

Princess eBook

Princess

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M. G. McCLELLAND

Author of "Oblivion," "Jean Monteith," "Eleanor Gwynn," *Etc.*

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With love and admiration,

I dedicate this book to the memory of my friend,

THOMAS ALEXANDER SEDDON.

PRINCESS.

CHAPTER I.

When the idea of a removal to Virginia was first mooted in the family of General Percival Smith, ex-Brigadier in the United States service, it was received with consternation and a perfect storm of disapproval. The young ladies, Norma and Blanche, rose as one woman—loud in denunciation, vehement in protest—fell upon the scheme, and verbally sought to annihilate it. The country! A farm!! The South!!! The idea was untenable, monstrous. Before their outraged vision floated pictures whereof the foreground was hideous with cows, and snakes, and beetles; the middle distance lurid with discomfort, corn-bread, and tri-weekly mails; the background lowering with solitude, ennui, and colored servants.

Rusticity, nature, sylvan solitudes, and all that, were exquisite bound in Russia, with gold lettering and tinted leaves; wonderfully alluring viewed at leisure with the gallery to one's self, and the light at the proper angle, charmingly attractive behind the footlights, but in reality!—to the feeling of these young ladies it could be best appreciated by those who had been born to it. In their opinion, they, themselves, had been born to something vastly superior, so they rebelled and made themselves disagreeable; hoping to mitigate the gloom of the future by intensifying that of the present.

Their mother, whose heart yearned over her offspring, essayed to comfort them, casting daily and hourly the bread of suggestion and anticipation on the unthankful waters, whence it invariably returned to her sodden with repinings. The young ladies set their grievances up on high and bowed the knee; they were not going to be comforted, nor pleased, nor hopeful, not they. The scheme was abominable, and no aspect in which it could be presented rendered its abomination less; they were hopeless, and helpless, and oppressed, and there was the end of it.

Poor Mrs. Smith wished it might be the end, or anywhere near the end; for the soul within her was “vexed with strife and broken in pieces with words.” The general could—and did—escape the rhetorical consequences of his unpopular measure, but his wife could not: no club afforded her its welcome refuge, no “down town” offered her sanctuary. She was obliged to stay at home and endure it all. Norma’s sulks, Blanche’s tears, the rapture of the boys—hungering

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for novelty as boys only can hunger—the useless and trivial suggestions of friends, the minor arrangements for the move, the decision on domestic questions present and to come, the questions, answers, futile conjectures, all formed a murk through which she labored, striving to please her husband and her children, to uphold authority, quell mutiny, soothe murmurs, and sympathize with enthusiasm; with a tact which shamed diplomacy, and a patience worthy of an evangelist.

After the indulgent American custom, she earnestly desired to please *all* of her children. In her own thoughts she existed only for them, to minister to their happiness; even her husband was, unconsciously to her, quite of secondary importance, his strongest present claim to consideration lying in his paternity. Had it been possible, she would have raised her tent, and planted her fig tree in the spot preferred by each one of her children, but as that was out of the question, in the mother's mind of course her sons came first. And this preference must be indulged the more particularly that Warner—the elder of her two boys, her idol and her grief—was slowly, well-nigh imperceptibly, but none the less surely, drifting away from her. A boyish imprudence, a cold, over-exertion, the old story which is so familiar, so hopeless, so endless in its repetition and its pathos. When interests were diverse, the healthy, blooming daughters could hope to make little headway against the invalid son. *They* had all the sunny hours of many long years before them; he perhaps only the hurrying moments of one.

For Warner a change was imperative—so imperative that even the rebellious girls were fain to admit its necessity. His condition required a gentler, kindlier atmosphere than that of New York. The poor diseased lungs craved the elixir of pure air; panted for the invigoration of breezes freshly oxygenized by field and forest, and labored exhaustedly in the languid devitalized breath of a city. The medical fraternity copiously consulted, recognized their impotence, but refrained from stating it; and availed themselves of their power of reference to the loftier physician—the boy must be healed, if he was to be healed, by nature. The country, pure air, pure milk, tender care; these were his only hope.

General Smith was a man trained by military discipline to be instant in decision and prompt in action. As soon as the doctors informed him that his son's case required—not wanderings—but a steady residence in a climate bracing, as well as mild, where the comforts of home could supplement the healing of nature, he set himself at once to discover a place which would fill all the requirements. To the old soldier, New England born and Michigan bred, Virginia appeared a land of sun and flowers, a country well-nigh tropical in the softness of its climate, and the fervor of its heat. The doctors recommended Florida, or South Carolina, as in duty bound, and to the suggestion of Virginia yielded only a dubious consent; it was very far *north*, they said, but still it might do. To the general, it seemed very far *south*, and he was certain it would do.

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In the old time, he remembered, when he was in lower Virginia with McClellan, he had reveled in the softness, the delight of that, to him, marvelous climate. He had found the nights so sweet; the air, vitalized with the breath of old ocean, so invigorating, the heat at noonday so dry, and the coolness at evening so refreshing. There were pines, too; old fields of low scrub, and some forests of the nobler sort; that would be the thing for Warner. He remembered how, as he sat in the tent door, the breeze scented with resinous odors used to come to him, and how, strong man though he was, he had felt as he drew it into his lungs that it did him good.

In those old campaigning days, the fancy had been born in him that some time in the future he would like to return and make his home here, where “amorous ocean wooed a gracious land”—that when his fighting days were over, and the retired list lengthened by his name, it would be a pleasant thing to have his final bivouac among the gallant foes who had won his admiration by their dauntless manner of giving and taking blows.

The exigencies and absorptions of military life, in time, dimmed the fancy, but it never altogether vanished. Out on the plains with Custer, away in the mountains and the Indian country, vegetating in the dullness of frontier posts, amid the bustle, the luxury and excitement of city life, the fancy would return; the memory of those soft starlit Virginia evenings would unfold him with a subtle spell. In thought he would again sit smoking in the tent door, the gray shadows stealing out from their covert in the woods, reconnoitering all the country ere they swept down and took possession, in the name of their queen—the night. The air would grow cool with the fragrant breath of the ocean and the pines; whip-poor-wills would chant in the tree tops, and partridges sound their blithe note away in the fields. It was not wonderful that when the necessity of securing a country home arose, the fancy should resume its sway, and that a meditated flitting southward should suggest Virginia as its goal.

The idea that any portion of his family would be displeased by the realization of his fancy, or feel themselves aggrieved by his arrangements, never entered into the veteran’s calculations; he returned from the South with his purchase made, and his mind filled with anticipations of the joy the unloading of this precious honey would occasion in the domestic hive, and when he was met by the angry buzz of discontent instead of the gentle hum of applause, his surprise was great, and his indignation unbounded.

“What the devil are they grumbling about?” he demanded of his wife. “Shirley’s a fine plantation. The water is good, the air superb; there are excellent gardens and first-rate oyster beds. The house is old-fashioned, but it’s comfortable, and a little money will make it more so. What’s the matter with them?”

“The girls are young, Percival,” explained the mother, putting in a plea for her rebels. “They are used to society and admiration. They don’t take interest in gardens and oyster beds yet; they like variety and excitement. The country is very dull.”

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“Not at all dull,” contradicted the general. “You talk as if I were requiring you all to Selkirk on a ten acre island, instead of going to one of the pleasantest and most populous counties in the oldest state in the Union. Mr. Byrd, the former owner of Shirley, told me that the neighborhood was very thickly settled and sociable. I counted five gentlemen’s houses in sight myself. Southerners, as a rule, are great visitors, and if the girls are lonely it will be their own fault. They’ll have as much boating and dancing and tom-foolery as is good for them.”

“Are there any young men?” demanded Mrs. Smith, who recognized the necessity of an infusion of the stronger element to impart to social joys body and flavor.

“Yes, I guess so,” replied her husband indifferently, masculinity from over-association having palled on him; “there’s always men about everywhere, except back in the home villages in Maine—they’re scarce enough *there*, the Lord knows! I saw a good many about in the little village near Shirley—Wintergreen, they call it. One young fellow attracted my attention particularly; he was sitting on a tobacco hogshead, down on the wharf, superintending some negroes load a wagon, and I couldn’t get it out of my head that I’d seen his face before. He was tall, and fair, and had lost an arm. I must have met him during the war, I think, although I’ll be hanged if I can place him.”

Mrs. Smith looked interested. “Perhaps you formerly knew him,” she remarked, cheerfully; “it’s a pity your memory is so bad. Why didn’t you inquire his name of some one, that might have helped you to place him?”

“My memory is excellent,” retorted the general, shortly; for a man must resent such an insinuation even from the wife of his bosom. “I’ve always been remarkable for an unusually strong and retentive memory, as you know very well—but it isn’t superhuman. At the lowest computation, I guess I’ve seen about a million men’s faces in the course of my life, and it’s ridiculous to expect me to have ’em all sorted out, and ticketed in my mind like a picture catalogue. My memory is very fine.”

Mrs. Smith recanted pleasantly. Her husband’s memory was good, for his age, she was willing to admit, but it was not flawless. About this young man, now, it seemed to her that if she could remember him at all, she could remember all about him. These hitches in recollection were provoking. It would have been nice for the girls to find a young man ready to their hands, bound to courtesy by previous acquaintance with their father.

She regretted that her husband should fail to recall, and had neglected to inquire, the name of this interesting person; but the knowledge that he was *there*, and others besides him, ameliorated the rigor of the situation.

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Mrs. Smith did not care for the south or southern people; their thoughts were not her thoughts, nor their ways, her ways. In her ignorance, she classed them low in the scale of civilization, deeming them an unprofitable race, whose days were given over to sloth, and their nights to armed and malignant prowling. For the colored people of the censured states, she had a profound and far-off sympathy, viewing them from an unreal and romantic standpoint. This tender attitude was mental; physically she shrank from them with disgust, and it was not the least of the crosses entailed by a residence in the south that she would be obliged to endure colored servants.

But all this was trifling and unimportant in comparison with the main issue, Warner's health. To secure the shadow of hope for her boy, Mrs. Smith decided that any thing short of cannibalism in her future surroundings would be endurable.

The information gleaned from her husband was faithfully repeated by Mrs. Smith to her daughters, with some innocent exaggeration and unconscious embellishment. She always wanted to make things pleasant for the children.

Blanche looked up from her crewel sun-flowers with reviving interest, but Norma walked over to the window, and stood drumming on the panes, and regarding the passers with a lowering brow.

"I wonder what Nesbit Thorne will think of it all?" she remarked, after an interval of silence, giving voice to the inwardness of her discontent.

"He'll *hate* it!" spoke Blanche, with conviction; "he'll abhor it, just as we do. I know he will." Blanche always followed her sister's lead, and when Norma was cross considered it her duty to be tearful. She was only disagreeable now because Norma was.

Percival, the youngest of the family, a spoiled and lively lad of twelve, to whom the prospect of change was rapture, took up the last remark indignantly.

"Nesbit won't do anything of the kind," quoth he. "Nesbit isn't a spoiled, airified idiot of a girl. He's got sense enough to appreciate hunting and fishing and the things that are of importance to *men*. I guess he'll want to come to Shirley this autumn for his shooting, instead of going down to North Carolina." Norma stopped her tattoo and turned her head slightly; the boy, observing that he had scored a point, proceeded: "Just the minute he gets back from Montana, I'm going to tell him all about Shirley and beg him to come. And if he does, I'm going gunning with him every day, and make him teach me how to shoot—see if I don't," regarding his mother from under his tawny brows threateningly. Percival's nature was adventurous and unruly: he had red hair.

"Nesbit got back last night," announced Warner from his sofa beside the other window. "I saw him pass the house this morning. There he is now, coming up the street. If his opinion is a matter of such importance, you can call him over and get it. I don't see that

it makes any difference what he thinks, myself.” The latter part of the sentence was muttered in an unheeded undertone.

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Norma tapped sharply on the glass, and beckoned to a gentleman on the opposite pavement, her brow clearing. He nodded gayly in response, and crossing, in obedience to her summons, entered the house familiarly without ringing the bell.

CHAPTER II.

All turned expectantly toward the door, pausing in their several occupations; even Warner's eyes were raised from his book, although his attention was involuntary and grudging. The attitude of the little circle attested the influence which the coming man wielded over every member of it; an influence which extended insensibly to every one with whom Nesbit Thorne's association was intimate. He was Mrs. Smith's nephew, and much in the habit, whenever he was in New York, of making her house his home—having none now of his own.

He was a slender, dark man, with magnificent dark eyes, which had a power of expression so enthralling as to disarm, or defy, criticism of the rest of his face. Not one man in fifty could tell whether Nesbit Thorne was handsome, or the reverse—and for women—ah, well! they knew best what they thought.

In his air, his carriage, his expression, was that which never fails to attract and hold attention—force, vitality, individuality. He was small, but tall men never dwarfed him; plain, but the world—his world—turned from handsomer men with indifference, to heap consideration upon him. To borrow the forceful vernacular of the street, there was “something in him.” There was no possibility of viewing either him or his actions with indifference; of merging him in, and numbering him with, the crowd.

There are men whose lives are intaglios, cut by the chisel of destiny deep into the sard of their generations; every line and curve and faintest tracing pregnant with interest, suggestion, and emotion. Men who are loved and hated, feared, adored and loathed with an intensity that their commonplace fellows are incapable of evoking. They are loadstones which attract events; whirlpools which draw to themselves excitement, emotion, and vast store of sympathy.

Some years previous to the opening of this story, Nesbit Thorne, then a brilliant recent graduate of Harvard, a leader in society, and a man of whom great things were predicted, whose name was in many mouths as that of a man likely to achieve distinction in any path of life he should select, made a hasty, ill-advised marriage with a Miss Ethel Ross, a New York belle of surpassing beauty and acumen. A woman whose sole thought was pleasure, whose highest conception of the good of life was a constantly varied menu of social excitement, and whose noblest reading of the word duty was compassed in having a well ordered house, sumptuous entertainments, and irreproachable toilets. A wife to satisfy any man who was unemotional, unexact, and prepared to give way to her in all things.

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Nesbit Thorne, unfortunately, was none of these things, and so his married life had come to grief. The first few months were smoothed and gilded by his passionate enjoyment of her mere physical perfection, his pleasure in the admiration she excited, and in the envy of other men. Life's river glided smoothly, gayly in the sunshine; then ugly snags began to appear, and reefs, fretting the surface of the water, and hinting of sterner difficulties below; then a long stretch of tossing, troubled water, growing more and more turbulent as it proceeded, boiling and bubbling into angry whirlpools and sullen eddies. The boat of married happiness was hard among the breakers, tossed from side to side, the sport of every wind of passion; contesting hands were on the tiller ropes. The craft yawed and jerked in its course, a spectacle for men to weep over, and devils to rejoice in; ran aground on quicksands, tore and tangled its cordage, rent the planking, and at the end of a cruise of as many months as it should have lasted years, it lay a hopeless wreck on the grim bar of separation.

The affair was managed gracefully, and with due deference to the amenities. There was gossip, of course—there always is gossip—and public opinion was many sided. Rumors circled around which played the whole gamut from infidelity to bankruptcy; these lived their brief span, and then gave place to other rumors, equally unfounded, and therefore equally enjoyable. The only fact authenticated, was the fact of separation, and the most lasting conclusion arrived at in regard to the matter was that it had been managed very gracefully.

The divorce which seemed the natural outcome of this state of affairs, and to which every one looked, as a matter of course, was delayed in this instance. People wondered a little, and then remembered that the Thornes were a Roman Catholic family, and concluded that the young man had religious scruples. With Mrs. Thorne the matter was plain enough; she had no reason, as yet, sufficiently strong to make her desire absolute release, and far greater command over Thorne's income by retaining her position as his wife.

When his domestic affairs had reached a crisis, Thorne had quietly disappeared for a year, during which time people only knew that he was enjoying his recovered freedom in distant and little frequented places. There were rumors of him in Tartary, on the Niger, in Siberia. At the expiration of the year he returned to New York, and resumed his old place in society as though nothing untoward had occurred. He lived at his club, and no man or woman ever saw him set foot within the precincts of his own house.

Occasionally he was seen to stop the nurse in the park, and caress and speak to his little son. His life was that of a single man. In the society they both frequented, he often encountered his wife, and always behaved to her with scrupulous politeness, even with marked courtesy. If he ever missed his home, or experienced regret for his matrimonial failure, he kept the feeling hidden, and presented to the world an unmoved front.

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In default of nearer ties, he made himself at home in his aunt's house, frequenting it as familiarly as he had done in the days before his marriage. In his strong, almost passionate nature, there was one great weakness; the love and admiration of women was a necessity to him. He could no more help trying to make women love him, than the kingfisher can help thrusting down his beak when the bright speckled sides of his prey flash through the water. It was from neither cruelty nor vanity, for Thorne had less of both traits than usually falls to the lot of men; it was rather from the restlessness, the yearning of a strong nature for that which it needed, but had not yet attained; the experimental searching of a soul for its mate. That sorrow might come to others in the search he scarcely heeded; was he to blame that fair promises would bud and lead him on, and fail of fruition? To himself he seemed rather to be pitied; their loss was balanced by his own. Thorne had never loved as he was capable of loving; as yet the *ego* was predominant.

As he entered the room, after an absence of weeks, with a smile and a pleasant word of greeting, the younger members of the circle fell upon him clamorously; full of themselves and their individual concerns. Even Warner, in whose mind lurked a jealousy of his cousin's influence, forgot it for the nonce, and was as eager to talk as the rest. Nesbit found himself listening to a demand for advice, an appeal for sympathy, and a paean of gratulation, before he had made his salutations, or gotten himself into a chair.

"Hold on!" he cried, putting up his hand in protest. "Don't all talk at once. I can't follow. What's the matter, Norma?"

His eye turned to his favorite involuntarily, and an almost imperceptible brightening, a lifting of the clouds on that young lady's horizon, began to take place. She answered his look, and (assisted by the irrepressible Percival) unfolded to him the family plans. Thorne, with good-humored enthusiasm, threw himself into the scheme, pronounced it delightful, and proceeded to indulge in all manner of cheerful prognostications. Percival was enchanted, and, establishing himself close beside the arm of his cousin's chair, commenced a series of vehement whispers, which lasted as long as the visit. Norma's brow cleared more and more, and when Thorne declared his intention of paying them a long visit during the hunting season, she allowed a smile to wreath her full crimson lips, and snubbed poor little Blanche unmercifully for still daring to be lachrymose.

The talk grew momentarily merrier, and the mother listened, smiling; her eyes, with a tender glow in them, fixed on Warner's face. The sick boy was in raptures over the old house mossed over with history and tradition, which would be his future home. Noting the eagerness of his interest, her heart gave a sudden bound, hope took her by the hand, and she dreamed dreams. There might come a reaction and improvement. At times the intuition of an invalid was the voice of nature, crying out for that which she needed. Warner's longing for this change might be the precursor of his cure. Who could read the future?

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CHAPTER III.

Backward and forward, from pantry to sideboard, from sideboard to china closet, flitted Pocahontas Mason setting the table for breakfast. Deftly she laid out the pretty mats on the shining mahogany, arranged the old-fashioned blue cups and saucers, and placed the plates and napkins. She sang at her work in a low, clear voice, more sweet than powerful, and all that her hands found to do was done rapidly and skillfully, with firm, accustomed touches, and an absence of jar and clatter. In the center of the table stood a corpulent Wedgwood pitcher, filled with geraniums and roses, to which the girl's fingers wandered lovingly from time to time, in the effort to coax each blossom into the position in which it would make the bravest show. On one corner, near the waiter, stood a housewifely little basket of keys, through the handle of which was thrust a fresh handkerchief newly shaken out.

When all the arrangements about the table had been completed, Pocahontas turned her attention to the room, giving it those manifold touches which, from a lady's fingers, can make even a plain apartment look gracious and homelike. Times had changed with the Masons, and many duties formerly delegated to servants now fell naturally to the daughter of the house. Perhaps the change was an improvement: Berkeley Mason, the young lady's brother, maintained that it was.

Having finished her work, Pocahontas crossed the room to one of the tall, old-fashioned windows, and pushed open the half-shut blinds, letting a flood of sunshine and morning freshness into the room. Under the window stood an ottoman covered with drab cloth, on which the fingers of some dead and gone Mason had embroidered a dingy wreath of roses and pansies. Pocahontas knelt on it, resting her arms on the lofty window-sill, and gazed out over the lawn, and enjoyed the dewy buoyance of the air. The September sunshine touched with golden glory the bronze abundance of her hair, which a joyous, rollicking breeze, intoxicated with dew and the breath of roses, tangled and tumbled into a myriad witcheries of curl and crinkle. The face, glorified by this bright aureole, was pure and handsome, patrician in every line and curve, from the noble forehead, with its delicate brown brows, to the well-cut chin, which spoke eloquently of breadth of character and strength of will. The eyes were gray, and in them lay the chief charm of the face, for their outlook was as honest and fearless as that of a child—true eyes they were, fit windows for a brave, true soul.

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The house, neutral-tinted with years and respectability, stood well back from the river, to whose brink the smooth, green lawn swept in scarcely perceptible undulation. The river here was broad, almost resembling an arm of the sea it was moving languidly to join. There was no haste about it, and no fret of ever active current; as all large bodies should, it moved slowly, and the eye rested gratefully on the tranquil flow. Across the water, apparently against the far horizon, a dense line of trees, fringing the further shore, rose tall and dark, outlined with picturesque distinctness against the soft, warm blue. The surrounding country was flat, but relieved from monotony by a certain pastoral peacefulness, and a look of careless plenty which, with thrift, might have become abundance. In the meadows the grass grew rich and riotous between the tall stacks of cured hay, and the fields of corn and tobacco gave vigorous promise of a noble harvest. The water also teemed with life and a shiftless out-at-elbow energy. Shabby looking fishing smacks, with dirty white wings, like birds too indolent to plume themselves, passed constantly, and flat-bottomed canoes, manned by good-humored negro oystermen, plied a lazy, thievish trade, with passing steamers.

Presently a gate slammed somewhere in the regions back of the house, and there was a sound of neighing and trampling. Pocahontas leaned far out, shading her eyes with her hands, to watch the colts career wildly across the lawn, with manes and tails and capering legs tossed high in air, in the exuberance of equine spirits. Following them sedately came a beautiful black mare, stepping high and daintily, as became a lady of distinction. She was Kentucky born and bred, and had for sire none other than Goldenrod himself. In answer to a coaxing whistle of invitation, she condescended to approach the window and accept sugar and caresses. Pocahontas patted the glossy head and neck of the beauty, chattering soft nonsense while the little heap of sugar she had placed on the window-sill vanished. Presently she laid an empty palm against the nose pushed in to her, and dealt it a gentle blow.

"That's all, Phyllis; positively all this morning. You would empty the sugar bowl if I'd let you. No, take your nose away; it's all gone; eleven great lumps have you had, and the feast of the gods is over."

But Phyllis would not be convinced; she pushed her nose up over the window ledge, and whinnied softly. As plainly as a horse can beg, she begged for more, but her mistress was obdurate. Placing both hands behind her, she drew back into the room, laughing.

"Not another lump," she called, "eleven are enough. Greedy Phyllis, to beg for more when you know I'm in earnest. Go away and play with the colts; you'll get no more to-day."

"You'll never make Phyllis believe that, my dear," remarked a tall, gray-haired lady, in a pretty muslin cap, who had entered unperceived.

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“Oh, yes, mother. She understands quite well. See, she’s moving off already. Phyllis knows I never break my word, and that persuasion is quite useless,” replied Pocahontas, turning to give her mother the customary morning kiss, to place her chair before the waiter for her, and to tell her how becoming her new cap was. The Masons never neglected small courtesies to each other.

The branch of the Mason family still resident at the old homestead of Lanarth had dwindled to four living representatives—Mrs. Mason, who had not changed her name in espousing her cousin Temple Mason, of Lanarth, and her son Berkeley, and daughters Grace and Pocahontas. There had been another son, Temple, the younger, whose story formed one of those sad memories which are the grim after-taste of war. All three of the Masons had worn gray uniforms; the father had been killed in a charge at Malvern Hill, the elder son had lost his good right arm, and the younger had died in prison.

Of the two daughters, Grace had early fulfilled her destiny in true Virginian fashion, by marrying a distant connection of her family, a Mr. Royall Garnett, who had been a playmate of her brothers, and whose plantation lay in an adjoining county. With praiseworthy conservatism, Mrs. Garnett was duplicating the uneventful placidity of her parents’ early years, content to rule her household wisely, to love and minister to her husband, and to devote her energies to the rearing of her children according to time-honored precedent. Pocahontas, the youngest of the family, was still unmarried, nay, more—still unengaged.

They had called her “Pocahontas” in obedience to the unwritten law of southern families, which decrees that an ancestor’s sin of distinction shall be visited on generations of descendants, in the perpetuation of a name no matter what its hideousness. It seems a peculiarity of distinguished persons to possess names singularly devoid of beauty; therefore, among the burdens entailed by pride upon posterity, this is a grievous one. Some families, with the forest taint in their blood, at an early date took refuge in the softer, prettier “Matoaca;” but not so the Masons. It was their pride that they never shirked an obligation, or evaded a responsibility: they did not evade this one. Having accepted “Pocahontas” as the name by which their ancestress was best known, they never swerved from it; holding to it undaunted by its length and harshness, and unmoved by the discovery of historians that Pocahontas is no name at all, but simply a pet sobriquet applicable to all Indian girls alike, and whose signification is scarcely one of dignity. Historians might discover, disagree, wrangle and explain, but Pocahontas followed Pocahontas in the Mason family with the undeviating certainty of a fixed law.

To the present Pocahontas (the eighth in the line) it really seemed as though the thing should stop. She yielded to the family fiat her own case, because not having been consulted she had no option in the matter, but when Grace’s little daughter was born she put in a plea for the child.

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"Break the spell," she entreated, "and unborn generations will bless you. We Virginians will keep on in one groove until the crack of doom unless we are jerked out of it by the nape of the neck. Your heart ought to yearn over the child—mine does. It's a wicked sin to call a pretty baby by such a monstrous name."

Grace trampled on the protest: "Not name her Pocahontas? Why, of *course* I shall! If the name were twice as long and three times as ugly my baby should bear it. I wonder you should object when you know that every Pocahontas in the family has invariably turned out an exceptionally fine woman. All have been noble, truthful, honorable; quick to see the right and unswerving in pursuit of it. I shall call my baby by that name, and no other."

Pocahontas opened her eyes. "Why, Grace," she said, "you talk as if the name were a talisman; as if virtues were transmitted with it. Isn't that silly?"

"Not at all," responded Grace promptly; "unless we cease to be ourselves after death, we *must* still take interest in the things of this world, in our families and descendants. We may not be able actually to transmit our virtues to them, but surely by guardian influence we can help them imitate ancestral good qualities. Guardian angels of our own blood are a great deal nearer than outside angels, and I believe the dear Lord appoints them whenever he can; and if so, why shouldn't the good women who are in heaven take interest in my baby who will bear their name? It *is* their name still, and it must hurt them to see it soiled; of course they must take interest. Were I an angel, the child on earth who bore my name should be my special charge."

"Then, according to your showing, Grace, six good women, now holy angels, have baby and me in constant keeping for love of our ugly name. The idea is fanciful, and I don't consider it orthodox: but it's pretty, and I like it. Miss Pocahontas the ninth, you and I must walk with circumspection, if not to grieve the good ladies up above who are kind enough to take such interest in us."

Pocahontas mocked at Grace's idea, but it pleased her all the same, and unconsciously it influenced her more than she knew. She loved the legends of her house, delighted in the fact of descent from brave men and true women. The past held her more than is common with the young people of the present day, and she sought out and treasured all the records of the six women who had borne her name, from the swarthy Indian princess down to the gentle gray-haired lady who held the place of honor at the Lanarth breakfast table.

"Princess," said Mrs. Mason, as she distributed the sugar and cream, "I wish you'd ring the bell. Rachel must have breakfast ready by this time, and I hear Berkeley's step outside."

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Princess rang the bell quite meekly. The pet sobriquet was in as familiar use among them as her real name, but her touch on the bell did not suggest the imperiousness of royalty. Aunt Rachel was an old family servant, faithful, fat, and important, and Aunt Rachel *hated* to be hurried. She said “it pestered her, an’ made her spile the vittles.” She answered promptly this time, however, entering with the great waiter of hot and tasty dishes before the bell had ceased its faint tintinnabulation. Berkeley, a tall fair man, whose right sleeve was fastened against his breast, entered also.

“I saw Jim Byrd this morning,” he remarked as he seated himself, after the customary greeting to his mother and sister. “He called here on his way over to Roy Garnett’s, where he was going to bid good-by. I asked him in to breakfast, but he couldn’t stop; said he had promised Grace to take breakfast with them. He has to make a farewell tour, or old friends’ feelings will be hurt. It’s rather awful, and hard on Jim, but he couldn’t bear the thought of the neighbors feeling slighted. I suggested a barbecue and a stump speech and bow, but the idea didn’t seem to appeal to Jim. Poor old fellow!”

“Couldn’t he contrive to hold Shirley, Berke?” questioned Mrs. Mason, as she passed his cup. “He had retained possession so long, there must have been some way to hold it altogether.”

“No; the thing was impossible,” replied Berkeley; “the plantation was mortgaged to the hub before Jim was born. The Byrds have been extravagant for generations, and a crash was inevitable. Old Mr. Byrd could barely meet the interest, even before the loss of Cousin Mary’s money. During the last years of his life some of it was added to the principal, which made it harder work for Jim. But for Jim’s management, and the fact that the creditors all stood like a row of blocks in which the fall of one would inevitably touch off the whole line, things would have gone to smash long ago. Each man was afraid to move in the matter, lest by so doing he should invite his own creditors to come down on him. Until lately they haven’t bothered Jim much outside of wringing all the interest out of him they could get. While his sisters were single, he was obliged to keep a home together for them, you know. Nina’s marriage last spring removed that responsibility, and I reckon it’s a relief to Jim to relinquish the struggle.”

“What a pity old Mr. Byrd persuaded Mary to sell out her bonds, and invest the money in tobacco during the war!” observed Mrs. Mason, regretfully. “It would have been something for the children if she had kept the bonds. It was too bad that those great warehouses, full of tobacco, belonging to the Byrds and Masons were burned in Richmond at the evacuation. Charlie Mason persuaded Mr. Byrd into that speculation, and although Charlie is my own cousin and Mary’s brother, I must admit that he did wrong. Your father always disapproved of the sale of those bonds.”

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"The speculation was a good one, and would have paid splendidly had events arranged themselves differently; even at the worst no one could foresee the burning of Richmond. Cousin Mary's money couldn't have freed Shirley, but if things had gone well with the venture, that tobacco would have done so, and left a handsome surplus. Charlie Mason is a man of fine judgment, and that he failed that time was through no fault of his. It was the fortunes of war."

Mrs. Mason sighed and dropped the subject. She was unconvinced, and continued to feel regret that Mr. Byrd had been allowed to work his speculative will with his wife's little patrimony. It would have been a serviceable nest-egg for the children, and a help to Jim in his long struggle. All of her life, she had been accustomed to seeing husbands assume full control of their wives' property, using it as their own, and she had taken little thought of the equities of the matter. To her it appeared natural that a wife's surrender to her husband should embrace things financial as well as things less material, but in this case she had always felt it a trifle hard. It would have been such a pleasant thing for Jim to have had some money, and been able to hold Shirley.

Pocahontas helped herself to hot waffles, and sugared them with a liberal hand.

"Dear old Jim," she said, calmly, "I wish he had come in: you should have insisted, Berkeley. It's cruel for him to have to give up the old home to strangers, and start life in a new place. I can't bear to think of it. Jim's such a good fellow, and Mexico seems a long way off. When is he coming to say good-by to us, Berke?"

"This evening. He is coming to tea; so mind you have something special."

After a pause, Mrs. Mason resumed the subject with the inquiry whether he had heard any thing relative to the purchaser of Shirley. But Berkeley only knew that the place had been bought by a northern man, a retired army officer, and that his name was Smith.

After they rose from the table, he lingered awhile, watching his mother gather the cups and saucers into the waiter in readiness for Aunt Rachel, and Pocahontas collect scraps for the dogs, two of which were already poking impatient, wistful noses into the room. Beyond the threshold they were not allowed to intrude, but they stood in the passage outside the open door, and whined and indulged in sharp "yaps" of protest against hope deferred. When they saw their mistress advancing with a heaped-up plate of food, both gave reins to their joy, and jumped and barked around her with delight. Pocahontas loved animals; the nobleness and fidelity of their instincts, harmonized with the large faithfulness of her own nature.

When his sister was out of hearing, Berkeley reopened the topic of Jim Byrd. He was standing at the mantle filling his pipe, which he balanced dextrously against one of the ornaments, and his back was toward his mother as he spoke.

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“Mother,” he questioned, “did it ever occur to you that Jim might grow fond of Pocahontas—might want her for a wife, in fact? I fancy something of the sort has happened, and that he came to grief. He has been depressed and unhappy for months; and neither business, nor trouble about the old place can account for his shunning us in the way he has been doing lately. I don’t believe he’s been inside this house twice in the last three months.”

“Yes, my dear, I used often to think of it—long before Jim thought of it himself, I believe, Berkeley. He spoke to Princess this summer, and she refused him. She did not tell me about it; but from little things I could guess pretty accurately. It’s a great disappointment to me, for I scarcely remember when the hope that they might love each other first dawned on my mind. Mary Mason and I were warm friends, as well as cousins, and it seemed natural that our children should marry.”

Berkeley knew that his mother had wished him to marry Belle or Susie, and that this was not the first time that she had been disappointed in her desire for another Byrd-Mason match. Had Temple lived, Nina Byrd would have been his wife: the two had been sweethearts from babyhood.

Mrs. Mason sighed regretfully. “I wish it could have been,” she said; “Jim is such a good fellow, and was always gentle and careful with the little girls, even when he grew a great rough lad; such a little chevalier in his feelings, too. I remember one Christmas just after the war, when he was about fourteen, the children wanted some Christmas green to decorate the parlor. It was the fall you were in the South, and they wanted to make the room pretty to welcome you home again. Susie, Nina and my two girls, went over into the Shirley woods to get it, and Jim went with them. They found plenty of lovely holly, but no mistletoe for a long time; you know how scarce it is around here. At last Pocahontas ’spied a splendid bunch, full of pure, waxen berries, way up in the top of a tall oak tree, and she set her heart at once on having it. There had been heavy sleet the night before, and every limb was caked with ice—slippery as glass. Climbing was doubly dangerous, and Grace begged him not to try, but that foolish Pocahontas looked disappointed, and Jim dashed right at the tree. It was a terribly foolhardy thing to do, and Grace said it made her sick to watch him; every minute she expected to see him slip and come crashing to the ground. The little girls all cried, and Grace boxed Jim’s ears the instant he was safe on the ground again with the mistletoe. The children came home in great excitement, Pocahontas with the mistletoe hugged tight in her arms and tears pouring down her cheeks. When I scolded Jim for his recklessness, he opened those honest hazel eyes of his at me in surprise and said, ‘But Princess wanted it,’ as if that were quite sufficient reason for risking his life. Poor little Princess.”

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After a moment she resumed: "I wish she could have loved him in the way we wish. Marriage is a terrible risk for a girl like her. She is too straightforward, too uncompromisingly intolerant of every-day littleness, to have a very peaceful life. She has grown up so different from other girls; so full of ideals and romance; she belongs, in thought and motives, to the last century rather than to this, if what I hear be true. She is large-hearted and has a great capacity for affection, but she is self-willed and she could be hard upon occasion. If she should fall into weak or wicked hands she would both endure and inflict untold suffering. And there is within her, too, endless power of generosity and self-sacrifice. Poor child! with Jim I could have trusted her; but she couldn't love him, so there's nothing to be done."

"Why couldn't she?" demanded Berkeley, argumentatively. "She'll never do any better; Jim's a handsome fellow, as men go, brave, honorable and sweet-tempered. What more does she want? It looks to me like sheer perversity."

Mrs. Mason smiled indulgently at her son's masculine obtuseness. The subtleties of women were so far beyond his comprehension that it was hardly worth while to endeavor to make him understand. She made the effort, however, despite its uselessness.

"It isn't perversity, Berkeley," she said; "I hardly realize, myself, why the thing should have seemed so impossible. I suppose, having always regarded Jim as a kindly old playmate, and big, brotherly friend, the idea of associating sentiment with him appeared absurd. Had they ever been separated the affair might have had a different termination; but there has never been a break in their intercourse—Jim has always been here, always the same. That won't do with a girl like Princess. It is too commonplace, too devoid of interest and uncertainty. Yes, my dear, I know that in your eyes this is folly, but at the same time it is nature. You don't understand. Princess, I fear, sets undue value on intellect, holding less brilliant endowments cheap beside it. And we must admit, Berkeley, dearly as we love Jim Byrd, and noble fellow as he is, he has not the intellectual power which commands admiration. With all my respect for intellect, I can see that Princess greatly overrates it. She has often declared that unless a man were intellectually her superior, she could never love him."

"Intellectually—a fiddle-stick!" scoffed Berkeley, contemptuously. "She don't know what she wants, or what is good for her. Women rarely do. They make their matrimonial selections like the blindest of bats, the most egregious of fools, and then, when the mischief is done, go in for unending sackcloth, or a divorce court. Pocahontas will get hold of a fellow some day who will wring her heart—with her rubbishing longing after novelty and intellect, and fine scorn of homespun truth and loyalty. Were I a woman, I should esteem the size of my husband's heart, and the sweetness of his temper, matter of more importance than the bigness of his brain, or the freshness of the acquaintance."

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"Very true, my son," assented Mrs. Mason, gently, "but you are powerless to alter women. Their hearts must go as nature wills, and lookers-on can only pray God to guide them rightly. But, Berkeley, you are unjust to your sister. Pocahontas has sound discrimination, and a very clear judgment. Her inability to meet our wishes is no proof that her choice will fall unworthily."

Berkeley made no response in words, but he looked unconvinced, and soon withdrew to attend to the plantation, indulging in profound conclusions about women, which were most of them erroneous.

In the afternoon Pocahontas, providing herself with a book and a gayly colored feather fan, established herself comfortably in the old split-bottomed rocking-chair in the deep shadow of the porch. The day had been close and sultry, and even the darkened rooms felt stifling; outside it was better, although the morning freshness had evaporated, and that of evening had not yet come. The sun sank slowly westward, sending long rays across the bosom of the river, whose waters were so still that they gleamed with opalescent splendor. The slender leaves of the old willows at the foot of the lawn drooped exhaustedly, showing all their silver linings; and the sky was one tawny blaze of color. The sail-boats in sight rocked gently with the sluggish flow of the current, and drifted rather than sailed on their course. Once a noisy, throbbing steamer, instinct with life and purpose, dashed by tumultuously, churning the still water with impatient wheels, and rupturing the slumberous air with its discordant whistle. It jarred upon the quiet beauty of the scene, and it was a relief when it swept around a bend of the river, leaving only a trail of blue smoke, which was harmonious.

One of the setters who had secreted himself in the house during the hot hours, stepped out with overdone innocence, and stretched himself in a shaded corner, panting and yawning dismally.

Pocahontas formed the only bit of coolness in the picture, sitting in the shadow of the old porch, in her pretty white dress, with a cape jessamine blossom showing purely against the bronze knot of her hair, and another among the laces on her breast. The volume of Emerson selected for the enlargement of her mental vision lay unheeded in her lap, and the big fan moved lazily, as the gray eyes gazed and gazed out over the parched lawn and the glistening river until the glare nearly blinded them.

She was thinking of Jim, and feeling pitiful and sad over her old friend who must break away from every home association, and far from kindred and family, among strange faces and unfamiliar surroundings, make for himself a new life. She was sorry for Jim—grieved for his pain in parting, for his disappointment in regard to herself, for her own inability to give him the love he longed for. She would have loved him had it been in her power; she honestly regretted that the calm, true sisterly affection she felt for

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him could not be converted into something warmer. Her friends wished it; his friends wished it. It was the natural and proper thing to have happened, and yet with her it had not happened. With Pocahontas, marriage was a very sacred thing, not to be contemplated lightly, or entered into at all without the sanctification of a pure, unselfish love. If she should marry Jim now, it would be with the knowledge that the depths of her nature were unstirred, the true rich gold still hidden. It did not seem to her that her old playfellow's hand was the one destined to stir the one, or discover the other. She might judge wrongly, but so it appeared to her, and she was too loyal to Jim to imagine for an instant that he would be satisfied with aught save her very best.

The evening freshened as the sun went down, a vagrant breeze stole out from some leafy covert and disported itself blithely. The big Irish setter moved from the corner to the top step, and ceased yawning. An old colored man appearing from behind the house took his way across the lawn in quest of the colts. The dog, with his interest in life reawakened, bounded off the steps prepared to lend valuable assistance, but was diverted from this laudable object by the approach of two gentlemen who must be welcomed riotously.

Pocahontas, rising, advanced out of the shadow to meet them—Jim Byrd, and a tall broad-shouldered man with a great silky red beard, her brother-in-law, Mr. Royall Garnett.

CHAPTER IV.

After a joyous exchange of greeting with her brother-in-law, of whom she was unusually fond, and a sweet, gracious welcome to her old play-fellow, Pocahontas withdrew to tell her mother of their arrival, and to assure herself that every thing was perfectly arranged for Jim's last meal among them.

Through some strange deficiency in herself, she was unable to give him what he most desired, but what she could give him she lavished royally. She wore her prettiest dress in his honor, and adorned it with his favorite flowers, forgetful in her eagerness to please him, that this might make things harder for him. She ordered all the dishes she knew he liked for tea, and spent a couple of hours in the hot kitchen that scorching morning preparing a cake that he always praised. With eager haste she took from its glass-doored cabinet the rare old Mason china, and rifled the garden of roses to fill the quaint century old punch-bowl for the center of the table. All things possible should be done to make Jim feel himself, that night, the honored guest, the person of most importance in their world. It was an heirloom—the Mason china—quaint and curious, and most highly prized. There was a superstition—how originated none knew—that the breakage of a piece, whether by design or accident, foreboded misfortune to the house of Mason.

Very carefully it was always kept, being only used on rare occasions when special honor was intended. During the civil war it had lain securely hidden in a heavy box under the brick pavement of one of the cellar rooms, thereby escaping dire vicissitudes. Many pieces had been broken, said to have been followed in every case by calamities harder to endure than the loss of precious porcelain, but much of it still remained. In design it was unique, in execution wonderful, and its history was romantic.

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In the olden time a rich and fanciful Mason had visited the colonies with one of the expeditions sent out by the Virginia Company of London. He was an artist of no mean repute, and during his stay in the new world had made sketches of the strange beautiful scenery, and studies from the wild picturesque life which captivated his imagination.

After his return to England, he perfected these drawings from memory, and some years later crossed over to France, and had them transferred to china at fabulous cost. The result was very beautiful, for each piece showed small but exquisite portrayals of life and scenery in the new world. The scenes were varied, and depicted in soft, glowing colors, and with a finish that made each a gem.

On one cup a hunter followed the chase through the silent forest; another showed a dusky maiden dreaming beside a waterfall; a third, a group of deer resting in a sunny valley; a fourth, a circle of braves around a council fire.

When, in after years, the grandson of the artist had married a bride with Indian blood in her veins, the punch-bowl had been added as a special compliment to the lady, and the china had been sent a wedding gift from the Masons of England, to the Masons of Virginia. The bowl was very graceful, and contained on one side a lovely representation of the landing at Jamestown, with the tranquil, smiling river, the vessel in the offing, and the group of friendly red men on the shore; on the other was, of course, depicted the rescue of Captain John Smith by the Indian girl. The bowl was finished at top and bottom with wreaths of Virginia creepers, forest leaves and blossoms.

To bring out this precious heirloom in honor of a guest was making him of consequence indeed.

Jim knew all about it, and when he caught sight of the pretty tea-table he understood the girl's intention and shot a quick, grateful glance across to her from his brown eyes. A whimsical memory of a superb breakfast he had once seen served to a man about to be hanged obtruded itself, but he banished it loyally. As he took the cup with the dreaming maiden on it from Mrs. Mason's hand, he said gratefully:

"How good of you to have out the beautiful old china in my honor. When I was a boy, I always imagined that coffee from these cups tasted different—had a woodsy, adventurous flavor. I think so still."

It was a merry meal, despite the shadow in the background, for the gentlemen taking their cue from Pocahontas vied with each other in talking nonsense, and depicting ridiculous phases of camp life in the tropics with Jim always for the hero of the scene. And Jim, shaking off the dismal emotions peculiar to farewell visits, responded gallantly, defending himself from each sportive attack, and illumining his exile with such rays of promise as occurred to him. He knew these old friends were sorry to lose him, and trying to lessen the wrench of parting; and being a quiet, self-controlled man—more

given to action than speech, and with a deep abhorrence of scenes, he appreciated their efforts.

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After tea, Berkeley and Royall lit their pipes and strolled out toward the stables, leaving Jim and Pocahontas alone together on the porch. The girl leaned back in her chair silently, not trying to make conversation any more, and Jim sat on the steps at her feet, letting his eyes follow wistfully the slope of the lawn, and the flow of the river. Presently, without turning his head, he asked her to walk with him down to the old willows by the riverside, for a farewell look on the scene so dear to him, and Pocahontas rose instantly and slipped her hand within his proffered arm.

Down by the river, where the lawn bent softly to the wooing of the water, stood two ancient willows of unusual size: they were gnarled with age, but vigorous and long limbed. The story ran that once a Pocahontas Mason, the lady of the manor here, had lovers twain—twin brothers who being also Masons were her distant cousins. One she loved, and one she did not, but both loved her, and being passionate men both swore that they would have her, come what might; and cause any man that came between, most bloodily to rue it. Between the brothers there arose quarrels, and ill feeling, which afflicted the lady, who was a good woman, and averse to breaking the peace of families. That brothers—twin-brothers, should be scowling venomously at each other because of her, appeared a grievous thing, and she set herself to mend it. By marrying the man she loved, she could end the affair at once, but his brother would never forgive him, and before love had maddened them the men had been friends as well as brothers. She gauged their characters thoughtfully, and hit upon a plan—which, at the expense of some self-sacrifice, would arrange the matter peacefully. Bidding both lovers attend her one day, she brought them to this spot, and cutting two willow wands of exactly the same length and thickness she stuck them deep into the moist soil, and announced her decision. They would wait three years, she said, and at the end of that time the man whose tree had grown the strongest, should come and claim his answer. She would attend to both willows herself, giving to each the same care, and treating them with equal fairness. Then she made the men shake hands in amity once more, and swear to abide by her decision.

The story further tells that both willows flourished finely, but that in the last year the true love's tree outstripped its mate, as was right and proper. As the lady had anticipated, when the term of probation expired only one of the twins appeared to claim an answer to his suit. And in the pocket of the constant man, when he kissed his own true love, lay a letter, from across the seas, full of brotherly affection and congratulation.

This little story was a favorite with Pocahontas, and she was fond of relating how her great-great-grandmother by a little wit and generous self-sacrifice, averted a feud between brothers, and kept family peace unbroken.

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The trees were always called “The Lovers,” and under their sweeping branches the young people were fond of gathering on moonlit summer evenings.

Pocahontas seated herself under the larger tree on the dry, warm grass, and Jim leaned against the rugged trunk, silently drinking in, with his eyes, the still beauty of the night—the silvery sheen of the water, the pure bend of the sky, the slope of the lawn, and the gray tranquillity of the old house in the background. And as he gazed, there awoke in his breast, adding to its pain, that weary yearning which men call home-sickness.

With a shuddering sigh and a movement of the strong shoulders as though some burden were settling down upon them, Jim dropped himself to the ground beside his companion, and suffered her gently to possess herself of his tobacco pouch and pipe. The girl felt that the peacefulness of the scene jarred upon his mood, and set herself to soothe him into harmony with himself and nature. Jim watched the white fingers deftly fill the bowl, and strike the match for him; then he took it from her hand and breathed softly through the curved stem until the fire circled brightly round, and the tobacco all was burning. He leaned back on his elbow and sent the smoke out in long quiet wreaths, and Pocahontas, with her hands folded together in her lap, watched it rise and vanish dreamily.

“I wonder,” she murmured presently, “if the nights out there—in Mexico, I mean—can be more beautiful than this. I have read descriptions, and dreamed dreams, but I can’t imagine any thing more perfect than that stretch of water shimmering in the moonlight, and the dark outline of the trees yonder against the sky.”

“It’s more than beautiful; it’s *home*.” Jim’s voice shook a little. “Do you know, Princess, that whenever the memory of home comes to me out yonder in the tropics, it will be just this picture, I shall always see. The river, the lights and shadows on the lawn, the old gray house, and *you*, with the flowers on your breast, and the moonlight on your dear face. Don’t be afraid, or move away; I’m not going to make love to you—all that is over; but your face must always be to me the fairest and sweetest on earth.” He paused a moment, and then added, looking steadily away from her; “I want to tell you—this last time I may ever have an opportunity of speaking to you alone—that you are never to blame yourself for what has come and gone. It’s been no fault of yours. You could no more help my loving you than I could help it myself; or than you could make yourself love me in return.”

“Oh, Jim, dear!” spoke the girl, quickly and penitently, “I do love you. I do, indeed.”

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"I know it, Princess, in exactly the same way you love Roy Garnett, and immeasurably less than you love Berkeley. That isn't what I wanted, dear. I'm a dull fellow, slow at understanding things, and I can't put my thoughts into graceful, fluent language; but I know what love is, and what I wanted you to feel is very different. Don't be unhappy about it—or me. I'll worry through the pain in time, or grow accustomed to it. It's tough, just at first, but I'll pull through somehow. It shall not spoil my life either, although it must mar it; a man must be a pitiful fellow, who lets himself go to the bad because the woman he loves won't have him. God means every man to hold up his own weight in this world. I'd as soon knock a woman down as throw the blame of a wasted life upon her."

Pocahontas listened with her eyes on the folded hands in her lap, realizing for the first time how deeply the man beside her loved her. Would any other man ever love her with such grand unselfishness, she wondered, ever give all, receive nothing in return, and still give on. *Why* could not she love him? *Why* was her heart still and speechless, and only her mind responsive. He was worthy of any woman's love; why could not she give him hers?

Ask the question how she would, the answer was always the same. She did not love him; she could not love him; but the reason was beyond her.

After a little while Jim spoke again: "When you were a little girl," he said, "I always was your knight. In all our plays, and troubles, it was always *me* you wanted. My boat was the one you liked best, and my dog and horse would come to your whistle as quickly as to mine. I was the one always to care for you and carry out your will. That can never be again, I know, but don't forget me, Princess. Let the thought of your old friend come to you sometimes, not to trouble you, only to remind you when things are hard and rough, and you need comfort, that there's a heart in the world that would shed its last drop to help you."

With quick impulse Pocahontas leaned forward and caught his hand in hers, and before he could divine her intention, bent her head and laid her soft, warm lips against it. When she lifted her eyes to his there were tears in them, and her voice trembled as she said: "I will think of you often, old friend; of how noble you are, and how unselfish. You have been generous to me all my life; far more generous than I have ever deserved."

As they arose, to return to the house, the jasmin blossom fell from the girl's hair to the ground at Jim's feet; he stooped and raised it. "May I keep it?" he said.

She bowed her head, silently.

CHAPTER V.

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In the dining-room at Lanarth stood Pocahontas, an expression of comical dismay upon her face, a pile of dusty volumes on the floor at her feet. The bookcase in the recess by the fireplace, with yawning doors and empty shelves, stood swept and garnished, awaiting re-possession. In a frenzy of untimely cleanliness, she had torn all the books from the repose of years, and now that the deed was beyond recall, she was a prey to disgust, and given over to repentance. The morning promised to be sultry, and the pile was very big; outside bugs and bees and other wise things hummed and sang in leafy places; the leaves on the magnolias were motionless, and the air asleep. A butterfly, passing to his siesta on the bosom of a rose, paused an instant on the window ledge to contemplate her foolishness; the flowers in the borders hung their heads. Berkeley passed the open window, looking cool and fresh in summer clothing, and Pocahontas, catching sight of him, put her fingers to her lips and whistled sharply to attract his attention, which being done, she followed up the advantage with pantomimic gestures, indicative of despair, and need of swift assistance. Berkeley turned good-naturedly, and came in to the rescue, but when he discovered the service required of him, he regarded it with aversion, and showed a mean desire to retreat, which unworthiness was promptly detected by Pocahontas, and as promptly frustrated.

"Do help me, Berkeley," she entreated. "They must all be put in place again before dinner, and it only wants a quarter to one now. I can't do it all before half-past two, to save my life, unless you help me. You know, mother dislikes a messy, littered room, and I've got your favorite pudding for dessert. Oh, dear! I'm tired to death already, and it's so warm!" The rising inflection of her voice conveyed an impression of heat intense enough to drive an engine.

"What made you do it?" inquired Berkeley, in a tone calculated to make her sensible of folly.

"Mother asked me to dust the books sometime ago, but I neglected it, and this morning when the sun shone on them I saw that their condition was disgraceful. I was so much disgusted with my untidiness, that I dragged them all out on the impulse of the moment, and only realized how hot it was, and how I hated it, after the deed was done. Come, Berke, do help me. I'm so tired."

Thus adjured, Berkeley laid aside his coat, for lifting is warm work with the sun at the meridian. The empty shirt sleeve had a forlorn and piteous look as it hung crumpled and slightly twisted by his side. Berkeley caught it with his other hand and thrust the cuff in the waistband of his trowsers. He was well used to his loss, and apparently indifferent to it, but the dangling of the empty sleeve worried him; the arm was gone close up at the shoulder.

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Then the pair fell to work briskly, dusting, arranging, re-arranging and chatting pleasantly. Pocahontas plied the duster and her brother sorted the books and replaced them on the shelves. The sun shone in royally, until Pocahontas served a writ of ejectment on his majesty by closing all the shutters; and the sun promptly eluded it by peeping in between the bars. A little vagrant breeze stole in, full of idleness and mischief, and meddled with the books—fluttering the leaves of “The Faery Queen,” which lay on its back wide open, lifting up the pages, and flirting them over roguishly as though bent on finding secrets. The little noise attracted the girl’s attention, and she raised the book and wiped the covers with her duster. As she slapped it lightly with her hand to get out all the dust, a letter slipped from among the leaves and fell to the floor near Berkeley’s feet.

“Where did this come from?” he inquired, as he picked it up.

“Out of this book,” she answered, holding up the volume in her hand. “It fell out while I was dusting; some one must have left it in to mark a place. It must have been in the book for years; see how soiled it is. Whose is it?”

There is something in the unexpected finding of a stray letter which stimulates curiosity, and Berkeley turned it in his hand to read the address. The envelope was soiled like the coat of a traveler, and the letter was crumpled as though a hand had closed over it roughly. The writing was distinct and clerkly. “Berkeley Mason, Esq., Wintergreen, — Co., Virginia.” Mr. Mason examined the blurred, indistinct postmark. “Point”—something, it seemed to be; and on the other side, Washington, plain enough, and the date, May, 1865. What letter had been forwarded him from the seat of government in the spring of ’65? Then memory unfolded itself like a map whose spring is loosened.

Seating himself in an easy chair, he drew the letter from its envelope, unfolding it slowly against his knee. It was a half-sheet of ordinary commercial paper and the lines upon it numbered, perhaps, a dozen. Mason winced at sight of the heading as though an old wound had been pressed. His sister, leaning over the back of his chair, read with him; putting out a hand across his shoulder to help him straighten the page. It ran thus:

POINT LOOKOUT,

May —, 1865.

TO BERKELEY MASON, ESQ., Virginia.

SIR—A Confederate soldier, now a prisoner of war at this place, giving his name as Temple Mason, is lying in the prison hospital at the point of death. He was too ill to be sent south with the general transfer, and in compliance with his urgent request, I write again—the third time, to inform you of his condition. He can’t last much longer, and in

event of his dying without hearing from his friends, he will be buried in the common cemetery connected with the prison, and his identity, in all probability, lost. This is what he appears to dread, and he entreats that you will come to him, in God's name, if you are still alive. The utmost dispatch will be necessary.

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Respectfully,

PERCIVAL SMITH, B. G. U. S. A.

Comdt., U. S. P., Point Lookout.

Mason returned the letter to its envelope and leaned back in his chair thinking. It was one of the many messages of sorrow that had winged their way through the country in the weeks following the close of the war; one of the murmurs of pain that had swelled the funeral dirge vibrating through the land.

Pocahontas came and seated herself on her brother's knee, gazing at him with wide gray eyes filled with inquiry. "When did this come? I never saw it before," she questioned, gravely.

Then with troubled brow, and voice that grew husky at times, he went over for her the sad story of the last months of the last year of that unhappy and fateful struggle. In the autumn of '64 their brother Temple, a lad of seventeen, had been taken prisoner, with others of his troop, while making a reconnoissance, and they had been unable to discover either his condition or place of incarceration. Mason, himself, had been at home on sick leave, weak and worn with the loss of his arm and a saber cut across his head. All through the winter and spring, while calamity followed calamity with stunning rapidity, the wearing anxiety about Temple continued, made more intolerable by the contradictory reports of his fate brought by passing soldiers. Finally, this letter had arrived and converted a dread fear into a worse certainty.

It had been handed to Roy Garnett by a Federal officer at Richmond, and Roy had ridden straight down with it all those weary miles, feeling curiously certain that it contained news of Temple, and sharing their anxiety to the full. Roy had been stanch and helpful in their trouble, aiding in the hurried preparations for the journey, and accompanying the wounded man, and the pale, resolute mother on their desperate mission. Then came the hideous journey, the arrival at the prison, the fearful questioning, the relief akin to pain of the reply; the interview with the bluff, kindly commandant, who took their hands heartily and rendered them every assistance in his power. Then, in the rough hospital of the hostile prison, the strange, sad waiting for the end, followed by the stranger, sadder home-coming. It was a pitiful story, common enough both north and south—but none the less pitiful for its commonness.

With her head down on her brother's shoulder, Pocahontas sobbed convulsively. She was familiar with the outlines of the tale, and knew vaguely of the weeks of anxiety that had lined her mother's gentle face and silvered her brown hair, but of all particulars she was ignorant. She had been very young at the time these sad events occurred; the young brother sleeping in the shadow of the cedars in the old burying-ground was

scarcely more than a name to her, and the memories of her childhood had faded somewhat, crowded out by the cheerful realities of her glad girl-life.

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When she broke the silence, it was very softly. "Berkeley," she said, "it was kindly done of that Federal officer to let us know. This is the third letter he wrote about poor Temple; the others must have miscarried."

"They did; and this one only reached us just in time. You see, communication with the south in those early days was more than uncertain. If Roy hadn't happened to be in Richmond, it's a question whether I should have received this one. It was kindly done, as you say, and this General Smith was a kindly man. I shall never forget his consideration for my mother, nor the kindness he showed poor Temple. But for his aid we could hardly have managed at the last, in spite of Roy's efforts. We owe him a debt of gratitude I'd fain repay. God bless him!"

"Amen!" echoed Pocahontas, softly.

CHAPTER VI.

One bright, crisp morning about the middle of October, Pocahontas stood in the back yard surrounded by a large flock of turkeys. They were handsome birds of all shades, from lightish red to deep glossy black; the sunlight on their plumage made flashes of iridescent color, green, purple, and blue, and that royal shade which seems to combine and reflect the glory of all three. Their heads were bent picking up the corn their mistress threw from the little basket in her hand, but occasionally the great gobblers would pause in their meal, and puff themselves out and spread their tails and throw their crimson heads back against their shining feathers, and proudly strut backward and forward, to the admiration, doubtless, of their mates.

Turkeys were the young lady's specialty, and on them alone of all the denizens of the poultry yard did she bestow her personal attention. From the thrilling moment in early spring when she scribbled the date of its arrival on the first egg, until the full-grown birds were handed over to Aunt Rachel to be fattened for the table, the turkeys were her particular charge, and each morning and afternoon saw her sally forth, armed with a pan full of curds, or a loaf of brown bread, for her flock.

Her usual attendant, on these occasions, was a little colored boy named Sawney—the last of a line of Sawneys extending back to the dining-room servant of Pocahontas's great-grandmother. The economy in nomenclature on a southern plantation in the olden time was worthy of Dandie Dinmont himself. The Sawney in question was a grandson of Aunt Rachel, and an utterly abominable little darkey, inky black, grotesque, and spoiled to a degree. He was devoted to Pocahontas, and much addicted to following her about, wherever she would allow him. At feeding-time he always appeared as duly as the turkeys, for Pocahontas never forgot to put a biscuit, or a lump of sugar, in her pocket for him.



With the largest black gobbler Sawney was on terms of deadly enmity; for on more than one occasion had his precious biscuit been plucked from his unsuspecting hand, and borne away in triumph by the wily bird. Half of feeding time was usually consumed by Sawney in throwing small stones at his enemy, who, as he was never by any chance smitten, would raise his head from time to time and gobble his assailant to scorn.

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On this particular morning there had been a lull in the feud. Sawney had devoured his biscuit unmolested, and had offered no gratuitous insults to his foe. Pocahontas, having emptied her basket, was watching her flock with interest and admiration, when Berkeley made his appearance on the porch with a letter in his hand. He seemed in a hurry, and called to his sister impatiently.

“Look here, Princess,” he said, as she joined him, “here’s a letter from Jim to old Aunt Violet, his ‘mammy.’ He told me he had promised the old woman to write to her. It came with my mail this morning, and I haven’t time to go over to Shirley and read it to her; I wish you would. She’s too poorly to come after it herself, so put on your bonnet and step over there now, like a good girl.”

“Step over there, indeed!” laughed Pocahontas. “How insinuatingly you put it. Aunt Vi’let’s cabin is way over at Shirley; half a mile beyond Jim Byrd’s line fence.”

“General Smith’s line fence, you mean. I wish you’d go, Princess. There’s money in the letter, and I don’t want to send it by the negroes. I promised Jim we’d look after the old woman for them. The girls want her to come to Richmond, but she won’t consent to quit the old place. She hasn’t any children of her own, you know.”

Pocahontas extended her hand for the letter. “She ought to go to Richmond and live with Belle or Nina,” she said, slipping it into her pocket. “She’d die of homesickness way out in California with Susie. I wonder whether the new people will let her stay at Shirley?”

“Oh, yes; Jim made every arrangement when he found she wouldn’t consent to move. He had an understanding with General Smith about the corner of land her cabin stands on; reserved it, or leased it, or something. It’s all right.”

Always kind, always considerate, thought the girl, wistfully, even amid the pain and hurry of departure—the sundering of old ties, finding time to care for the comfort of his old nurse. Good, faithful Jim.

“Have the new people come?” she called after her brother, as he disappeared within the house.

“I don’t know. I rather think they have,” he answered. “I noticed smoke rising from the kitchen chimney this morning. Ask Aunt Rachel—the negroes are sure to know.”

Pausing a moment at the kitchen door to request the servants to inform her mother that she had walked over to Shirley to read a letter to old Aunt Vi’let, and would be home in an hour or so, Pocahontas set out on her expedition, never noticing that little Sawney, with a muttered “Me d’wine too,” was resolutely following her. The way led along a pleasant country road, as level as a table, which ran, with scarcely a bend, or turning,



straight from the Masons' back gate over to the ancient home of the Byrd family at Shirley. Overhead the interlacing branches of oak and magnolia trees made a gorgeous canopy of glossy green and russet, and the sunshine filtering through the leaves embroidered the old road with an intricate pattern of light and shadow. Now and then a holly tree, or bush, bright with berries, made a lovely dash of color, and glowed all over with suggestions of Christmas and rejoicing.

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Pocahontas sauntered slowly, enjoying the beauty of the morning, and thinking happy thoughts of the past, in which were mingled memories of the three Byrd girls, who had been her playmates, and of Jim. It was just beside that holly that Nina Byrd, an enterprising child, had fallen over the fence into a mud puddle, while in pursuit of a little striped ground squirrel, and soiled her hands and dress, and afterward shook her and Susie because they laughed at her. Nina was always passionate. And over in that meadow, she had once been forced to take refuge in a tree from the hostile demonstrations of an unruly heifer whose calf she had annoyed with overtures of friendship. She had sat among the branches, forlorn and frightened, for more than an hour, feeling that each moment was a month, and that such a thing as forgetfulness was impossible to the bovine mind, when Jim, cantering home from school over in the village, had spied her out and rescued her.

Passing from retrospect to anticipation, the girl's mind wandered to the new arrivals, and idle speculations about them filled it. Naturally, her thoughts were colored by her wishes, and she pleased herself with fancying them agreeable people, refined and cultured, with whom association would be pleasant. Her fancy was untrammelled, for her facts were few, and the name afforded no clew whatever. People named "Smith" might be any thing—or nothing, regarded socially. The name was non-committal, but it suggested possibilities, and its range was infinite. Wits, felons, clergymen, adventurers, millionaires and spendthrifts, all had answered to the unobtrusive cognomen. It was plain and commonplace, but as baffling as a disguise. With Talbot, Meredith, or Percival, the case is different, such nomenclature presupposes gentility. As the name "Percival" crossed the girl's mind in her whimsical musings, her thoughts seized upon it and fitted it instantly to the name which had preceded it, Percival—and Smith! Percival Smith! That was the name signed to the letter they had re-discovered after its sleep of years—the letter telling them of Temple. This newcomer was, or had been, an army officer—a general. Suppose it should be the same person? Nay; it must be—it was! Her mind leaped to the delightful conclusion impetuously, and before she had proceeded ten yards further, Pocahontas was fully convinced of the correctness of her conclusion, and busy with plans for returning the kindness they had received.

Filled with pleasure in her thought, her steps quickened, as though her feet were trying to keep pace with her bright imaginings. And so engrossed was she with castle-building, that it was only when she stopped to climb a fence separating the road from a field through which lay a short cut to Aunt Violet's cabin, that she became aware of her small attendant.

"Why, Sawney, who told you to come?" she questioned, as she sprang to the ground on the other side. The little fellow slowly and carefully mounted the fence, balancing his fat body on the top rail as he turned circumspectly in order to scramble down. When the landing had been safely effected, he peered up at her with twinkling eyes, and announced, with the air of one imparting gratifying intelligence: "Nobody. I tum myse'f. I dwine long-er you."

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"There are sheep in this field; you'd better run home. They'll scare you to death."

"Ain't 'feard," was the valiant response.

Pocahontas wrinkled up her brows; it was almost too far to send him back alone, and there was no one passing along the road who could escort him to the home gate—even if he would go, which was unlikely. It would not do to start him home with the certainty that he would return, the instant her eye was off him, and stand by the fence, peeping through the cracks until she should get back to him. Since he had followed her so far, it would be better to let him go all the way.

"Come, then," she said, doubtfully, "I suppose I must take you, although you had no business to follow me. If the sheep come after us, Sawney, remember that you're not afraid. You must not cry, or hold on to my dress with your dirty little hands. Do you hear?"

"Ya-m," acquiesced Sawney, with suspicious readiness, resuming his line of march behind her.

They pursued their way uneventfully until they had reached the middle of the field when the catastrophe, which Pocahontas had anticipated, occurred. A flock of sheep peacefully grazing at a little distance, suddenly raised their heads, and advanced with joyful bleating, evidently regarding the pair as ministering spirits come to gratify their saline yearning. Sawney—perjured Sawney! all unmindful of his promise, no sooner beheld their advance, than he halted instantly, the muscles of his face working ominously.

"Come on, Sawney," urged the young lady, encouragingly, "the sheep won't hurt you: they think we have salt for them; come on."

But Sawney had no confidence in the explanation, and plainly discredited the statement of the animals' lack of hostile intention. He refused to stir: nay, more, he dropped himself solidly to the earth with an ear-splitting howl, and grabbed tight hold of Pocahontas's dress with both grimy paws; the sheep, meanwhile, came hurrying up at a sharp trot, pushing against each other in their haste, and bleating in glad anticipation of a treat. Some of the boldest ventured near enough to sniff the girl's dress, gazing up at her expectantly, with their soft, pretty eyes; a proceeding which evoked redoubled yells from Sawney. They were perfectly harmless; even the rams were peaceful, which made the child's conduct the more provoking. In vain Pocahontas coaxed, threatened and commanded, in vain she assured him solemnly that the sheep would not hurt him, and acrimoniously that if he did not hush instantly and get up, she would leave him alone for the sheep to eat up. Sawney would not stir. The more she talked the louder he howled and the more obstinately he clung to her dress. Then she took off her hat and waved it at the animals who sprang aside, startled at first, but returned in closer ranks with more

insistent bleating. Losing patience at last, Pocahontas stooped and caught the boy by his shoulders and shook him soundly. She was about to proceed to more violent measures when a voice at her elbow said quietly:

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"Perhaps I can be of service to you."

She started, and glanced round quickly. A slender, dark, young man, a stranger, was standing beside her, glancing, with unconcealed amusement, from her flushed, irate countenance to the sulky, streaming visage at her feet.

"Oh, thank you; you can indeed," accepting his proffered aid with grateful readiness. "If you will kindly drive these sheep away, I'll be much indebted to you. This provoking little boy is afraid of them, or pretends to be, and I can't induce him to stir. Now, Sawney, hush that abominable noise this instant! The gentleman is going to drive all the sheep away."

With perfect gravity, but his eyes full of laughter, Nesbit Thorne flourished his cane and advanced on the flock menacingly. The animals backed slowly. "Will that do?" he called, when he had driven them about a hundred yards.

"A little further, please," she answered. "No, a great deal further; quite to the end of the field. He won't move yet!" Her voice quivered with suppressed mirth.

Feeling like "Little Boy Blue" recalled to a sense of duty, Thorne pursued the sheep remorselessly; the poor beasts, convinced at last that disappointment was to be their portion, trotted before him meekly, giving vent to their feelings in occasional bleats of reproach.

Meanwhile, Pocahontas lifted Sawney forcibly to his feet, and led him across to the opposite fence, over which she helped him to climb, being determined that no more scenes should be inflicted on her that morning. When she had put a barrier between him and danger, she ordered him to sit down and calm his shattered nerves and recover his behavior. She remained within the field, herself, leaning against the fence and awaiting the gentleman's return, that she might thank him.

By the time he rejoined her, Nesbit Thorne had decided that his new acquaintance was a very handsome, and unusually attractive woman. The adventure amused him, and he had a mind to pursue it further. As he approached, he removed his hat courteously, with a pleasant, half-jocular remark about the demoralized condition of her escort, and a word indicative of his surprise at finding a country child, of any color, afraid of animals.

"Yes; it is unusual," she assented, smiling on him with her handsome gray eyes, "I can't account for his terror, for I'm sure no animal has ever harmed him. If he were older I'd accuse him of trying to earn a cheap notoriety, but he's almost too little to pretend. He's a troublesome monkey, and if I'd noticed he was following me, I'd have forbidden him. I'm much indebted for your kindly service; without your assistance, Sawney would have sat there screaming until they organized an expedition at home to cruise in search of us, or the sheep had retired of their own accord."

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"Not as bad as that, I guess," he returned, extending his hand to aid her in mounting the fence, noticing that the one she gave him was delicate and shapely, and that the foot, of which he caught a glimpse, was pretty, and well-arched. He would gladly have detained her talking in the pleasant sunshine, or even—as time was no object, and all ways alike—have liked to saunter on beside her, but there was no mistaking the quiet decision of her manner as she repeated her thanks and bade him good morning.

"Who the dickens was she?" he wondered idly as he leaned on the fence in his turn, and watched the graceful figure disappearing in the distance. She walked well, he noticed, without any of the ugly tricks of gait so many women have; firm and upright, with head finely poised, and every movement a curve. Her look and voice harmonized with her carriage; she pleased his artistic sense, and he lowered his lids a little as he watched her, as one focuses a fine picture, or statue.

The aesthetic side of Thorne's nature was cultured to the extreme of fastidiousness; ugly, repulsive, even disagreeable things repelled him more than they do most men. He disliked intensely any thing that grated, any thing that was discordant. If "taste is morality," Thorne had claims to be considered as having attained an unusual development. His taste ruled him in most things, unless, indeed, his passions were aroused, or his will thwarted, in which case he could present angularities of character in marked contrast to the smoothness of his ordinary demeanor.

Women amused him, as a rule, more than they interested him. He constantly sought among them that which, as yet, he had never found—that which he was beginning to think he never should find, originality combined with unselfishness.

Even in that brief interview, Pocahontas had touched a chord in his nature no woman had ever touched before; it vibrated—very faintly, but enough to arrest Thorne's attention, for an instant, and to cause him to bend his ear and listen. In some subtle way, a difference was established between her and all other women. Her ready acceptance of his aid, her absolute lack of self-consciousness, even her calmly courteous dismissal of him, piqued Thorne's curiosity and interest. He reflected that in all probability he would meet her soon again, and the idea pleased him.

As he selected a cigar, the grotesque side of the adventure touched him; he smiled, and the smile broadened into a laugh as he recalled his own part in the performance. What would Norma have said, could she have beheld him heading off sheep from a squalling little African at the command of an utterly strange young woman?

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Pocahontas related her adventure gleefully when they were all assembled at dinner; and the amusement it excited was great. Berkeley insisted teasingly that her deliverer would develop into one of the workmen from Washington, employed by General Smith in the renovation of Shirley. One of the carpenters, or—as he looked gentlemanly and wore a coat, a fresco man, abroad in search of an original idea for the dining-room ceiling. This idea she had obligingly furnished him, and he would be able to make a very effective ceiling of her, and Sawney, and the sheep, if he should handle them rightly. These suggestions Pocahontas scouted, maintaining gayly that the dark stranger was none other than her “Smith,” the very identical John of her destiny.

Later she confided to her brother her conjecture relative to the identity of their new neighbor, and was more delighted than surprised to learn from him that her surmise had been correct. Berkeley had obtained the information from the solicitor in Wintergreen, who had been employed in the transfer of the estate.

CHAPTER VII.

The Smith family speedily settled down into their new home, and after the first feeling of strangeness had worn off, were forced to acknowledge that the reality of country living was not so disagreeable as they had anticipated. The neighborhood was pleasantly and thickly settled, the people kind-hearted and hospitable. True, Mrs. Smith still secretly yearned for modern conveniences and the comforts of a daily market, and felt that time alone could reconcile her to the unreliability and inefficiency of colored servants, but even she had compensation. Her husband—whose time, since his retirement, had hung like lead upon his hands, was busy, active and interested, full of plans, and reveling in the pure delight of buying expensive machinery for the negroes to break, and tons of fertilizers for them to waste. The girls were pleased, and Norma happier and less difficult than she had been for years. And, best and most welcome of all, Warner appeared to strengthen. As for Percival, his satisfaction knew no bounds; his father had given him a gun and Nesbit Thorne was teaching him how to use it.

At the eleventh hour Nesbit Thorne had decided to accompany his relatives in their flitting, instead of waiting to visit them later in the season. He was incited thereto by idleness and ennui, leavened by curiosity as to the manner in which their future life would be ordered, and also by a genuine desire to be of service to them in the troublesome move. Perhaps there was, besides, an unacknowledged feeling in his breast, that with the departure of his kindred, New York would become lonelier, more wearisome than ever. They had given him a semblance of a home, and there was in the man's nature an undercurrent of yearning after love and the rounding out of true domestic life, that fretted and chafed in its obstructed channel, and tried here and there blindly for another outlet.

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Thorne's coming with them seemed to the Smiths a very natural proceeding. His aunt proposed it one day, when he had been more than usually helpful, vowing that she scarcely knew how to get along without him, and Thorne fell in with the proposal at once; it made little difference, since he was coming for the shooting anyway. If Norma had another theory in regard to his unwillingness to be separated from them, she was careful to keep it hidden.

The country gentry, led and influenced by the Masons, extended the right hand of fellowship to the new-comers, and wrapped the folds of the social blanket cordially around them. The worldly affairs of the Virginians, like their surroundings, were in a more or less perceptible state of dilapidation, and their means frequently failed to match their hospitality. But their intentions were the best, and the Smiths (well-bred people, neither arrogant, nor purse-proud) speedily became reconciled to informality and lack of system, and learned to overlook deficiencies, or to piece them out with kindness.

From the first they were thrown much into the society of the Lanarth family, for the Masons at once assumed right of property in them, being bent with simple loyalty on defraying some portion of their debt of gratitude. When their loved one was "sick and in prison" these strangers had extended to him kindness, and now that opportunity offered, that kindness should be returned, full measure, pressed down and running over. For the general, Pocahontas conceived a positive enthusiasm, a feeling which the jolly old soldier was not slow in discovering, nor backward in reciprocating; the pair were the best of friends.

Ever since the finding of the letter, the girl's mind had been filled with the story of the brother whom she scarcely remembered. With tender imagination, she exaggerated his youth, his courage, his hardships, and glorified him into a hero. Every thing connected with him appeared pitiful and sacred; his saber hung above the mantle, crossed with his father's, and she took it down one morning and half-drew the dulled blade from the scabbard. The brass of the hilt, and the trimmings of the belt and scabbard were tarnished, and even corroded in places. She got a cloth and burnished them until they shone like gold. When she replaced it, the contrast with the other sword hurt her, and a rush of remorseful tenderness made her take that down also, and burnish it carefully. Poor father! almost as unknown as the young brother, she was grieved that he should have been the second thought.

She was restoring her father's sword to its place, and re-arranging the crimson sash, faded and streaked in its folds, from wear and time, when Norma and Blanche arrived, escorted by Nesbit Thorne. Little Sawney had been sitting on the hearth-rug watching her polish the arms, and offering suggestions, and Pocahontas dispatched him to invite her guests into the parlor, while she ran up-stairs to remove the traces of her work. The young people from Shirley often walked over in the afternoons; the way was short and pleasant, and the brother and sister usually accompanied them part of the way home.

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Thorne was fond of these informal visits; his interest in Pocahontas had increased; the chord, instead of merely vibrating, was beginning to give out faint, sweet notes, like a far-off dream of music, just stirring toward embodiment. He took a keen artistic pleasure in her, she satisfied him, and at first he was almost shy of pressing the acquaintance lest she should fail somewhere. He had been disappointed so many times, had had so many exquisite bubbles float before him, to break at a touch and leave only dirty soap-suds. He let himself be interested slowly, drawing out the pleasure, and getting its full flavor. Then, when he found that it was true metal and might be worked at will without fear of baseness, or alloy, he gave himself up to the pleasure of it. Then, his instinct being always to draw to himself what he desired, he strove to awaken an interest in her. He was a man of unusually brilliant attainments, and he spared no pains. He began to seek her society, and, when in it, to exert himself and appear always at his best, trying to fascinate her as she was, unconsciously, beginning to fascinate him. He would entrap her into ventilating her old-fashioned ideas and prejudices; her primitive notions of life and conduct. Her straightforwardness, simplicity, absolute truthfulness, struck him as quaint and delicious; even her romance and almost German sentiment were attractive to him. He felt like a scientist, who discovers old truths in an absolutely new development. Early in their acquaintance he discovered her fondness for old legends, and her perfect acceptance of, and faith in them; and it was his delight to beguile her into relating tales of her kindred, and of the olden times so dear to the hearts of Virginians. Her remarks and comments often touched, always interested him, although sometimes they well-nigh convulsed him with amusement. To the mind of the man of the world they appeared so—almost obsolete.

Pocahontas was generally willing enough to tell her stories, unless indeed Norma happened to be present, and then the improvisatrice was dumb. Pocahontas was not in sympathy with Norma. Norma thought old stories great rubbish, and did not scruple to show that such was her opinion, and Pocahontas resented it. One evening, in the beginning of their acquaintance, the three girls had walked down to the old willows at the foot of the lawn, and Pocahontas, for the amusement of her guests, had related the little story connected with them.

"I think it was all great foolishness," Norma declared. "If she loved the man, why not marry him at once like a sensible woman? The idea of making him wait three years, and watch a rubbishy little tree, just because his brother would have made a scene. What if he did make a scene? He would soon have submitted to the inevitable, and made friends. The lady couldn't have cared much for her lover, to be willing to put up with that driveling probation."

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"She did love him," retorted Pocahontas, with annoyance, "and she proved it by being willing to sacrifice a little of her happiness to spare him the bitterness of a quarrel with his own brother. The men were twins, and they loved one another, until unnatural rivalry pushed family affection into the background. If the matter had been settled when both were at white heat, an estrangement would have ensued which it would have taken years to heal—if it ever *was* healed. There's no passion so unyielding as family hate. They were her kinsmen, too, men of her own blood; she must think of *them*, outside of herself. The welfare of the man she didn't love must be considered as well as that of the man she did love—more, if any thing, because she gave him so much less. How could she come between twin brothers, and turn their affection to hatred? She knew them both—knew that her own true lover would hold firm for all the years of his life, so that she could safely trust him for three. And she knew that the lighter nature would, in all probability, prove inconstant; and if he left her of his own freewill, there could be no ill-feeling, and no remorse."

Norma laughed derisively. "And in this fine self-sacrifice she had no thought of her lover," quoth she. "*His* pain was nothing. She sacrificed him, too."

"And why not? Surely no man would grudge a paltry three years out of his whole life's happiness to avoid so dreadful a thing as ill blood between twin brothers. If *she* could wait for his sake, *he* could wait for hers. A woman must not cheapen herself; if she is worth winning, she must exact the effort."

"I think it is a lovely story," Blanche interposed, decidedly. "The lady behaved beautifully; just exactly as she should have done. A quarrel between brothers is awful, and between twin brothers would be awfuler still."

In her eager partisanship, Blanche's language was more concise than elegant, but she wanted Pocahontas to know that she sided with her.

Norma regarded her sister with amusement not unmixed with chagrin. These new friends were stealing away her follower. Blanche was becoming emancipated.

"Any woman who trifles with her happiness, because of a scruple, is a fool," she repeated, dogmatically.

Pocahontas held back the angry retort that was burning on the tip of her tongue, and let the subject drop. Norma was her guest, and, after all, what did it matter what Norma thought? But after that she refrained from repeating old stories before her; and of the two sisters, Blanche became her favorite.

As she entered the parlor with smiles and words of welcome, Blanche held out her hands filled with late roses and branches of green holly, bright with berries.

“See,” she said, “two seasons in one bouquet. The roses are for your mother. I found them on a bush in a sheltered corner; and as we came along I made Nesbit cut the holly for me. I never can resist holly. That tree by your gate is the loveliest thing I have ever seen; just like those in the store windows at home for Christmas. Only we never had such a profusion of berries, and I don’t think they were as bright. Do you think the holly we get at home is as bright, Norma?”

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"Oh, yes; it looked always pretty much the same. We got beautiful holly every Christmas," replied Norma, who did not like Virginia exalted at the expense of her native place.

"But not with such masses of berries. Just look at this branch; was there ever any thing more perfect? Princess, please give me something to put it in. It's far too pretty to throw away. Can I have that vase on the piano?"

Pocahontas smiled assent. She could have holly by the cart-load, but she liked Blanche's enthusiasm. While the others chatted, Blanche decked the vase with her treasure; then two others which she found for herself on a table in the corner. There were still some lovely rich bits, quite small twigs, left when she had finished, and she once more clamored for something to put them in.

Pocahontas, in the midst of an eager discussion with Thorne and Norma, in which both were arrayed against her, glanced around carelessly. There was a cup and saucer on a small stand near her, and she picked up the cup thoughtlessly and held it out to Thorne. Just as their hands met in the transfer, both of them talking, neither noticing what they were doing, Berkeley entered suddenly and spoke, causing them to start and turn. There was a quick exclamation from Pocahontas, a wild clutch into space from Thorne, and on the floor between them lay the fragile china in half a dozen pieces.

Pocahontas bent over them regretfully. It was the cup with the dreaming Indian maiden on it—the cup from which Jim Byrd had taken his coffee on that last evening. There were tears in her eyes, but she kept her head bent so that no one should see them. She would rather any cup of the set should have come to grief than that one.

She had brought it into the parlor several days before to show to a visitor, who wished a design for a hand-screen for a fancy fair, and had neglected to replace it in the cabinet. She reproached herself for her carelessness as she laid the fragments on the piano, and then the superstition flashed across her mind. Could it be an omen? The idea seemed foolish, and she put it aside.

"Don't feel badly about it," she said to Thorne, who was humbly apologetic for his awkwardness, "it was as much my fault as yours; we neither of us were noticing. Indeed, it's more my fault, for if I hadn't neglected to put it away, the accident could not have happened. You must not blame yourself so much."

"In the actual living present, I'm the culprit," observed Berkeley, "since my entrance precipitated the catastrophe. I startled you both, and behold the result! Nobody dreamed of convicting me, and this is voluntary confession, so I expect you all to respect it; the smallest unkindness will cause me to leave the room in a torrent of tears."

Every one laughed, and Pocahontas put the fragments out of sight behind a pile of music books. She could not put the subject out of her mind so easily, although she exerted herself to an unusual degree to prevent her guests from feeling uncomfortable; the superstition rankled.

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As they took leave, Thorne held her hand in a warmer clasp than he had ever before ventured on, and his voice was really troubled as he said:

"I can't tell you how worried I am about your beautiful cup. I never had a small accident trouble me to the same extent before. I feel as though a serious calamity had befallen. There was no tradition, no association, I hope, which made the cup of special value, beyond its beauty, and the fact of its being an heirloom."

Pocahontas was too truthful for evasion.

"There were associations of course," she answered gently, "with that cup as well as with the rest of the china. It has been in the family so many generations, you know. Don't reproach yourself any more, please—remember 'twas as much my fault as yours. And broken things need not remain so," with an upward glance and a bright smile, "they can be mended. I shall have the cup riveted."

She would not tell him of the superstition; there was no use in making him feel worse about the accident than he felt already. She did not wish him to be uncomfortable, and had gladly assumed an equal share of blame. It was extremely silly in her to allow her mind to dwell on a foolish old tradition. How could the breakage of a bit of china, no matter how precious, presage misfortune? It was ill doing that entailed ill fortune, not blind chance, or heathen fate. She would think no more of foolish old portents.

Still!—she wished the cup had not been broken—wished with all her heart that it had not been *that* cup.

CHAPTER VIII.

Blanche Smith was not at all a clever girl—not like Norma. Norma had always stood first in her classes, had borne off prizes and medals, but with Blanche it was otherwise. No amount of coaching ever sufficed to pull her through an examination, or to remove her from the middle of her class. Blanche was a dunce confessedly; she hated books, and the acquisition of knowledge by labor. If people told her things and took the trouble to explain them, she remembered them sometimes; sometimes not. To accomplishments she took as a duck to water—danced beautifully, was a fair musician, sang with taste and sweetness, and chattered French with absolute self-confidence and a tolerable accent, although her rudimentary knowledge of the tongue was of the vaguest.

At school she had been more popular than her cleverer sister; the girls affirmed that she was sweeter tempered and more obliging. At home also, she was the favorite. Her father idolized her, her brothers domineered over, and petted her; even the mother made an unconscious difference between the girls; she admired Norma more—was

prouder of her, but she depended upon Blanche. Norma saw the difference, and sometimes it vexed her, but generally she was indifferent to it. Her people did not understand her; she was not like them; when barn-door fowls unwittingly

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hatched eaglets, it was natural that the phenomenon should be beyond their comprehension, and that their ignorance should prefer the tamer members of their brood. Not that Norma actually instituted such comparison, and deliberately set herself above her kindred; she simply acted upon the hypothesis unconsciously, and when the warmest of the family affection settled around Blanche, felt sure that it was due to natural difference, and could be no fault of hers.

Little Blanche, in her deep content with her new surroundings, wondered how she could ever have been so besotted as to object to the move. The place, the people, the mode of life were all delicious to her, and for the family at Lanarth, her enthusiasm was touching. Mrs. Mason was just her idea of "Mrs. Washington, or Cornelia, or Lady de Bourgainville," she explained to Norma, mixing history and fiction, as usual, and was laughed at for her pains.

Pocahontas never laughed at her—at least not offensively, or in a way to make her feel her ignorance. She thought sometimes that her foolish society was preferred by her new friend to that of her clever sister; certainly the quaint old tales which Pocahontas poured unreservedly into her delighted ears were never told to Norma. What impression lay in the girl's mind of handsome Berkeley Mason, had best remain uncanvassed. It is ill work, violating feminine sanctuaries unless the need be urgent; an empty coat-sleeve, carelessly carried, is a powerful agent for converting a man into a hero.

Christmas, the grand high festival of the year, was approaching, and all the community was stirred with deep desire for its worthy celebration. Sociability ceased, or at best was sustained in limp, half-hearted fashion by the men. The ladies had other things to think of; for on them rested the sole responsibility of the Christmas preparations—the providing of copious lodging for expected guests, the bedecking of rooms with evergreens and holly, the absorption of store-room and kitchen, the never-ending consultations with the cook—all the wonderful machinations, the deep mysteries and incantations, which would result in glittering hospitality later on. Realizing this, they suffered lesser matters to pass unheeded, caring naught for social converse, intellectual pleasures, or intelligence of church or state. Women might elope, men embezzle, dynasties fall, ministries change, or public faith be broken, and they viewed the result, if indeed they noted it, with absolute composure. But let eggs be unattainable, jellies become murky, the fruit in cake or pudding sink hopelessly to the bottom, and Rachel weeping for her children could not have made more wild acclaim.

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At Lanarth, the week of preparation (good old Virginia housekeepers always allowed a week at least, and Mrs. Mason adhered to the time-honored custom) passed busily. Every thing turned out unusually well, and the store-room was a picture. Jellies, in slender glasses, glittered in exquisite amber perfection, or glowed warmly crimson, with points of brighter hue where the sun fell on them. Heaps of old-fashioned “snowballs” hid golden hearts under a pure white frosting, and cakes, baked in fantastic shapes, like Turks’ heads and fluted melons, were rich, warm, brown, or white and gleaming as Christmas snow. The pastry showed all shades from palest buff to tender delicate brown, and for depth of tone there were their rich interiors of dark mincemeat and golden custards. Of the pleasures of this beautiful world not the least is the sight of beautiful food.

And it was Christmas eve.

The shadows were gathering, and the sun sending in his resignation to the night, when Pocahontas, tying on her pretty scarlet hood and wrappings, armed herself with a small basket of corn, and proceeded to the poultry yard to house her turkeys for the night. They usually roosted in an old catalpa tree near the back gate, earlier in the season; but as Christmas approached Pocahontas found it expedient to turn the key upon them, since leaving them out caused weaker brothers to offend. As she passed the kitchen door she called to little Sawney, whose affection for his grandmother increased at Christmas, to come out and help her.

The little fellow had that morning been invested by a doting parent with a “pa’r o’ sto’ boots” purchased entirely with reference to the requirements of the future. They were many sizes too large for him: the legs adorned with flaming scarlet tops, reached nearly to his middle; they flopped up and down at every step, and evinced an evil propensity for wobbling, and bringing their owner with sorrow to the ground. They were hard-natured, stiff-soled, uncompromising—but! they were *boots*!—“sto’ boots, whar cos’ money!”—and Sawney’s cup of bliss was full.

Any one who has experience in the ways and wiles of the domestic treasure, must be aware of the painful lack of consideration sometimes evinced by turkeys in this apparently simple matter of allowing themselves to be housed. Some evenings, they march straight into their apartment with the directness and precision of soldiers filing into barracks; on others the very Prince of Darkness, backed by the three Fates and the three Furies, apparently takes possession of the perverse, shallow-pated birds. They wander backward and forward, with an air of vacancy as though they knew not what to do; they pass and repass the yawning portal of the turkey house, with heads erect and eyes fixed on futurity, not only as if they did not see the door, but actually as if there were no door there to see. And when the maddened driver, wrought to desperation, hurls into their midst a stick or stone, hoping fervently and vengefully that it may break a neck or a leg, they leap nimbly into the air with “put-putterings” of surprise and rebuke, and then advance cautiously upon the missile and examine it.

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The Lanarth turkeys were behaving in just this reprehensible manner, and Pocahontas was working herself into a frenzy over them. Three times she engineered the flock successfully up to the open door, and three times the same old brown hen advanced, peered cautiously into the house, started tragically aside as though she beheld some evil thing, and produced a panic and a stampede.

“You miserable wretch!” exclaimed Pocahontas, hurling her empty basket impotently at the dusky author of her woe, “I could kill you! Shoo! shoo! Sawney, why don’t you help me? Head them! Run round them! Shoo! shoo! you abominable creatures!”

Sawney essayed to obey, grasping the straps of his boots, and lifting his feet very high.

“Take them off and run,” commanded Pocahontas. But Sawney would as soon have parted with his skin. “I dwine ter run,” he responded, and gripped his boots valiantly. It was of no use. Sawney had gotten too much boot for his money, and if walking in them was difficult, running was impossible. He held on to them bravely, but that only impeded progress further; the faithless cowhides wobbled, twisted, and finally landed him sprawling on his back in the middle of the flock, which promptly retired to distant parts of the poultry yard, “puttering” and dodging.

“Sawney proves a broken reed, as usual,” called a pleasant voice from somewhere in the background; “here, let me help you,” and Nesbit Thorne leaped over the fence, and advanced, gun in hand, to the rescue.

“It’s the fault of his ‘sto’ boots,” Pocahontas explained, laughing, as she extended her hand. “Sawney’s intentions were honorable enough. I shall be glad of your assistance—as usual,” with a merry glance, “for these aggravating birds are shattering my nerves, and ruining my temper.”

Then, together, the pair pursued the unruly fowls, and pressed upon them and buffeted them, until the turkeys were right glad to defy the vision of the old brown sensationalist, and take refuge in their house. Pocahontas closed the door with a sharp bang almost upon the tail of the hindmost one, locked it, and then turned cordially to her companion and invited him to remain and take tea with them.

Thorne glanced down at his splashed boots and corduroys. “I’m scarcely in trim for a lady’s tea table,” he said, smiling, “you must excuse me, and let me come some other time. I met your brother on the low grounds as I came up. I’ve been shooting over his land, and called to leave your mother a few birds.”

“Had you good sport?” inquired Pocahontas, with interest, watching him empty the pockets of his shooting-coat on the top of an adjacent chicken-coop, and admiring the soft shades, and exquisite markings of the plumage of the dead birds.



“Here’s old ‘bur-rabbit,’” said Thorne, reaching his hand behind his back, and drawing out the pretty brown beast by the legs. “I knocked him over just below your garden fence in a little patch of briers. It was a pretty shot; see, right through the head. I hate to mangle my game. I’d pretty fair sport; the birds are a little wild, though, and I had no dog. I lost a fine duck—a canvas-back, this afternoon, by its falling into deep water. I must send North for a brace of good dogs.”

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"That isn't necessary," said Pocahontas, touching the birds gently, and stroking their soft feathers. "Berke and Royall both have good dogs, trained retrievers, and used to the country. Strange dogs don't do so well over unaccustomed ground. It's a shame that you had no dog, and dreadfully neglectful of the boys not to have noticed. No, no!" as Thorne moved away from the coop, "you must not leave all those; you have none for yourself, and you'll be disgraced as a sportsman if you go home empty-handed. They won't believe you've killed a thing. We *never* do, when our men come home with nothing to show. Jim Byrd never dared face Nina, or me, without, at least, half a dozen birds."

"Who is Jim Byrd?" demanded Thorne quickly. "I never heard you mention him before."

"Haven't you?" regarding him with great surprise. "Well that is curious, for he is one of our oldest, dearest friends, Berke's and mine. A year ago I couldn't have imagined life possible without Jim's dear old face near us. He formerly lived at Shirley; it was the Byrd patrimony for generations. His sisters were the closest girl-friends Grace and I ever had, and for years the two families were as one. There were financial troubles handed down from father to son, growing always greater; the old place had finally to be sold, and your uncle bought it. Jim is in Mexico now, engineering, and the girls are all married. I wonder you have never heard me mention Jim. I think, and speak of him frequently. We all do."

So perfectly unembarrassed was the girl's manner, that despite a faint wistfulness discernible in her face, Thorne put aside the half-thought formulated in his brain by the familiar mention of Jim Byrd's name. He allowed himself to be persuaded to re-pocket part of the game, particularly a brace of ducks, which the soul of the general loved. As he rose from his seat on the chicken-coop, Pocahontas noticed the handsome gun beside him, and leaning forward with a woman's instinctive desire to handle dangerous things, she took it in her hands with an exclamation of admiration.

"Is it loaded?" she inquired, raising it to her shoulder, and laying her finger lightly on the trigger.

"Yes," Thorne answered, drawing nearer, "take care, Miss Mason. It always makes me nervous to see a gun in a woman's hands. Don't pull the trigger, please; the charge is heavy and the recoil will hurt you."

But the warning came too late; intentionally, or unintentionally, she *did* pull the trigger, and the gun carelessly held, recoiled sharply, striking against her shoulder with such force that she staggered and would have fallen, if Thorne had not caught her in his arms. The gun slipped to the ground, but fortunately did not discharge the second barrel.

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Thorne regarded the white face upon his breast with trepidation, amazed even amid his anxiety at the fierce pang that shot through his heart at the sight of its pallor. Suppose she should be seriously hurt! Brute that he had been, not to have taken better care of her. Fool! *fool!* to have let her touch that accursed gun! His hand trembled as he loosened her cloak, and passed it tenderly over her shoulder. Dislocated? No; such cruel harm had not befallen her: a bruise, a little stiffness was the worst in store. A passionate relief, bewildering in its intensity, thrilled through him; his dark cheek rivaled hers in pallor; his eyes glowed.

Then her lids quivered, the gray eyes unclosed, and the color flushed back warmly, covering cheek and brow and neck with a mighty surge of crimson. With a quick effort, Pocahontas disengaged herself from his arms, and leaned against the fence, a few steps away from him. Struggling for self-mastery, Thorne made his anxious inquiries, striving by a fierce exercise of will to still his bounding pulses, and banish from his eyes the expression he felt glowing within them. And Pocahontas, with her paleness in force again, replied to his inquiries with tremulous but determined lightness, putting aside his self reproaches, and assuming the blame with eager incoherence. She made a terrible mess of it, but Thorne was past all nicety of observation; his only thought, now that he was assured of her safety, was to get himself away without further betrayal of his feelings. His mind was in a tumult, and his heart rose up and choked him. For a moment he held the small, tremulous fingers in a strong, warm clasp, then with a quick “good-night” relinquished them, sprang over the fence and walked rapidly away in the direction of Shirley.

CHAPTER IX.

Walking home in the still dusk of the winter gloaming, Thorne found himself compelled at last to look the situation in the face without disguise or subterfuge; to “take stock” of it all, as it were, and ask himself what should be the result. He had lingered in Virginia, lengthening his stay from week to week, because the old world quaintness of the people, the freshness and yet antiquity of thought prevalent among them, charmed him, pleased the aesthetic side of his nature, as the softness of their voices pleased his ear, and the suavity of their manners, his taste. He was tired to death of the old routine, weary beyond expression of the beaten track, of the sameness of the old treadmill of thought. Here he had found variety.

For somewhat the same reason he had sought Pocahontas, charily at first, dreading disappointment, but finally, as his interest deepened, without reserve. She was different from other women, more candid, less impressible. He could not discover what she thought of him, beyond her surface interest in his talents and conversation. She piqued and stimulated him; in her presence he exerted himself and appeared at his best, which is always pleasant to a man. Even old thoughts, and hackneyed theories donned new apparel when about to be presented to her notice.

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He had played with fire, and was forced now to admit that the fate of the reckless had overtaken him. He loved her. The truth had been dawning on his mind for weeks past, but he had put it aside, willfully blinding himself because of his contentment with the present. Now, self delusion was no longer possible; the report of his gun had blown away the last rays of it forever. When Pocahontas lay well-nigh senseless in his arms, when her fair face rested on his breast and her breath touched his cheek, he knew, and acknowledged to himself that he loved her with a passionate intensity such as in all his careless, self-indulgent life he had never before felt for a woman.

And he had no right to love her; he was a married man.

When this idea flashed across his mind it almost stunned him. He had been free in heart and mind so long that he had ceased to remember that he was bound in fact. The substance had so withdrawn itself into the background of his life that he had forgotten that the shadow still rested on him. He was free, and he was bound. Thorne turned the idea over in his mind, as one turns a once familiar thing that has grown strange from being hidden long from sight. Was he a married man?—undoubtedly—the idea appalled him.

Two years had passed since the separation and there had been no divorce. Thorne had thought the matter out at the time, as a man must, and had decided to wait, and to let any initial steps be taken by his wife. He had no love left for her, and he realized with grim intensity that their marriage had been a terrible mistake, but there was sufficient chivalry in his nature to make him feel that the mother of his child had claims upon him—to make him willing, for the child's sake, to leave her the protection of his home and name as long as she cared to keep it. Then, too, the habit of thought in his family, and all his early influences were against divorce. The idea had not presented itself spontaneously, as the natural solution of his domestic difficulties; he had been obliged to familiarize himself with it. His family had been Catholics for generations, his mother had become one on her marriage, and had been ardent and devout, as is usual with proselytes. Thorne was not a religious man himself, but he respected religion, and in an abstract way considered it a beautiful and holy thing. He had never thought of it with any reference to his own life, but it made a halo around the memory of his mother. Her views had influenced him in his decision in the matter of a divorce. The world had given him credit for religious scruples of his own, but the world had done him more than justice; he was only haunted by the ghosts of his mother's scruples.

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Thorne leaned on the fence of the field where he had first seen Pocahontas, and went over his former experience of love. What a miserable thing it had been, at best! How feverish, vapory and unsatisfying! What a wretched fiasco his marriage had proved! And yet he had loved his wife! Her beauty was of a type that insures its possessor love of a certain sort—not the best, but strong enough to stand the wear and tear of well-to-do existence, if only it is returned. If Ethel had loved him, Thorne would have held to his lot, and munched his husks, if not with relish, certainly with decency and endurance. But Ethel did not love him.

Their marriage, from Ethel's standpoint, had been mercantile; for his wealth and position, she had willingly bartered her youth and beauty, and if he would have been content with face value, she would have been content. Why should people trouble the depths of life when the surface was so pleasant and satisfying? She liked Thorne well enough, but his ceaseless craving for congeniality, deep affection, community of interest, and the like, wearied, bored and baffled her. Why should they care for the same things, cultivate similar tastes, have corresponding aspirations? If they differed in thought and life and expression, let them differ—it was of no consequence. She found her husband's exactions tiresome. He had her birthright, she had his pottage; let the matter end there, and each be satisfied.

But Thorne was *not* satisfied. He had married a transcendently beautiful woman, but he had no wife. Half the men of his acquaintance envied him, but he did not rejoice, nor plume himself. He wanted his wife to lean on him, to clothe the strength of his manhood with the grace of her womanhood—and his wife showed herself not only capable of standing alone, but of pushing him away with both hands. His mood underwent many changes, and finally he let her go, with some disgust, and a deep inward curse at his past folly. It was not a pleasant retrospect.

Night had fallen; the air was still and brooding; across the sky scudded ragged masses of clouds, advanced guard of the storm that was mustering along the horizon; everywhere there was a feeling that foreboded snow. In the sky, few stars were visible, and those glimmered with a cold, wan light; at the zenith a solitary planet burned steadfastly. The road stretched away into the night; it was dark under the trees beside the fence; away in the distance the echo of footsteps sounded.

Thorne thought of Pocahontas. His face softened, and his eyes shone tenderly. How true she was, how thorough and noble. Her pure face and fearless gray eyes rose before him; with the love of such a woman to bless him, her hand in his, her influence surrounding him, to what might not a man aspire! There were no insincerities, no half-truths, no wheels within wheels, such as Ethel delighted in, about this other woman. Even her occasional fits of impatience and temper were indulged in frankly—a sudden flurry of tempest and then the bright, warm sunshine; no long-continued murkiness, and heavy sodden depression for hours and days.

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Did she love him? As he asked himself the question, Thorne's heart bounded, and the blood coursed hotly through his veins. He had tried to make her love him—had he succeeded? Thorne was no fatuous fool, blinded by his own vanity, but his power over women had been often tried, fully proven, and he had confidence in himself. Once only had he failed of securing the love he sought, and it was the memory of that failure which made him pause and question now. He was not sure. She liked him, was pleasant and gracious, but he had seen her so to other men. Never until this evening had she changed color at his touch. She liked him—and Thorne felt within him a fierce desire to change her passivity of regard into wild activity of passion. He could do it. That tide of crimson, a vague terror and awakening in the gray eyes, as they met his gaze on re-opening to consciousness, had shown him a tiny cleft which his hand might broaden, until it should flood their two lives with the light of love.

The echo of the footsteps deepened, merged into actual sound, drew nearer. Thorne, in the deep obscurity of the trees, listened, moving near to the dusky, trunk of an old magnolia; he was in no mood for passing civilities, and in this friendly country all wayfarers exchanged greetings. In the sound of the advancing steps, he could distinguish an unmistakable shuffle which proclaimed race—two negroes returning from the little village, beyond Shirley, whither they had gone to make Christmas purchases. They walked by the light of a flaring pine knot, which was encouraged to burn by being swung around violently from time to time; it lighted the men's dark faces, and reflected itself in intermittent flashes on the sides of a bright tin bucket which the younger man carried, but it intensified the gloom around them. Both had on their backs bags filled with lumpy things, like bundles. They were talking cheerfully, and the sound of their rough voices and guttural laughter reached Thorne before the men themselves came abreast of his position. The negro with the bucket was relating an anecdote. Thorne caught part of it.

"Yes, sar," he was saying, "dat was de fust ov it. Mars Jim, he clumb right spang up to de tip-top de tree, an' de ice was cracklin', an' slippin', an' rattlin' down like broke up lamp chimblys. De little gals was 'pon de groun' watchin' him, an' hollerin' an' wringin' deir han's. I was loadin' de ox-cart wid pine kindlin's back in de woods, an' when I hearn de chil'en hollerin', I came runnin' to see what was de matter wid 'em."

"What he clumb arter?" questioned the other negro; "hit's mighty dangersome gittin' up trees when dey got sleet 'pon 'em."

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"Mighty dangersome," acquiesced the narrator, "dat's what I 'lowed ter myse'f when I seed him. He was arter a lump o' dat green truck wid white berries 'pon it—mizzletoe, dey calls its name. When I got dar, he was comin' down de tree holdin' it by de stem wid he teef. He wouldn't fling it down, kase he's feard he'd spile de berries. Time he totch de groun' good, Miss Grace, she hauled off, she did, an' smacked his jaws ez hard ez she could stave, an' axed him how *dar'ed* he skeer 'em like dat? An' Mars Jim, he larfed out loud, and said: 'Princess wanted it,' an' den he put de truck he'd resked his nake ter git in Miss Pocahontas's arms, an' she hugged it up tight, an' went long to de house cryin'."

Thorne moved involuntarily, and the gun in his hand struck against the trunk of the tree behind which he stood. The negroes paused and glanced around alertly, the man with the torch swinging it backward and forward, with a muttered "What's dat?" Nothing of any consequence; a bird, or a rabbit, perhaps—nothing worth investigation. The man with the bucket set his burden on the ground, and opened and shut his hand rapidly several times. The wire of the handle had cramped his fingers. Both men transferred their bags from the right shoulder to the left, and leaned against the tree stems to rest themselves a moment.

The elder man resumed the subject.

"Love her! Lord-er-mussy 'pon me! Jim Byrd was fa'rly *foolish* wid love. De groun' warn't fitten fur Miss Pocahontas ter set her foots 'pon in his notion; he'd er liked ter spread *hissef* down to save her slippers. T'want no question 'bout lovin' wid Mars Jim!"

"But he gone away," objected the torch-bearer. "I reckon Miss Pocahontas done kick him; dat how come he lef. What he doin' in Nexican ef he kin get what he want here? He *gone*!"

"*Dat* ain't nothin'. He was bleeched ter go out yander ter git money ter buy back de old place. Money mighty plentiful out dar, Aunt Vi'let say. Gwine way ain't nothin' ter a *man*; he kin come back 'gin. I went 'way ter Richmond onct myse'f ter rake up money 'nouf ter buy one mule, an' rent er scrop o' lan', so ez I could marry Sarah. Mars Jim's comin' back; las' word he sed ter Aunt Vi'let, was *dat*. Miss Pocahontas ain't kick him n'other. What she gwine kick him fur? Mars Jim's er likely man, an' all de ginnerashuns o' de Byrds an' Masons bin marryin' one n'other ever sence Virginny war er settle_mint_. My ole gran'daddy, whar war ole Mr. Dabney Byrd's kyar'ege driver, allus sed—Lord, a-mussy! what DAT!!"

The speaker paused with his mouth open and a chilly sensation about the back, as though a lump of ice were traveling down his spine. A sound, as of scriptural denunciation, low, but intense, had caught his ear. A bat, circling low, had grazed Thorne's face and caused him to throw up his hand with an impatient oath. The wisdom of the defunct "kyar'ege driver" was overwhelmed in the flood of perturbation which

seized his descendant. The man swung his torch around nervously and peered into the darkness, conscious of a distrust of his surroundings that amounted to positive pain. The other negro said nothing; but addressed himself to the adjustment of his burden in the manner least likely to impede retreat.

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Among the colored folks this portion of the road enjoyed an evil reputation, particularly after nightfall, for in a field near by there was an ancient graveyard, and the rumor went, that the denizens thereof were of a specially unruly, not to say malicious spirit, and found pure delight in ambushes along the road side, and in sallies upon unsuspecting travelers with results too painful for description.

"Haunts was mighty rank 'bout dar," the negroes said, and after sundown that part of the road was destitute of attractions. The graveyard had not been used for many years; but that only made the danger greater, for ghosts, grown bold with long immunity of office, were held capable of deeper malignity, than would be within the range of ghosts oppressed with the modesty of debutants. The fact that the occupants of the place had, in life, been of their own race, inspired the negroes with no feeling of kinship or confidence. They were earnestly afraid of all spirits, be they white, black, or red; but most of all of black ones, because they seemed most in league with the devil.

When, therefore, the light of the flickering pine torch fell obliquely on Thorne's dark figure and caught a gleam from the polished mountings of his gun, and another from the brass of the cartridge belt, which to the terrified darkeys looked like a cincture of fire, they became possessed with the idea that the most malevolent of all the spirits, perhaps the devil himself, was upon them. Calling on their Maker with more urgency than they ever did at "pray'r meetin'," they grabbed up their belongings and addressed themselves to flight. The bags, flopping up and down on their backs, held them to their speed, by corporeal reminder of what they had to lose if the devil should overtake them, and the molasses in the bucket slopped over the sides and sweetened the dust at every jump. The bucket top had bounced off in the first burst and sped down the road before them, and the owner, feeling that he had no time to lose, never dreamed of stopping to look for it. Every now and then the bucket banged against his leg causing him to feel that the evil one might be gaining, and to yell "Oh, Lawdy! Oh, Lawdy!!" at the top of his lungs. The torch-bearer had flung away his light, thinking to elude the devil in the darkness, and all his soul was in his heels.

Thorne laughed a little, in a mirthless fashion; but he was too miserable to be amused. While the men talked, black jealousy had crept around the old magnolia and linked arms with him. Twice in the same evening this name had crossed him. Who the devil was this Jim Byrd? These men had spoken of him as the avowed lover of Pocahontas, the man she would eventually marry. The girl herself had admitted him to be a dear and valued friend—a friend so dear that his going had left a blank in her life. The power he had but now felt to be his own, suddenly appeared to be slipping into other hands. Another sickle was sharpening for the harvest; other eyes had recognized the promise of the golden grain; other hands were ready to garner the rich sheaves.

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Thorne's heart grew hot; angry blood surged from it and inflamed his system; every nerve tingled; his eyes glowed, and his fingers tightened on the barrel of the gun beside him. His consciousness of antagonism grew so intense that it seemed to annihilate space and materialize his distant rival into an actual presence; his feeling was that which animates brutes when they lock horns, or fly at each other's throats; and, could the emotional force which swayed his soul have been converted into physical force and projected through space, Jim would never have seen the light of another day.

Poor Thorne! If suffering may be pleaded in extenuation of moods whose cause is mingled love and pain, he certainly was not without excuse. Imagination, wounded by jealousy, leaped forward into the future and ranged amid possibilities that made him quiver—noble, beautiful possibilities, filled with joy and light and sweetness—and filled for his rival—not for him. As in a mirror he beheld his love in his rival's arms, resting on his bosom, as an hour ago she had rested on his own; only in this man's embrace, he pictured her glowing, sentient, responsive to look and caress; not cold, lifeless and inanimate. Should this thing be? No! a thousand times no! Must he always have a stone for bread? Must his garner always stand empty while other men's overflowed with corn?

Deeply the man cursed his past folly; bitterly he anathematized the weakness which had allowed shadowy scruples and a too fastidious taste to rule his judgment in the matter of a divorce. He would wait no longer; he would break at once and forever the frail fetter that still bound him to a union from which all reality, all sanctity had fled. He would be free in fact, as he was in heart and thought, to pit his strength against that of his rival. This prize should not slip from his grasp uncontested. No man should approach the shrine unchallenged.

The wind rose, sighing fitfully; the clouds gathered and formed an army which stormed the zenith and threatened to overwhelm the pure light of the planet. The lesser stars vanished, two or three falling in their haste and losing themselves forever in infinity. The night thickened; snow began to fall.

CHAPTER X.

The Christmas festivities were to close on New Year's Eve with a grand ball at Shirley. It was to be a sumptuous affair with unlimited Chinese lanterns, handsome decorations, a magnificent supper, and a band from Washington. The Smiths were going to requite the neighborhood's hospitality with the beating of drums, the clashing of cymbals, and the flowing of champagne. This cordial friendly people had welcomed them kindly, and must have their courtesy returned in fitting style. Mrs. Smith suggested a simpler entertainment, fearing contrast, and any appearance of ostentation, but the general gauged his neighbors better. They were at once

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too well bred, and too self-satisfied for any idea of comparison to occur to them. They would eat his fruit-cake, or make him welcome to their corn-bread with the same hearty unconcern. His wealth, and their own poverty troubled them equally little; they were abstract facts with which hospitality had nothing to do. But in their way they were proud; having given their best without grudge or stint, they would expect his best in return, and the general was determined that they should have it. The risk of offense lay in simplicity, not grandeur.

Mrs. Royall Garnett came over to Lanarth a day or so before the grand event, bearing her family in her train, to assist in the weighty matter of a suitable toilet for Pocahontas. She was a tall, handsome woman, with a noble bearing, and great decision of character; and on most matters—notably those pertaining to the sacred mysteries of the wardrobe, her word with her family was law. Grace's taste was admitted to be perfect.

After an exhaustive discussion of the subject, at which both Berke and Royall ignorantly and gratuitously assisted, and were flouted for their pains, it was irrevocably decided that Pocahontas should appear in pure white unrelieved by a single dash of color.

"She looks cheap and common in any thing but dead black, or pure white, at a party," pronounced Grace with sisterly frankness, and of course that settled the matter, although Mrs. Mason did venture on the modest protest that it would look "bride-like and unusual."

"I want her to look unusual," declared Grace; "to make her so, is at present the object of my being. I shall hesitate at nothing short of cutting off her nose to secure that desirable result. To be admired, a woman must stand out distinctly from the throng; and I've set my heart on Princess's being the belle of the ball. Have you plenty of flowers, dear? As flowers are to be your sole garniture, you must have a profusion. I can't tolerate skimpy, rubbishing bouquets."

"None at all, Grace," confessed Pocahontas, ruefully, "except a single calla. I cut my last white rosebuds and camellias to send to Nina Byrd Marion the very day before I heard about the Shirley ball. Isn't it provoking?"

"Then somebody must get you some," Grace responded promptly, pausing in her preparations, and regarding her sister with the air of an autocrat; "if the men are not lost to all sense of honor and decency, you'll have plenty. Of course you *must* have plenty. If only they will have sufficient intellect to select white ones! But they won't. I'd better instruct Roy and Berkeley at once."

On the morning of the ball, Berkeley entered his mother's room, where the three ladies sat in solemn conclave regarding with discontent a waiter full of colored flowers which a

thoughtful neighbor had just sent over to Pocahontas. He held in his hand a good-sized box which he deposited in his sister's lap with the remark:

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"Look, Princess! Here's a New Year's gift just come for you. I don't know the writing. I wonder what it is!"

"A subtle aroma suggests—fruit," hazarded Grace, sniffing curiously.

"Perhaps flowers," suggests Mrs. Mason, who that morning was a woman with one idea.

Pocahontas wrestled with the cords, unfolded the wrappers, and lifted the cover. Then she uttered a long drawn "oh" of satisfaction.

"What is it?" demanded the others with lively impatience.

Pocahontas lifted a card and turned it in her hand, and a smile broke over her face as she answered: "Flowers; from Jim Byrd."

Then she removed the damp moss and cotton, and lifted spray after spray of beautiful snowy jasmin—Cape Jasmin, pure and powerful, and starry wreaths of the more delicate Catalonian. Only white flowers—all jasmin, Jim's favorite flower; and with them were tropical ferns and grasses. As she held the exquisite blossoms in her hands and inhaled their rich perfume, the girl was conscious that when her old friend penned the order for the fragrant gift, his heart had been full of home, and of the evening beside the river when she had worn his flowers in hair and dress, and had bidden him farewell.

"How beautiful they are!" exclaimed Grace, excitedly, "and just in time for to-night. To think of the way I've made that wretched husband of mine charge through the country since day-break, this morning, in pursuit of white flowers, and here they come like a fairy story. It was very nice of Jim. I'd no idea there was so poetical an impulse in the old fellow; as the selection of these flowers appears to indicate."

"You don't appreciate Jim, Grace. You do him injustice. If thought and care and love for others, combined with tenderness, and delight in giving pleasure, constitutes poetical impulses, then Jim Byrd is the noblest poet we are likely ever to meet." Pocahontas spoke warmly, the color flushing to her cheeks, the light coming to her eyes. Poor Jim!—so far away. Was it disloyal to her old friend to go that night to dance among strangers in the rooms that had been his,—that were full of associations connected with him? At all events, no flowers would she wear save his; no other ornaments of any kind. It would seem, then, as though he participated in her pleasure; rejoiced in her joy. Jim loved always to see her happy. For reasons of their own, the two elder ladies had decided on remaining at home, so that Pocahontas repaired to the ball in male custody alone. Blanche, who was on the watch for the Lanarth party, came forward the instant of their arrival, accompanied by her father, to welcome them, and to bear Pocahontas away to the upper regions to warm herself and remove her wrappings. The rooms were a little chill, she explained, with a shiver, in spite of the splendid fires the general had kept roaring in them all day. Pocahontas must remain where she was and warm herself

thoroughly, and she would send one of the boys for her presently. And after a little girlish gossip and mutual admiration of each others' appearance, the small maiden tripped away to her duties below.

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Soon there was a knock at the door, and Pocahontas, catching up fan, bouquet and handkerchief, opened it and stepped into the hall. Nesbit Thorne, slender and distinguished looking, was awaiting her, Blanche having encountered and dispatched him immediately on her return to the parlors. As the girl stood an instant framed by the open door, thrown into relief by the soft glowing background of the warmly lighted room, Thorne's heart swelled with mingled gladness and impatience. Joy in the pure perfection of her beauty; impatience at the restraint circumstances forced him still to put upon his love.

At the foot of the stairs they were pounced upon by Percival, who had selected that coigne of vantage as least likely to attract his mother's attention, there to lay in wait for the cards of the unwary. He had been strictly forbidden to importune grown young ladies for dances unless they happened to be wall-flowers, and the injunction lay heavy on his soul. "I *will* ask girls other men ask," he muttered, darkly, "I hate putting up with refuse and leavings. I'm going to ask the ones I want to ask," and he intrenched himself beside the stairway with intent to black-mail such girls as he should fancy.

Pocahontas, who had a natural affinity for boys, and a great fondness for Percival, yielded to his demand readily enough, surrendering her card to him in gay defiance of Thorne's outspoken reprobation, and laughing mischievously as the boy scrawled his name triumphantly opposite a waltz.

"B.M.! Who's B.M., Miss Princess?" he questioned, as he dextrously avoided Thorne's extended hand, and placed the card in Pocahontas's.

"You've got him down just above me, and you wrote it yourself. Who is he? Benevolent Missionary? Brother Mason?"

"Exactly!" she answered, smiling, and watching Thorne scribble his name in several places on her card. "It is Berkeley. The Byrd girls and I always saved a waltz for him to prevent his feeling left out. He don't like to ask girls generally; his one arm makes it look awkward, and he knows they wouldn't like to refuse, because they all feel sorry for him. We put a hand on each shoulder, and don't care how it looks. Berke is adroit, and manages quite nicely. Often, too, it's an advantage to have a dance you can dispose of later on, so I continue to put the initials, although Berke seldom dances now. He liked waltzing with the Byrd girls best."

"You were very intimate with the Byrds, I think you said," Thorne remarked idly, bowing to an acquaintance as he spoke.

"Very intimate. See what came to me this morning; all these exquisite flowers, just when I needed them for to-night. Roy searched the neighborhood through for white flowers without success, and then these came. Aren't they beautiful?" And she lifted her bouquet toward his face.

“Extremely beautiful!” he assented, bending his head to inhale their fragrance. “It was very kind and thoughtful of your friends to send them. I suppose, from the connection, that they are a Byrd offering.”

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Pocahontas laughed softly. “Yes,” she said, “but they did not come from Belle, or Nina, and Susie is in California. Jim ordered them for me. I am so pleased.”

Thorne instantly raised his head and stiffened his back as though the delicate perfume were some noxious poison, and moved on with her toward the parlors in silence.

“I wish you knew Jim, Mr. Thorne,” pursued the happy voice at his side; “he’s such a good fellow, so noble, generous, and unselfish; we’re all so fond of Jim. I wish he were here to-night to tread a measure with me in the old rooms. You would be sure to fraternize with Jim. You could not help liking him.”

Thorne drew in his lips ominously. He could help liking Jim Byrd well enough, and felt not the faintest desire for either his presence or his friendship. The intervention of a woman with whom two men are in love has never yet established amity between them; the very suggestion of such a thing on her lips is sufficient to cause an irruption of hatred, malice and all unkindness.

Moreover, Thorne was in a fury with himself. He had thought of sending for flowers for Pocahontas at the same time he dispatched the order to the Richmond florist for his aunt. He had feverishly longed to do it, and had pondered the matter fully half an hour before deciding that he had better not. He had not scrupled to pay Pocahontas attentions *before* he realized that he was in love with her, but that fact, once established in his mind, placed her in a different position in regard to him.

She was no longer the woman he wished to draw into a flirtation *pour passer le temps*; she was the woman he wished to marry—was determined to marry, if possible. The instinct, common to every manly man, to hold in peculiar respect the woman whom he wishes to make his wife, led Thorne to feel that, until he should be free from the fetter that bound him, he should abstain from paying Pocahontas marked attention; to feel that she would have cause of complaint against him if he did not abstain.

So he argued the case in cold blood; but now his blood was boiling and he dubbed himself fool in language concise and forcible. See what had come of his self-denial? Another man had done what he had left undone; another hand had laid in hers the fragrant offering it should have been his to bestow. Fool that he had been, to stand aside and let another man seize the opportunity!

Jasmin, too! Pah! The heavy perfume made him ill. He was conscious of a fierce longing to snatch the blossoms from her hand and crush them down into the heart of the fire and hold them there—the pale, sickly things. *He* would have given her roses, passionate, glorious roses, deep-hearted and crimson with the wine of love.

Pocahontas had small time for wondering over her cavalier’s sudden moroseness, for no sooner had she entered the parlors than old friends crowded forward to speak to her

and claim a dance; the girl was popular among the young people of the vicinity. She was a wonderful success that night. Not even Norma, for all her rich tropical beauty, was more admired.

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"Our little squaw is smashing things, Berke," remarked Roy Garnett, later in the evening, as he joined his brother-in-law in the recess by the fireplace. "The men all swear she's the handsomest woman in the room—and on my soul I believe they're right."

"She does look well," responded Mason with all a brother's calm moderation. "Her dress is in good taste, and she moves gracefully. But she isn't the handsomest woman in the room by long odds. Look at Norma Smith."

"I have looked at her," retorted Roy shortly, "and so I suppose have the other men. There's no more comparison between her and Princess than there is between a gorgeous, striped tulip, and a white tea rose." (For some inscrutable reason Roy had never been able to endure Norma, and even grudging acknowledgment of her undeniable beauty). "Look at that fellow Thorne, now!" he added, with the pleased alacrity of one producing an unexpected trump, "I should say that *he* shared my opinion. He hasn't danced voluntarily with another woman in the room, nor left her side a moment that he could help. It looks as though he were pretty hard hit, doesn't it?"

Garnett was right; for after the episode with Jim Byrd's flowers, Thorne had thrown self-control to the winds. He danced with Pocahontas as frequently as she would allow him, hovered constantly in her vicinity, and only lost sight of her when dragged off by his aunt for duty dances. Twice during the evening—and only twice—did he leave her voluntarily, and then it was to dance with Norma, whose suspicions he did not wish to arouse. The instinct of rivalry had overthrown all restraint and for this evening he was madly determined to let things take their course. They were here, he and his family, in Jim Byrd's place; living in the house that had been his, entertaining the friends that had been his, in the very rooms that so short a time ago had echoed to his footsteps and resounded with his laugh. He had been thrust aside, and must continue to stand aside; the past had been his, let him keep out of the present; let him beware how he marred the future. And for the bond that held himself, Thorne had forgotten all about it. In his passion and excitement it was a thing without existence.

Later in the evening, there came a gleam of brightness for little Blanche; a blissful hour which indemnified her for the boredom so unflinchingly endured. As Norma only did what pleased her, most of the drudgery of entertaining fell upon Blanche, whose grievous portion it was to attend to the comfort of dowagers; to find partners for luckless damsels unable to find them for themselves, and to encourage and bring out bashful youths. As the latter considered that the true expression of their gratitude lay in devoting themselves exclusively and eternally to their pretty little preceptress, Blanche had lately come to hold this part of her duty a wearisome affliction.

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She was seated on a tiny sofa surrounded by a band of uneasy and enamored youths ranging in age from sixteen to twenty, when Mason caught sight of her pretty, fatigued, but resolutely courteous face, and came instantly to her rescue. He was very fond of Blanche, and teased and petted her with almost cousinly freedom. He felt himself a middle-aged man beside her, and admired her sweet face, and gentle unselfishness as unreservedly as he would have done those of a child. Moving her draperies aside with a kindly, if unceremonious hand, he ensconced himself beside her right willingly and devoted his best energies to her amusement, and that of her small court; lifted the burden of their entertainment from her shoulders with ready tact, and waked the boys up vigorously, causing them to enjoy themselves, and forget that they were *young*; and lonesome, and foolish. Kind, thoughtful Berkeley! No wonder the silly little heart beside him fluttered joyously, and the shy blue eyes were raised to his grave handsome face with full measure of content.

And so the hours sped, golden-footed, silver-footed; and the pipers piped and the men and maidens danced and the elders gossiped, drank champagne, and reveled in the fleshpots, yawning surreptitiously behind fans and handkerchiefs as the evening waned.

Pocahontas, roused from a dream of enjoyment by Roy's mandate, sped lightly up stairs to the dressing-room, and arrayed herself hastily in her mufflings. At the stairway Thorne joined her, and as her foot touched the lowest step he took her unresisting hand and raised it to his lips murmuring softly; "A happy New Year to you—my darling! my queen!"

Then good-night to host and hostess, a swift, impulsive kiss to Blanche, and Berkeley put her into the carriage; Roy tightened the reins and they drove rapidly away in the chill gray of the January dawn. The ball was over; the New Year begun.

Thorne, standing by the steps watching the receding carriage, noticed the bouquet of half-faded jasmin blossoms, which had slipped unheeded from the girl's hand, and lay neglected and forgotten on the frozen ground. The impulse came to him to raise them tenderly because her hands had touched them, and then the thought of who had given them arose and struck down the impulse. He set his heel upon them.

For him also, the New Year had begun.

CHAPTER XI.

The day after a ball is always a languid, wearisome period, to be dozed or yawned through, on bed or sofa, in a state of total collapse. Life for the time is disorganized, disenchanting; there is a feeling of flatness everywhere, the rooms lately brilliant and joyous with light and color; fade out in the chilling glare of day, and appear like "banquet halls deserted," which each individual "treads alone," surrounded by an atmosphere of

fatigue, *ennui* and crossness. In the country the flatness falls with full perfection, for there is seldom the anticipation of more excitement to buoy one up and keep the effervescence of the cup of pleasure up to the proper sparkle.

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At a late—a very late breakfast, the morning after the Shirley ball, the Smiths were assembled with the exception of Blanche, who had entreated to be left undisturbed, since she must sleep or die, and Percival, who had breakfasted sketchily on scraps and confectionery, hours before, and was away in the woods with his gun.

The mail, always deposited in a little heap beside the general's plate, had been distributed. There was very little—two newspapers, a couple of letters for Nesbit Thorne, and one for Norma from a New York friend, claiming a promised visit, and overflowing with gossip and news of Gotham, full of personalities also, and a faint lady-like suspicion of wickedness—a racy, entertaining letter. The writer, a Mrs. Vincent, was Norma's most intimate friend, and she often sacrificed an hour of her valuable time to the amusement of the girl, whom she felt convinced was bored to death down in that country desert. The letter in question was unusually diffuse, for Mrs. Vincent was keeping her room with a heavy cold, and had herself to amuse as well as Norma. Norma read scraps of it aloud for the edification of her mother, and the young men; the general, with his nose in his paper, let the tide of gossip pass.

Thorne, after a comprehensive glance at his own correspondence, slipped his letters quietly into his pocket, and gave his best attention to his cousin's. He had a rooted objection to reading even indifferent letters under scrutiny, and these he felt convinced were not indifferent; for one was addressed in the handsome large hand of his wife, and the writing on the other was unknown to him—it had a legal aspect. They were letters whose perusal might prove unpleasant; so Thorne postponed it.

There is an old adage relative to thoughts of the power of darkness being invariably followed by the appearance of his emissaries, and although Mrs. Thorne was far from being the devil, or her letter one of his imps, the arrival of the one, so promptly upon the heels of thoughts of the other, was singular; her husband felt it so.

"Mamma," observed Norma, glancing up from her letter, "Kate says that Cecil Cumberland is engaged, or going to be engaged, I can't exactly make out which. Kate words it a little ambiguously; at all events there appears to be considerable talk about it. Kate writes: 'Cecil looks radiantly worried, and sulkily important. His family are ranged in a solid phalanx of indignant opposition, which, of course, clinches the affair firmly. Eva Cumberland was here this morning in a white heat of passion over it; and I believe apoplexy or hydrophobia is imminent for the old lady. The fact of Mrs.——'" Norma's voice trailed off into an unintelligible murmur, and she read on silently.

"Mrs.—who, my dear?" questioned her mother, with lively interest. "Is Cecil going to marry an objectionable widow?"

"Wait a moment, mamma. Kate writes so indistinctly, I'll be able to tell you presently," there was a shade of reserve perceptible in Norma's voice.

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"But why do the family oppose it?" persisted Mrs. Smith. A warning look from her daughter admonished her to let the matter rest; that there were facts connected with Mr. Cumberland's marriage, the investigation and discussion of which had better be postponed. Mrs. Smith's tongue burned with inquiries, but she bravely held them back, and sought to produce a diversion by idle conjectures about Percival.

Norma parried the curiosity of the others adroitly, and declining any more breakfast, betook herself and her letter to the back parlor, where she drew a deep arm-chair to the fire, and settled herself comfortably to re-peruse that portion of her friend's epistle, which related to Cecil Cumberland's affairs.

Thorne presently followed her, and established himself opposite. He was great friends with Norma; once, in the days before his marriage, there had appeared a likelihood of their becoming more than friends. All that had been forgotten by the man; the woman's memory was more tenacious. They were wonderfully good friends still, these two; they never worried or jarred on one another.

Thorne, having no special desire to read his own letters, lighted a cigar, stirred the fire to a glorious blaze, and waxed conversational. The theme he selected for discussion was the topic introduced and interdicted at the breakfast table a few moments previously—the debatable engagement of their New York acquaintance. On this subject he chose to exhibit an unusual—and as Norma felt, unnecessary, degree of curiosity. He cross-questioned the girl vigorously, and failing to elicit satisfactory replies, laughingly accused her of an attempt to earn a cheap notoriety by the elaboration of a petty mystery.

"I wish you'd stop trying to put me on the witness stand, Nesbit!" she exclaimed in vexation; "why don't you read your own letters? One is from Ethel, I know. See what she says."

Thorne took his wife's missive from his pocket, opened, and glanced through it hurriedly; then turned back to the first page, and re-read it more carefully, the expression of his face hardening into cynicism, slightly dashed with disgust. The letter was penned in a large running hand and covered eight pages of dainty cream-laid paper. It was rambling in phraseology, and lachrymose in tone, but it indicated a want, and made that want clear.

It was—divorce.

Mrs. Thorne gave no special reason for desiring release from her marriage vows; she dwelt at length on her "lonely and unprotected" condition, and was very sorry for herself, and considered her case a hard one; suggesting blame to her husband in that he had not taken the necessary steps for her release long before. She intimated that he had been selfish and lacking in proper consideration for her in leaving it to her to take the

initial steps in the matter. He should have arranged about the divorce at the time of the separation, she said, and so have spared her annoyance. As he had not done so, she hoped he would show some consideration for her now, and help her to arrange the disagreeable business as speedily and privately as possible. He really owed her indulgence “after all that had passed”; the last words were heavily underscored.

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Thorne, conscious that the present position of matters between them, as well as the past unhappiness, was quite as much her fault as his, and the act of separation more so—he having been the passive and consenting party, did not consider it specially incumbent on him to make things easy for his wife. In his irritation and disgust at her heartless selfishness, he half determined to make them very much the reverse. He was not surprised at his wife's communication; he knew perfectly well that she would seek a divorce sooner or later, as the liberality of the world in such matters made it natural that she should do. He also knew that it was the larger command of the income which he had allowed her for his child's sake, combined with the lack of strong personal motive, which had prevented her from getting a divorce before. Her letter irritated him, not because she desired to break the shadowy bonds which still held her, but because he had behaved well to her, and she had taken it as her right with careless ingratitude. What he had done, he had done for his son's sake, but he was none the less provoked that Ethel had failed of appreciation and acknowledgment.

"Read *that!*" he said, and tossed the letter into Norma's lap. While she was doing so, he broke the seal of the other letter which proved to be a communication from a firm of solicitors in a small town in Illinois, in whose hands Mrs. Thorne had placed her case. It was delicately and ambiguously worded, as became the nature of the business, and contained simply a courteous notification of their client's intentions.

Norma had been prepared for Mrs. Thorne's letter by that of her friend Mrs. Vincent; and perhaps also by a secret hope on which she had fed for years—a hope that this *would* happen. She read the letter therefore without emotion, and returned it without comment.

"Well?" he queried impatiently.

"Well!" she echoed.

"What do you think of it?"

"I think that Mrs. Thorne wishes to marry again."

"No!—do you?" The tone was thoughtful; the interrogation delivered slowly. The idea was a new one, and it put a different complexion upon the matter, because of the child; there were still several years during which the personal custody of the boy was the mother's of right. It behooved him to look into this matter more closely.

"Yes, I'm sure of it," responded Norma; "it's town talk. See what Kate Vincent says about it."

She handed him her letter folded down at this paragraph: "People have been mildly excited, and the gossips' tongues set wagging by a rumor which floated down from the

Adirondacks last summer, and has been gaining body and substance ever since. You remember how Cecil Cumberland philandered after a certain lady of our acquaintance last winter, and how unremitting were his attentions? Friendship, my dear! Harmless friendship on a pure platonic platform; you

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understand—*honi soit qui mal y pense*. Well this autumn the plot thickened; the platonism became less apparent; the friendship more pronounced. Nothing painfully noticeable—oh no; the lady is too clever—still, the gossips began to take a contract, and work on it in slack seasons, and latterly with diligence. It is openly predicted that madam will seek a divorce, and then!—we shall see what we shall see. Cecil looks radiantly worried and sulkily important. His family are ranged in a solid phalanx of indignant opposition, which of course clinches the matter firmly. Eva Cumberland was here this morning in a white heat of passion over it, and I believe apoplexy or hydrophobia is imminent for the old lady. The fact of Mrs. Thorne's being still a married woman gives the affair a queer look to squeamish mortals, and the Cumberland women are the quintessence of conservative old-fogyism; they might be fresh from the South Carolina woods for all the advancement they can boast. It's wicked, and I'm ashamed of myself, but whenever I think of Ethel Thorne trying conclusions with those strait-laced Cumberlands, I'm filled with unholy mirth." Then followed belated apologies for this careless handling of a family matter, and copious explanations. Mrs. Vincent was a wordy woman, fond of writing and apt to be diffuse when not pressed for time.

Thorne returned the letter to his cousin, and announced his intention of returning to New York immediately.

"By using dispatch I can catch the boat at Wintergreen this afternoon," he said. "I wish you'd tell your mother, Norma, only your mother, please; it will be time enough to acquaint the others when the whole affair is out. And, Norma, I can trust you, I know; keep the matter quiet here as long as possible. These people are strangers; they know nothing. I don't want to be in every body's mouth—a nine days' wonder, *here* as well as in New York. It will be bad enough there. Promise me to keep it quiet, Norma."

Thorne had reasons for the request. He had ascertained, beyond all doubt, that no hint of his story had as yet reached Pocahontas. He was surprised at first, for he thought all women gossiped, and the affair had never been a secret. He did not conceive for a moment, that the fact of his divorce would be a permanent stumbling block in the way of his happiness, but he realized something of the conservatism of her surroundings, and the old world influences and prejudices amid which she had been reared. She would be shocked and startled at first; she would have to grow accustomed to the idea, then reconciled to it. He recognized at a glance the immense advantage it would be to him to tell his story himself, and, in his own way, to enlist her sympathy and to arouse her indignation and her partisanship.

The explanation of the girl's ignorance is simple and natural. The intercourse between the two families was cordial and frequent, but there were reservations—tracts of territory which were never trenched on. There was about the Masons a certain fine reserve which discouraged promiscuous and effusive confidences. Exhaustive investigation of

their neighbors' affairs had never been their practice; it was a proud family; a conservative family.

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The Smiths had seen no reason to give publicity to their *own* particular family scandal. Other people's skeletons were interesting, but the rattling of the bones of their own annoyed them. Then, too, it was such an old story, its interest as gossip had passed, its piquancy had evaporated. These people knew none of the parties; it could be to them of no possible interest even as narrative. There had been no definite determination on the part of the Smiths to say nothing of the affair; but nothing had been said. Thorne did not correspond with his wife, nor did any member of his family, so there were no tell-tale letters to excite comment or curiosity at the village post-office. How was Pocahontas to know?

With Thorne's good pleasure, her ignorance would remain until he himself should lift it.

Norma gave the required promise willingly. She, too, objected to this affair obtaining publicity. While Thorne sought her father to explain a sudden call to New York "on business," she communicated the contents of Mrs. Vincent's letter to her mother, and informed her of Thorne's determination. Then leaving the good lady to get the better of her consternation by herself, and to make impossible suggestions, to the empty air, she repaired to her cousin's room, and assisted him in his hurried preparations.

CHAPTER XII.

Norma was exultant. The thing she had longed, thirsted and well-nigh prayed for, was coming to pass. Thorne would be a free man once more, free to come back to her, free to bring again the old sweetness to her life, free to renew the spring of years ago. Sitting by the library fire in the gloaming after her cousin's departure, Norma dreamed dreams and was happy—her eyes softened, and her lips smiled. Then her face darkened slowly, and the hands in her lap clinched themselves. In her fierce joy in the possibility of her reward coming to her at last, was mingled a dread that the cup might be dashed from her lips a second time.

During the first couple of months after the removal to Virginia, Norma had relaxed her constant, imperceptible watch over Thorne. He had accompanied them to the new home unsolicited; and having come, he had remained. Small wonder that Norma had been deceived; for vanity aside, she could not help but know that no woman in that region—not even Pocahontas Mason—was her peer in beauty, wit, or accomplishments. What had she to fear, with habit and contrast both in her favor? Norma neglected to provide against one subtle and most powerful element—novelty.

For the past few weeks, first one thing, then another; trifles light as air, but forging a chain heavy enough to link suspicion with certainty, had filled the girl with the old fever of unrest. Was she never to be at rest? Would the glory of the past never shine upon the present?

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Like most women who allow their minds to dwell constantly on one theme, Norma exaggerated the past. When she first left school there had been a little semi-sentiment and a good deal of rather warm cousinly attentions on Thorne's part, but without serious intention. As has been stated, Thorne liked women; he sought their society and was apt to endeavor to awaken their interest, to gain their affection. He thought that the restless craving of his nature was for love to be given him. It was not. It was the wild passion in his breast seeking to give *itself*. What he needed was not more love drawn into the reservoir of his heart, but an outlet for that already accumulated. This he had never had since he had reached manhood, save only in his affection for his child, and that was as yet too small a channel to afford vent for the power of love behind. And so it came to pass that in his need for an outlet, he had made a great deal of love to a great many women, and had looked more than he made.

As Norma budded into beautiful womanhood, he had been attracted by her, and had yielded to the attraction, intending no harm but accomplishing a good deal. He had liked and admired his cousin then, and in exactly the same manner and degree, he liked and admired her now.

To the young lady, the affair wore a totally different aspect; the flirtation, which had meant nothing to him and had been long ago effaced from his memory, meant every thing of value on earth to *her*, and was as fresh in her mind as though the years that had passed had been days or hours. Thorne's marriage had been a great blow to her—great and unexpected. She had observed his attentions to Ethel Ross, and raged at them in secret; but she had seen him equally devoted to a score of other women, and the devotion had been evanescent; with her rage and jealousy, had mingled no definite alarm. The engagement—an affair of six weeks, had been contracted while she was away from home, and the first intimation she had of it came through a letter from Ethel Ross inviting her to officiate as bridesmaid. Norma read and the heart within her died, but she made no sound, for she was a proud woman—as proud as she was passionate. She even acceded to the bride's request and, as Thorne's next of kin, led the bevy of girls selected, from the fairest of society to do honor to the occasion; her refusal would have excited comment. But as she stood behind the woman, who she felt had usurped her place, a fierce longing was in her heart to strike her rival dead at her feet.

After the marriage she continued her intimacy with Mrs. Thorne—and with Mr. Thorne. When clouds began to gather along the matrimonial horizon, and "rifts within the lute" to make discord of life's music, she beheld the one, and hearkened to the other with savage thrills of satisfaction. She did nothing to widen the breach—Norma was too proud to be a mischief-maker, but she did nothing to lessen it. She watched with sullen pleasure the cleft increase to a crack, the crack to a chasm. When the separation became an accomplished fact, it found Norma, of course, ranged strongly on the husband's side.

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During the year which had elapsed since Thorne's return from abroad, Norma had contrived to establish considerable influence over her cousin. She studied him quietly, and adapted herself to his moods, never boring him with an over-display of interest, never chilling him with an absence of it. Her plan was to make herself necessary to him, and in part she succeeded. Thorne, lonely and cut adrift, came more and more frequently to his aunt's house and exhibited more and more decidedly his preference for his cousin's society. The thin end of the wedge was in, and but for the move to Virginia, and its ill-starred consequences, the inevitable result must have followed.

Would it follow now? A vision of Pocahontas, with her fair face, and her sweet gray eyes framed in a soft cloud of white, standing on the lower step of the stairway, with Thorne beside her, his head bent low over the hand he clasped, rose before Norma's eyes and caused them to burn with jealous anger. Here was the old thing repeating itself; here was flirtation again, the exact extent of which she could not determine. It must be stopped at once, trampled out ere the flame should do irremediable damage.

But how? With the question came the answer. Norma was sure that, as yet, no knowledge of Thorne's marriage had ever reached Pocahontas. She would enlighten her; and in such a way that, if there had been aught of love-making on the gentleman's part (and Norma, knowing her cousin, thought it probable there had been), every look and word and tone should seem a separate insult.

She also decided that it would be better to accept Mrs. Vincent's invitation, and return to New York for awhile. She knew very well why the invitation had been given, and saw through the shallow maneuvers to win her acceptance of it. Hugh Castleton, Mrs. Vincent's favorite brother, was in New York again, and she had not abandoned her old scheme of a match between him and her friend. Norma felt quite competent to foil her friend's plans in the present as she had foiled them in the past, so had no hesitation, on that score, in accepting the invitation. It would be better to be in New York—on the spot, while this matter should be pending. Thorne might need advice, certainly would need sympathy and petting; he must not learn to do without her. Even if he had only been amusing himself here, after his reprehensible wont, her presence in New York could do no harm and might be productive of good.

CHAPTER XIII.

One afternoon, several days after Thorne's departure, Norma donned her warmest wraps and set out for a walk over to Lanarth. It was a dull afternoon following on a morning of uncertain brightness; dark clouds, heavy with snow, hung sullenly along the horizon; and above, the sky was of a somber, leaden hue. The air felt chill and clinging, like that of a vault; and heaven above, and earth beneath betrayed a severity of mood infinitely depressing. Norma shivered in spite of her heavy furs, and hurried on, burying her hands in her muff.

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Pocahontas, duly notified of Norma's approach by the vigilant Sawney, met her guest at the door, and drew her in with words of welcome, and praises of her bravery in venturing abroad in such gloomy weather. The girls did not kiss each other—as is too much the custom with their sex. Pocahontas did not like effusive embraces; a kiss with *her* meant a good deal.

In the sitting-room Mrs. Mason and Berkeley added their welcome, and established Norma in the coziest corner of the hearth, where the fire would comfort without scorching her. Pocahontas stooped to remove her furs and wraps, but Norma staid her hand; it would not be worth while, she said; she had only come to call.

“Do stay to tea!” entreated Pocahontas. “Berke will take you home afterward. We haven't looked on a white face except our own for two whole days. We are pining for change and distraction, and beginning to hate each other from very *ennui*. Take pity on us and stay.”

“Yes, my dear, you must consent,” added Mrs. Mason. “You haven't taken tea with us for a long time. Berkeley, help Norma with her wrappings. And, Princess, suppose you run and tell Rachel to make waffles for tea. Norma is so fond of them.”

Norma yielded to their persuasions, feeling a little curiously, but hardening her heart. What she had come to say, she intended to say; but it would be best to wait an opportunity. She let Berkeley take her wraps, and established herself comfortably, bent on making the time pass pleasantly, and herself thoroughly agreeable.

The meal was a merry one, for Norma exerted herself unusually, and was ably seconded by Pocahontas, who, for some reason, appeared in brilliant spirits. After tea they discovered that it was snowing heavily. The threatened storm had come—evenly, slowly, in a thick, impenetrable cloud, the white flakes fell, without haste, excitement or the flurry of wind. Already the ground was covered and the trees were bending with the weight of the white garment the sky was throwing over them. It was unfit weather for a lady to encounter, or indeed for anything feminine to be abroad in, save a witch on a broomstick. Norma was fain to accept Mrs. Mason's invitation and remain for the night at Lanarth.

When the two girls, in dressing gowns and slippers, sat over the fire in Pocahontas's room, brushing out their long hair, Norma found the opportunity for which she had lain in wait the entire evening. It was the hour for confidences, the house was quiet, the inmates all dispersed to their several couches. Norma, brush in hand and hair flowing in a heavy, black veil around her, had quitted her own room across the passage, and established herself in a low rocking-chair beside Pocahontas's bright fire. She was far too clever a diplomatist to introduce her subject hastily; she approached it gradually from long range—stalked it delicately with skillful avoidance of surprise or

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bungling. The game must be brought down; on that she was determined; but there should be no bludgeon blows, no awkward carnage. The death-stab should be given clean, with scientific skill and swiftness, and the blow once given, she would retire to her own room and let her victim find what solace she could in solitude. Norma was not wantonly cruel; she could impale a foe, but she had no desire to witness his contortions. After a death-scene she shrank from the grewsomeness of burial; she preferred a decent drop-curtain and the grateful darkness.

After some idle conversation, she deftly turned the talk upon New York, and the life there, and rallied all her powers to be picturesque and entertaining. She held her listener entranced with rapid, clever sketches of society and the men and women who composed it, drawing vivid pictures of its usages, beliefs, and modes of thought and expression. Gradually she glided into personalities, giving some of her individual experiences, and sketching in an acquaintance or two, with brilliant, caustic touches. Soon Thorne's name appeared, and she noticed that the listener's interest deepened. She spoke of him in warm terms of admiration—dwelt on his intellect, his talents and the bright promise of his manhood; and then, observing that the brush had ceased its regular passes over the bright brown hair, and that the gray eyes were on the fire, without pause or warning she spoke of his hurried courtship and sudden marriage. She winced involuntarily as she saw the cold, gray pallor creep slowly over the girl's face, and noted the sudden tremor that passed through her limbs; but she steeled herself against compassion, and proceeded with her brushing and her narrative like one devoid of sight and understanding.

"I can not expect you, who know Nesbit so slightly, to be much interested in all this," she said, watching Pocahontas through her lashes; "I fear I only bore you with my story, but my mind has been so exercised over the poor fellow's troubles again lately, that I must unburden it to some one. You have no personal interest in the matter, therefore you will forgive my trespassing on your courtesy—especially when I tell you that I've no one at home to talk to. Nesbit wishes particularly that his story shouldn't get abroad here, and if I should revive it in Blanche's mind, she might mention it to others. Mamma would not; but unfortunately mamma and I rarely look at a thing from the same standpoint. It's been a relief to speak to you—far greater than speaking to Blanche. Blanche is so excitable."

Yes; Blanche was excitable, Pocahontas assented absently; she was bracing her will, and steeling her nerves to endure without flinching. Not for worlds would she—even by the quivering of an eyelash—let Norma see the torture she was inflicting. She felt that Norma had an object in this disclosure, and was dimly sure that the object was hostile. She would think it all out later; at present Norma must not see her anguish. A woman would sooner go to the stake and burn slowly, than allow another woman, who is trying to hurt her, to know that she suffers.

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Norma continued, speaking gently, without haste or emotion, telling of the feverish brightness of those early days of marriage, and of the clouds that soon obscured the sunshine—telling of the *ennui* and unhappiness, gradually sprouting and ripening in the ill-assorted union—shielding the man, as women will, and casting the blame on the woman. Finally she told of the separation, lasting now two years, and of the letter from his wife which had caused Thorne's precipitate departure the day after the Shirley ball.

But of the divorce now pending she said never a word.

"Have they any children?" questioned Pocahontas steadily.

And was told that there was one—a little son, to whom the father was attached, and the mother indifferent. It was a strange case.

Again Pocahontas assented. Her voice was cold and even; its tones low and slightly wearied. To herself it appeared as though she spoke from a great distance, and was compelled to use exertion to make herself heard. She was conscious of two distinct personalities—one prostrate in the dust, humiliated, rent and bleeding, and another which held a screen pitifully before the broken thing, and shielded it from observation. When Norma bid her good-night she responded quietly, and rising accompanied her guest to her room to see that every arrangement was perfect for her comfort.

Far into the night she sat beside her dying fire trying to collect her faculties, and realize the extent of the calamity which had befallen her. The first, and, for the time, dominant emotion was a stinging sense of shame, an agony of rage and humiliation which tingled hotly through her, and caused her cheek to flame, and her body to writhe as from the lash of a whip. She had been degraded; an insult had been put upon her. Her eyes blazed, and her hands clinched. Oh, for strength to hurl the insult back—for a man's arm and a man's power to avenge the foul affront! He—a married man—to come, concealing his bonds, and playing the part of a lover free to woo—free to approach a woman and to win her heart! The proud head bent to meet the hands upraised to cover the pale, drawn face. She loved him and he was unworthy. He had deceived and lied to her, if not in words, then in actions; knowing himself bound to another woman, he had deliberately sought her out and made her love him. It was cruel, cruel! All along she had played virgin gold against base metal, and now she was bankrupt.

When the burning, maddening sense of outrage had passed, and pride stood with lowered crest and listless hands, love lifted its head and tried to speak. He was not without excuse, love pleaded; his life had been miserable; his lot hard and unendurable; he had been given a stone for bread, and for wine, the waters of Marah. Until the night of the ball he had retained mastery over himself—had held his love in check. Then memory roused herself and entered testimony—words, looks, tender, graceful attentions thronged back upon her, and pride caught love by the throat and cried out that there was no excuse.

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Perhaps, she pondered heavily, he, too, writhed beneath this avalanche of pain; perhaps remorse and the consciousness of the anguish he had entailed upon them both tore and lacerated him. He had gone away at last, out of her life, back to the home and the ties that were hateful to him. He had gone away to take up his share of their joint burden, and he would be merciful, and never cross her path again.

But would he? The girl quivered, her hand sought the pocket of her dress, and her eyes glanced forlornly around the room like the eyes of a hunted creature. She recalled something that the morning's post had brought her—something that had seemed sweet and fair, something that had caused her pulses to thrill, all day, with exultant happiness.

Only a New Year card; a graceful white-fringed thing, showing a handful of blue forget-me-nots, thrown carelessly beside an old anchor on a bit of golden sand. Pocahontas laid it on her lap and gazed at it with strained, tearless eyes, and read anew its sweet message of remembrance and hope. She had been startled by Thorne's sudden departure, but had quietly accepted the message of explanation and farewell sent her by Blanche; she trusted him too implicitly to doubt that what he did was best and wisest, and was happy in the knowledge that he would return.

How long ago it appeared to her already, since this pretty card had come; she looked at it strangely, with eyes in which there was longing, renunciation, and a wild hopelessness of love. She must not keep it; it was not hers; it belonged of right to that other—the woman who was his wife. No, she must not keep it—the beautiful, tender thing. With steady hand, but blanched, quivering lips, she reached over and made a little grave among the dying embers, in which a sullen spark glowed like baleful eye. Quietly, with the feeling that she was burying all of youth and hope and joy her life would ever know, she kissed the card with dumb, clinging, passionate kisses, and then with a low, dry sob, covered it from sight.

As she raised herself up, her eyes fell on the little box lying on her desk in which she had placed the fragments of the cup they had broken between them—the cup that her old play-fellow had used on that last evening. With the impulse of habit and association, her mind turned wearily to Jim. He was so true; he had never failed her. Had *he* suffered as she was suffering? Poor Jim! Was this ceaseless, gnawing agony that had usurped *her* life no stranger to *his*? If so—God pity him!—and her!

CHAPTER XIV.

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On the way up from Virginia, Nesbit Thorne ran over in his mind the possibilities opened by this new move of his wife's, and, on the whole, he was satisfied. The divorce had become as much an object with him as with her, and if she had remained quiescent in the matter, he must have moved. He was glad to have been spared this—very glad that the initial steps had been of her taking. It put him in a good position with himself. The *manes* of his mother's scruples would be satisfied, and would never cause him discomfort since the fault did not rest with him. And then the boy—never could his son cast word or thought of blame to the father who had behaved so well; who had given every chance, foregone every advantage; acted not only the part of a gentleman, but of a generous, long-suffering man. Thorne felt a glow of satisfaction in the knowledge that in years to come his son would think well of him.

But this supposition of Norma's in regard to a second marriage put the whole matter in a new light in regard to the child. If such a change should be in contemplation, other arrangements must be made about the boy; he could no longer remain in the custody of his mother. *His* son could not remain under the roof of his wife's second husband during his own lifetime. The line must be drawn somewhere. It did not occur to Thorne that his wife, with equal justice, might raise similar objections.

He determined to see Ethel at once and discover whether or not there was truth in the reports that had reached him anent Cecil Cumberland. If there should be, he would bring such pressure as lay in his power to bear on her, in order to obtain immediate possession of the boy. The child was still so young that the law gave the mother rights which could only be set aside at the expense of a disagreeable suit; but Thorne thought he could manage Ethel in such a way as to make her voluntarily surrender her rights. He knew that her affection for the child was neither deep nor strong.

He ascended the steps of his own house and rang the bell sharply. It was answered by a strange servant who regarded him with interest; evidently a gentleman caller at that hour of the morning was unusual. Was Mrs. Thorne at home? The man would inquire. Would the gentleman walk in. What name should he say? Mr. Thorne—and his business was pressing; he must see her at once.

The man opened the door of the back parlor and stood aside to let Mr. Thorne pass; then he closed it noiselessly and proceeded up-stairs to inform his mistress.

Thorne glanced around the room curiously; it was two years since he had seen it. On the marble hearth burned a bright wood-fire, and the dancing flames reflected themselves in the burnished brasses. The tiles around the fireplace were souvenirs of his wedding, hand-painted by the bevy of bridesmaids to please a fancy of Ethel's. Norma's was in the center—the place of honor.

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It was a strange thing that Norma had selected to paint; heavy sprays of mingled nightshade and monkshood on a ground the color of a fading leaf; but, strange as it was, it was the most beautiful of them all. There were flowers in the room and the perfume of heliotrope and roses filled the air. The piano was open and on it one of the popular songs of the day; a loud, garish thing. Ethel liked what she called "bright music;" on the keys lay a tumbled lace handkerchief, and on the floor, close to the pedal of the instrument, was a man's driving glove.

Over the piano hung the portrait of a lady with soft, gray hair, and the expression of purity and love which medieval painters gave to their saints. It was a picture of Thorne's mother and it hurt him to see it there. He determined to have it removed as soon as possible.

The door opened and Mrs. Thorne entered, feeling herself terribly ill-used and persecuted, in that her husband had elected to come to her in person, instead of availing himself of the simpler and more agreeable mode of communication through their lawyers. It was quite possible that he would make himself disagreeable. Mrs. Thorne shrank from any thing disagreeable, and had no tolerance for sarcasms addressed to herself. She would have refused the interview had she dared, but in her heart she was dimly afraid of her husband.

Thorne bowed coldly, and then placed a chair for her on the hearth-rug. "Sit down," he said, "I want to talk to you," and then he seated himself opposite her.

For awhile he did not speak; somehow the words he had come to say stuck in his throat; it was so cold-blooded for them, husband and wife, to sit there beside their own hearth and discuss their final separation. A log, which had burned in half, fell and rolled forward on the marble hearth, sending little puffs of gray smoke into the room. He reached past her for the tongs and laid the log back in its place, and the little action seemed to seal his lips more closely. The tiny clock on the carved oak mantle chimed the hour in soft, low tones; he counted the strokes as they fell, one, two, and so on up to twelve. The winter sunshine streamed in between the parting of the curtains and made a glory of his wife's golden hair.

Ethel was the first to speak. "You got my letter?" she questioned, keeping her eyes fixed on the fire.

"Yes; that is the reason I'm here."

The broken log was blazing again quite merrily, the two ends far apart.

“Why not have written instead of coming?” she demanded, as one who protested against some grievous injury; “it would have been far pleasanter for both. There’s no sense in our harassing ourselves with personal interviews.”

“I preferred a personal interview.”

Ethel lapsed into silence; the man was a hopeless brute, and it was useless to expect courtesy from him. She tapped her foot against the fender, and a look of obstinacy and temper disfigured the soft outlines of her face. The silence might remain unbroken until the crack of doom for any further effort she would make.

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Thorne broke it himself. He was determined to carry his point, and in order to do so strove to establish ascendancy over his wife from the start.

"What's the meaning of this new move, Ethel?" he demanded, authoritatively. "I want to understand the matter thoroughly. Why do you want a divorce?"

Mrs. Thorne turned her face toward him defiantly.

"Because I'm tired of my present life, and I want to change it. I'm sick of being pointed at, and whispered about, as a deserted wife—a woman whose husband never comes near her."

"Whose fault is that?" he retorted sharply; "this separation is none of my doing, and you know it. Bad as things had become, I was willing to worry along for the sake of respectability and the child; but you wouldn't have it so. You insisted on my leaving you—said the very sight of me made your chains more intolerable. Had I been a viper, you could scarcely have signified your desire for my absence in more unmeasured terms."

"I know I desired the separation," Mrs. Thorne replied calmly, "I desire it still. My life with you was miserable, and my wish to live apart has only increased in intensity. You never understood me."

Thorne might have retorted that the misunderstanding had been mutual, and also that *all* the wretchedness had not fallen to her share; but he would not stoop to reproaches and vituperation. It was a natural peculiarity of her shallow nature to demand exhaustive comprehension for quite commonplace emotions.

"It's useless debating the past, Ethel. We've both been too much to blame to afford the luxury of stone-throwing. What we must consider now is the future. Is your mind quite made up? Are you determined on the divorce?"

"Quite determined. I've given the matter careful consideration, and am convinced that entire separation, legal as well as nominal, is absolutely necessary to my happiness."

"And your reasons?"

"Haven't I told you, Nesbit?" using his name, for the first time, in her anger. "Why do you insist on my repeating the same thing over and over, eternally? I'm sick of my life, and want to change it."

"But how?" he persisted. "Your life will be the same as now, and your position not so assured. The alimony allowed by law won't any thing like cover your present expenditures, and you can hardly expect me to be more generous than the law compels. The divorce can make little difference, save to diminish your income and

deprive you of the protection of my name. You will not care to marry again, and the divorce will be a restricted one.” Thorne was forcing his adversary’s hand.

“Why will it be restricted?” she demanded, her color and her temper rising. “It shall *not* be restricted, or hampered in any way, I tell you, Nesbit Thorne! Am I to be fettered, and bound, and trammled by you forever? I will *not* be. The divorce shall give me unlimited power to do what I please with my life. It shall make me as free as air—as free as I was before I married you.”

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"You would not wish to marry again?" he repeated.

"Why not?" rising to her feet and confronting him in angry excitement.

"Because, in that case, you would lose your child. I neither could nor would permit my son to be brought up in the house of a man who stood to him in the relationship you propose."

"You cannot take him from me," Mrs. Thorne retorted in defiant contradiction; her ideas of the power of men and lawyers hopelessly vague and bewildered. "No court on earth would take so small a child from his mother."

"Ah! you propose having the case come into court then? I misunderstood you. I thought you wished the affair managed quietly, to avoid publicity and comment. Of course, if the case comes into court, I shall contest it, and try to obtain possession of the boy, even for the time the law allows the mother, on the ground of being better able to support and educate him."

"I do not want the case to come into court here, Nesbit, and you know that I do not! Why do you delight in tormenting me?"

"Listen to me, Ethel. I've no wish to torment you. I simply wished to show you that I would abide by my rights, and that I have some power—all the power which money can give—on my side. Our marriage has been a miserable mistake from the first; we rushed into it without knowledge of each other's characters and dispositions, and, like most couples who take matrimony like a five-barred gate, we've come horribly to grief. I shall not stand in your way; if you wish to go, I shall not hinder you. This is what I propose: I'll help you in the matter, will take all the trouble, make the arrangements, bear all the expense. It will be necessary for one of us to go to Illinois, and see these lawyers, if the divorce is to be gotten there. It may be necessary to undergo a short residence in the state in order to simulate citizenship, and make the divorce legal. I'll find out about this, and if it's necessary I will do it. After the divorce, I'll allow you the use of this house, and a sufficient income to support it; and also the custody of our son as long as you remain unmarried. In return, you must waive all right to the boy for the years you can legally claim him, and must bind yourself to surrender him to me, or any person I appoint, at least a month before any such marriage, and never, by word or act, to interfere in his future life, or any disposition I may think best to make of him. I should also strongly object to any future marriage taking place from my house, and should expect legal notice in ample time to make arrangements about the boy."

"Would you allow me to see the child whenever I wished?"

"Certainly. I'm no brute, and you are his mother. I shall only stipulate that the meetings take place in some other house than yours. You are at liberty to visit him as often as

you like, so long as you are faithful to our agreement and leave his mind unbiased. I will never mention you unkindly to him, and shall expect the same consideration from you. When he is old enough to judge between us, he will decide as he thinks right.”

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"Suppose you marry again, yourself. What about the child then? You are very hard and uncompromising in your dictation to me, Nesbit, but I can have feelings and scruples as well as you."

Thorne was startled. He considered that he was behaving well to his wife. He wanted to behave well to her; to let the past go generously, so that no shadow of reproach from it might fall upon the future. Her tart suggestion set the affair in a new light. It was an unpleasant light, and he turned his back on it, thinking that by so doing he disposed of it. There was the distance of the two poles between Pocahontas Mason and Cecil Cumberland. *He* surely was the best judge of what would conduce to the welfare of his son.

"We were discussing the probability of your re-marriage, not mine," he responded coldly; "the reports in circulation have reached even me at last."

"What reports?" with defiant inquiry.

"That you are seeking freedom from your allegiance to one man, in order to swear fealty to another. That your vows to me are irksome because they prevent your taking other vows to Cecil Cumberland. I pass over the moral aspect of the affair; that must rest with your own conscience," (it is astonishing how exemplary Thorne felt in administering the rebuke); "that rests with your conscience," he repeated, "and with that I've nothing to do. The existence of such reports—which lays your conduct as a married woman open to censure—gives me the right to dictate the terms of our legal separation. I'm obliged to speak plainly, Ethel. You brought about the issue, and must abide by the consequences. I've stated my terms and it's for you to accept or decline them."

Thorne leaned back in his chair and watched the flames eat into the heart of the hickory logs. He had no doubt of her decision, but he awaited it courteously. The broken log had burned completely away, and a little heap of whity-gray ashes lay on each side of the hearth.

Ethel sat and pondered, weighing at full value all the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal and deciding that the former outweighed the latter. The object on which she was bent—the thing which appeared the greatest earthly good, was the divorce. At any cost, she would obtain *that*, and obtain it as quickly and quietly as possible; no talk, no exposure, no disagreeable comments. This was the main point, and to carry it, Ethel Thorne felt herself capable of more than the surrender of one small child. The separation at worst would only be partial; she could see the boy every day if she wished—even after her marriage with Cecil Cumberland. Nesbit had promised, and in all her experience of him she had never known him break his word. Then she could retain the little fellow until all these troublesome affairs should be settled, which would disarm criticism and save appearances, and appearances *must* be preserved on account of the Cumberlands.

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That a divorced daughter-in-law would be none too welcome in that stately, old-fashioned family, Mrs. Thorne was well aware. Perhaps it would be as well to be unhampered by such a forcible reminder of her former state as the child, while she was winning the Cumberland heart and softening the Cumberland prejudice. Cecil, she knew already, regarded the baby with scant favor, and would be unfeignedly rejoiced to be quit of him. On the whole, Nesbit was behaving well to her. She had expected far more difficulty, infinitely more bitterness, for, like the world, she gave her husband credit for the scruples of his father's faith. Her heart softened toward him a little for the first time in years—or would have softened, but for the blow he had dealt her egregious self-love in letting her go so easily.

She signified her acceptance of his proposal in a few brusque, ungracious words, for she considered it due to her dignity to be disagreeable, in that she was acceding to terms, not dictating them.

Thorne rose from his chair with a deep breath of relief. The interview had been intolerable to him, and although he had carried his point and acquitted himself well, his prominent feeling was one of unqualified disgust. What a lie his married life had been! What a sepulcher filled with dead, dry bones! For the moment all womanhood was lowered in his eyes because of his wife's heartless selfishness. Had she shown any feeling about the boy—any ruth, or mother-love, Thorne knew that he would not have driven so hard a bargain; felt that he might even have let his compassion rule his judgment. But she had shown none; all her thought and care had been for herself, and herself alone. And for her, and such as her, men wrecked their lives. A flood of anger at his past folly, of resentful bitterness at the price he had been forced to pay for it, passed over Thorne. He could scarcely constrain himself to the formal bow which courtesy required.

As he left the room, the sound of a child's wailing came down to him, mingled with the sound of a woman's voice soothing it. He glanced back at his wife; she had moved nearer the fire, her fair head with its golden glory of hair was thrown back against the dark velvet of the chair; she was smiling and the sound of the child's grief fell on heedless ears.

CHAPTER XV.

Thorne had even less difficulty with his legal arrangements than he had anticipated. He had, hitherto, relegated the subject of divorce to the limbo of things as little thought and spoken of as possible by well-bred people. He knew nothing of the *modus operandi*, and was surprised at the ease and celerity with which the legal machine moved.

"I'll have to prove my identity, and the truth of my statements to the men out there, I suppose," he remarked to the lawyer, from whom he obtained all necessary information.

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The lawyer laughed; he was a Southerner by birth, and his voice was gentle, his manner courteous.

"Of your identity, Mr. Thorne, these men will take excellent care to inform themselves, and of your responsibility also," he answered. "For the truth of your statements, they are apt to take your word, and the depositions of your witnesses, without troubling themselves about substantiating the facts. The soundness of your evidence is your lookout, not theirs. If the case were to be contested, it would be different, but, in this instance, there is consent of both parties, which simplifies matters. This case is reduced to a matter of mere form and business."

"Apparently, then, my statements may be a tissue of lies from beginning to end, for all the difference it makes," observed Thorne, curious to discover how small a penknife could now cut the bond which once the scythe of death alone was held to be able to sever.

"For your veracity, Mr. Thorne, your appearance is a sufficient voucher," responded the lawyer, with a ready courtesy. "And the looseness on which you comment, recollect, is all in your favor. When a man has an unpleasant piece of business in hand, it's surely an immense advantage to be able to accomplish it speedily and privately."

Thorne walked in the direction of his hotel in a state of preoccupation. He was sore and irritated; he disliked it all intensely; it jarred upon him and offended his taste. Over and over he cursed it all for a damnable business from beginning to end. He was perfectly aware, reasoning from cause to effect, that the situation was, in some sort, his own fault; but that was a poor consolation. That side of the question did not readily present itself; his horizon was occupied by the nearer and more personal view. He loathed it all, and was genuinely sorry for himself and conscious that fate was dealing hardly by him.

As he turned a corner, he ran against a tall, handsome young lady, who put out her hand and caught his arm to steady herself, laughing gayly:

"Take care, Nesbit!" she exclaimed, "you nearly knocked me down. Since when have you taken to emulating Mrs. Wilfer's father, and 'felling' your relatives to the earth?"

"Why, Norma! is it really you?" he questioned, refusing to admit the evidence of sight and touch unfortified by hearing.

He was genuinely delighted to see her, and foresaw that she would be a comfort to him during the days that must elapse before it became possible for him to start for Illinois. He needed sympathy and some one to make much of him. And Norma, with her lustrous eyes aglow with the pleasure of the meeting, appeared to divine it, for she set herself to entertain him with little incidents and adventures of her journey from Virginia, and with scraps of intelligence of the people at home. She did not mention Pocahontas,

save in reply to a direct inquiry, and then simply stated that she had spent a night at Lanarth a day or so before coming North, and that the family were all well.

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She cheered Thorne wonderfully, for she seemed to bring Virginia and the life of the last few months nearer to him—the peaceful life in which new hopes had budded, in which he had met, and known, and loved Pocahontas. Norma did him good, raised his spirits, and made the future look bright and cheerful; but not in the way she hoped and intended. She had come North with the hope of furthering her own plans, of making herself necessary and agreeable, of keeping the old days fresh in his memory. And she was necessary to him, as a trusted comrade who had never failed him; a clever adviser in whose judgment he had confidence; a charming friend who was fond of him, and who had, but now, come from the enchanted land where his love dwelt. Of her plans he knew nothing, suspected nothing; and the days she brought fresh to his thoughts were days in which she had no part.

In a little while, he went West, and there was a period of uneventful waiting; after which Norma received a Western paper containing a short and unobtrusive notice of the granting of a divorce to Nesbit Thorne from Ethel, his wife.

She bore it away to her room and gloated over it greedily. Then she took her pen and ran it around the notice, marking it heavily; this done, she folded, sealed and directed it in a clear, bold hand—General Percival Smith,—Wintergreen Co., Virginia. It would save elaborate explanations.

CHAPTER XVI.

Spring opened very late that year in Virginia—slowly and regretfully, as though forced into doing the world a favor against its will, and determined to be as grudging and disagreeable over it as possible. The weather was cold, wet, and unwholesome—sulking and storming alternately, and there was much sickness in the Lanarth and Shirley neighborhood. The Christmas had been a green one—only one small spurt of snow on Christmas eve, which vanished with the morning. The negroes were full of gloomy prognostications in consequence, and shook their heads, and cast abroad, with unction, all sorts of grewsome prophecies anent the fattening of the church-yard.

All through the winter, Mrs. Mason had been ailing, and about the beginning of March she succumbed to climatic influences, backed by hereditary tendency, and took to her bed with a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism. Pocahontas had her hands full with household care and nursing, and perhaps it was as well, for it drove self into the background of her mind, for a part of the time at least, and filled with anxiety the empty days. Grace, living five miles away and loaded down with family cares and duties of her own, could be of little practical assistance.

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The winter had been a hard one for Pocahontas, harder, perhaps, for the gallant nature which forbade her to bewail herself. She suffered deeply and dumbly through all the weary nights and days. Pride and womanly reserve precluded all beating of the breast, and forced principle and nature to the ceaseless fight. Right gallantly she bore herself. The mortification, the anguish, the love, must be met, hand to hand, eye to eye, foot to foot. She endeavored to keep cheerful—to take the same interest in life as formerly, and in the main she succeeded; but there would come times when the struggle would seem greater than she could bear, and being a woman, with a woman's heart, and a woman's nerves, she would be irritable and difficult. But these moods were never of long duration, any more than the more desperate ones, when she would lock herself in her chamber and cast herself on the floor and lie there prone and quivering—heart and conscience utterly at variance—heart crying out with mad insistence that the struggle was in vain; for love was strengthened by repression; and conscience sternly replying that it should not be; the struggle should continue until the last vestige of love should be expunged from heart and life. It was no wonder, as time went on, that the girl's cheek paled and that a dumb pleading came into the pure gray eyes.

Sometimes the thought of Jim would come and place itself in contrast to the thought of the other man, for, unconsciously to her, her old friend was her standard in many things. Her recognition of the nobility of Jim's love would force, in some sort, recognition of the selfishness of Thorne's love. She put such thoughts from her fiercely, and girded at Jim in her aching, unreasonable heart, because his love was grander and truer than the love she craved. Once, when old Sholto—the great red setter—came and laid his head lovingly upon her lap, she frowned and pushed him roughly away, because he looked up at her with eyes whose honest faithfulness reminded her of Jim.

And the mother watched her child silently; conscious, through the divination of unselfish mother-love, that her daughter suffered, yet powerless to help her, save by increased affection and the intangible yet perceptible comfort of a delicate respect. She could trust her child and would not force her confidence; if spoken sympathy were needed, Pocahontas knew that her mother's heart was open to her, and if to her silence should seem best, she should have her will. From long experience Mrs. Mason knew that some sorrows must be left quietly to time.

When at length the news of Thorne's divorce reached them, she warded off with tender consideration all remark or comment likely to hurt the girl, and gave straight-forward, hot-tempered Berkeley a hint which effectually silenced him. In sooth, the honest fellow had small liking for the subject. He bitterly resented what he considered Thorne's culpable concealment of the fact of his marriage.

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He remembered the night of the ball at Shirley, and the memory rankled. It did not occur to him that the matter having remained a secret might have been the natural result of an unfortunate combination of circumstances, and in no sort the consequence of calculation or dishonor on Thorne's part. Neither did it occur to him, large-minded man though he was, to try to put himself in Thorne's place and so gain a larger insight into the affair, and the possibility of arriving at a fairer judgment. Berkeley's interest in the matter was too personal to admit of dispassionate analysis, or any impulse toward mercy, or even justice. His anger burned hotly against Thorne, and when the thought of him rose in his mind it was accompanied by other thoughts which it is best not to put into words.

During Mrs. Mason's illness, little Blanche was unremitting in her attentions, coming over daily with delicacies of her own concoction, and striving to help her friends with a sweet, unobtrusive kindness which won hearty response from both ladies, and caused them to view Berkeley's increasing attentions to the little maid with pleasure. They even aided the small idyl by every lawful means, having the girl with them as often as they could and praising her judiciously.

With her winsome, childish ways and impulsiveness, Blanche formed a marked contrast to grave, reserved Berkeley Mason, and was perhaps better suited to him on that account. When their engagement was announced, there was no lack of congratulation and satisfaction in both families. The general, as he gave his hearty approbation to her choice, pinched her ears and asked what had become of her objections to Virginia; and Percival tormented her unceasingly, twitting her with her former wails of lamentation. Blanche did not care. She took their teasing in good part, and retorted with merry words and smiles and blushes. She had made her journey to the unknown, and returned with treasure.

Mrs. Smith, in her chamber, smiled softly, and thought on muslin and lace and wedding favors.

CHAPTER XVII.

The weeks rolled by, and gradually Mrs. Mason grew convalescent. She was still confined to her room, but the worst of the pain was over, and she could lie on the sofa by the fireside and have Berkeley read aloud to her in the evenings. Blanche, if she happened to be there, would sit on a low chair beside the sofa, busy with some delicate bit of fancy work, and later in the evening Berke would take her home. Sometimes Pocahontas would bring her work and listen, or pretend to listen, with the rest, but oftener she would go into the parlor and play dreamily to herself for hours. She had taken up her music industriously and practiced hard in her spare moments.

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She had been playing a long time one evening in April, and had left the piano for a low chair beside the open fire. She was tired. Although spring had come, the evenings were chill and the room was large. Her hands were cold and she spread them out to the blaze. The heavy curtains billowed and sank and billowed again, as intrusive puffs of wind crept officiously through the crevices of the old casements. Blanche and Berkeley were with her mother, and they were reading "Lorna Doone." She had read the book a week ago, and did not care to hear it over.

The front door opened quietly—it was always on the latch—and footsteps came along the hall; quick, eager footsteps, straight to the parlor door; the knob turned. No need to turn her head, no need to question of her heart whose step, whose hand that was, to guess whose presence filled the room.

Thorne came across the room, and stood opposite, a great light of joy in his eyes, his hands outstretched for hers. Benumbed with many emotions, Pocahontas half-rose, an inarticulate murmur dying on her lips. Thorne put her gently back into her chair, and drew one for himself up to the hearth-rug near her; he was willing to keep silence for a little space, to give her time to recover herself; he was satisfied for the moment with the sense of her nearness, and his heart was filled with the joy of seeing her once more. The lamps were lit, but burning dimly. Thorne rose and turned both to their fullest brilliancy; he must have light to see his love.

"I want to look at you, Princess," he said gently, seeking her eyes, with a look in his not to be misunderstood; "it has been so long—so cruelly long, my darling, since I have looked on your sweet face. You must not call the others. For this first meeting I want but you—you only, my love! my queen!" His voice lingered over the terms of endearment with exquisite tenderness.

Pocahontas was silent—for her life she could not have spoken then. Her gray eyes had an appealing, terrified look as they met his; her trembling hands clasped and unclasped in her lap.

"How frightened you look, my darling," Thorne murmured, speaking softly and keeping a tight rein over himself. "Your eyes are like a startled fawn's. Have I been too abrupt—too thoughtless and inconsiderate? You would forgive me, love, if you knew how I have longed for you; have yearned for this meeting as Dives yearned for water—as the condemned yearn for reprieve. Have you no smile for me, sweetheart?—no word of welcome for the man whose heaven is your love? You knew I would come. You knew I loved you, Princess."

"Yes;"—the word was breathed, rather than uttered, but he heard it, and made a half movement forward, the light in his eyes glowing more passionately. Still, he held himself in check; he would give her time.

“You knew I loved you, Princess,” he repeated. “Yes, you must have known. Love like mine could not be concealed; it *must* burn its way through all obstacles from my heart to yours, melting and fusing them into one. Don’t try to speak yet, love, there is no need to answer unless you wish. I can wait—for I am near you.”

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Pocahontas rallied her forces resolutely, called up her pride, her womanhood, her sense of the wrong he had done her. If she should give way an instant—if she should yield a hair's breadth, she would be lost. The look in his eyes, the tenderness of his voice, appeared to sap the foundations of her resolution and to turn her heart to wax within her.

"Why have you come?" she wailed, her tone one of passionate reproach. "Had you not done harm enough? Why have you come?"

Thorne started slightly, but commanded himself. It was the former marriage; the divorce; she felt it keenly—every woman must; some cursed meddler had told her.

"My darling," he answered, with patient tenderness, "you know why I have come—why it was impossible for me to keep away. I love you, Princess, as a man loves but once in his life. Will you come to me? Will you be my wife?"

The girl shook her head, and moved her hand with a gesture of denial; words she had none.

"I know of what you are thinking, Princess. I know the idea that has taken possession of your mind. You have heard of my former marriage, and you know that the woman who was my wife still lives. Is it not so?" She bent her head in mute assent. Thorne gazed at her pale, resolute face with his brows knit heavily, and then continued:

"Listen to me, Princess. That woman—Ethel Ross—is my wife no longer, even in name; she ceased to be my wife in fact two years ago. Our lives have drifted utterly asunder. It was her will, and I acquiesced in it, for she had never loved me, and I—when my idiotic infatuation for her heartless, diabolical beauty passed, had ceased to love her. At last, even my presence became a trouble to her, which she was at no pains to conceal. The breach between us widened with the years, until nothing remained to us but the galling strain of a useless fetter. Now that is broken, and we are free,"—there was an exultant ring in his voice, as though his freedom were precious to him.

"Were you bound, or free, that night at Shirley?" questioned the girl, slowly and steadily.

A flush crept warmly over Thorne's dark face, and lost itself in the waves of his hair. He realized that he would meet with more opposition here than he had anticipated. No matter; the prize was worth fighting for—worth winning at any cost. His determination increased with the force opposed to it, and so did his desire.

"In heart and thought I was free, but in *fact* I was bound," he acknowledged. "The words I spoke on the steps that night escaped me unaware. I was tortured by jealousy, and tempted by love. I had no right to speak them then; nothing can excuse or palliate the weakness which allowed me to. I should have waited until I could come to you

untrammelled—as now. I attempt no justification of my madness, Princess. I have no excuse but my love, and can only sue for pardon. You will forgive me, sweetheart”—using the old word tenderly—“for the sake of my great love. It’s my only plea”—his voice took a pleading tone as he advanced the plea hardest of all for a woman to steel her heart against.

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Pocahontas gazed at him in bewilderment, her mind grappling with an idea that appalled her, her face blanching with apprehension, and her form cowering as from an expected blow.

"Must I understand, Mr. Thorne, that love for *me* suggested the thought of divorcing your wife?" she questioned hoarsely—"that *I* came between you and caused this horrible thing? It is *not*—it *can not* be true. God above! Have I fallen so low?—am I guilty of this terrible sin?"

Thorne's quick brain recognized instantly the danger of allowing this idea to obtain possession of her mind. Fool! he thought furiously, why had not he been more cautious, more circumspect. Dextrously he set himself to remove the idea or weaken its force—to prove her guiltless in her own eyes.

"Princess," he said, meeting the honest, agonized eyes squarely, "I want to tell you the story of my marriage with Ethel Ross, and of my subsequent life with her. I had not intended to harass you with it until later—if at all; but now, I deem it best you should become acquainted with it, and from my lips. It will explain many things."

Then he briefly related all the miserable commonplace story. He glossed over nothing, palliated nothing; bearing hardly now on his wife, and again on himself, but striving to show throughout how opposed to true marriage was this marriage, how far removed from a perfect union was this union. Pocahontas listened with intense, strained interest, following every word, sometimes almost anticipating them. Her heart ached for him—ached wearily. Life had been so hard upon him; he had suffered so. With a woman's involuntary hardness to woman, she raised the blame from Thorne's shoulders and heaped it upon those of his wife. Her love and her sympathy became his advocates and pleaded for him at the bar of her judgment. Her heart yearned over him with infinite compassion.

If Thorne had kept silence, and left the matter there, and waited until she should have adapted herself to the new conditions, should have assimilated the new influences, which crowded thick upon her, it would have been better. But he could not keep silent—he had no patience to wait. He could not realize that the things which were as a thrice-told tale to *him*, had an overwhelming newness for *her*. That the influences which had molded his thought, were very far removed from the influences which had made *her* what she was. He could not understand that, while the world had progressed, this isolated community had remained stationary, and that the principles and rules of conduct among them, still, were those which had governed *his* world in the beginning of the century.

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He saw that her sympathy had been aroused, that she suffered for, and with, him, and he could not forbear from striving to push the advantage. He went on speaking earnestly; he demonstrated that this marriage which had proved so disastrous was in truth no marriage, and that its annulment was just and right, for where there was no love, he argued, there could be no marriage. With all the sophistry; with all the subtle arguments of which he was master—and they were neither weak nor few—he assailed her. Every power of his brilliant intellect, every weapon of his mental armory, all the force of his indomitable will was brought to bear upon her—and brought to bear in vain.

Calm, pale, resolute, she faced him—her clear eyes meeting his, her nervous hands folded tightly together. She would not give way. In their earnestness both had risen, and they stood facing each other on the hearth-rug, their eyes nearly on a level. The man's hand rested on the mantle, and quivered with the intensity of his excitement; the woman's hung straight before her, motionless, but wrung together until the knuckles showed hard through the tense skin. She would NOT give way.

Thorne was startled and perplexed. Opposition he was prepared for, argument he could meet and possibly refute, tears and reproaches he could subdue—but dumb, quiet resistance baffled him. Suddenly he abandoned reason, cast self-control to the winds, and gave the reins to feeling. If he could not convince her through the head, he would try a surer road—the heart. Though proof against argument, would she be proof against love? He knew she loved him; he felt it in every fiber of his being, every pulse of his heart—and he was determined to win her at all hazards; his she must be; his she *should* be.

“My love!” he murmured, extending his arms with an appealing tenderness of look and gesture. “Come to me. Lay your sweet face on my breast, your dear arms around my neck. I need you, Princess; my heart cries out for you, and will not be denied. I can not live without you. You are mine—mine alone, and I claim your love; claim your life. What is that woman? What is any woman to me, save you, my darling—you only? My love! My love! It is my very life for which I am pleading. Have you no pity? No love for the man whose heart is calling you to come?”

Pocahontas shivered, and bent slightly forward—her face was white as death, her eyes strange and troubled. The strength and fire of his passion drew her toward him as a magnet draws steel. Was she yielding? Would she give way?

Suddenly she started erect again, and drew back a step. All the emotions, prejudices, thoughts of her past life; all the principles, scruples, influences, amid which she had been reared, crowded back on her and asserted their power. She could *not* do this thing. A chasm black as the grave, hopeless as death, yawned at her feet; a barrier as high as heaven erected itself before her.

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"I can not come," she wailed in anguish. "Have you no mercy?—no pity for me? There is a barrier between us that I dare not level; a chasm I can not cross."

"There is *no* barrier," responded Thorne, vehemently, "and I will acknowledge none. I am a free man; you are a free woman, and there is no law, human or divine, to keep us asunder, save the law of your own will. If there be a chasm—which I do not see; which I swear does not exist—I will cross it. If you can not come to me, I can come to you; and I *will*. You are *mine*, and I will hold you—here in my arms, on my breast, in my heart. Have you, and hold you, so help me God!"

With a quick stride he crossed the small space between them, and stood close, but still not touching her.

"Have you no pity?" she moaned.

"None," he answered hoarsely. "Have you any for me?—for us both? I love you—how well, God knows, I was not aware until to-night—and you love me I hope and believe. There is nothing between us save an idle scruple, which even the censorious world does not share. I ask you to commit no sin; to share no disgrace. I ask you to be my wife before the face of day; before the eyes of men; in the sight of heaven!"

Could she be his wife in the sight of heaven? It was all so strange to her, she could not understand. Words, carelessly heard and scarcely heeded, came back to her, and rung their changes in her brain with ceaseless iteration. It was like a knell.

"Nesbit?" she said wearily, using his name unconsciously, "listen and understand me. In the eyes of the law, and of men you are free; but I can not see it so. In my eyes you are still bound."

"I am *not* bound," denied Thorne, fiercely, bringing his hand down heavily on the mantle; "whoever tells you that I am, lies, and the truth is not in him. I've told you all—and yet not all. Ethel Ross, the woman who was my wife—whom *you* say is my wife still—is about to marry again. To join her life—as free and separate from mine as though we had never met—to the life of another man. Isn't that enough? Can't you see how completely every tie between us is severed?"

Pocahontas shook her head. "I can not understand you, and you will not understand me," she said mournfully; "her sin will not lessen our sin; nor her unholy marriage make ours pure and righteous."

Thorne stamped his foot. "Do you wish to madden me?" he exclaimed; "there is no sin, I tell you; nor would our marriage be unholy. You are torturing us both for nothing on God's earth but a scruple. I've argued, reasoned, and pleaded with you, and you refuse to weigh the argument, to listen to the reason, to yield to the persuasion. You are hard,

and opinionated, and obstinate. You set up your individual judgment against the verdict of the world and deem it infallible. You are hard to yourself, and cruelly hard to me,

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for, as there is a God in heaven, I believe you love me, even as I love you. Oh, my love! my love!" his voice melted, his arms closed around her. "Why do you try me beyond my strength? Why are you so cruel to us both? See; I hold you safely; your heart beats on mine; your dear face is on my breast. Stay with me, my darling, my own, my wife;" and soft, clinging passionate kisses pressed down on hair, and cheek, and lips; kisses that burned like flame, that thrilled like strong wine.

For a moment Pocahontas lay quietly in his arms, lulled into quiescence. Then she wrenched herself free, and moved away from him. It had been said of her that she could be hard upon occasion; the occasion had arisen, and she was hard.

"Go!" she said, her face wan as ashes, but her voice firm; "it is you who are cruel; you who are blind and obstinate. You will neither see nor understand why this thing may not be. I have showed you my thought, and you will not bend; implored you to have pity, and you are merciless. And yet you talk of love! You love me, and would sacrifice me to your love; love me, and would break down the bulwarks I have been taught to consider righteous, to gratify your love. I do not understand; love seemed to me so different, so noble and unselfish. Leave me; I am tired; I want to think it out alone."

Thorne stood silent, his head bent in thought. "Yes," he said presently; "it will be better so. You are overwrought, and your mind is worn with excitement; you need rest. Tomorrow, next week, the week after, this matter will wear a different aspect. I can wait, and I will come again. It will be different then."

"It will never be different," the voice was low; the gray eyes had a hopeless look.

Thorne repeated his assertion in the gentle, persistent tone of one who is patient with the unreasonableness of a frightened child. His determination to win success never faltered, rather it hardened with opposition into adamant; but he was beginning to realize his blunder. He had overwhelmed her; had brought about an upheaval of her world so violent that, in her bewilderment, her dread of chaos, she instinctively laid hold on the old supports and clung to them with desperation. She must have time to think, to familiarize herself with the strange emotions, to adapt herself to the changed conditions. Only one other thing would he say. He held in reserve a card which he knew, ere now, had proved all powerful with conscientious women. To gain his end, he would stop at nothing; he took both her hands in his, and played his card deliberately.

"Think over it well," he said, "weigh every argument, test every scruple. My life is in your hands. I am not a religious man, nor a good man, but you can make me both. Give me the heaven that I crave, the heaven of your love, and I will be by it ennobled into faith in that other heaven, of which it will be the foretaste. But refuse; deny the soul that cries out to you; thrust aside the hands that seek to clasp you, as the truest,

noblest, holiest thing they have ever touched, and—on your head be it. I have placed the responsibility in your hands and there it rests.”

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With a lingering look into her eyes and a fervent pressure of her hands, he turned and slowly left the room.

Back to the mind of the girl, standing motionless where he had left her, came, unwished and unbidden, the memory of a summer night out yonder beside the flowing river. She seemed to see again, the swaying of the branches in the moonlight, and to hear the lulling wash of the water against the shore; to hear also, a quiet, manly voice fighting down its pain, lest the knowledge of it should wound her, saying, simply and bravely: "Don't be unhappy about me, dear. I'll worry through the pain in time, or grow accustomed to it. It's tough just at first, but I'll pull through somehow. It shall not spoil my life either, although it must mar it; a man must be a pitiful fellow who lets himself go to the bad because the woman he loves won't have him. God means every man to hold up his own weight in this world. I'd as soon knock a woman down as throw the blame of a wasted life upon her."

Plain words, poorly arranged and simply spoken, for the man who uttered them was not clever; but brave, manly words, for all that. The girl turned from the unwelcome memory with a sharp, impatient sigh that was almost a groan. It pained her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The next day Thorne quietly returned to New York, without making any attempt to see or communicate with Pocahontas again. He had considered the situation earnestly, and decided that it would be his wisest course. Like a skilled general, he recognized the value of delay. Failing to carry the citadel by assault, he resorted to strategy. In the girl's love for him, he possessed a powerful ally; there was a traitor in the camp of his adversary, and sooner or later it would be betrayed into his hands; of this he was convinced, and the conviction fortified him to trust the result to time. Pride and principle were in arms now, holding love in check, but it would not be so always; soon her woman's heart would speak, would wield an influence more powerful and resistless, from the concentration engendered by repression. Now, too, she was braced by the excitement of personal resistance; she was measuring her will, with his will, her strength with his strength. Let him withdraw for a time, and what would follow? The outside pressure, the immediate need of concentrated effort removed, there would inevitably ensue a state of collapse; purpose and prejudice would sink exhausted, the strain on the will relax, the weapons fall from the nerveless hands. Then the heart would rally its forces, would collect its strength for the field; external conflict suspended, internal strife would commence, fierce, cruel and relentless as internecine struggles ever are. Was there any doubt of the result of the battle? It only needed time. Time, quietude, and earnest thought, free from the disturbing, stimulating power of his presence.

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He could wait; every affection of her loving, constant heart, every fiber of her self-sacrificing nature, would fight for him; prejudices, even the most deeply-rooted, must yield, in time, to love. When he should come again it would be to claim his victory.

No thought of abandoning the pursuit crossed his brain; no impulse of ruth stirred his heart. Did she suffer? So did he—keenly, cruelly. Let her end this torture for them both; let her lay aside these senseless scruples, and place her hand in his. His arms were open to her, his heart yearning for her; let her come and anchor in the sure haven of his love.

Pocahontas told her mother, very quietly, of Thorne's visit, his proposal, and her rejection of it; just the bare facts, without comment or elaboration. But Mrs. Mason had a mother's insight and could read between the lines; she did not harass her daughter with many words, even of approval; or with questions; she simply drew the sweet, young face down to her bosom a moment, and held it there with tender kisses. Nor did Berkeley, to whom his mother communicated the fact, volunteer any comment to his sister. After what had passed, Thorne's proposal was not a surprise, and to them the girl's answer was a foregone conclusion. Poor child! the brother thought impatiently, the mother wistfully, how much bitterness would have been spared her could she only have loved Jim Byrd.

During the weeks that followed Thorne's second return north, the two families were thrown together more and more intimately. Blanche's engagement and Warner's increased illness served to break down all restraints. All through the winter the boy had steadily lost ground, and as the spring progressed, instead of rallying as they hoped, his decline became more rapid. The best advice was had, but science could only bear the announcement of bereavement; there was nothing to be done, the doctors said, save to alleviate pain, and let the end come peacefully; it was needless to worry the boy with change, or bootless experiments. Even to the mother's willfully blinded eyes, and falsely-fed hopes, conviction came at last that her son's days were numbered.

Berkeley, Royall and other of the neighboring gentlemen took turns in aiding with the nursing and the night-watches, as is the custom in southern country neighborhoods where professional nurses are unknown.

Of all the kindly friends that watched and tended him through long weeks of illness, the one that Warner learned to love the best was Berkeley Mason. There was a thoughtful strength in the nature of the man who had suffered, the soldier who had endured, which the weaker nature recognized and rested on. To the general, during this time of trouble, the young man became, in very truth, a son; the old debt of kindness was canceled, and a new account opened with a change in the balance.

As is usual in cases of lingering consumption, the end was very sudden—so sudden, in fact, that Norma, still away with her northern friends, received the telegram too late for

word or look or farewell kiss. She was traveling with Mrs. Vincent and the message followed her from place to place.

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On a still, beautiful May morning, Warner was laid to rest in the Lanarth graveyard beside poor Temple Mason. It was the boy's own request, and his mother felt constrained to comply with it, although she would have preferred interring the remains of her child beside those of her own people at Greenwood. The story of the young life beating itself out against prison bars, had taken strong hold of the lad's imagination, and the fancy grew that he too would sleep more sweetly under the shadow of the old cedars in the land the young soldier had loved so well.

Norma and Pocahontas stood near each other beside the new-made grave, and as they quitted the inclosure, their hands met for an instant coldly. Pocahontas tried not to harbor resentment, but she could not forget whose hand it had been that had struck her the first bitter blow.

After Warner's death, Mrs. Smith appeared to collapse, mentally as well as bodily. She remained day after day shut in his chamber, brooding silently and rejecting with dumb apathy all sympathy and consolation. Her strength and appetite declined, and her interest in life deserted her, leaving a hopeless quiescence that was inexpressibly pitiful. Her husband, in alarm for her life and reason, hurriedly decided to break up the establishment at Shirley, and remove her for a time from surroundings that constantly reminded her of her loss.

In the beginning of June, the move was made, the house closed, the servants dismissed, and the care of the estate turned over to Berkeley. With the dawning of summer, the birds of passage winged their flight northward.

CHAPTER XIX.

There comes a time in human affairs, whether of nations or individuals, when a dull exhausted calm appears to fall upon them—a period of repose, a lull after the excitement of hurried events, a pause in which to draw breath for the renewal of the story. Grateful are these interludes, and necessary for the preservation of true equipoise, but they are not interesting, and in novels all description of them is carelessly skipped over. In stories we want events, not lingerings.

The summer passed quietly for the family at Lanarth, broken only by the usual social happenings, visits from the "Byrd girls," as they were still called, with their husbands and little ones; a marriage, a christening, letters from Jim and Susie, and measles among the little Garnetts. In August, Pocahontas and her mother went for a month to Piedmont, Virginia, to try the medicinal waters for the latter's rheumatism, and after their return home, Berkeley took a holiday and ran up to the Adirondacks to see Blanche.

Poor Mrs. Smith did not rally as her family had hoped, and the physicians—as is customary when a case baffles their skill—all recommended further and more complete

change. They must take her abroad, and try what the excitement of foreign travel would do toward preventing her from sinking into confirmed invalidism. General Smith, who had abandoned every care and interest for the purpose of devoting himself to his wife, embraced the proposal with eagerness, and insisted on the experiment being tried as speedily as possible.

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Blanche could not help some murmurs, both inwardly and to Berkeley, at the long separation in store for them; and the lover, although himself a little rueful, heartened her up with bright prophecies for their future. An immediate marriage for them was out of the question, for since Warner's death Mrs. Smith clung to her younger daughter with absolute dependence. The last of September was decided on for sailing, as that would allow General Smith time to enter Percival at school, and to complete other necessary arrangements before the family departure. The management of Shirley would remain in Berkeley's hands, and the house would continue closed until the return of the travelers.

To Nesbit Thorne, the summer had appeared interminable, and every golden hour had been shod with lead. He had passed the season partly in the Adirondacks with his relatives and partly in New York; but he was always oppressed with the same miserable unrest, the same weary longing. It would appear, at times, impossible for him to hold to his resolution of waiting until after the re-marriage of his *ci-devant* wife, before again seeking Pocahontas. He yearned to be with her, to hold her hands, and gaze into her eyes, so intensely at times, that it required the utmost exertion of his will to prevent himself from boarding the first southward-bound train. He was forced continually to remind himself that if he should yield to the impulse, he would be guilty of egregious folly—having waited so long, he could surely wait a few weeks longer. Ethel's marriage would dissipate every shadow of a tie between them, and with that fact fully established, Pocahontas *must* hear him.

In deference to Cumberland prejudice, Mrs. Thorne's marriage had been deferred until September—to that lady's great annoyance. She saw no reason for delay, nor any necessity for humoring the Cumberland old-fogyism, and in delicate ambiguous terms she conveyed this opinion to her lover, and discovered, to her surprise and indignation, that he disagreed with her. Some concession was due to the feelings of his family, and he did not wish to be hurried; on this ground, he intrenched himself and defied the world to move him. When Cecil made a point, he held to it with the obstinacy characteristic of mediocrity, and Ethel, not being exactly in a position to dictate, and requiring moreover some portion of the Cumberland countenance, was forced to acquiesce.

Some weeks before the day appointed for her marriage, Ethel removed herself and her belongings to the house of a poor and plastic aunt, who was in the habit of allowing herself to be run into any mold her niece should require. According to their agreement, Ethel gave her whilom husband due notice of her plans, and Thorne at once removed the child to Brooklyn, and placed him under the care of a sister of his father's, a gentle elderly widow who had known sorrow. His house he put in the hands of an agent to rent or sell, furnished, only removing such articles as had belonged to his parents. The house was hateful to him, and he felt that should the beautiful, new life of which he dreamed ever dawn for him, it must be set amid different surroundings from those which had framed his matrimonial failure.

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Still in deference to the Cumberland prejudice, the re-marriage of Ethel Thorne took place very quietly. It was a morning wedding, graced only by the presence of a few indifferent relatives, and a small crowd of curious friends. The two Misses Cumberland, handsome, heavy-browed women, after much discussion in the family bosom, and some fraternal persuasion, had allowed themselves to be seduced into attending the obnoxious nuptials, and shedding the light of the family countenance upon the ill-doing pair. Very austere and forbidding they looked as they seated themselves, reprobatively, in a pew far removed from the chancel, and their light was no better than the veriest darkness.

Twelve hours after the marriage had been published to the world, another marked paper was speeding southward, addressed this time to Pocahontas, and accompanied by a thick, closely written, letter. Thorne had decided that it would be better to send a messenger before, this time, to prepare the way for him. In his letter Thorne touched but lightly on the point at issue between them, thinking it better to take it for granted that her views had modified, if not changed. The strength of his cause lay in his love, his loneliness, his yearning need of her. On these themes he dwelt with all the eloquence of which he was master, and the letter closed with a passionate appeal, in which he poured out the long repressed fire of his love: "My darling, tell me I may come to you—or rather tell me nothing; I will understand and interpret your silence rightly. You are proud, my beautiful love, and in all things I will spare you—in all things be gentle to you; in all things, save this—I can not give you up—I *will* not give you up. I will wait here for another week, and if I do not hear from you, I will start for Virginia at once—with joy and pride and enduring thankfulness."

Pocahontas took the paper to her mother's room, the letter she put quietly away. She would answer it, but not yet; at night—when the house should be quiet she would answer it.

The lines containing the brief announcement were at the head of the list:

MARRIED.

"CUMBERLAND-THORNE.—At the church of the Holy Trinity, September 21st, 18—, by the Rev. John Sylvestus, Cecil Cumberland to Ethel Ross Thorne; both of this city."

Mrs. Mason laid the paper on the little stand beside her chair. "My daughter," she said, looking up at the girl seriously, "this can make no difference."

"No, mother," very quietly, "no difference; but I thought you ought to know."

In her own room, at night, when the house was still, the girl sat with the letter in her lap thinking. The moonlight poured in through the open window and made a map on the

floor, whereon slender shadows traced rivers, mountains and boundaries. In the trees outside, the night insects chirped, and bats darted and circled in the warm air.

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If only she could think that this made a difference. She was so weary of the struggle. The arguments which formerly sustained her had, with ceaseless iteration, lost their force; her battle-worn mind longed to throw down its arms in unconditional surrender. Her up-bringing had been so different; this thing was not regarded by the world in the same light as it appeared to her; was she over-strained, opinionated, censorious? Nesbit had called her so—was he right? Who was *she*, to set up her feeble judgment against the world's verdict—to condemn and criticise society's decision? Divorce must be—even Scripture allowed that; a limb must be sacrificed sometimes that a life might be saved. True, the process had always appeared to her, in her ignorance, an operation of cruel anguish, from which the patient came halt, or lame, or blind for life; but what if she should be wrong? What if the present crab-like propensity for the renewal of the missing part was the natural and sensible condition. This wicked woman—this wife who had recklessly thrown aside life's choicest gift—was happy; she had replaced her lopped-off limb with a new one, and it was well with her. Norma had said long ago that, "any woman who trifled with her happiness because of a scruple was a fool." Was Norma right? Was her hesitation senseless, doltish folly?

The boundaries of the moonlight shifted; a long irregular cape, like a shining finger, stretched out across the floor and touched the hem of her dress. From behind the screen in the fireplace came a little sound, as though a mouse were rustling fragments of torn paper.

If she could only recognize that this marriage *had* made a difference. It was so wearisome, this strife with a heart that would not admit defeat, a love that fought on and would not die. What was required of her?—nothing; nothing save to sit with folded hands and let happiness flood her life like sunshine—only to lay away the letter in her desk and wait silently for her lover to come to her. Her lover—the man whose influence had changed the monotonous calm of existence into the pulsing passion of living—the man who loved her; whom she loved. No words were needed—only silence; he was so thoughtful for her, so anxious to spare her; only silence, and in a little while his arms would infold her; his beautiful eyes, heavy with tenderness, gaze deep into hers; his sweet, passionate kisses burn upon her lips.

The radiant finger stole softly up her dress, across her lap, and made a little pool of brightness in the heart of which the letter lay; outside in the dove-cote a pigeon cooed sleepily to his mate.

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What was that tale of long ago that was coming strangely back to her? A girl, one whom they all knew and loved, had been separated from her husband after several years of misery, bravely borne. Her husband had been a confirmed drunkard, and in his cups was as one possessed with devils. They had grieved over Clare, and when her husband's brutality grew such that her brother interfered and insisted on her procuring a divorce for the protection of herself and her children, they had felt that it was right; and while they deplored the necessity, they had sided with Clare throughout. But when, two years later, wedding cards had come from Clare, from some place in the West, whither she had moved with her children; it had been a grievous shock, for the drunkard still lived. It had seemed a strange and monstrous thing, and their judgment had been severe—their censure scathing. Poor Clare! She understood her temptation better now. Poor little Clare!

What was it Jim had said? The men had been guarded in the expression of their opinion before her; they were fastidious in conversation before women. This, he had said in an under-tone to Berkeley, but she had caught it, and caught also the scorn of the hazel eye, and knew that the lip curled under the brown mustache. He had said—"To a woman of innate purity the thing would be impossible. There is a coarseness in the situation which is revolting."

What would he think of her? She was weighing the matter—canvassing its possibility. Was her nature deteriorating? Was she growing coarser, less pure? Would her old friend, whose standard was so high, despise her? Would she be lowered in the eyes of those whose influence and opinions had, heretofore, molded her life? The associations of years are not uprooted and cast aside in days or in months. Responsibilities engendered by the past environed her, full-grown, comprehensible, insistent; responsibilities which might be engendered by the future, lay in her mind a tiny germ in which the embryo life had scarcely begun to stir. The duty to the old life seemed to her plain and clear; a beaten track along which she might safely travel. The duty to another life which might, in time, be equally plain and clear, was now a bewildering mist through which strange shapes passed, like phantasmagoria. She could not think; her mind was benumbed; right and wrong, apparently, had changed places and commingled so, that, for the time, their identity was confused, indistinguishable: she could not guide herself, as yet; she could only hold blindly to the old supports.

The silver finger had lifted itself from her lap and rested on her breast, forming a shining pathway from her heart, through the open window, out into the silence and beauty of the night.

CHAPTER XX.

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Winter again; the city dull, listless and sodden of aspect in the gloom of a January evening. In the country, and nature's quiet places, the dusk was throwing a veil over the cheerlessness of earth, as a friend covers a friend's deficiencies with love; but here, in the haunts of men, garish electric lights made plain the misery. The air was a depressing compound which defied analysis; but was apparently composed of equal parts of snow, drizzle, and stinging sleet; the wind caught it in sudden whirls, and dashed it around corners and into the eyes and the coat collars of wayfarers with gusty malevolence.

The streets were comparatively deserted, only such people being abroad as could not help themselves, and these plodded along with bent heads, and silent curses on the night. Even the poor creatures who daily "till the field of human sympathy" kept close within the shelter of four walls, no matter how forlorn, and left the elements to hold Walpurgis night in the thoroughfares alone.

In a comfortable easy chair, in the handsome parlor of an elegant up-town mansion, sat Ethel Cumberland, reading a novel. Since her second marriage, life had gone pleasantly with her and she was content. Cecil never worried her about things beyond her comprehension, or required other aliments for his spiritual sustenance than that which she was able and willing to furnish; he was a commonplace man and his desires were commonplace—easily understood and satisfied. He liked a pretty wife, a handsome house, a good dinner with fine wine and jolly company; he liked high-stepping horses, a natty turn-out, and the smile of Vanity Fair. Ethel's tastes were similar, and their lives so far had fitted into each other without a single crevice. The Cumberlands were grim and unbending, it is true, and after that one concession to fraternal feeling, made no more; they held themselves rigidly aloof from the pair, and invested all intercourse with paralyzing formality. Ethel did not care a pin for them or their opinion; if they chose to be old-fogyish and disagreeable, they were quite welcome to indulge their fancy. As long as society smiled upon her, Madam Ethel was superbly indifferent to the Cumberland frown.

Cecil worried over it, as men will worry, who have been accustomed to the adulation of their womenkind, when that adulation is withdrawn. He grumbled and fumed over their "damned nonsense," as he called it, and bored his wife no little with conjectures as to their reasons for being stiff and unpleasant when nobody else was.

Since her return from her wedding trip, which had lengthened to four months amid the delights of Paris, Mrs. Cumberland had found time for only one short visit to her little son. There had been such an accumulation of social duties and engagements, that pilgrimages over to Brooklyn were out of the question; and besides, she disliked Mrs. Creswell, Thorne's aunt, who had charge of the boy, and

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who had the bad taste, Ethel felt sure, to disapprove of her. It was too bad of Nesbit to put the child so far away, and with a person whom she did not like; it amounted to a total separation, for of course it would be impossible for her to make such a journey often. When her time should be less occupied, she would write to Nesbit about it; meanwhile, her maternal solicitude found ample pacification in sending a servant across at intervals to carry toys and confectionery to the little fellow, and to inquire after his welfare.

The portieres were drawn aside to admit Mr. Cumberland in smoking jacket and slippers, yawning and very much bored. He was a large, heavy looking man, very dependent on outside things for his entertainment. Failing to attract his wife's attention, he lounged over to the window, and drew aside the velvet curtain. The atmosphere was heavy, and the light in front of the house appeared to hold itself aloof from the environment in a sulky, self-contained way; all down the street, the other lamps looked like the ghosts of lights that had burned and died in past ages.

A little girl with a bag of apples in her frost-bitten hands came hastily around the corner, and, going with her head down against the sleet, butted into an elderly gentleman, with a big umbrella, who was driving along in an opposite direction. The gentleman gave the child an indignant shove which caused her to seat herself violently upon the pavement; the bag banged hard against the bricks and delivered up its trust, and the apples scudded away into the gutter.

Cecil laughed amusedly as the little creature picked herself up crying, and proceeded to institute search for the missing treasure. A kindly policeman, who doubtless had children of his own, stopped on his beat, and helped her, wiping the mud from the rescued fruit with his handkerchief, and securing all again with a newspaper and a stout twine string which he took from his pocket; then they went away together, the officer carrying the bundle and the child trotting contentedly in the lee of him. They seemed to be old acquaintances.

Nothing else happened along to amuse him, so Mr. Cumberland let the velvet folds fall back in their place and came over to the fire. He had been suffering with a heavy cold, and found confinement to the house in the last degree irksome. His wife was too much engrossed with her book to be willing to lay it aside for his entertainment, and he spurned her suggestion of the evening paper, so there was nothing for it but to sulk over a cigar and audibly curse the weather.

A sharp ring at the door-bell, tardily answered by a servant, and then footsteps approached the parlor door. Husband and wife looked up with interest—with expectation. Was it a visitor? No; only the servant with a telegram which he handed Mr. Cumberland, and then withdrew. Cecil turned the thin envelope in his hand inquisitively. He was fond of having every thing pass through his own hands—of

knowing all the ins and outs, the minutiae of daily happenings. “What is it?” questioned Ethel, indolently.

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"A dispatch for you. Shall I open it?"

"If you like. I hate dispatches. They always suggest unpleasant possibilities. It's a local, so I guess it's from my aunt, about that rubbishing dinner of hers."

Cecil tore open the envelope and read the few words it contained with a lengthening visage; then he let his hand fall, and stared blankly across at his wife.

"It's from that fellow! and it's about the child," he said, uneasily.

"What fellow? What child? Not mine! Give it to me quickly, Cecil. How slow you are!" And she snatched the telegram from his unresisting hand. Hastily she scanned the words, her breath coming in gasps, her fingers trembling so that she could scarcely hold the paper. "The child is dying. Come at once!" That was all, and the message was signed Nesbit Thorne. Short, curt, peremptory, as our words are apt to be in moments of intense emotion; a bald fact roughly stated.

For a moment Ethel Cumberland sat stunned, with pallid face and shaking hands, from which the message slipped and fluttered to the carpet. Then she sprang to her feet in wild excitement, an instinct aroused in her breast which even animals know when their young are in danger.

"Cecil!" she cried, sharply, "don't you hear? My child! My baby is dying! Why do you stand there staring at me? I must go—you must take me to him now, this instant, or it will be too late. Don't you understand? My darling—my boy is dying!" and she burst into a passion of grief, wringing her hands and wailing. "Go! send for a carriage. There's not a moment to lose. Oh, my baby!—my baby!"

"You can't go out in this storm. It's sleeting heavily, and I've been ill. I can't let you go all that distance with only a maid, and how am I to turn out in such weather?" objected Mr. Cumberland, who, when he was opposed to a thing, was an adept in piling up obstacles. "I tell you it's impossible, Ethel. It's madness, on such a night as this."

"Who cares for the storm?" raved Ethel, whose feelings, if evanescent, were intense. "I *will* go, Cecil! I don't want you, I'll go by myself. Nothing shall stop me. If it stormed fire and blood I should go all the same. I'll walk—I'll *crawl* there, before I will stay here and let my boy die without me. He is *my* baby—my *own* child, I tell you, Cecil!—if he isn't yours."

Of this fact Cecil Cumberland needed no reminder. It was a thorn that pricked and stung even his dull nature—for the child's father lived. To a jealous temperament it is galling to be reminded of a predecessor in a wife's affections, even when the grave has closed over him; if the man still lives, it is intolerable.

He was not a brute, and he knew that he must yield to his wife's pressure—that he had no choice but to yield; but he stood for a moment irresolute, staring at her with lowering brows, a hearty curse on living father and dying child slowly formulating in his breast.

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As he turned to leave the room to give the necessary orders, a carriage drove rapidly to the door and stopped, and there was a vigorous pull at the bell. Thorne had provided against all possible delay. Then the question arose of who should accompany her, and they found that there was not a single available woman in the house. It was impossible to let her go alone, and Cumberland, with the curses rising from his heart to his lips, was forced, in very manhood, to go with her himself.

In Brooklyn Mrs. Creswell met them herself at the door, and appeared surprised—as well she might—to see Mr. Cumberland. She motioned Ethel toward the staircase, and then with a formal inclination of the head, ushered her more unwelcome guest into a small parlor where there was a fire and a lamp burning. Here she left him alone. Her house was in the suburbs, and there was nowhere else for him to go at that hour of the night and in that terrible storm.

The room was warm and cheerful, a child's toys lay scattered on floor and sofa, a little hat and coat were on the table, beside a cigar case and a crumpled newspaper. There was nothing for the man to do save to stare around and walk the floor impatiently, longing for death to hasten with his work, so that the false position might be ended.

Guided by unerring instinct, Ethel went straight to the chamber where her child lay dying—perhaps already dead. Outside the door she paused with her hand pressed hard on her throbbing heart.

It was a piteous sight that met her view as the door swung open, rendered doubly piteous by the circumstances. A luxurious room, a brooding silence, a tiny white bed on which a little child lay, slowly and painfully breathing his life away.

CHAPTER XXI.

There were two persons in the room besides the little one: Thorne and the doctor, a grave, elderly man, who bowed to the lady, and, after a whispered word with Thorne, withdrew. Ethel sank on her knees beside the low bed and stretched out yearning arms to the child; the mother-love awakened at last in her heart and showing itself in her face.

“My baby!” she moaned, “my little one, don't you know your mother? Open your beautiful eyes, my darling, and look at me; it is your mother who is calling you!” Her bonnet had fallen off, the rich wrap and furs were trailing on the carpet where she had flung them; her arms were gathered close around the little form, her kisses raining on the pallid face, the golden hair.

The sleet beat on the window panes; the air of the room stirred as though a dark wing pressed it; the glow of the fire looked angry and fitful; a great, black lump of coal settled

down in the grate and broke; in its sullen heart blue flames leaped and danced weirdly. The woman knelt beside the bed, and the man stood near her.

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In the room there was silence. The child's eyes unclosed, a gleam of recognition dawned in them, he whispered his mother's name and put his hand up to her neck. Then his look turned to his father, his lips moved. Thorne knelt beside the pillow and bent his head to listen; the little voice fluttered and broke, the hand fell away from Ethel's neck, the lids drooped over the beautiful eyes. Thorne raised the tiny form in his arms, the golden head rested on his breast, Ethel leaned over and clasped the child's hands in hers. A change passed over the little face—the last change—the breath came in feeble, fluttering sighs, the pulse grew weaker, weaker still, the heart ceased beating, the end had come.

Gently, peacefully, with his head on his father's breast, his hands in his mother's clasp, the innocent spirit had slipped from its mortal sheath, and the waiting angel had tenderly received it.

Thorne laid the child gently down upon the pillows, pressing his hand over the exquisite eyes, his lips to the ones that would never pay back kisses any more; then he rose and stood erect. Ethel had risen also, and confronted him, terror, grief, and bewilderment, fighting for mastery in her face—in her heart. Half involuntarily, she stretched out her hands, and made a movement as though she would go to him; half involuntarily he extended his arms to receive her; then, with a shuddering sob, her arms fell heavily to her sides, and he folded his across his breast.

Down below, pacing the floor, in hot impatience to be gone, was the other man, waiting with smoldering jealousy and fierce longing for the end. And, outside, the snow fell heavily, with, ever and anon, a wild lash of bitter sleet; the earth cowered under her white pall, hiding from the storm, and the wind sobbed and moaned as it swept through the leafless trees like a creature wailing.

CHAPTER XXII.

The south of France. There is music in the very words—sunshine, poetry, and a sense of calm; a suggestion of warmth and of infinite delight. No wonder pain, care and invalidism, flock there, from less favored climes, for comfort and healing; returning, year after year, to rest beneath the shadow of olive and ilex, and to dream the luscious days away beside the blue waters of the Mediterranean, drinking in strength and peace with every far-reaching gaze into the cloudless azure of the southern sky, every deep-drawn breath of the sunny southern air.

Mrs. Smith grew daily stronger, more like herself. Time, and care, and ceaseless affection, had wrought their beneficent work, and mind and body were recovering a healthier tone; her interest revived, and her hold on life renewed itself. As the weeks drifted into months, her condition became so materially improved that the anxiety of her family subsided and left room for other thoughts and interests; and finally her health was

sufficiently re-established to admit of her husband's leaving them in the picturesque French village, while he returned to America.

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In the quaint little village, time glided softly by on golden-slippered feet, the peaceful monotony broken only by little jaunts to neighboring hamlets, the arrival and departure of the mails, and long, blissful sails on the deep blue sea. Blanche's sweet face and gentle ways speedily won the simple hearts of the fisher-folks, and her letters were filled with anecdotes of her village *proteges*, and their picturesque life. And a steamer would have been necessary to convey away the floral and aquatic treasures heaped on her by the kindly peasants and their little brown-legged children.

The family would winter abroad, and return to America in the spring for the wedding, which Blanche had decided should take place in June. June was a lovely month, she thought, past all the uncertainty of spring, and with the glory of summer beyond it.

Some weeks after General Smith's return to New York, Nesbit Thorne joined his relatives in the pretty Mediterranean village. The general had found his nephew so changed, so worn in mind and body, that the kindly old soldier became seriously alarmed, and insisted on trying the remedy uppermost in his mind. He had come, with unswerving faith, to regard the south of France as an unfailing sanitarium, and he took his nephew promptly in hand, and gave him no peace until he consented to go abroad, never leaving him until he had secured his stateroom, and seen him embarked on his voyage.

Thorne went indifferently enough, partly to escape his uncle's persistence, and partly because all places were alike, all equally wearisome to him. He cherished also a hope of hearing, through Blanche, some tidings of the woman who still possessed him like a spell.

When he first joined them, Norma's waning hopes flickered up, in a final effort at revivification, but not for long. That her cousin should be moody, listless and thoroughly unhinged, did not surprise her, since the trials through which he had recently passed were sufficient to have tried a more robust physique than his. She set herself to interest and cheer him, and, at first, was in a measure successful; for Thorne—always fond of Norma, observed her efforts and exerted himself to a responsive cheerfulness, often feigning an interest he was far from feeling, in order to avoid disappointing her. But as he grew accustomed to her ministrations, the effort relaxed and he fell into gloom and bitterness once more.

There was in the man a sense of wrong, as well as failure. Life had dealt hardly with him—the bitterness had been wrung out to him to the very dregs. In all things—whether his intentions had been noble or ignoble, he had alike failed. He could not understand it. In his eyes, the conduct of the two women whose influence had been potent in his life, while springing from different causes, had resulted in the same effect—uncompromising hardness toward *him*. The diverse properties of the solutions had made no appreciable difference in the crystallization.

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His love for Pocahontas had suffered no diminution; rather, it had increased. His longing for her presence, for her love, was so great at times, that the thought would come to him to end the intolerable pain by stopping forever the beating of the heart that would not break.

Her second refusal had been a cruel blow to him. He had seemed to himself so patient, so tenderly considerate; he had made allowance for the conservatism, the old world principles and prejudices amid which she had been reared; he had given her time to weigh and consider and plead. That the verdict should have gone against him, admitted, in his mind, but of one conclusion—Pocahontas did not love him. Had she loved him, she *must* have proved responsive; love, as he understood it, did not crucify itself for a principle; it was more prone to break barriers than to erect them. And this point of hers was no principle; it was, at noblest, an individual conscientious scruple, and to the man of the world it appeared the narrowest of bigotry.

His mind slowly settled to the conviction that she had never loved him as he had loved her—as he still loved her. Then began a change for the worse. The doubt of her love begot other doubts—a grisly brood of them—doubt of truth, doubt of generosity and courage, doubt of disinterestedness, doubt of womanhood. Thorne was getting in a bad way. Over the smoldering fires of his heart a crust of cynicism began to form and harden, powdered thick with the ashes of bitterness. What was the worth of love?—*he* had found it but a fair-weather friend. A storm—less than a storm—a cloud, though but as big as a man's hand, had sent the frail thing skurrying to cover. All ended in self—the *ego* dominated the world. Righteousness and unrighteousness arrived at the same result. The good called it self-sacrifice, and blinded and glorified themselves; the bad were less hypocritical; *they* gave it no sounding name and sought it openly. Self—from first to last, the same under all names and all disguises. Nay, the wicked were truer than the good, for the self-seeker inflicted no lasting injury on any save himself, while the ardor with which the self-immolator flourished the sacrificial knife imperiled other vitals than his own.

Truly, Thorne was getting into a very bad way. His was not the nature that emits sweetness when bruised; it cankered and got black spots through it. And he knew no physician to whom he could go for healing; no power, greater than his own, to set his disjointed life straight. Love and faith, alike, stood afar off. The waters of desolation encompassed his soul, without a sign of olive branch or dove.

Norma, watching him with the eyes of her heart, as well as those of her understanding, learned something of all this. Thorne did not tell her, indeed he talked little in the days they spent together, walking or sitting on the warm dry sand of the coast, and of himself not at all. His pain was a prisoner, and his breast its Bastile.

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But Norma learned it, all the same, and learned, too, that never while that stormy heart beat in a living breast would it beat for her. She faced the conclusion squarely, accepted it, and took her resolution. Norma was a proud woman, and she never flinched; the world should know nothing of her pain, should never guess that her life held aught of disappointment.

A letter from Blanche to Berkeley, written within the following month, contained the result of Norma's resolution.

"You will be surprised," Blanche wrote, "to hear of Norma's sudden marriage to Hugh Castleton, which took place three days ago, at the house of the American Minister here in Paris. We were amazed—at least mamma and I were—when Hugh joined us here, and, after a long interview with Norma, informed us that he had cabled father for consent and that the ceremony was to take place almost immediately. Hugh, as perhaps you know, is a brother of Mrs. Vincent, Norma's intimate friend, and he has been in love with Norma time out of mind. I do not like the marriage, and feel troubled and sick at heart about it. It has been so hastily arranged, and Norma isn't one bit in love with her husband, and don't pretend to be. Hugh is patient and devoted to her, which is my strongest hope for their happiness in the future. It seems to me so unnatural to make a loveless marriage. I can't understand a woman's doing it. Nesbit is going to Palestine and the East. He is miserably changed; his hair is beginning to streak with gray at the temples already, and the lines about his mouth are getting hard. It makes me miserable to think about his life and his future. I can't help feeling that he has had hard measure meted out to him all around. It is cruel to touch happiness but never grasp it. I know what you all think about the affair, Berkeley, but I'm so wrought up about poor Nesbit, I must and *will* speak. He ought not to be made to suffer so; it would be far kinder to take a pistol and kill him at once. You don't think about *him* at all—and you should. I know that I'm just a silly little thing, and that my opinions don't amount to much, but I must say that I think you are wrong about this matter. A human soul is worth more than a scruple, be the scruple ever so noble, and I believe the Heavenly Father thinks so too. If you, who are strong and large-minded, will put prejudice aside and think the matter out fairly, you will be *obliged* to see that Pocahontas is doing wrong. She is killing herself, and she is killing him, and you ought not to let her do it. You know your influence over her—I believe it is you and your mother—the dread of disappointing you, or lowering herself in your estimation, or something of that sort, that holds her back. Don't do it any longer, Berkeley. Be generous and noble and large-hearted, like God means us all to be toward each other. It is awful to be so hard. Excess of righteousness must be sinful—almost

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as sinful as lack of righteousness. There, I've said it all and shocked you, but I can't help that. Nesbit's face haunts me so that I can't rid myself of it, sleeping or waking. I am all the time picturing terrible possibilities. Think of all that Nesbit has had to endure. Think of how that selfish woman wrecked his past, and ask yourself if there is any justice—not mercy—bare justice, in letting her wreck his future, now that the child's death has severed the last link that bound them together. Has *any thing* been spared Nesbit? Has not his heart been wrung again and again? Put yourself in his place, Berkeley, and acknowledge that after so much tempest, he is entitled to *some* sunshine, How *can* Pocahontas stand it? Could *I*, if it were *you*? Could I endure to see you suffer? Do you think that if *you* were in Nesbit's place I would not come to you, and put my arms round you, and draw your head to my bosom and whisper—'Dear love, if to all this bitterness I can bring one single drop of sweet, take it freely, fully from my lips and from my love?'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

Berkeley Mason went on to New York in ample time to meet the incoming Cunarder. His sister accompanied him, and as it was her first visit to the Empire City, Mason arranged to have nearly a week for lionizing before the arrival of the travelers. Percival was allowed to come from Hoboken and join the party, in order that his mother's eyes might be gladdened by the sight of him the instant she should land.

At the last moment, General Smith was prevented from joining his family in Paris according to his original intention, and having old-fashioned notions relative to the helplessness of ladies, and no sort of confidence in Blanche's ability to distinguish herself as her mother's courier and protector, he cabled privately to Nesbit Thorne, requesting him to defer his Eastern journey for a month, and escort his aunt and cousin home. Thorne changed his plans readily enough. He only contemplated prolonged travel as an expedient to fill the empty days, and if he could be of service to his relatives, held himself quite at their disposal.

Pocahontas was ignorant of this change of programme, or it is certain that she would have remained in Virginia. Her feelings toward Thorne had undergone no change, but, after the long struggle, there had come to her a quiescence that was almost peace. So worn and tempest-tossed had been her mind, that she clung to even this semblance of rest, and would hardly yet have risked the re-opening of the battle, which a meeting with Thorne would be sure to inaugurate.

She was glad to see her old friend General Smith again, for between the two existed a hearty affection, and more than glad to see Percival. That young gentleman's joy at being released from the thralldom of school, coupled with the exhilaration of seeing his

friends, and the prospect of a speedy reunion with his mother and Blanche, appeared to well-nigh craze him. It certainly required unusual vents for its exuberance—such as standing on his head in the elevator, promenading the halls on his hands, and turning “cart-wheels” down the passages, accomplishments acquired with labor and pain from his colored confreres in the South.

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It is an interesting thing to await, on the wharf of a large city, the incoming of a great steamer. The feeling of expectation in the air is exhilarating, the bustle, hurry and excitement are contagious; involuntarily one straightens up, and grows alert, every sense on the *qui vive*, eyes observant, intelligence active, memory garnering impressions. Note the variety of expression in the faces of the waiting crowd—the eager longing, the restless expectation of some; the listless inactivity, indifference, or idle curiosity of others. Stand aside, if you have no business here, no personal interest in the event about to happen, and watch your fellow-men for your own amusement and profit. Many a glimpse of domestic history, many a peep into complex human nature will be vouchsafed you, and if the gift of fancy be yours, you can piece out many a story. See; the throbbing monster has reached her resting place, her fires may subside, her heart may cease its regular pulsations, her machinery may lapse into well-earned rest, given over to polishing and oil and flannel rags. The bridge is down, the waiting crowds rush together, the wharf crowd merging into the deck crowd, and both pouring landward again in an eager flood. There are embraces, kisses, congratulations, tears, a continuous stream of questions and reply, and a never-ending reference to luggage.

There they stand, a little group apart, close beside the railing, with hands outstretched and eyes alight; and amid the bustle and confusion, the embraces and hand-clasping, the collection of hand-traps, and inquiries about checks, no one had time to notice that, at sight of each other, two faces paled, or that two hands as they met were cold and tremulous.

In a marvelously short time after landing, the party were packed into carriages, and whirled away to their hotel, leaving their heavy luggage in the jaws of the custom-house to be rescued later by the general and Berkeley. As they left the wharf, Pocahontas noticed another steamer forging slowly in, and preparing to occupy the berth next that of the Cunarder.

A couple of hours after the arrival of the European travelers at the St. Andrew's Hotel, a squarely-built young man of medium height, with a handsome, bronzed face, and heavy, brown mustache, sprung lightly up the steps of the hotel and passed into the clerk's office. Here he ordered a room and delivered his valise and umbrella to a porter, explaining that he should probably remain several days. Then he turned to the book, pushed toward him by the clerk, to register his name.

"You are late, sir," remarked that functionary, affably; not that he felt interest in the matter, but because to converse was his nature.

"Late, for what?" inquired the gentleman, without glancing up.

"For nothing, in particular," replied the clerk. "I only made the remark because the other Cunard passengers got in an hour ago."

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"I didn't come by the Cunarder. I'm from down South," responded the bronzed man. "I saw her discharging as we came in."

Then he ran his eye over the names above his own on the page of the register. There were only three—Mrs. General Smith, Miss Smith, Nesbit Thorne. No one he knew, so he slapped together the covers of the book, and pushed it from him; procured a light for his cigar, pocketed this key of his room, and sauntered out to have a look at the city, and possibly to drop in at one of the theaters later on.

The clerk, in idle curiosity, pulled the register toward him, opened it, and glanced at the name; it was the fourth from the top, just under Nesbit Thorne's—James Dabney Byrd, Mexico.

CHAPTER XXIV.

No; Blanche was not a clever woman; that could not be claimed for her; but her essential elements were womanly. Pain, grief, distress of any sort woke in her heart a longing to give help and comfort.

Since Norma's marriage, Blanche had drawn much nearer to her cousin. She had always been fond of him in an abstract way, and had felt a surface sorrow, not unmingled with aesthetic interest, in the dramatic incidents of his life. She had lived in the same house with him, had associated with him daily, had taken his hand, had kissed him; but she had never *known* him. She had never gauged his nature with the understanding born of sympathy, never seen the real man. Now it was otherwise. Association with larger, simpler natures had developed the latent capabilities of her own, and the presence of love had made her more observant, more responsive.

Her enlarged sympathies made her yearn over Thorne; her happiness made her long earnestly to help him. She cast about in her mind what she should do. She knew the strength of Berkeley's prejudices, and that his influence with his sister had been—and still was—silently but strenuously exerted to hold her back from a course from which, as Blanche suspected, his feelings, more than his conscience, revolted.

Blanche, differently reared, could not see the matter from the Mason standpoint at all. To her, the past was past; to be deplored, of course, but not to be allowed to cast a baleful shadow on the future. That, to Blanche, was morbid; she could see no sense in drawing conscientiousness to a point and impaling her own heart, and, worse, other hearts thereon. Blanche's creed was simple—people committed faults, made blunders, sinned, suffered; atoned the sin by the suffering, and should then be kissed and forgiven.



She talked to Berkeley in her gentle, persuasive way (she had not courage yet to talk to Pocahontas) and exerted all her influence in Thorne's behalf; but she speedily discovered that she made little headway; that while Berkeley listened, he did not assent; that he put down her efforts; mainly, to personal attachment to her cousin, and was therefore inclined to rule out her testimony. She needed help; pressure must be brought to bear which had no connection with Thorne; some one from the old life must speak, some one who shared the prejudices, and was big enough and generous enough to set them aside and judge of the affair from an unbiased, impersonal standpoint.

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When this idea presented itself, her mind turned instantly to Jim. Here was a man from the old life, a man reared as they had been reared, a man in no way connected with Thorne. Jim could help her, if he would, and somehow, Blanche felt assured that he would.

Jim had discovered their presence in the hotel very speedily and had joined the party, glad, with an earnest gladness, to see his old friends again, glad also to meet these new friends who had become associated with the old ones. Blanche had been attracted by him, as women, children, and dumb animals always were attracted by him; he was strong, and yet very gentle.

She determined to speak to him, to make him understand the position, and to entreat him to exert his influence with Berkeley, and through Berkeley, with Pocahontas, to set this matter straight. She did not know that she was about to do a cruel thing; was about to stretch a soul on the rack and turn the screws. That fine reserve which infolded the Masons like a veil precluded gossiping about themselves or their affairs. Blanche had never heard of Jim as the lover of Pocahontas—or if she had, it had been in an outside, intangible way that had made no impression on her.

Possessed by her idea, and intent on securing an opportunity for uninterrupted conversation, she asked Jim to take a walk with her. She had some calls to make, she said, and they would walk through the park. At this season the park was very beautiful, and she should like to show it to him; New Yorkers were very proud of it. Blanche knew that she was doing an unconventional thing; but she had observed, rather wonderingly, the frank helpfulness with which Southerners would identify themselves with each others' affairs, and she felt sure that in speaking to Jim she ran little risk of rebuff. Jim had known the Masons always, was of their blood; to put his shoulder to their wheel would seem to him the right, and natural thing to do. Therefore Blanche made her request with confidence, and Jim, who had never in his life questioned a woman's right to his time and attention, went with her willingly.

They sauntered about for a time and Jim admired all the beauties that were pointed out to him, and showed his country training by pointing out in his turn, subtler beauties which escaped her; the delicate shading of bark and leaf-bud, the blending of the colors of the soil, the way the shadows fell, the thousand and one things an artist, or a man reared in the woods and fields, is quick to see, if he has eyes in his head. He pointed out to her a nest a pair of birds were building, and called her attention to a tiny squirrel, with a plume-like tail, jumping about among the branches overhead. He told her stories of the tropics, too, and of the strange picturesque life in the land of the Montezumas, and made himself pleasant in a cheery, companionable way that was very winning. He was pleased with Blanche, and thought that his old friend had done well for himself in securing the love of the sweet-faced maiden at his side. He liked talking to her, and walking beside her in the sunshine; he decided that "Berke was a deuced lucky fellow, and had fallen on his feet," and he was glad of it.

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After awhile they turned into an unfrequented walk, and Blanche seized her opportunity. She made Jim sit down on a bench under an old elm tree and seated herself beside him. Then, insensibly and deftly, she turned the talk to Virginia. She spoke of his old home, and praised its beauty, and told him how a love for it had grown up in her heart, although she was a stranger; she spoke of the cordial, friendly people, and of the kindness they had extended to her family; of Warner, his illness, death, and burial beside poor Temple Mason. Then she glided on to Pocahontas, and spoke of her friend with enthusiasm, almost with reverence; then, seeing that his interest was aroused, she told him as simply and concisely as she could the story of her cousin's love for Pocahontas, and the position in which the affair now stood.

"I know that she loves him," Blanche said quietly, "loves him as he loves her, and that she is breaking her own heart, as well as his, by this hesitation. It seems to me so wrong. What is a scruple compared to the happiness of a life? The child is dead, all connection between Nesbit and that heartless woman is severed forever. She is no more to him than she is to you, or to Berkeley. I think that Pocahontas would give way, but for Berkeley, for the influences of her old life. I think some one ought to speak to Berkeley, to make him see how wrong he is, how hard, how almost cruel. I have spoken, but I'm of Nesbit's blood, on Nesbit's side, and my words haven't the weight that words would have coming from a person who is outside of it all, and yet who belongs *to them*. If YOU would speak, Mr. Byrd, I think it would do good. Berkeley would listen to you, and would come to look at this matter in its true light. Pocahontas is breaking her heart, and Nesbit's heart, and she ought not to be let do it." There were tears in Blanche's eyes and in her voice as she spoke, and she laid one small hand on Jim's arm appealingly.

Jim never moved; he sat like a man carved out of stone and listened. He knew that Pocahontas had never loved *him*, as he had wanted her to love him; but the knowledge that her love was given to another man, was bitter. He said no word, only listened with a jealous hatred of the man, who had supplanted him, growing in his breast.

Blanche looked at him with tearful eyes and quivering lips; his gaze was on the ground; his face wore, to her, an absent, almost apathetic look. She was disappointed. She had expected, she did not know exactly *what*, but certainly more sympathy, more response. She thought that his heart must be less noble than his face, and she regretted having given him her confidence and solicited his aid. When they got back to the avenue, she released him from further attendance a trifle coldly. She would make her calls alone, she said, it might be irksome to him, probably he had other engagements. He had been very good to sacrifice so much of his time to her; she would not detain him longer.

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Jim went back to the path and sat down again, not noticing her change of manner, and only conscious of the relief of being free from the necessity of talking commonplace, of being left to think this matter out alone. He thought vaguely that she was a kind, considerate woman and then she passed out of his mind.

The first feeling with which he grappled was wonder; a strange thing had happened. A few short months ago these people had been unknown to him; were, as far as his life had been concerned, non-existent. And now! Land, home, friends, love, all things that had been his, were theirs! His place knew him no more; these strangers filled it. It was a strange thing, a cruel thing.

Pocahontas had been glad to see him again, but in her pleasure there had been preoccupation; he had felt it; it was explained now. He knew that she had never loved him, but the possibility of her loving another man had never come home to him before. He tried to steady himself and realize it; it ate into his heart like corroding acid. Perhaps it was not true; there might be some mistake; then his heart told him that it was true; that there was no mistake. She loved this man, this stranger, of whose existence she had been ignorant that evening when she had said farewell to *him* under the old willows beside the river. She had been tender and pitiful then; she had laid her soft lips against his hand, had given him a flower from her breast. He moved his hand, and, with the fingers of the other hand, touched the spot which her lips had pressed; the flower, faded and scentless, lay, folded with a girlish note or two she had written him, in the inside pocket of his vest.

The shadows shifted as the wind swayed the branches; the sound of women's voices came from behind a clump of evergreens; they were raised in surprise or excitement, and sounded shrill and jarring. In the distance a nurse pushed a basket-carriage carelessly; she was talking to a workman who slouched beside her, and the child was crying. Two sparrows near at hand, quarreled and fought over a bit of string.

His anger burned against Thorne. He could see no good in his rival; no tragedy, no pathos, in the situation. Had his life gone wrong?—Doubtless the fault had been his. Did he suffer? Jim felt a brute joy in the knowledge of his pain.

What was that the young lady had said? Thorne had been divorced—the woman who had been his wife lived—there were prejudices; he knew them all; a barrier existed; his heart leaped. Here was hope, here was vengeance.

A cloud passed over the sun, eclipsing its brightness; a chill was on the face of nature; a dead twig, broken by the squirrel in his gambols, fell at his feet.

He had been asked to speak, to exert his influence, to smooth the path for his rival. He would *not* speak; why should he speak? Was it any business of his? Nay; was it not rather his duty to be silent, or to throw such influence as he possessed into the other

scale? Should he aid to bring about a thing which he had been taught to regard with aversion? Was it not his duty as a man, as a Christian, to *increase* the prejudice, to build higher the barrier? Was it not better that Thorne should suffer, that Pocahontas should suffer, as he himself was suffering, than that wrong should be done?

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The devil is never subtler than when he assumes the garb of priest.

And if he did not speak—more, if he should solidify, by every means in his power, this barrier of prejudice into a wall of principle, which should separate these two forever, what might not be the result? Jim's strong frame shook like a leaf. His abnormally-excited imagination leaped forward and constructed possibilities that thrilled him. The spot on his hand that her lips had touched, burned.

A little girl came down the walk, trundling a hoop; it struck against Jim's foot and fell over. The helpful instinct that was in him made him stoop and lift it for her; the child, a tiny thing, pushed back her curls and looked up at him with grave, wide-open eyes; suddenly her face dimpled; a smile like sunshine broke over it, and she raised her sweet lips to his, to kiss her thanks.

What had happened? A child's look, a child's kiss; it was a strange thing. He raised his head and glanced around, passing his hand over his brow like a man aroused from a delirium of dreams. Forces foreign to his nature had been at work. He could not understand it—or himself.

Words came back to him out of his past—his own words—"a man must hold up his own weight," and other words, "a man must help with his strength a woman's weakness." He thought of his love with pity, with remorse. He had never failed her, never put himself first, till now. What was this thing he had thought of doing?

Jim stood erect and pulled himself together, lifting his head and squaring his shoulders as a man does who is about to face an issue fairly.

CHAPTER XXV.

Pocahontas was alone. The party had dispersed, one here, one there, about their own concerns, filled with their own interests. They had invited her to accompany them, even urged it; but she would not; she was tired, she said, and would rest; but there was no rest for her.

The crisis of her life had come, and she was trying to face it. Heretofore the fight had been unequal; the past had had the advantage of sun and wind and field, the old influences had been potent because they were present, had never been broken. Now she was in a measure removed from them; the forces faced each other on neutral ground, the final conflict was at hand.

What should she do? How should she decide? She was torn and swayed by the conflict of emotions within her; the old fight was renewed with added fierceness. Her heart yearned over Thorne, her love rose up and upbraided her for hardness. He was so changed, he had suffered so, his hair was growing gray, hard lines were deepening

about his mouth, and to his eyes had come an expression that wrung her heart—a cynical hopelessness, a sullen gloom. Was this her work? Was she shutting out hope from a life, thus making a screen of a scruple to keep sunlight from a soul?

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Unconsciously she was assuming the responsibility which he had thrust upon her—was fitting the burden to her shoulders. She did not analyze the position; did not see that he had been ruthless; that he had no right to use such a weapon against her. She only saw that he suffered, that he needed her, that she loved him.

What did it matter about herself? Her scruple might die—and if it should not, she was strong enough to hold it down, to keep her foot on its breast. Was her love so weak that it should shrink from pain?

If only the scruple would die! If only the old influences would lose their hold; if only she could see this thing as the world saw it. Was she made different from others, that her life should be molded on other lines than *their* lives? God, above! *Why* should she suffer, and make Thorne suffer?

Her mother, Berkeley, the dead brother whom she had exalted into a hero, the memory of the brave men and noble women from whom she had sprung, the old traditions, the old associations rose, in her excited fancy, and arrayed themselves on one side. Against them in serried ranks came compassion, all the impulses of true womanhood toward self-sacrifice and love.

The loneliness of the crowded hotel oppressed her; the consciousness of the life that environed but did not touch her, gave birth to a yearning to get away from it all—out into the sunshine and the sweet air, and the warmth and comfort of nature. If she could get away into some still, leafy place, she could think.

Hastily arraying herself, she left her chamber and descended the broad stairway. She passed through the hall, and out into the sunshine of the busy street; and Jim, who, unseen by her, was standing in the clerk's office, turned and looked after her. A troubled expression, like the shadow of a cloud, passed over his face, and he followed her silently.

In the street it was better. There were people, little children, a sense of life, a sense of humanity, and over all, around all, the warm sunlight. Comfort and help abounded. A woman, weighed down with a heavy burden, paused, bewildered, in the middle of a crossing—a man helped her; a child stood crying on a doorstep—a larger child soothed it; an ownerless dog looked pitifully into a woman's face—she stooped and stroked its head with her ungloved hand. The longing for the isolation of nature slowly gave place to a recognition of the community of nature.

A quiet street branched off from the crowded thoroughfare. Pocahontas turned into it and walked on. The roar of traffic deadened as she left it further and further behind; the passers became fewer. It was the forenoon and the people were at work; the houses rose tall on either hand; the street was still and almost deserted.

A man passed with a barrow of flowers—roses, geraniums, jasmin; their breath made the air fragrant. In a stately old church near by some one was playing; a solemn, measured movement. Pocahontas turned aside and entered. The place was still and hushed; the light dim and beautiful with color; on the altar, tapers burned before the mother and child; everywhere there was a faint odor of incense.

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Pocahontas wandered softly here and there, soothed by the peace, comforted by the music. On one side there was a small chapel, built by piety in memory of death. Pocahontas entered it. Here, too, lights burned upon the altar, shedding a soft, golden radiance that was caught and reflected by the silver candlesticks and the gold and crystal of the vases. On the steps of the altar was a great basket of roses; and through a memorial window streamed the sunlight, casting on the tessellated pavement a royal wealth of color, blue and gold and crimson; against the dark walls marble tablets gleamed whitely. Near one of them, a tiny shield, a man stood with his head bent and his shoulder resting against a carved oak column—Nesbit Thorne, and the tablet bore the inscription: “Allen Thorne, obiit Jan. 14th, 18—, aetat 4 years.”

Pocahontas drew back, her breath coming in short gasps; the movement of the music quickened, grew stronger, fiercer, with a crash of cords. Thorne did not move; his head was bent, his profile toward her; about his pose, his whole form, was a look of desolation. His face was stern, its outlines sharp, its expression that of a man who had had hard measure meted out to him, and who knew it, and mutinied against the decree. He did not see her, he was not conscious of her presence, and the knowledge that it was so, sent a pang through her heart. A wave of pity swept over her; an impulse struggled into life, to go to him, to take his hand in hers, to press close to his side, to fill the void of his future with her love. What held her back? Was it pride? Why could not she go to him? His unconsciousness of her presence held her aloof—made her afraid with a strange, new fear.

Footsteps neared, echoing strangely; the music had sunk to a minor cadence which seemed to beat the measure of their advance. The eyes of the woman were filled with a strained expectancy. Into the waiting place, framed by the central arch, came the figure of a man—strongly built, of noble air, of familiar presence. Eyes brave and true and faithful met hers gravely, a hand was outstretched toward her.

Pocahontas shivered, and her heart beat with heavy, muffled strokes. The counter influences of her life were drawing to the death struggle. Thorne turned; his eyes were upon her; he advanced slowly.

Jim came straight to where she stood and took her hands in his; his face was pale and drawn, as the face of a man who has passed through the white heat of suffering. His hands were cold, and trembled a little as they closed on hers; he tried to speak, but his lips were dry and his voice inaudible.

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"Sweetheart," he said at length, using the tender old word unconsciously, and speaking brokenly, "I asked you once to let the thought of me come—sometimes—when life should be hard upon you; to let the influence, of my love stir sometimes in your memory. That would be wrong now—worse; it would be selfish and unmanly. A man has no right to cast his shadow on a woman's life when it has passed into the keeping of another man." His voice grew husky, his lips quivered, but he went bravely on. "I know your story—Berkeley has told me—the young lady has spoken—I take back the request. I'd rather all thought of me should be banished from you in this world and in the next, than that it should make a breach, even in the outworks of your life, to let in trouble to you."

He paused abruptly; through the strong frame ran a shudder, like the recoil from pain; but the man's will was firm, his purpose steadfast. All of her life he had cared for her, been tender with her; shielding her from trouble, or grief, or blame, as far as in him lay, and, though his heart should break, he would not fail her now. Slowly he spoke again.

"Child," he said, gently, "if I've ever said a word that hurts you, forget it, put it from you. I did not understand then; I do *now*—and I'd give my right hand to recall it. What you do has always been right in my eyes—*must* always be right. I can never——" his voice failed him; something rose in his throat and choked utterance; he bent his head until his lips touched the hands he held, and then turned quietly away.

Pocahontas did not move; she scarcely breathed. The spell of Jim's magnanimity held her, made her realize, at last, the grandeur, the immensity of love. Her soul was awed. Thought followed thought through her brain; love in its sublimity was bared to her gaze; self fell away—burned as dross in the fire of suffering; to guide herself was not enough; she must aid and comfort others. If hands were outstretched in anguish, she must clasp them; if a heart cried to her in desolation, she had no right to turn aside. Was she so pure, so clean, so righteous, that contact with another soul—one that had known passions and sorrows of which she was, of which she *must* be, ignorant—should soil her? If so, her righteousness was a poor thing, her cleanness, that of the outside of the cup and platter, her purity, that of unquarried marble.

Thorne drew nearer; she raised her head; their eyes met; he extended his hands with a gesture not to be denied.

With a smile of indescribable graciousness, a tenderness, a royalty of giving, she made a movement forward and laid her hands in his.

CHAPTER XXVI.

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Thorne did not accompany the party to Virginia, although it was tacitly understood that he should follow in time for Blanche's wedding, which would take place in June. Pocahontas wished it so arranged, and Thorne, feeling that his love had come to him, as through fire, was anxious to order all things according to her wishes. He was very quiet, grave, and self-contained; his old buoyancy, his old lightness had passed away forever. The whirl and lash of a hurricane leave traces which not even time can efface. A man does not come through fire unscathed—he is marred, or purified; he is never the same. In Thorne, already, faintly stirred nature's grand impulse of growth, of pressing upward toward the light. He strove to be patient, tender, considerate, to take his happiness, not as reward for what he was, but as earnest of what he might become.

Jim remained in New York also. He would go back to his work, he said, it would be better so. He had come north on business for his company, and when that should be completed he would return to Mexico. He would not go to Virginia; he did not want to see strangers in the old home; he would write to his sisters and explain; no one need trouble about him; he would manage well enough.

Before they separated, Jim had a long talk with Berkeley, and in the course of it the poor fellow completed his victory over self. He spoke generously of Thorne.

"It's a big subject, Berkeley," he said, in conclusion, "and I don't see that you or I have any call to pass judgment on it, or to lay down arbitrary lines, saying *this* is righteous, *that* is unrighteous. We may have our own thoughts about the matter—we *must* have, but we've no right to lop or stretch other people to fit them. Princess is a pure woman, a noble woman, better, a thousand-fold, than you or me or any other man that breathes. From her standpoint, what she does is right, and, whether we differ with her or not, we are bound to believe that she has weighed the matter and made her choke in all honor and truth. And, Berke, listen to me! You are powerless to alter any thing, and it's a man's part to face the inevitable and make the best of it. You can't better things, but you can make them worse. Don't alienate your sister. You are the nearest man of her blood, and, as such, you have influence with her; don't throw it away. If you are cold, hard, and unloving to her now, you'll set up a barrier between you that you'll find it hard to level. Never let her turn from you, Berke. Stand by her always, old friend."

Poor Jim! He could not as yet disassociate the old from the new. To him it still seemed as though Berkeley, and, in a measure, he himself were responsible for her life; must take care and thought for her future. Love and habit form bonds that thought does not readily burst asunder.

Berkeley was good to his sister—influenced partly by Blanche, partly by Jim, but most of all by his strong affection for Pocahontas herself. He drew her to his breast and rested his cheek against her hair a moment, and kissed her tenderly, and the brother and sister understood each other without a spoken word.

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He could not bring himself to be cordial to Thorne all at once, but he loyally tried to do his best, and Thorne was big enough to see and appreciate the effort. There might come a time when the men would be friends.

Poor Mrs. Mason! Her daughter's engagement was a shock, almost a blow to her, and she could not reconcile herself to it at first. The foundations seemed to be slipping from under her feet, the supports in which she trusted, to be falling away. She was a just as well as a loving woman, and she knew that the presence of a new and powerful love brings new responsibilities and a new outlook on life. She faithfully tried to put herself in her daughter's place and to judge of the affair from Pocahontas's standpoint; but the effort was painful to her, and the result not always what she could wish. She recognized, the love being admitted, that Thorne had claims which must be allowed; but she felt it hard that such claims should exist, and her recognition of them was not sufficiently full and generous to make her feel at one with herself. Old minds adapt themselves to new conditions slowly.

However, mother-love is limitless, and, through all, her impulse was to hold to her child, to do nothing, to say nothing which would wound or alienate her. And for the rest—there was no need of haste; she could keep these things and “ponder them in her heart.”