said:

"Major, Doctor Coffin has just pronounced me well. I am at your disposal, sir, for anything that ought to be done."

Garnet shaded his eyes again. "Thank you, John," was his subdued reply. "It's such a clear case of self-defence—I hear there will be no arrest. Still, I shall remain here to-night. Johanna's gone home, I believe. There's only one thing, the deepest yearning of my heart, John; but before I ask that boon, I want you to know, John, that I acknowledge my sin! my awful, awful sin of years! O my God! my God! why did I do it?"

Parson Tombs wept again. "He's confessed everything, John," he said with eager tenderness.

"God knows," responded Garnet, "God knows I never concealed it but to save others from misery! and while I concealed it I could not master it! Now I have purged my sin-blackened soul of all its hideous secret and evil purpose! The thorn in my flesh is plucked out and I cast myself on the mercy of God and the charity of his people!"

"Pra-aise Gawd!" murmured Parson Tombs, "no sinneh eveh done that in vain!"

"O John," moaned Garnet, "God only knows what I've suffered and must suffer! But it's all right! all right! I pray He may lop off every unfruitful branch of my life—honors, possessions—till nothing is left but Rosemont, the lowly work He called me to, Himself! Let Him make me as one of his hired servants! But, John," he continued while March stood dumb with wonder at his swift loss of subtlety, "I want you to know also that I feel no resentment—I cannot—O I cannot—against her who shares my guilt and shame!"

"Great Heaven!" murmured March, with a start as if to turn away.

"No, thank God! her vanity and jealousy can drive me to no more misdeeds! She made me send Mademoiselle Eglantine to Europe, when she knew I had to sell her husband's stock in both companies to bribe the woman to go! John, the cause of her betraying me to him at last was my faithful refusal to break off my engagement with your mother!"

"Major Garnet, I prefer——"

"Will you tell your mother that, John? It's the one thing you can do for me! Tell her I beseech her in the name of a love——"

"Stop!" murmured March in a voice that quivered with repulsion.

"—A love that has dared all, and lost all, for hers——"

"Stop!" said John again, and Garnet turned a beseeching eye upon the pastor.

"John," tearfully said the old man, "let us not yield to our feelings when the cry of a soul in shipwreck"—he stopped to swallow his emotions. "Ow penitent brother on'y asks you to bear his message. It's natu'al he should cling to the one pyo tie that holds him to us. O John, 'in wrath remembereh mercy!' An' yet you may be the nearest right, God knows! O brethren, let's kneel and ask Him faw equal love an' wisdom!"

Garnet rose to kneel, but March put out a protesting hand. "I wouldn't do that, sir." The tone was gentle, almost compassionate. "I don't suppose God would strike you dead, but—I wouldn't do it, sir." He turned to go, and, glancing back unexpectedly, saw on Garnet's face a look so evil that it haunted him for years.

LXXVIII.

BARBARA FINDS THE RHYME

Barbara walked along the slender road in front of Rosemont's grove. The sun was gone. Her father had not arrived yet with Johanna, but she questioned every stir of the air for the sound of their coming. A yearning which commonly lay very still in her bosom and ought in these two long years to have got reconciled to its lovely prison, was up once more in silent mutiny.

With slow self-compulsion she turned toward the house. The dim, vacated dormitories grew large against the fading after-glow. The thrush's song ceased. Remotely from the falling slope beyond the unlighted house the voices of a negro boy and girl, belated in the milking-pen, came to her ear more lightly than the gurgle of the shallow creek so near her feet. Suddenly the cry of the whip-Will's-widow filled the grove—"whip-Will's-widow! whip-Will's-widow! whip-Will's-widow!"—in headlong importunity until the whole air sobbed and quivered with the overcharge of its melancholy passion. Then as abruptly it was hushed, the echoes died, and Barbara, at the grove gate, recalled the other twilight hour, a counterpart of this in all but its sadness, when, on this spot, she had bidden John March come the next day to show Widewood to Henry Fair.

And now Henry Fair "some day soon," his unexpected letter said, was to come again. And she was letting him come. One of his sweet mother's letters—always so welcome—had ever so delicately hinted a hope that she would do so, the fond mother affectionately imputing to the father's wisdom the feeling that Henry's present life contained more uncertainties than were good for his, or anyone's, future. He was coming at last for her final word, and in her meditations, his patient constancy, like a great ambassador, pleaded mightily in advance.

Henry Fair, gentle, strong, and true, will come; *the other* never comes. The explanation is very simple; she has made it to Johanna twice within the year: a strained relation—it happens among the best of men—between him and Rosemont's master. Besides, Mr. March, she says, visits nowhere. He is, as Fannie herself testifies, more completely out of all Suez's little social eddies than even the overtaken young mistress of Rosemont, and does nothing day or night but buffet the flood of his adversities. As she reminds herself of these things now, she recalls Fannie's praise of his "indomitable pluck," and feels a new, warm courage around her own heart. For as long as men can show valor, she gravely reflects, surely women can have fortitude. How small a right, at best—how little honest room—there is in this huge world of strifes and sorrows for a young girl's heart to go breaking itself with its own grief and longing.

The right thing is, of course, to forget. She should! She must! But—she has said so every evening and morning for two years. Old man! old woman! do you remember what two years meant when you were in the early twenties? Even yet, with the two years gone, by hard crowding of the hours with cares, as a ship crowds sail or steam, it seems at times as if her forgetting were about to make headway; but just then the unexpected happens—merely the unexpected. O why not the romantic? She hears him praised or blamed; or, as now, he is ill; or she meets him in a dream; or between midnight and dawn she cannot sleep; or, worst of all, by some sad mischance she sees him, close by, in a throng or in a public way—for an instant—and, when it is too late, knows by his remembered look that he wanted to speak; and the flood lifts and sweeps her back, and she must begin again. The daylight hours are the easiest; there is so much to do and see done, and just the clear, lost, silent-hearted mother's ways to follow. One can manage everything but the twilights with their death of day, their hush of birds, the mind gazing back into the past and the heart asking unanswerable questions of the future. For the evenings there are books, though not all; especially not Herrick, any more; nor Tennyson, for it opens of itself at "Mariana," who wept, "I am aweary, aweary. Oh, God, that I were dead!"

Barbara walked again. Moving at a slow pace, so, one can more soberly—She heard wheels. A quarter of a mile away they rumbled on a small bridge and were unheard again, and while she still listened to hear them on the ground others

sounded on the bridge. She hurried back to the steps of the house and had hardly reached them when Johanna drove into the grove and Fannie's voice called,

"Is that you, Barb?"

"Yes. Where's pop-a? Has anything happened?"

"He's got to stay in town to-night. Barb," said the visitor, springing to the ground, "Mr. Fair's just behind. He's only come so's to take me back to my baby."

"Fannie, something's happened!"

"Yes, Barb, dear, come into the house."

About midnight—"Doctor, her head hasn't stopped that motion since it touched the pillow," murmured Fannie. Fair had gone back and brought the physician. But the patient was soon drugged to slumber, and Fannie and Fair started for town to return early in the morning. The doctor and Johanna watched out the night. At dawn Fair rose from a sleepless couch.

At sunrise he could hear no sound through March's door; but as he left the hotel he saw Leggett come up from the train, tap at Garnet's door and go in.

Barbara awoke in a still bliss of brain, yet wholly aware of what had befallen.

"Johanna"—the maid showed herself—"has Miss Fannie gone home?"

"Yass'm. But she comin' back. She be here ve'y soon now, I reckon."

Barbara accepted a small cup of very black coffee. When it was drunk, "Johanna," she said, with slow voice and gentle gaze, "were you in the hotel?"

"Yass'm," murmured the maid. "I uz in Mr. March's room. He uz talkin' wid Mr. Fair, an' knock' his suppeh by *accident* onto de flo', an'"—she withdrew into herself, consulted her conscience and returned. "Miss Barb——"

"What, Johanna?"

Johanna told.

Long after she was done her mistress lay perfectly still gazing into vacancy. But the moment Fannie was alone with her she dragged the kind visitor's neck down to her lips and with unaccountable blushes mingled her tears with bitter moanings.

By and by—"And Fannie, dear, *make* them stay to breakfast. And thank Mr. Fair for me, as sweetly as you can. I don't know how I can ever repay him!"

"Don't you?" dryly ventured Fannie; but her friend's smile was so sad that she went no farther. Tears sprang to her eyes, as Barbara, slowly taking her hand, said,

"Of course pop-a can't keep Rosemont now. If he tries to begin a new life, Fannie, wherever it is, I shall stay with him."

Fair gave the day mainly to the annual meeting of the trustees at Suez University. The corner-stone was not to be laid until the morrow. March reopened his office, but did almost no work, owing to the steady stream of callers from all round the square coming to wish him well with handshake and laugh, and with jests which more or less subtly implied their conviction that he was somehow master of the hour. When Ravenel came others slipped out, although he pleasantly remarked that they need not, and those who looked in later and saw the two men sitting face to face drew back. "That thing last night," said Weed to Usher, going to the door of their store to throw his quid into the street, "givm the *Courier* about the hahdest kick in the ribs she evva got." But no one divined Ravenel's errand, unless Garnet darkly suspected it as he waited beside Jeff-Jack's desk for its owner's return, to ask him for ten thousand dollars on a mortgage of his half of Widewood, with which to quiet, he serenely explained, any momentary alarm among holders of his obligations. And even Garnet did not guess that Ravenel would not have telegraphed, as he did, to a bank in Pulaski City in which he was director, to grant the loan, had not John March just declined his offer of a third interest in the *Courier*.

At evening March and Fair dined together in Hotel Swanee. They took a table at a window and talked but little, and then softly, with a placid gravity, on trivial topics, keeping serious ones for a better privacy, though all other guests had eaten and gone. Only Shotwell, unaware of their presence, lingered over his pie and discussed Garnet's affair with the head waitress, an American lady. He read to her on the all-absorbing theme, from the Pulaski City *Clarion*; whose editor, while mingling solemn reprobations with amazed regrets, admitted that a sin less dark than David's had been confessed from the depths of David's repentance. In return she would have read him the Suez *Courier's* much fuller history of the whole matter; but he had read it, and with a kindly smile condemned it as "suspended in a circumaambient air of edito'ial silence."

"I know not what co'se othe's may take, my dea' madam, but as faw me, give me neither poverty naw riches; give me political indispensability; the pa-papers have drawn the mantle of charity ove' 'im, till it covers him like a circus-tent."

"Ah! but what'll his church do?" The lady bent from her chair and tied her slipper.

"My dea' madam, what *can* she do? She th'ows up—excuse the figgeh—she th'ows up, I say, her foot to kick him out; he tearfully ketches it in his ha-and an' retains it with the remahk, 'I repent!' What *can* his church do? She can do jest one thing!"

"What's that?" asked the lady, gathering his dishes without rising.

"Why she can make him marry Miz Proudfit!"

The lady got very red. "Captain Shotwell, I'll thaynk you not to allude to that person to me again, seh!" She jerked one knee over the other and folded her arms.

"My dea' madam! I was thoughtless! Fawgive me!" The Captain stood up. "I'm not myself to-day. Not but what I'm sobeh; but I—oh, I'm in trouble! But what's that to you?" He pulled his soft hat picturesquely over his eyes, and starting out, discovered March and Fair. He looked sadly mortified as he saluted them, but quickly lighted up again and called March aside.

"John, do you know what Charlie Champion's been doin'? He's been tryin' to get up a sort o' syndicate to buy Rosemont and make you its pres—O now, now, ca'm yo'self, he's give it up; we all wish it, but you know, John, how ow young men always ah; dead broke, you know. An' besides, anyhow, Garnet may ruin Rosemont, but, as Jeff-Jack says, he'll neveh sell it. It's his tail-holt. Eh—eh—one moment, John, I want to tell you anotheh thing. You've always been sich a good friend—John, I've p'posed to Miss Mahtha-r again, an' she's rejected me, as usual. I knew you'd be glad to hear it." He smiled through his starting tears. "But she cried, John, she did!—said she'd neveh ma' anybody else!"

"Ah, Shot, you're making a pretty bad flummux of it!"

"Yes, John, I know I am—p'posin' by da-aylight! It don't work! But, you know, when I wait until evenin' I ain't in any condition. Still, I'll neveh p'pose to her by da-aylight again! I don't believe Eve would 'a' ma'd Adam if he'd p'posed by da-aylight."

The kind Captain passed out. He spent the night in his room with our friend, the commercial traveler, who, at one in the morning, was saying to him for the tenth time,

"I came isstantly! For whareverss Garness's troubl'ss my trouble! I can't tell you why; thass my secret; I say thass my secret! Fill up again; this shocksh too much for me! Capm—want to ask you one thing: *Muss* I be carried to the skies on

flow'ry bedge of ease while Garnet *fighss* to win the prise 'n' sails through bloody seas? Sing that, Capm! I'll line it! You sing it!" Shotwell sang; his companion wept. So they closed their sad festivities; not going to bed, but sleeping on their arms, like the stern heroes they were.

"Why, look at the droves of ow own people!" laughed Captain Champion at the laying of the corner-stone. And after it, "Yes, Mr. Fair's address was fi-ine! But faw me, Miz Ravenel, do you know I liked just those few words of John March evm betteh?"

"They wa'n't so few," drawled Lazarus Graves, "but what they put John on the shelf."

The hot Captain flashed. "Politically, yes, seh! On the *top* shelf, where we saave up ow best men faw ow worst needs, seh!"

Fair asked March to take a walk. They went without a word until they sat down on the edge of a wood. Then Fair said,

"March, I have a question to ask you. Why don't you try?"

"Fair, she won't ever let me! She's as good as told me, up and down, I mustn't. And *now* I can't! I'm penniless, and part of her inheritance will be my lost lands. I can't ignore that; I haven't got the moral courage! Besides, Fair, I know that if she takes you, there's an end of all her troubles and a future worthy of her—as far as any future can be. What sort of a fellow would I be—Oh, mind you! if I had the faintest reason to think she'd rather have me than you, I George! sir——" He sprang up and began to spurn the bark off a stump with a strength of leg that made it fly. "Fair, tell me! Are you going to offer yourself, notwithstanding all?"

"Yes. Yes; if the letter I expect from home to-morrow, and which I telegraphed them to write, is what I make no doubt it will be; yes."

March gazed at his companion and slowly and soberly smiled. "Fair," he softly exclaimed, "I wish I had your head! Lord! Fair, I wish I had your chance!"

"Ah! no," was the gentle reply, "I wish one or the other were far better."

A third sun had set before Barbara walked again at the edge of the grove. Two or three hours earlier her father had at last come home, and as she saw the awful change in his face and the vindictive gleam with which he met her recognition of it, she knew they were no longer father and daughter. The knowledge pierced like

a slow knife, and yet brought a sense of relief—of release—that shamed her until she finally fled into the open air as if from suffocation. There she watched the west grow dark and the stars fill the sky while thoughts shone, vanished, and shone again in soft confusion like the fireflies in the grove. Only one continued—that now she might choose her future. Her father had said so with an icy venom which flashed fire as he added, "But if you quit Rosemont now, so help me God, you shall never own it, if I have to put it to the torch on my dying bed!"

She heard something and stepped into hiding. What rider could be coming at this hour? John March? Henry Fair? It was neither. As he passed in at the gate she shrank, gasped, and presently followed. Warily she rose up the front steps, stole to the parlor blinds, and, peering in, saw her father pay five crisp thousand dollar bills to Cornelius Leggett.

In her bed Barbara thought out the truth: that Cornelius still held some secret of her father's; that in smaller degree he had been drawing hush money for years; and that he had concluded that any more he could hope to plunder from the blazing ruin of his living treasury must be got quickly, and in one levy, ere it fell. But what that secret might be she strove in vain to divine. One lurking memory, that would neither show its shape nor withdraw its shadow, haunted her ringing brain. The clock struck twelve; then one; then two; and then she slept.

And then, naturally and easily, without a jar between true cause and effect, the romantic happened! The memory took form in a dream and the dream became a key to revelation. When Johanna brought her mistress's coffee she found her sitting up in bed. On her white lap lay the old reticule of fawn-skin. She had broken the clasp of its inner pocket and held in her hand a rudely scrawled paper whose blue ink and strutting signature the unlettered maid knew at a glance was from her old-time persecutor, Cornelius. It was the letter her father had dropped under the chair when she was a child. Across its face were still the bold figures of his own pencil, and from its blue lines stared out the *secret*.

Garnet breakfasted alone and rode off to town. The moment he was fairly gone Johanna was in the saddle, charged by her mistress with the delivery of a letter which she was "on no account to show or mention to anyone but——"

"Yass'm," meekly said Johanna, and rode straight to the office of John March.

A kind greeting met her as she entered, but it was from Henry Fair, and he was alone. He, too, had been reading a letter, a long one in a lady's writing, and seemed full of a busy satisfaction. Mr. March, he said, had ridden out across the river, but would be back very shortly. "Johanna, I may have to go North to-night. I wonder if it's too early in the day for me to call on Miss Garnet?"

"No-o, seh," drawled the conscientious maid, longing to say it was. "H-it's early, but I don't reckon it's too early," and was presently waiting for Mr. March, alone.

Hours passed. He did not come. She got starving hungry, yet waited on. Men would open the door, look in, see or not see her sitting in the nearest corner, and close it again. About two o'clock she slipped out to the Hotel Swanee, thinking she might find him at dinner. They said he had just dined and gone to his office. She hurried back, found it empty, and sat down again to wait. Another hour passed, and suddenly the door swung in and to again, and John March halted before his desk. He did not see her. His attitude was as if he might wheel and retrace his steps.

Mrs. March had broken off her engagement promptly. But when Garnet, by mail, still flattered and begged, the poetess, with no notion of relenting, but in her love of dramatic values and the gentle joy of perpetuating a harrowing suspense, had parleyed; and only just now had her tyrannical son forced a conclusion unfavorable to the unfortunate suitor. So here in his office March smote his brow and exclaimed,

"O my dear mother! that what is best for you should be so bad for me! Ahem! Why—why, howdy, Johanna? Hmm!"

With silent prayers and tremors the girl watched him read the letter. At the first line he sank into his chair, amazed and pale. "My Lord!" he murmured, and read on. "O my Lord! it can't be! Why, how?—why—O it shan't be!—O—hem! Johanna, you can go'long home, there's no answer; I'll be there before you."

At the post-office March reined in his horse while Deacon Usher brought out a drop letter from Henry Fair. But he galloped as he read it, and did not again slacken speed till he turned into the campus—except once. At the far edge of the battle-field, on that ridge where in childhood he had first met Garnet, he overtook and passed him now. As he went by he slowed to a trot, but would not have spoken had Garnet not glared on him like a captured hawk. The young man's blood boiled. He stood up in his stirrups.

"Don't look at me that way, sir; I've just learned your whole miserable little secret and expect to keep it for you." He galloped on. When, presently, he looked behind, Garnet had turned back—to find Leggett. That search was vain. Cornelius and his "Delijah," kissing their hands to their creditors, were already well on their way into that most exhilarating of all conundrums, the wide, wide world.

From Pulaski City Garnet returned on the early morning train to Suez, intending to ride out to Rosemont without a moment's delay. But on the station platform he

came face to face with John March. They went to the young man's office and sat there, locked in, for an hour. Another they used up in the court-house and in Ravenel's private office with him between them in the capacity of an attorney. Yet when the three men parted Ravenel had neither asked nor been told what the matter was which had occasioned the surprising legal transaction that they had just completed.

"Now," said Garnet, briskly, "I must hurry home, for I want to leave on the evening train."

He rode out alone upon the old turnpike and over the knoll where Suez still hopes some day to build the reservoir, and reached the spot where he and his young adjutant picked blackberries that first day we ever saw them. There he stopped, and looking across the land to the roofs of distant Rosemont, straightened up in the saddle with a great pride, and then, all at once, let go a long groan of anguish and, covering his face, heaved with sobs that seemed as though each tore a separate way up from his heart. Then, as suddenly, he turned his horse's head and rode slowly back. Twice, as he went, he handled something in the pocket of his coat's skirt, and the third time drew it out—a small repeater. He did not raise the weapon; he only looked down at it in his trembling hand, the old thimbles still in the three discharged chambers, the lead peeping from the other two, and, thinking of the woman who shared his ruin, said in his mind, "One for each of us."

But it never happened so. He often wishes, yet, that it had, although he is, and has been for years, a "platform star;" "the eloquent Southern orator, moralist and humorist"—yes, that's the self-same man. He's booked for the Y. M. C. A. lecture course in your own town this season. His lecture, entitled "Temptation and How to Conquer It," is said to be "a wonderful alternation of humorous and pathetic anecdotes, illustrative, instructive and pat." I have his circular. His wife travels with him. They generally put up at hotels; tried private hospitality the first season, but it didn't work, somehow.

They have never revisited Dixie; and only once in all these years have they seen a group of Suez faces. But a season or two ago—I think it was ninety-three—in Fourteenth Street, New York, wife and I came square upon Captain Charlie Champion, whom I had not seen for years, indeed, not since his marriage, and whom my wife, never having been in Suez, did not know. Still he would have us up to dinner at his hotel with Mrs. Champion. He promised me I should find her "just as good and sweet and saane as of old, and evm prettieh!" Plainly the hearty Captain was more a man than ever, and she had made him so! He told us we should meet Colonel Ravenel and also—by pure good luck!—Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fair. You may be sure we were glad to go.

Ravenel had to send us word from the rotunda begging us to go in to dinner without him and let him join us at table. Champion neglected his soup, telling us of two or three Suez people. "Pettigrew?—O he left Suez the year Rosemont changed haynds. Po' Shot!—he's ow jail-keepah, now, you know—he says one day, s'e, 'Old Pettie may be in heavm by now, but I don't believe he's happy; he'll neveh get oveh the loss of his sla-aves!'"

Fair spoke of John March, saying his influence in that region was not only very strong but very fine. Where to Champion responded,

"—Result is we've got a betteh town and a long sight betteh risin' generation than we eveh had befo'. I don't reckon Mr. Fair thinks we do the dahkeys justice. John says we don't and I don't believe we do. When it comes to that, seh, where on earth does the under man get all his rights? But we come neareh toe it in the three counties than anywheres else in Dixie, and that I *know*."

I dropped an interrogative hint as to how March stood with Ravenel.

The Captain smiled. "They neveh cla-ash. Ravenel's the same mystery he always was, but not the same poweh; his losin' Garnet the way he did, and then John bein' so totally diffe'nt, you know—John don't ofm ask Jeff-Jack to do anything, but he neveh aasks in vaain.—John's motheh? Yes, she still lives with him.—No, she ve'y seldom eveh writes much poetry any mo', since heh book turned out to be such a' unaccountable faailu'e. She jest lives with him, and really"—he dropped his voice—"you'd be amaazed to see how much she's sort o' sweetened and mellered under the influence of—Ah! there's Colonel Ravenel——"

He broke off with a whisper of surprise. At a table near the door Garnet's wife sat smiling eagerly after her husband as if it was at her instigation he had risen and effusively accosted Ravenel; and both she and Garnet knew that we all saw, when Ravenel said with an unmoved face and colorless voice,

"No. No, I'm perfectly sure I never saw you before, sir." It may have been wholly by chance, but in drawing a handkerchief as he spoke he showed the hand whose thumb he had lost in saving Garnet's life.

The "star" hurried back to his seat and resumed conversation with the partner of his fate—for a moment. But all at once she rose and went out, he following, leaving their meal untouched.

Wife, as it was right she should, fell in love with Mrs. Fair on the spot, and agreed with me by stolen glances I knew how to interpret, that she was as lovely and refined a woman as she had ever met. Boston had not removed that odd, winning drawl so common in the South, and which a Southerner learns to miss so in the East. But when wife tried to have her talk about Suez and its environs she

looked puzzled for an instant and then, with a light of mild amusement in her smile, said,

"O!—I never saw Suez; I was born and brought up in Chicago."

"No," said Ravenel, "it's Mrs. Champion who can tell you all about Suez."

"That's so!" cried Champion, and turning to his wife, added, "What the Saltehs don't know about Suez ain't wuth knowin', is it, Mahtha?"

That night I told wife this whole story. As I reached this point in it she interposed a strong insinuation that I am a very poor story-teller.

"I thought," she continued, "I thought I had heard you speak of John March as a married man, father of vast numbers of children."

To the last clause I objected and she modified it. "But, anyhow, you leave too much to be inferred. I want to know what Garnet's fatal secret was; and—well, I don't care especially what became of the commercial traveler, but I *do* want to hear a little about Barbara! Did she marry the drummer?"

I said no, apologized for my vagueness and finished, in effect, thus:

Before Barbara came down-stairs, at Rosemont, that day, to see Mr. March, she sent him Leggett's letter. Cornelius had caught scent of the facts in it from Uncle Leviticus's traditions and had found them in the county archives, which he had early learned the trick of exploring. The two Ezra Jaspers, cousins, one the grantee of Widewood, the other of Suez, had had, each, a generous ambition to found a college. He of Suez—the town that was to be—selected for his prospective seat of learning a parcel of sixty acres close against the western line of Widewood. Whereupon the grantee of Widewood good-naturedly, as well as more wisely, "took up" near the *Suez tract* the sixty acres which eventually became Rosemont. Both pieces lay on the same side of the same creek and were both in Clearwater County, as was much, though not the most, of Widewood. Moreover, both were in the same "section" and "range," and in their whole description differed scarcely more than by an N and an S, one being in the northwest and the other in the southwest corner of the same township. On the ill-kept county records these twin college sites early got mixed. When Garnet founded Rosemont his friends in office promised to tax that public benefaction as gently as they dared, and he was only grateful and silent, not surprised, when his tax-bill showed no increase at all. But while Rosemont was still small and poor and he seriously embarrassed by the cost of an unsuccessful election, came this letter of Leggett's to open his eyes and complete his despair. There across it were his own pencilings of volume and page to show that he had seen the record. In one of his mad moments, and in the hopeful conviction that the mulatto would

soon get himself shot or hung, he paid him to keep still. From that time on, making Leggett's silence just a little more golden than his speech, he had, "in bad faith," as the lawyers say, been pouring all his gains, not worse spent, into property built on land belonging to the Widewood estate; that is, into Rosemont. When Judge March found his Clearwater taxes high, he was only glad to see any of his lands growing in value. When John came into possession, Garnet, his party being once more in power, had cunningly arranged for Rosemont not to be taxed on its improvements, but only on its land, and March discovered nothing. In the land boom Garnet kept the odd sixty acres, generally supposed to be a part of Widewood, out of sight, and induced John to deed it to his mother. But when John came back from Europe landless, there arose the new risk that he might persuade her to sell the odd sixty acres, and, on looking into the records to get its description, find himself and his mother the legal owners of Rosemont.

"That's why the villain was so anxious to marry her!" said John to himself audibly as he paced up and down in the Rosemont parlor.

"Mr. March," said Barbara's slow voice. She had entered as she spoke.

"Miss—Miss Garnet!"

"Please be seated." There was a tempest in her heart, but her words were measured and low. "You were very kind to come." She dragged her short sentences and at the same time crowded them upon each other as if afraid to let him speak. He sat, a goodly picture of deferential attention, starving to see again her old-time gaze; but she kept her eyes on the floor. "Mr. March, of course—of course, this is terrible to—me. I only say it because I don't want to seem heartless to—others—when I tell you I thank God—O please don't speak yet, sir"—her hands trembled—"I thank God this thing has come to light. For my dear father's own sake I am glad, gladder than I can tell, that he has lost Rosemont. The loss may save him. But I'm glad, too, Mr. March, that it's come to you—please hear me—and to your mother. Of course I know your lost Widewood isn't all here; but so much of it is. I wish——"

March stopped her with a gesture. "I will not—O I cannot—hear any more! I'm ashamed to have let you say so much! Rosemont is yours and shall stay yours! That's what I came to say. Two properties were exchanged by accident when each was about as near worthless as the other, and your mother's family and my father's have lived up to the mistake and have stood by it for three generations. I will not take it! My mother will not! She renounced it this morning! Do you understand?"

Barbara gave a start of pain and murmured, "I do." Her heart burned with the knowledge that he was waiting for her uplifted glance. He began again.

"The true value of Rosemont never came out of Widewood. It's the coined wealth of your mother's character and yours!" He ceased in a sudden rage of love as he saw the colors of the rose deepen slowly on the beautiful, half-averted face, and then, for very trepidation, hurried on. "O understand me, I will not be robbed! Major Garnet cannot have Rosemont. But no one shall ever know I have not bought it of him. And it shall first be yours; yours in law and trade as it is now in right. Then, if you will, you, who have been its spirit and soul, shall keep it and be so still. But if you will not, then we, my mother and I, will buy it of you at a fair price. For, Miss—Miss——"

"Barb—" she murmured.

"O thank you!" cried he. "A thousand times! And a thousand times I promise you I'll never misunderstand you again! But hem!—to return to the subject; Miss Barb—I—O well, I was going to add merely that—that, eh—I—hem!—that, eh—O—However!" She raised her eyes and he turned crimson as he stammered, "I—I—I've forgotten what I was going to say!"

"I can neither keep Rosemont nor sell it, Mr. March. It's yours. It's yours every way. It's yours in the public wish; my father told me so last night. And there's a poetic justice——"

"Poetic—O!"

"Mr. March, didn't we once agree that God gives us our lives in the rough for us to shape them into poetry—that it's poetry, whether sad or gay, that makes alive—and that it's only the prose that kills?"

"Oh! do you remember that?"

"Yes." Her eyes fell again. "It was the time you asked me to use your first name."

"O! Miss Barb, are you still going to hold that against me?"

"Rosemont should be yours, Mr. March. It rhymes!" She stood up.

"No! No, no! I give it to you!" he said, springing to his feet.

"Will you, really, Mr. March?" She moved a step toward the door.

"O Miss Barb, I do! I do!"

"But your mother's consent——"

A pang of incertitude troubled his brave face for an instant, but then he said, "Oh, there can be no doubt! Let me go and get it!" He started.

"No," she falteringly said, "don't do it."

"Yes! Yes! Say yes! Tell me to go!" He caught her hand beseechingly. As their eyes gazed into each other's, hers suddenly filled and fell.

"Go," was her one soft word. But as he reached the door another stopped him:

"John——"

He turned and stood trembling from head to foot, his brow fretted with an agony of doubt. "Oh, Barbara Garnet!" he cried, "why did you say that?"

"Johanna told me," she murmured, smiling through her tears.

He started with half-lifted arms, but stopped, turned, and with a hand on his brow, sighed, "My mother!"

But a touch rested on his arm and a voice that was never in life to be strange to him again said, "If you don't say 'our mother,' I won't call you John any——"

Oh! Oh! Oh! men are so rough sometimes!

THE END.

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