

JOHN MARCH PART V

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' Proudly'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-a-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 va-ain!"

"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.