

Mr. Crewe's Career — Volume 3 eBook

Mr. Crewe's Career — Volume 3 by Winston Churchill

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IN WHICH EUPHRASIA TAKES A HAND

Austen had not forgotten his promise to Euphrasia, and he had gone to Hanover Street many times since his sojourn at Mr. Jabe Jenney's. Usually these visits had taken place in the middle of the day, when Euphrasia, with gentle but determined insistence, had made him sit down before some morsel which she had prepared against his coming, and which he had not the heart to refuse. In answer to his inquiries about Hilary, she would toss her head and reply, disdainfully, that he was as comfortable as he should be. For Euphrasia had her own strict ideas of justice, and to her mind Hilary's suffering was deserved. That suffering was all the more terrible because it was silent, but Euphrasia was a stern woman. To know that he missed Austen, to feel that Hilary was being justly punished for his treatment of her idol, for his callous neglect and lack of realization of the blessings of his life—these were Euphrasia's grim compensations.

At times, even, she had experienced a strange rejoicing that she had promised Austen to remain with his father, for thus it had been given her to be the daily witness of a retribution for which she had longed during many years. Nor did she strive to hide her feelings. Their intercourse, never voluminous, had shrunk to the barest necessities for the use of speech; but Hilary, ever since the night of his son's departure, had read in the face of his housekeeper a knowledge of his suffering, an exultation a thousand times more maddening than the little reproaches of language would have been. He avoided her more than ever, and must many times have regretted bitterly the fact that he had betrayed himself to her. As for Euphrasia, she had no notion of disclosing Hilary's torture to his son. She was determined that the victory, when it came, should be Austen's, and the surrender Hilary's.

"He manages to eat his meals, and gets along as common," she would reply. "He only thinks of himself and that railroad."

But Austen read between the lines.

"Poor old Judge," he would answer; "it's because he's made that way, Phrasie. He can't help it, any more than I can help flinging law-books on the floor and running off to the country to have a good time. You know as well as I do that he hasn't had much joy out of life; that he'd like to be different, only he doesn't know how."

"I can't see that it takes much knowledge to treat a wife and son like human beings," Euphrasia retorted; "that's only common humanity. For a man that goes to meetin' twice a week, you'd have thought he'd have learned something by this time out of the New Testament. He's prayed enough in his life, goodness knows!"

Now Euphrasia's ordinarily sharp eyes were sharpened an hundred fold by affection; and of late, at odd moments during his visits, Austen had surprised them fixed on him with a penetration that troubled him.

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"You don't seem to fancy the tarts as much as you used to," she would remark. "Time was when you'd eat three and four at a sittin'."

"Phrasie, one of your persistent fallacies is, that I'm still a boy."

"You ain't yourself," said Euphrasia, ignoring this pleasantry, "and you ain't been yourself for some months. I've seen it. I haven't brought you up for nothing. If he's troubling you, don't you worry a mite. He ain't worth it. He eats better than you do."

"I'm not worrying much about that," Austen answered, smiling. "The Judge and I will patch it up before long—I'm sure. He's worried now over these people who are making trouble for his railroad."

"I wish railroads had never been invented," cried Euphrasia. "It seems to me they bring nothing but trouble. My mother used to get along pretty well in a stage-coach."

One evening in September, when the summer days were rapidly growing shorter and the mists rose earlier in the valley of the Blue, Austen, who had stayed late at the office preparing a case, ate his supper at the Ripton House. As he sat in the big dining room, which was almost empty, the sense of loneliness which he had experienced so often of late came over him, and he thought of Euphrasia. His father, he knew, had gone to Kingston for the night, and so he drove up Hanover Street and hitched Pepper to the stone post before the door. Euphrasia, according to an invariable custom, would be knitting in the kitchen at this hour; and at the sight of him in the window, she dropped her work with a little, joyful cry.

"I was just thinking of you!" she said, in a low voice of tenderness which many people would not have recognized as Euphrasia's; as though her thoughts of him were the errant ones of odd moments! "I'm so glad you come. It's lonesome here of evenings, Austen."

He entered silently and sat down beside her, in a Windsor chair which had belonged to some remote Austen of bygone days.

"You don't have as good things to eat up at Mis' Jenney's as I give you," she remarked. "Not that you appear to care much for eatables any more. Austen, are you feeling poorly?"

"I can dig more potatoes in a day than any other man in Ripton," he declared.

"You'd ought to get married," said Euphrasia, abruptly. "I've told you that before, but you never seem to pay any attention to what I say."

"Why haven't you tried it, Phrasie?" he retorted.

He was not prepared for what followed. Euphrasia did not answer at once, but presently her knitting dropped to her lap, and she sat staring at the old clock on the kitchen shelf.

“He never asked me,” she said, simply.

Austen was silent. The answer seemed to recall, with infinite pathos, Euphrasia’s long-lost youth, and he had not thought of youth as a quality which could ever have pertained to her. She must have been young once, and fresh, and full of hope for herself; she must have known, long ago, something of what he now felt, something of the joy and pain, something of the inexpressible, never ceasing yearning for the fulfilment of a desire that dwarfed all others. Euphrasia had been denied that fulfilment. And he—would he, too, be denied it?

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Out of Euphrasia's eyes, as she gazed at the mantel-shelf, shone the light of undying fires within—fires which at a touch could blaze forth after endless years, transforming the wrinkled face, softening the sterner lines of character. And suddenly there was a new bond between the two. So used are the young to the acceptance of the sacrifice of the old that they lose sight of that sacrifice. But Austen saw now, in a flash, the years of Euphrasia's self-denial, the years of memories, the years of regrets for that which might have been.

"Phrasie," he said, laying a hand on hers, which rested on the arm of the chair, I was only joking, you know."

"I know, I know," Euphrasia answered hastily, and turned and looked into his face searchingly. Her eyes were undimmed, and the light was still in them which revealed a soul of which he had had no previous knowledge.

"I know you was, dear. I never told that to a living being except your mother. He's dead now—he never knew. But I told her—I couldn't help it. She had a way of drawing things out of you, and you just couldn't resist. I'll never forget that day she came in here and looked at me and took my hand—same as you have it now. She wasn't married then. I'll never forget the sound of her voice as she said, 'Euphrasia, tell me about it.'" (Here Euphrasia's own voice trembled.) "I told her, just as I'm telling you,—because I couldn't help it. Folks, had to tell her things."

She turned her hand and clasped his tightly with her own thin fingers.

"And oh, Austen," she cried, "I want so that you should be happy! She was so unhappy, it doesn't seem right that you should be, too."

"I shall be, Phrasie," he said; "you mustn't worry about that."

For a while the only sound in the room was the ticking of the old clock with the quaint, coloured picture on its panel. And then, with a movement which, strangely, was an acute reminder of a way Victoria had, Euphrasia turned and searched his face once more.

"You're not happy," she said.

He could not put this aside—nor did he wish to. Her own confidence had been so simple, so fine, so sure of his sympathy, that he felt it would be unworthy to equivocate; the confessions of the self-reliant are sacred things. Yes, and there had been times when he had longed to unburden himself; but he had had no intimate on this plane, and despite the great sympathy between them—that Euphrasia might understand had never occurred to him. She had read his secret.

In that instant Euphrasia, with the instinct which love lends to her sex, had gone farther; indignation seized her—and the blame fell upon the woman. Austen's words, unconsciously, were an answer to her thoughts.

"It isn't anybody's fault but my own," he said.



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Euphrasia's lips were tightly closed. Long ago the idol of her youth had faded into the substance of which dreams are made—to be recalled by dreams alone; another worship had filled her heart, and Austen Vane had become—for her—the fulness and the very meaning of life itself; one to be admired of all men, to be desired of all women. Visions of Austen's courtship had at times risen in her mind, although Euphrasia would not have called it a courtship. When the time came, Austen would confer; and so sure of his judgment was Euphrasia that she was prepared to take the recipient of the priceless gift into her arms. And now! Was it possible that a woman lived who would even hesitate? Curiosity seized Euphrasia with the intensity of a passion. Who was this woman? When and where had he seen her? Ripton could not have produced her—for it was characteristic of Euphrasia that no girl of her acquaintance was worthy to be raised to such a height; Austen's wife would be an unknown of ideal appearance and attainments. Hence indignation rocked Euphrasia, and doubts swayed her. In this alone she had been an idealist, but she might have known that good men were a prey to the unworthy of the opposite sex.

She glanced at Austen's face, and he smiled at her gently, as though he divined something of her thoughts.

"If it isn't your fault, that you're not happy, then the matter's easily mended," she said.

He shook his head at her, as though in reproof.

"Was yours—easily mended?" he asked.

Euphrasia was silent a moment.

"He never knew," she repeated, in a low voice.

"Well, Phrasie, it looks very much as if we were in the same boat," he said.

Euphrasia's heart gave a bound.

"Then you haven't spoke!" she cried; "I knew you hadn't. I—I was a woman—but sometimes I've thought I'd ought to have given him some sign. You're a man, Austen; thank God for it, you're a man. If a man loves a woman, he's only got to tell her so."

"It isn't as simple as that," he answered.

Euphrasia gave him a startled glance.

"She ain't married?" she exclaimed.

"No," he said, and laughed in spite of himself.

Euphrasia breathed again. For Sarah Austen had had a morality of her own, and on occasions had given expression to extreme views.

“She’s not playin’ with you?” was Euphrasia’s next question, and her tone boded ill to any young person who would indulge in these tactics with Austen.

He shook his head again, and smiled at her vehemence.

“No, she’s not playing with me—she isn’t that kind. I’d like to tell you, but I can’t—I can’t. It was only because you guessed that I said anything about it.” He disengaged his hand, and rose, and patted her on the cheek. “I suppose I had to tell somebody,” he said, “and you seemed, somehow, to be the right person, Phrasie.”

Euphrasia rose abruptly and looked up intently into his face. He thought it strange afterwards, as he drove along the dark roads, that she had not answered him.

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Even though the matter were on the knees of the gods, Euphrasia would have taken it thence, if she could. Nor did Austen know that she shared with him, that night, his waking hours.

The next morning Mr. Thomas Gaylord, the younger, was making his way towards the office of the Gaylord Lumber Company, conveniently situated on Willow Street, near the railroad. Young Tom was in a particularly jovial frame of mind, despite the fact that he had arrived in Ripton, on the night express, as early as five o'clock in the morning. He had been touring the State ostensibly on lumber business, but young Tom had a large and varied personal as well as commercial acquaintance, and he had the inestimable happiness of being regarded as an honest man, while his rough and genial qualities made him beloved. For these reasons and others of a more material nature, suggestions from Mr. Thomas Gaylord were apt to be well received—and Tom had been making suggestions.

Early as he was at his office—the office-boy was sprinkling the floor—young Tom had a visitor who was earlier still. Pausing in the doorway, Mr. Gaylord beheld with astonishment a prim, elderly lady in a stiff, black dress sitting upright on the edge of a capacious oak chair which seemed itself rather discomfited by what it contained,—for its hospitality had hitherto been extended to visitors of a very different sort.

“Well, upon my soul,” cried young Tom, “if it isn’t Euphrasia!”

“Yes, it’s me,” said Euphrasia; “I’ve been to market, and I had a notion to see you before I went home.”

Mr. Gaylord took the office-boy lightly by the collar of his coat and lifted him, sprinkling can and all, out of the doorway and closed the door. Then he drew his revolving chair close to Euphrasia, and sat down. They were old friends, and more than once in a youth far from model Tom had experienced certain physical reproof at her hands, for which he bore no ill-will. There was anxiety on his face as he asked:—“There hasn’t been any accident, has there, Euphrasia?”

“No,” she said.

“No new row?” inquired Tom.

“No,” said Euphrasia. She was a direct person, as we know, but true descendants of the Puritans believe in the decency of preliminaries, and here was certainly an affair not to be plunged into. Euphrasia was a spinster in the strictest sense of that formidable and highly descriptive term, and she intended ultimately to discuss with Tom a subject of which she was supposed by tradition to be wholly ignorant, the mere mention of which still brought warmth to her cheeks. Such a delicate matter should surely be led up to delicately. In the meanwhile Tom was mystified.

“Well, I’m mighty glad to see you, anyhow,” he said heartily. “It was fond of you to call, Euphrasia. I can’t offer you a cigar.”

“I should think not,” said Euphrasia.

Tom reddened. He still retained for her some of his youthful awe.

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"I can't do the honours of hospitality as I'd wish to," he went on; "I can't give you anything like the pies you used to give me."

"You stole most of 'em," said Euphrasia.

"I guess that's so," said young Tom, laughing, "but I'll never taste pies like 'em again as long as I live. Do you know, Euphrasia, there were two reasons why those were the best pies I ever ate?"

"What were they?" she asked, apparently unmoved.

"First," said Tom, "because you made 'em, and second, because they were stolen."

Truly, young Tom had a way with women, had he only been aware of it.

"I never took much stock in stolen things," said Euphrasia.

"It's because you never were tempted with such pie as that," replied the audacious Mr. Gaylord.

"You're gettin' almighty stout," said Euphrasia.

As we see her this morning, could she indeed ever have had a love affair?

"I don't have to use my legs as much as I once did," said Tom. And this remark brought to an end the first phase of this conversation,—brought to an end, apparently, all conversation whatsoever. Tom racked his brain for a new topic, opened his roll-top desk, drummed on it, looked up at the ceiling and whistled softly, and then turned and faced again the imperturbable Euphrasia.

"Euphrasia," he said, "you're not exactly a politician, I believe."

"Well," said Euphrasia, "I've be'n maligned a good many times, but nobody ever went that far."

Mr. Gaylord shook with laughter.

"Then I guess there's no harm in confiding political secrets to you," he said. "I've been around the State some this week, talking to people I know, and I believe if your Austen wasn't so obstinate, we could make him governor."

"Obstinate?" ejaculated Euphrasia.

"Yes," said Tom, with a twinkle in his eye, "obstinate. He doesn't seem to want something that most men would give their souls for."

“And why should he dirty himself with politics?” she demanded. “In the years I’ve lived with Hilary Vane I’ve seen enough of politicians, goodness knows. I never want to see another.”

“If Austen was governor, we’d change some of that. But mind, Euphrasia, this is a secret,” said Tom, raising a warning finger. “If Austen hears about it now, the jig’s up.”

Euphrasia considered and thawed a little.

“They don’t often have governors that young, do they?” she asked.

“No,” said Tom, forcibly, “they don’t. And so far as I know, they haven’t had such a governor for years as Austen would make. But he won’t push himself. You know, Euphrasia, I have always believed that he will be President some day.”

Euphrasia received this somewhat startling prediction complacently. She had no doubt of its accuracy, but the enunciation of it raised young Tom in her estimation, and incidentally brought her nearer her topic.

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"Austen ain't himself lately," she remarked.

"I knew that he didn't get along with Hilary," said Tom, sympathetically, beginning to realize now that Euphrasia had come to talk about her idol.

"It's Hilary doesn't get along with him," she retorted indignantly. "He's responsible—not Austen. Of all the narrow, pig-headed, selfish men the Lord ever created, Hilary Vane's the worst. It's Hilary drove him out of his mother's house to live with strangers. It's Austen that comes around to inquire for his father—Hilary never has a word to say about Austen." A trace of colour actually rose under Euphrasia's sallow skin, and she cast her eyes downward. "You've known him a good while, haven't you, Tom?"

"All my life," said Tom, mystified again, "all my life. And I, think more of him than of anybody else in the world."

"I calculated as much," she said; "that's why I came." She hesitated. Artful Euphrasia! We will let the ingenuous Mr. Gaylord be the first to mention this delicate matter, if possible. "Goodness knows, it ain't Hilary I came to talk about. I had a notion that you'd know if anything else was troubling Austen."

"Why," said Tom, "there can't be any business troubles outside of those Hilary's mixed up in. Austen doesn't spend any money to speak of, except what he gives away, and he's practically chief counsel for our company."

Euphrasia was silent a moment.

"I suppose there's nothing else that could bother him," she remarked. She had never held Tom Gaylord's powers of comprehension in high estimation, and the estimate had not risen during this visit. But she had undervalued him; even Tom could rise to an inspiration—when the sources of all other inspirations were eliminated.

"Why," he exclaimed, with a masculine lack of delicacy, "he may be in love—"

"That's struck you, has it?" said Euphrasia.

But Tom appeared to be thinking; he was, in truth, engaged in collecting his cumulative evidence: Austen's sleigh-ride at the capital, which he had discovered; his talk with Victoria after her fall, when she had betrayed an interest in Austen which Tom had thought entirely natural; and finally Victoria's appearance at Mr. Crewe's rally in Ripton. Young Mr. Gaylord had not had a great deal of experience in affairs of the heart, and he was himself aware that his diagnosis in such a matter would not carry much weight. He had conceived a tremendous admiration for Victoria, which had been shaken a little by the suspicion that she might be intending to marry Mr. Crewe. Tom Gaylord saw no reason why Austen Vane should not marry Mr. Flint's daughter if he chose—or any other man's daughter; partaking, in this respect, somewhat of Euphrasia's view. As for Austen

himself, Tom had seen no symptoms; but then, he reflected, he would not be likely to see any. However, he perceived the object now of Euphrasia's visit, and began to take the liveliest interest in it.

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"So you think Austen's in love?" he demanded.

Euphrasia sat up straighter, if anything.

"I didn't say anything of the kind," she returned.

"He wouldn't tell me, you know," said Tom; "I can only guess at it."

"And the—lady?" said Euphrasia, craftily.

"I'm up a tree there, too. All I know is that he took her sleigh-riding one afternoon at the capital, and wouldn't tell me who he was going to take. And then she fell off her horse down at East Tunbridge Station—"

"Fell off her horse!" echoed Euphrasia, an accident comparable in her mind to falling off a roof. What manner of young woman was this who fell off horses?

"She wasn't hurt," Tom continued, "and she rode the beast home. He was a wild one, I can tell you, and she's got pluck. That's the first time I ever met her, although I had often seen her and thought she was a stunner to look at. She talked as if she took an interest in Austen."

An exact portrayal of Euphrasia's feelings at this description of the object of Austen's affections is almost impossible. A young woman who was a stunner, who rode wild horses and fell off them and rode them again, was beyond the pale not only of Euphrasia's experience but of her imagination likewise. And this hoyden had talked as though she took an interest in Austen! Euphrasia was speechless.

"The next time I saw her," said Tom, "was when she came down here to listen to Humphrey Crewe's attacks on the railroad. I thought that was a sort of a queer thing for Flint's daughter to do, but Austen didn't seem to look at it that way. He talked to her after the show was over."

At this point Euphrasia could contain herself no longer, and in her excitement she slipped off the edge of the chair and on to her feet.

"Flint's daughter?" she cried; "Augustus P. Flint's daughter?"

Tom looked at her in amazement.

"Didn't you know who it was?" he stammered. But Euphrasia was not listening.

"I've seen her," she was saying; "I've seen her ridin' through Ripton in that little red wagon, drivin' herself, with a coachman perched up beside her. Flint's daughter!" Euphrasia became speechless once more, the complications opened up being too vast

for intelligent comment. Euphrasia, however, grasped some of the problems which Austen had had to face. Moreover, she had learned what she had come for, and the obvious thing to do now was to go home and reflect. So, without further ceremony, she walked to the door and opened it, and turned again with her hand on the knob. "Look here, Tom Gaylord," she said, "if you tell Austen I was here, I'll never forgive you. I don't believe you've got any more sense than to do it."

And with these words she took her departure, ere the amazed Mr. Gaylord had time to show her out. Half an hour elapsed before he opened his letters.

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When she arrived home in Hanover Street it was nine o'clock—an hour well on in the day for Euphrasia. Unlocking the kitchen door, she gave a glance at the stove to assure herself that it had not been misbehaving, and went into the passage on her way upstairs to take off her gown before sitting down to reflect upon the astonishing thing she had heard. Habit had so crystallized in Euphrasia that no news, however amazing, could have shaken it. But in the passage she paused; an unwonted, or rather untimely, sound reached her ears, a sound which came from the front of the house—and at nine o'clock in the morning! Had Austen been at home, Euphrasia would have thought nothing of it. In her remembrance Hilary Vane, whether he returned from a journey or not, had never been inside the house at that hour on a week-day; and, unlike the gentleman in “*La Vie de Boheme*,” Euphrasia did not have to be reminded of the Sabbath.

Perhaps Austen had returned! Or perhaps it was a burglar! Euphrasia, undaunted, ran through the darkened front hall to where the graceful banister ended in a curve at the foot of the stairs, and there, on the bottom step, sat a man with his head in his hands. Euphrasia shrieked. He looked up, and she saw that it was Hilary Vane. She would have shrieked, anyway.

“What in the world’s the matter with you?” she cried.

“I—I stumbled coming down the stairs,” he said.

“But what are you doing at home in the middle of the morning?” she demanded.

He did not answer her. The subdued light which crept under the porch and came in through the fan shaped window over the door fell on his face.

“Are you sick?” said Euphrasia. In all her life she had never seen him look like that.

He shook his head, but did not attempt to rise. A Hilary Vane without vigour!

“No,” he said, “no. I just came up here from the train to—get somethin’ I’d left in my room.”

“A likely story!” said Euphrasia. “You’ve never done that in thirty years. You’re sick, and I’m a-going for the doctor.”

She put her hand to his forehead, but he thrust it away and got to his feet, although in the effort he compressed his lips and winced.

“You stay where you are,” he said; “I tell you I’m not sick, and I’m going down to the square. Let, the doctors alone—I haven’t got any use for ‘em.”

He walked to the door, opened it, and went out and slammed it in her face. By the time she had got it open again—a crack—he had reached the sidewalk, and was apparently in full possession of his powers and faculties.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FALLING-OUT IN HIGH PLACES

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Although one of the most exciting political battles ever fought is fast coming to its climax, and a now jubilant Mr. Crewe is contesting every foot of ground in the State with the determination and pertinacity which make him a marked man; although the convention wherein his fate will be decided is now but a few days distant, and everything has been done to secure a victory which mortal man can do, let us follow Hilary Vane to Fairview. Not that Hilary has been idle. The “Book of Arguments” is exhausted, and the chiefs and the captains have been to Ripton, and received their final orders, but more than one has gone back to his fief with the vision of a changed Hilary who has puzzled them. Rumours have been in the air that the harmony between the Source of Power and the Distribution of Power is not as complete as it once was. Certainly, Hilary Vane is not the man he was—although this must not even be whispered. Senator Whitredge had told—but never mind that. In the old days an order was an order; there were no rebels then. In the old days there was no wavering and rescinding, and if the chief counsel told you, with brevity, to do a thing, you went and did it straightway, with the knowledge that it was the best thing to do. Hilary Vane had aged suddenly, and it occurred for the first time to many that, in this utilitarian world, old blood must be superseded by young blood.

Two days before the convention, immediately after taking dinner at the Ripton House with Mr. Nat Billings, Hilary Vane, in response to a summons, drove up to Fairview. One driving behind him would have observed that the Honourable Hilary’s horse took his own gaits, and that the reins, most of the time, drooped listlessly on his quarters. A September stillness was in the air, a September purple clothed the distant hills, but to Hilary the glories of the day were as things non-existent. Even the groom at Fairview, who took his horse, glanced back at him with a peculiar expression as he stood for a moment on the steps with a hesitancy the man had never before remarked.

In the meantime Mr. Flint, with a pile of letters in a special basket on the edge of his desk, was awaiting his counsel; the president of the Northeastern was pacing his room, as was his wont when his activities were for a moment curbed, or when he had something on his mind; and every few moments he would glance towards his mantel at the clock which was set to railroad time. In past days he had never known Hilary Vane to be a moment late to an appointment. The door was open, and five and twenty minutes had passed the hour before he saw the lawyer in the doorway. Mr. Flint was a man of such preoccupation of mind that he was not likely to be struck by any change there might have been in his counsel’s appearance.

“It’s half-past three,” he said.

Hilary entered, and sat down beside the window.

“You mean that I’m late,” he replied.

“I’ve got some engineers coming here in less than an hour,” said Mr. Flint.

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"I'll be gone in less than an hour," said Hilary.

"Well," said Mr. Flint, "let's get down to hardtack. I've got to be frank with you, Vane, and tell you plainly that this political business is all at sixes and sevens."

"It isn't necessary to tell me that," said Hilary.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I know it."

"To put it mildly," the president of the Northeastern continued, "it's the worst mixed-up campaign I ever knew. Here we are with the convention only two days off, and we don't know where we stand, how many delegates we've got, or whether this upstart at Leith is going to be nominated over our heads. Here's Adam Hunt with his back up, declaring he's a reformer, and all his section of the State behind him. Now if that could have been handled otherwise—"

"Who told Hunt to go in?" Hilary inquired.

"Things were different then," said Mr. Flint, vigorously. "Hunt had been promised the governorship for a long time, and when Ridout became out of the question—"

"Why did Ridout become out of the question?" asked Hilary.

Mr. Flint made a gesture of impatience.

"On account of that foolishness in the Legislature, of course."

"That foolishness in the Legislature, as you call it, represented a sentiment all over the State," said Hilary. "And if I'd been you, I wouldn't have let Hunt in this year. But you didn't ask my opinion. You asked me when you begged me to get Adam out, and I predicted that he wouldn't get out."

Mr. Flint took a turn up and down the room.

"I'm sorry I didn't send for him to go to New York," he said. "Well, anyway, the campaign's been muddled, that's certain,—whoever muddled it." And the president looked at his counsel as though he, at least, had no doubts on this point. But Hilary appeared unaware of the implication, and made no reply.

"I can't find out what Bascom and Botcher are doing," Mr. Flint went on; "I don't get any reports—they haven't been here. Perhaps you know. They've had trip passes enough to move the whole population of Putnam

County. Fairplay says they're gettin' delegates for Adam Hunt instead of Giles Henderson. And Whitredge says that Jake Botcher is talking reform."

"I guess Botcher and Bascom know their business," said Mr. Vane. If Mr. Flint had been a less concentrated man, he might have observed that the Honourable Hilary had not cut a piece of Honey Dew this afternoon.

"What is their business?" asked Mr. Flint—a little irrelevantly for him.

"What you and I taught 'em," said Mr. Vane.

Mr. Flint considered this a moment, and decided to let it pass. He looked at the Honourable Hilary more closely, however.

"What's the matter with you, Vane? You're not sick, are you?"

"No."

Mr. Flint took another turn.

"Now the question is, what are we going to do? If you've got any plan, I want to hear it."

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Mr. Vane was silent.

“Suppose Crewe goes into the convention with enough delegates to lock it up, so that none of the three has a majority?”

“I guess he’ll do that,” said Mr. Vane. He fumbled in his pocket, and drew out a typewritten list. It must be explained that the caucuses, or primaries, had been held in the various towns of the State at odd dates, and that the delegates pledged for the different candidates had been published in the newspapers from time to time—although very much in accordance with the desires of their individual newspapers. Mr. Crewe’s delegates necessarily had been announced by what is known as political advertising. Mr. Flint took the Honourable Hilary’s list, ran his eye over it, and whistled.

“You mean he claims three hundred and fifty out of the thousand.”

“No,” said Hilary, “he claims six hundred. He’ll have three hundred and fifty.”

In spite of the ‘Book of Arguments,’ Mr. Crewe was to have three hundred! It was incredible, preposterous. Mr. Flint looked at his counsel once more, and wondered whether he could be mentally failing.

“Fairplay only gives him two hundred.”

“Fairplay only gave him ten, in the beginning,” said Hilary.

“You come here two days before the convention and tell me Crewe has three hundred and fifty!” Mr. Flint exclaimed, as though Hilary Vane were personally responsible for Mr. Crewe’s delegates. A very different tone from that of other times, when conventions were mere ratifications of Imperial decrees. “Do you realize what it means if we lose control? Thousands and thousands of dollars in improvements—rolling stock, better service, new bridges, and eliminations of grade crossings. And they’ll raise our tax rate to the average, which means thousands more. A new railroad commission that we can’t talk to, and lower dividends—lower dividends, do you understand? That means trouble with the directors, the stockholders, and calls for explanations. And what explanations can I make which can be printed in a public report?”

“You were always pretty good at ’em, Flint,” said Hilary.

This remark, as was perhaps natural, did not improve the temper of the president of the Northeastern.

“If you think I like this political business any better than you do, you’re mightily mistaken,” he replied. “And now I want to hear what plan you’ve got for the convention. Suppose there’s a deadlock, as you say there will be, how are you going to handle it? Can you get a deal through between Giles Henderson and Adam Hunt? With all my



other work, I've had to go into this myself. Hunt hasn't got a chance. Bascom and Botcher are egging him on and making him believe he has. When Hunt gets into the convention and begins to fall off, you've got to talk to him, Vane. And his delegates have all got to be seen at the Pelican the night before and understand that they're to swing to Henderson after two ballots. You've got to keep your hand on the throttle in the convention, you understand. And I don't need to impress upon you how grave are the consequences if this man Crewe gets in, with public sentiment behind him and a reactionary Lower House. You've got to keep your hand on the throttle."

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"That's part of my business, isn't it?" Hilary asked, without turning his head.

Mr. Flint did not answer, but his eye rested again on his counsel's face.

"I'm that kind of a lawyer," Hilary continued, apparently more to himself than to his companion. "You pay me for that sort of thing more than for the work I do in the courts. Isn't that so, Flint?"

Mr. Flint was baffled. Two qualities which were very dear to him he designated as sane and safe, and he had hitherto regarded his counsel as the sanest and safest of men. This remark made him wonder seriously whether the lawyer's mind were not giving away; and if so, to whom was he to turn at this eleventh hour? No man in the State knew the ins and outs of conventions as did Hilary Vane; and, in the rare times when there had been crises, he had sat quietly in the little room off the platform as at the keyboard of an organ, and the delegates had responded to his touch. Hilary Vane had named the presidents of conventions, and the committees, and by pulling out stops could get such resolutions as he wished—or as Mr. Flint wished. But now?

Suddenly a suspicion invaded Mr. Flint's train of thought; he repeated Hilary's words over to himself. "I'm that kind of a lawyer," and another individuality arose before the president of the Northeastern. Instincts are curious things. On the day, some years before, when Austen Vane had brought his pass into this very room and laid it down on his desk, Mr. Flint had recognized a man with whom he would have to deal,—a stronger man than Hilary. Since then he had seen Austen's hand in various disturbing matters, and now it was as if he heard Austen speaking. "I'm that kind of a lawyer." Not Hilary Vane, but Hilary Vane's son was responsible for Hilary Vane's condition—this recognition came to Mr. Flint in a flash. Austen had somehow accomplished the incredible feat of making Hilary Vane ashamed—and when such men as Hilary are ashamed, their usefulness is over. Mr. Flint had seen the thing happen with a certain kind of financiers, one day aggressive, combative, and the next broken, querulous men. Let a man cease to believe in what he is doing, and he loses force.

The president of the Northeastern used a locomotive as long as possible, but when it ceased to be able to haul a train up-grade, he sent it to the scrap-heap. Mr. Flint was far from being a bad man, but he worshipped power, and his motto was the survival of the fittest. He did not yet feel pity for Hilary—for he was angry. Only contempt,—contempt that one who had been a power should come to this. To draw a somewhat far-fetched parallel, a Captain Kidd or a Caesar Borgia with a conscience would never have been heard of. Mr. Flint did not call it a conscience—he had a harder name for it. He had to send Hilary, thus vitiated, into the Convention to conduct the most important battle since the founding of the Empire, and Austen Vane was responsible.

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Mr. Flint had to control himself. In spite of his feelings, he saw that he must do so. And yet he could not resist saying: "I get a good many rumours here. They tell me that there may be another candidate in the field—a dark horse."

"Who?" asked Hilary.

"There was a meeting in the room of a man named Redbrook during the Legislature to push this candidate," said Mr. Flint, eyeing his counsel significantly, "and now young Gaylord has been going quietly around the State in his interest."

Suddenly the listless figure of Hilary Vane straightened, and the old look which had commanded the respect and obedience of men returned to his eye.

"You mean my son?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Mr. Flint; "they tell me that when the time comes, your son will be a candidate on a platform opposed to our interests."

"Then," said Hilary, "they tell you a damned lie."

Hilary Vane had not sworn for a quarter of a century, and yet it is to be doubted if he ever spoke more nobly. He put his hands on the arms of his chair and lifted himself to his feet, where he stood for a moment, a tall figure to be remembered. Mr. Flint remembered it for many years. Hilary Vane's long coat was open, and seemed in itself to express this strange and new-found vigour in its flowing lines; his head was thrown back, and a look on his face which Mr. Flint had never seen there. He drew from an inner pocket a long envelope, and his hand trembled, though with seeming eagerness, as he held it out to Mr. Flint.

"Here!" he said.

"What's this?" asked Mr. Flint. He evinced no desire to take it, but Hilary pressed it on him.

"My resignation as counsel for your road."

The president of the Northeastern, bewildered by this sudden transformation, stared at the envelope.

"What? Now—to-day?" he said.

"No," answered Hilary; "read it. You'll see it takes effect the day after the State convention. I'm not much use any more you've done your best to bring that home to me, and you'll need a new man to do—the kind of work I've been doing for you for twenty-five years. But you can't get a new man in a day, and I said I'd stay with you,

and I keep my word. I'll go to the convention; I'll do my best for you, as I always have. But I don't like it, and after that I'm through. After that I become a lawyer—lawyer, do you understand?"

"A lawyer?" Mr. Flint repeated.

"Yes, a lawyer. Ever since last June, when I came up here, I've realized what I was. A Brush Bascom, with a better education and more brains, but a Brush Bascom—with the brains prostituted. While things were going along smoothly I didn't know—you never attempted to talk to me this way before. Do you remember how you took hold of me that day, and begged me to stay? I do, and I stayed. Why? Because I was a friend of yours. Association with you for twenty-five years had got under my skin, and I thought it had got under yours." Hilary let his hand fall. "To-day you've given me a notion of what friendship is. You've given me a chance to estimate myself on a new basis, and I'm much obliged to you for that. I haven't got many years left, but I'm glad to have found out what my life has been worth before I die."

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He buttoned up his coat slowly, glaring at Mr. Flint the while with a courage and a defiance that were superb. And he had picked up his hat before Mr. Flint found his tongue.

"You don't mean that, Vane," he cried. "My God, think what you've said!"

Hilary pointed at the desk with a shaking finger.

"If that were a scaffold, and a rope were around my neck, I'd say it over again. And I thank God I've had a chance to say it to you." He paused, cleared his throat, and continued in a voice that all at once had become unemotional and natural. "I've three tin boxes of the private papers you wanted. I didn't think of 'em to-day, but I'll bring 'em up to you myself on Thursday."

Mr. Flint reflected afterwards that what made him helpless must have been the sudden change in Hilary's manner to the commonplace. The president of the Northeastern stood where he was, holding the envelope in his hand, apparently without the power to move or speak. He watched the tall form of his chief counsel go through the doorway, and something told him that that exit was coincident with the end of an era.

The end of an era of fraud, of self-deception, of conditions that violated every sacred principle of free government which men had shed blood to obtain.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN ADVENTURE OF VICTORIA'S

Mrs. Pomfret was a proud woman, for she had at last obtained the consent of the lion to attend a lunch party. She would have liked a dinner much better, but beggars are not choosers, and she seized eagerly on the lunch. The two days before the convention Mr. Crewe was to spend at Leith; having continual conferences, of course, receiving delegations, and discussing with prominent citizens certain offices which would be in his gift when he became governor. Also, there was Mr. Watling's nominating speech to be gone over carefully, and Mr. Crewe's own speech of acceptance to be composed. He had it in his mind, and he had decided that it should have two qualities: it should be brief and forceful.

Gratitude, however, is one of the noblest qualities of man, and a statesman should not fail to reward his faithful workers and adherents. As one of the chiefest of these, Mrs. Pomfret was entitled to high consideration. Hence the candidate had consented to have a lunch given in his honour, naming the day and the hour; and Mrs. Pomfret, believing that a prospective governor should possess some of the perquisites of royalty, in a rash moment submitted for his approval a list of guests. This included two distinguished

foreigners who were staying at the Leith Inn, an Englishman and an Austrian, and an elderly lady of very considerable social importance who was on a visit to Mrs. Pomfret.

Mr. Crewe had graciously sanctioned the list, but took the liberty of suggesting as an addition to it the name of Miss Victoria Flint, explaining over the telephone to Mrs. Pomfret that he had scarcely seen Victoria all summer, and that he wanted particularly to see her. Mrs. Pomfret declared that she had only left out Victoria because her presence might be awkward for both of them, but Mr. Crewe waved this aside as a trivial and feminine objection; so Victoria was invited, and another young man to balance the table.

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Mrs. Pomfret, as may have been surmised, was a woman of taste, and her villa at Leith, though small, had added considerably to her reputation for this quality. Patterson Pomfret had been a gentleman with red cheeks and an income, who incidentally had been satisfied with both. He had never tried to add to the income, which was large enough to pay the dues of the clubs the lists of which he thought worthy to include his name; large enough to pay hotel bills in London and Paris and at the baths, and to free the servants at country houses; large enough to clothe his wife and himself, and to teach Alice the three essentials of music, French, and deportment. If that man is notable who has mastered one thing well, Patterson Pomfret was a notable man: he had mastered the possibilities of his income, and never in any year had he gone beyond it by so much as a sole d vin blanc or a pair of red silk stockings. When he died, he left a worthy financial successor in his wife.

Mrs. Pomfret, knowing the income, after an exhaustive search decided upon Leith as the place to build her villa. It must be credited to her foresight that, when she built, she saw the future possibilities of the place. The proper people had started it. And it must be credited to her genius that she added to these possibilities of Leith by bringing to it such families as she thought worthy to live in the neighbourhood —families which incidentally increased the value of the land. Her villa had a decided French look, and was so amazingly trim and neat and generally shipshape as to be fit—for only the daintiest and most discriminating feminine occupation. The house was small, and its metamorphosis from a plain wooden farm-house had been an achievement that excited general admiration. Porches had been added, and a coat of spotless white relieved by an orange striping so original that many envied, but none dared to copy it. The striping went around the white chimneys, along the cornice, under the windows and on the railings of the porch: there were window boxes gay with geraniums and abundant awnings striped white and red, to match the flowers: a high, formal hemlock hedge hid the house from the road, through which entered a blue-stone drive that cut the close-cropped lawn and made a circle to the doorway. Under the great maples on the lawn were a tea-table, rugs, and wicker chairs, and the house itself was furnished by a variety of things of a design not to be bought in the United States of America: desks, photograph frames, writing-sets, clocks, paperknives, flower baskets, magazine racks, cigarette boxes, and dozens of other articles for the duplicates of which one might have searched Fifth Avenue in vain.

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Mr. Crewe was a little late. Important matters, he said, had detained him at the last moment, and he particularly enjoined Mrs. Pomfret's butler to listen carefully for the telephone, and twice during lunch it was announced that Mr. Crewe was wanted. At first he was preoccupied, and answered absently across the table the questions of the Englishman and the Austrian about American politics, and talked to the lady of social prominence on his right not at all; nor to Mrs. Pomfret—who excused him. Being a lady of discerning qualities, however, the hostess remarked that Mr. Crewe's eyes wandered more than once to the far end of the oval table, where Victoria sat, and even Mrs. Pomfret could not deny the attraction. Victoria wore a filmy gown of mauve that infinitely became her, and a shadowy hat which, in the semi-darkness of the dining room, was a wondrous setting for her shapely head. Twice she caught Mr. Crewe's look upon her and returned it amusedly from under her lashes,—and once he could have sworn that she winked perceptibly. What fires she kindled in his deep nature it is impossible to say.

She had kindled other fires at her side. The tall young Englishman had lost interest in American politics, had turned his back upon poor Alice Pomfret, and had forgotten the world in general. Not so the Austrian, who was on the other side of Alice, and who could not see Victoria. Mr. Crewe, by his manner and appearance, had impressed him as a person of importance, and he wanted to know more. Besides, he wished to improve his English, and Alice had been told to speak French to him. By a lucky chance, after several blind attempts, he awakened the interest of the personality.

“I hear you are what they call reform in America?”

This was not the question that opened the gates.

“I don't care much for the word,” answered Mr. Crewe, shortly; “I prefer the word progressive.”

Discourse on the word “progressive” by the Austrian almost a monologue. But he was far from being discouraged.

“And Mrs. Pomfret tells me they play many detestable tricks on you—yes?”

“Tricks!” exclaimed Mr. Crewe, the memory of many recent ones being fresh in his mind; “I should say so. Do you know what a caucus is?”

“Caucus—caucus? It brings something to my head. Ah, I have seen a picture of it, in some English book. A very funny picture—it is in fun, yes?”

“A picture?” said Mr. Crewe. “Impossible!”

“But no,” said the Austrian, earnestly, with one finger to his temples. “It is a funny picture, I know. I cannot recall. But the word caucus I remember. That is a droll word.”

“Perhaps, Baron,” said Victoria, who had been resisting an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, “you have been reading ‘Alice in Wonderland.’”

The Englishman, Beatrice Chillingham, and some others (among whom were not Mr. Crewe and Mrs. Pomfret) gave way to an extremely pardonable mirth, in which the good-natured baron joined.

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"Ach!" he cried. "It is so, I have seen it in 'Alice in Wonderland.'" Here the puzzled expression returned to his face, "But they are birds, are they not?"

Men whose minds are on serious things are impatient of levity, and Mr. Crewe looked at the baron:

"No," he said, "they are not birds."

This reply was the signal for more laughter.

"A thousand pardons," exclaimed the baron. "It is I who am so ignorant. You will excuse me—yes?"

Mr. Crewe was mollified. The baron was a foreigner, he had been the object of laughter, and Mr. Crewe's chivalrous spirit resented it.

"What we call a caucus in the towns of this State," he said, "is a meeting of citizens of one party to determine who their candidates shall be. A caucus is a primary. There is a very loose primary law in this State, purposely kept loose by the politicians of the Northeastern Railroads, in order that they may play such tricks on decent men as they have been playing on me."

At this mention of the Northeastern Railroads the lady on Mr. Crewe's right, and some other guests, gave startled glances at Victoria. They observed with surprise that she seemed quite unmoved.

"I'll tell you one or two of the things those railroad lobbyists have done," said Mr. Crewe, his indignation rising with the subject, and still addressing the baron. "They are afraid to let the people into the caucuses, because they know I'll get the delegates. Nearly everywhere I speak to the people, I get the delegates. The railroad politicians send word to the town rings to hold snap caucuses' when they hear I'm coming into a town to speak, and the local politicians give out notices only a day before, and only to the voters they want in the caucus. In Hull the other day, out of a population of two thousand, twenty men elected four delegates for the railroad candidate."

"It is corruption!" cried the baron, who had no idea who Victoria was, and a very slim notion of what Mr. Crewe was talking about.

"Corruption!" said Mr. Crewe. "What can you expect when a railroad owns a State? The other day in Britain, where they elect fourteen delegates, the editor of a weekly newspaper printed false ballots with two of my men at the top and one at the bottom, and eleven railroad men in the middle. Fortunately some person with sense discovered the fraud before it was too late."

"You don't tell me!" said the baron.

“And every State and federal office-holder has been distributing passes for the last three weeks.”

“Pass?” repeated the baron. “You mean they fight with the fist—so? To distribute a pass—so,” and the baron struck out at an imaginary enemy. “It is the American language. I have read it in the prize-fight. I am told to read the prize-fight and the baseball game.”

Mr. Crewe thought it obviously useless to continue this conversation.

“The railroad,” said the baron, “he is the modern Machiavelli.”

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"I say," Mr. Rangely, the Englishman, remarked to Victoria, "this is a bit rough on you, you know."

"Oh, I'm used to it," she laughed.

"Mr. Crewe," said Mrs. Pomfret, to the table at large, "deserves tremendous credit for the fight he has made, almost single-handed. Our greatest need in this country is what you have in England, Mr. Rangely, —gentlemen in politics. Our country gentlemen, like Mr. Crewe, are now going to assume their proper duties and responsibilities." She laid her napkin on the table and glanced at Alice as she continued: "Humphrey, I shall have to appoint you, as usual, the man of the house. Will you take the gentlemen into the library?"

Another privilege of celebrity is to throw away one's cigar, and walk out of the smoking room if one is bored. Mr. Crewe was, in a sense, the host. He indicated with a wave of his hand the cigars and cigarettes which Mrs. Pomfret had provided, and stood in a thoughtful manner before the empty fireplace, with his hands in his pockets, replying in brief sentences to the questions of Mr. Chillingham and the others. To tell the truth, Mr. Crewe was bringing to bear all of his extraordinary concentration of mind upon a problem with which he had been occupied for some years past. He was not a man, as we know, to take the important steps of life in a hurry, although; like the truly great, he was capable of making up his mind in a very brief period when it was necessary to strike. He had now, after weighing the question with the consideration which its gravity demanded, finally decided upon definite action. Whereupon he walked out of the library, leaving the other guests to comment as they would; or not comment at all, for all he cared. Like all masterful men, he went direct to the thing he wanted.

The ladies were having coffee under the maples, by the tea-table. At some little distance from the group Beatrice Chillingham was walking with Victoria, and it was evident that Victoria found Miss Chillingham's remarks amusing. These were the only two in the party who did not observe Mr. Crewe's approach. Mrs. Pomfret, when she saw the direction which he was taking, lost the thread of her conversation, and the lady who was visiting her wore a significant expression.

"Victoria," said Mr. Crewe, "let's go around to the other side of the house and look at the view."

Victoria started and turned to him from Miss Chillingham, with the fun still sparkling in her eyes. It was, perhaps, as well for Mr. Crewe that he had not overheard their conversation; but this might have applied to any man.

"Are you sure you can spare the time?" she asked.

Mr. Crewe looked at his watch—probably from habit.

“I made it a point to leave the smoking room early,” he replied.

“We’re flattered—aren’t we, Beatrice?”

Miss Chillingham had a turned-up nose, and a face which was apt to be slightly freckled at this time of year; for she contemned vanity and veils. For fear of doing her an injustice, it must be added that she was not at all bad-looking; quite the contrary All that can be noted in this brief space is that Beatrice Chillingham was herself. Some people declared that she was possessed of the seven devils of her sex which Mr. Stockton wrote about.

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"I'm flattered," she said, and walked off towards the tea-table with a glance in which Victoria read many meanings. Mr. Crewe paid no attention either to words, look, or departure.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

"You've made that very plain, at least," answered Victoria. "Why did you pretend it was the view?"

"Some conventionalities have to be observed, I suppose," he said. "Let's go around there. It is a good view."

"Don't you think this is a little—marked?" asked Victoria, surveying him with her hands behind her back.

"I can't help it if it is," said Mr. Crewe. "Every hour is valuable to me, and I've got to take my chances when I get 'em. For some reason, you haven't been down at Leith much this summer. Why didn't you telephone me, as I asked you."

"Because I've suddenly grown dignified, I suppose," she said. "And then, of course, I hesitated to intrude upon such a person of importance as you have become, Humphrey."

"I've always got time to see you," he replied. "I always shall have. But I appreciate your delicacy. That sort of thing counts with a man more than most women know."

"Then I am repaid," said Victoria, "for exercising self-control."

"I find it always pays," declared Mr. Crewe, and he glanced at her with distinct approval. They were skirting the house, and presently came out upon a tiny terrace where young Ridley had made a miniature Italian garden when the Electric dividends had increased, and from which there was a vista of the shallows of the Blue. Here was a stone garden-seat which Mrs. Pomfret had brought from Italy, and over which she had quarrelled with the customs authorities. Mr. Crewe, with a wave of his hand, signified his pleasure that they should sit, and cleared his throat.

"It's just as well, perhaps," he began, "that we haven't had the chance to see each other earlier. When a man starts out upon an undertaking of the gravest importance, wherein he stakes his reputation, an undertaking for which he is ridiculed and reviled, he likes to have his judgment justified. He likes to be vindicated, especially in the eyes of—people whom he cares about. Personally, I never had any doubt that I should be the next governor, because I knew in the beginning that I had estimated public sentiment correctly. The man who succeeds in this world is the man who has sagacity enough to gauge public sentiment ahead of time, and the courage to act on his beliefs." Victoria looked at him steadily. He was very calm, and he had one knee crossed over the other.

“And the sagacity,” she added, “to choose his lieutenants in the fight.”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Crewe. “I have always declared, Victoria, that you had a natural aptitude for affairs.”

“I have heard my father say,” she continued, still maintaining her steady glance, “that Hamilton Tooting is one of the shrewdest politicians he has ever known. Isn’t Mr. Tooting one of your right-hand men?”

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"He could hardly be called that," Mr. Crewe replied. "In fact, I haven't any what you might call 'right-hand men.' The large problems I have had to decide for myself. As for Tooting, he's well enough in his way; he understands the tricks of the politicians—he's played 'em, I guess. He's uneducated; he's merely a worker. You see," he went on, "one great reason why I've been so successful is because I've been practical. I've taken materials as I've found them."

"I see," answered Victoria, turning her head and gazing over the terrace at the sparkling reaches of the river. She remembered the close of that wintry afternoon in Mr. Crewe's house at the capital, and she was quite willing to do him exact justice, and to believe that he had forgotten it—which, indeed, was the case.

"I want to say," he continued, "that although I have known and—ahem—admired you for many years, Victoria, what has struck me most forcibly in your favour has been your open-mindedness—especially on the great political questions this summer. I have no idea how much you know about them, but one would naturally have expected you, on account of your father, to be prejudiced. Sometime, when I have more leisure, I shall go into them, fully with you. And in the meantime I'll have my secretary send you the complete list of my speeches up to date, and I know you will read them carefully."

"You are very kind, Humphrey," she said.

Absorbed in the presentation of his subject (which chanced to be himself), Mr. Crewe did not observe that her lips were parted, and that there were little creases around her eyes.

"And sometime," said Mr. Crewe, when all this has blown over a little, I shall have a talk with your father. He undoubtedly understands that there is scarcely any question of my election. He probably realizes, too, that he has been in the—wrong, and that railroad domination must cease—he has already made several concessions, as you know. I wish you would tell him from me that when I am governor, I shall make it a point to discuss the whole matter with him, and that he will find in me no foe of corporations. Justice is what I stand for. Temperamentally, I am too conservative, I am too much of a business man, to tamper with vested interests."

"I will tell him, Humphrey," said Victoria.

Mr. Crewe coughed, and looked at his watch once, more. "And now, having made that clear," he said, "and having only a quarter of an hour before I have to leave to keep an appointment, I am going to take up another subject. And I ask you to believe it is not done lightly, or without due consideration, but as the result of some years of thought."

Victoria turned to him seriously—and yet the creases were still around her eyes.

“I can well believe it, Humphrey,” she answered. “But—have you time?”

“Yes,” he said, “I have learned the value of minutes.”

“But not of hours, perhaps,” she replied.

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"That," said Mr. Crewe, indulgently, "is a woman's point of view. A man cannot dally through life, and your kind of woman has no use for a man who dallies. First, I will give you my idea of a woman."

"I am all attention," said Victoria.

"Well," said Mr. Crewe, putting the tops of his fingers together, "she should excel as a housewife. I haven't any use for your so-called intellectual woman. Of course, what I mean by a housewife is something a little less bourgeoisie; she should be able to conduct an establishment with the neatness and despatch and economy of a well-run hotel. She should be able to seat a table instantly and accurately, giving to the prominent guests the prestige they deserve. Nor have I any sympathy with the notion that makes a married woman a law unto herself. She enters voluntarily into an agreement whereby she puts herself under the control of her husband: his interests, his career, his—"

"Comfort?" suggested Victoria.

"Yes, his comfort—all that comes first. And his establishment is conducted primarily, and his guests selected, in the interests of his fortunes. Of course, that goes without saying of a man in high place in public life. But he must choose for his wife a woman who is equal to all these things,—to my mind her highest achievement,—who makes the most of the position he gives her, presides at his table and entertainments, and reaches such people as, for any reason, he is unable to reach. I have taken the pains to point out these things in a general way, for obvious reasons. My greatest desire is to be fair."

"What," asked Victoria, with her eyes on the river, "what are the wages?"

Mr. Crewe laughed. Incidentally, he thought her profile very fine.

"I do not believe in flattery," he said, "but I think I should add to the qualifications personality and a sense of humour. I am quite sure I could never live with a woman—who didn't have a sense of humour."

"I should think it would be a little difficult," said Victoria, "to get a woman with the qualifications you enumerate and a sense of humour thrown in."

"Infinitely difficult," declared Mr. Crewe, with more ardour than he had yet shown. "I have waited a good many years, Victoria."

"And yet," she said, "you have been happy. You have a perpetual source of enjoyment denied to some people."

"What is that?" he asked. It is natural for a man to like to hear the points of his character discussed by a discerning woman.



“Yourself,” said Victoria, suddenly looking him full in the face. “You are complete, Humphrey, as it is. You are happily married already. Besides,” she added, laughing a little, “the qualities you have mentioned—with the exception of the sense of humour—are not those of a wife, but of a business partner of the opposite sex. What you really want is a business partner with something like a fifth interest, and whose name shall not appear in the agreement.”

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Mr. Crewe laughed again. Nevertheless, he was a little puzzled over this remark.

"I am not sentimental," he began.

"You certainly are not," she said.

"You have a way," he replied, with a shade of reproof in his voice, "you have a way at times of treating serious things with a little less gravity than they deserve. I am still a young man, but I have seen a good deal of life, and I know myself pretty well. It is necessary to treat matrimony from a practical as well as a sentimental point of view. There wouldn't be half the unhappiness and divorces if people took time to do this, instead of rushing off and getting married immediately. And of course it is especially important for a man in my position to study every aspect of the problem before he takes a step."

By this time a deep and absorbing interest in a new aspect of Mr. Crewe's character had taken possession of Victoria.

"And you believe that, by taking thought, you can get the kind of a wife you want?" she asked.

"Certainly," he replied; "does that strike you as strange?"

"A little," said Victoria. "Suppose," she added gently, "suppose that the kind of wife you'd want wouldn't want you?"

Mr. Crewe laughed again.

"That is a contingency which a strong man does not take into consideration," he answered. "Strong men get what they want. But upon my word, Victoria, you have a delicious way of putting things. In your presence I quite forget the problems and perplexities which beset me. That," he said, with delicate meaning, "that is another quality I should desire in a woman."

"It is one, fortunately, that isn't marketable," she said, "and it's the only quality you've mentioned that's worth anything."

"A woman's valuation," said Mr. Crewe.

"If it made you forget your own affairs, it would be priceless."

"Look here, Victoria," cried Mr. Crewe, uncrossing his knees, "joking's all very well, but I haven't time for it to-day. And I'm in a serious mood. I've told you what I want, and now that I've got to go in a few minutes, I'll come to the point. I don't suppose a man could

pay a woman a higher compliment than to say that his proposal was the result of some years of thought and study."

Here Victoria laughed outright, but grew serious again at once.

"Unless he proposed to her the day he met her. That would be a real compliment."

"The man," said Mr. Crewe, impatiently, "would be a fool."

"Or else a person of extreme discernment," said Victoria. "And love is lenient with fools. By the way, Humphrey, it has just occurred to me that there's one quality which some people think necessary in a wife, which you didn't mention."

"What's that?"

"Love," said Victoria.

"Love, of course," he agreed; "I took that for granted."

"I supposed you did," said Victoria, meekly.

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"Well, now, to come to the point—" he began again.

But she interrupted him by glancing at the watch on her gown, and rising.

"What's the matter?" he asked, with some annoyance.

"The fifteen minutes are up," she announced. "I cannot take the responsibility of detaining you."

"We will put in tantalizing as another attractive quality," he laughed. "I absolve you of all responsibility. Sit down."

"I believe you mentioned obedience," she answered, and sat down again at the end of the bench, resting her chin on her gloved hand, and looking at him. By this time her glances seemed to have gained a visibly disturbing effect. He moved a little nearer to her, took off his hat (which he had hitherto neglected to do), and thrust his hands abruptly into his pockets—as much as to say that he would not be responsible for their movements if they were less free.

"Hang it all, Victoria," he exclaimed, "I'm a practical man, and I try to look at this, which is one of the serious things in life, in a practical way."

"One of the serious things," she repeated, as though to herself.

"Yes," he said, "certainly."

"I merely asked to be sure of the weight you gave it. Go on."

"In a practical way, as I was saying. Long ago I suspected that you had most of those qualities."

"I'm overwhelmed, Humphrey," she cried, with her eyes dancing. "But—do you think I could cultivate the rest?"

"Oh, well," said Mr. Crewe, "I put it that way because no woman is perfect, and I dislike superlatives."

"I should think superlatives would be very hard to live with," she reflected. "But—dreadful thought!—suppose I should lack an essential?"

"What—for instance?"

"Love—for instance. But then you did not put it first. It was I who mentioned it, and you who took it for granted."

"Affection seems to be a more sensible term for it," he said. "Affection is the lasting and sensible thing. You mentioned a partnership, a word that singularly fits into my notion of marriage. I want to be honest with you, and understate my feelings on that subject."

Victoria, who had been regarding him with a curious look that puzzled him, laughed again.

"I have been hoping you haven't exaggerated them," she replied.

"They're stronger than you think," he declared. "I never felt this way in my life before. What I meant to say was, that I never understood running away with a woman."

"That does not surprise me," said Victoria.

"I shouldn't know where to run to," he proclaimed.

"Perhaps the woman would, if you got a clever one. At any rate, it wouldn't matter. One place is as good as another. Some go to Niagara, and some to Coney Island, and others to Venice. Personally, I should have no particular preference."

"No preference!" he exclaimed.

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"I could be happy in Central Park," she declared.

"Fortunately," said Mr. Crewe, "you will never be called upon to make the trial."

Victoria was silent. Her thoughts, for the moment, had flown elsewhere, but Mr. Crewe did not appear to notice this. He fell back into the rounded hollow of the bench, and it occurred to him that he had never quite realized that profile. And what an ornament she would be to his table.

"I think, Humphrey," she said, "that we should be going back."

"One moment, and I'll have finished," he cried. "I've no doubt you are prepared for what I am going to say. I have purposely led up to it, in order that there might be no misunderstanding. In short, I have never seen another woman with personal characteristics so well suited for my life, and I want you to marry me, Victoria. I can offer you the position of the wife of a man with a public career—for which you are so well fitted."

Victoria shook her head slowly, and smiled at him.

"I couldn't fill the position," she said.

"Perhaps," he replied, smiling back at her, "perhaps I am the best judge of that."

"And you thought," she asked slowly, "that I was that kind of a woman?"

"I know it to be a practical certainty," said Mr. Crewe.

"Practical certainties," said Victoria, "are not always truths. If I should sign a contract, which I suppose, as a business man, you would want, to live up to the letter of your specifications,—even then I could not do it. I should make life a torture for you, Humphrey. You see, I am honest with you, too—much as your offer dazzles me." And she shook her head again.

"That," exclaimed Mr. Crewe, impatiently, "is sheer nonsense. I want you, and I mean to have you."

There came a look into her eyes which Mr. Crewe did not see, because her face was turned from him.

"I could be happy," she said, "for days and weeks and years in a but on the side of Sawanec. I could be happy in a farm-house where I had to do all the work. I am not the model housewife which your imagination depicts, Humphrey. I could live in two rooms and eat at an Italian restaurant—with the right man. And I am afraid the wrong one would wake up one day and discover that I had gone. I am sorry to disillusionize you,

but I don't care a fig for balls and garden-parties and salons. It would be much more fun to run away from them to the queer places of the earth—with the right man. And I should have to possess one essential to put up with—greatness and what you call a public career.”

“And what is that essential?” he asked.

“Love,” said Victoria. He heard the word but faintly, for her face was still turned away from him. “You’ve offered me the things that are attainable by taking thought, by perseverance, by pertinacity, by the outwitting of your fellow-men, by the stacking of coins. And I want—the unattainable, the divine gift which is bestowed, which cannot be acquired. If it could be acquired, Humphrey,” she added, looking at him, “I am sure you would acquire it—if you thought it worth while.”

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"I don't understand you," he said,—and looked it.

"No," said Victoria, "I was afraid you wouldn't. And moreover, you never would. There is no use in my trying to make myself any clearer, and you'll have to keep your appointment. I hesitate to contradict you, but I am not the kind of woman you want. That is one reason I cannot marry you. And the other is, that I do not love you."

"You can't be in love with any one else?" he cried.

"That does seem rather preposterous, I'll admit," she answered. "But if I were, it wouldn't make any difference."

"You won't marry me?" he said, getting to his feet. There was incredulity in his voice, and a certain amount of bewilderment. The thing was indeed incredible!

"No," said Victoria, "I won't."

And he had only to look into her face to see that it was so. Hitherto nil desperandum had been a good working motto, but something told him it was useless in this case. He thrust on his hat and pulled out his watch.

"Well," he said, "that settles it. I must—say I can't see your point of view—but that settles it. I must say, too, that your refusal is something of a shock after what I had been led to expect after the past few years."

"The person you are in love with led you to expect it, Humphrey, and that person is—yourself. You are in love temporarily with your own ideal of me."

"And your refusal comes at an unfortunate tune for me," he continued, not heeding her words, "when I have an affair on my hands of such magnitude, which requires concentrated thought. But I'm not a man to cry, and I'll make the best of it."

"If I thought it were more than a temporary disappointment, I should be sorry for you," said Victoria. "I remember that you felt something like this when Mr. Rutter wouldn't sell you his land. The lady you really want," she added, pointing with her parasol at the house, "is in there, waiting for you."

Mr. Crewe did not reply to this prophecy, but followed Victoria around the house to the group on the lawn, where he bade his hostess a somewhat preoccupied farewell, and bowed distantly to the guests.

"He has so much on his mind," said Mrs. Pomfret. "And oh, I quite forgot—Humphrey!" she cried, calling after him, "Humphrey!"

"Yes," he said, turning before he reached his automobile. "What is it?"



“Alice and I are going to the convention, you know, and I meant to tell you that there would be ten in the party—but I didn’t have a chance.” Here Mrs. Pomfret glanced at Victoria, who had been joined at once by the tall Englishman. “Can you get tickets for ten?”

Mr. Crewe made a memorandum.

“Yes,” he said, “I’ll get the tickets—but I don’t see what you want to go for.”

CHAPTER XXV

MORE ADVENTURER

Victoria had not, of course, confided in Beatrice Chillingham what had occurred in the garden, although that lady had exhibited the liveliest interest, and had had her suspicions. After Mr. Crewe’s departure Mr. Rangely, the tall young Englishman, had renewed his attentions assiduously, although during the interval in the garden he had found Miss Chillingham a person of discernment.

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"She's not going to marry that chap, is she, Miss Chillingham?" he had asked.

"No," said Beatrice; "you have my word for it, she isn't."

As she was leaving, Mrs. Pomfret had taken Victoria's hand and drawn her aside, and looked into her face with a meaning smile.

"My dear!" she exclaimed, "he particularly asked that you be invited."

"Who?" said Victoria.

"Humphrey. He stipulated that you should be here."

"Then I'm very much obliged to him," said Victoria, "for I've enjoyed myself immensely. I like your Englishman so much."

"Do you?" said Mrs. Pomfret, searching Victoria's face, while her own brightened. "He's heir to one of the really good titles, and he has an income of his own. I couldn't put him up here, in this tiny box, because I have Mrs. Fronde. We are going to take him to the convention—and if you'd care to go, Victoria—?"

Victoria laughed.

"It isn't as serious as that," she said. "And I'm afraid I can't go to the convention—I have some things to do in the neighbourhood."

Mrs. Pomfret looked wise.

"He's a most attractive man, with the best prospects. It would be a splendid match for you, Victoria."

"Mrs. Pomfret," replied Victoria, wavering between amusement and a desire to be serious, "I haven't the slightest intention of making what you call a 'match.'" And there was in her words a ring of truth not to be mistaken.

Mrs. Pomfret kissed her.

"One never can tell what may happen," she said. "Think of him, Victoria. And your dear mother—perhaps you will know some day what the responsibility is of seeing a daughter well placed in life."

Victoria coloured, and withdrew her hand.

"I fear that time is a long way off, Mrs. Pomfret," she replied.

"I think so much of Victoria," Mrs. Pomfret declared a moment later to her guest; "she's like my own daughter. But at times she's so hopelessly unconventional. Why, I believe Rangely's actually going home with her."

"He asked her to drop him at the Inn," said Mrs. Fronde. "He's head over heels in love already."

"It would be such a relief to dear Rose," sighed Mrs. Pomfret.

"I like the girl," replied Mrs. Fronde, dryly. "She has individuality, and knows her own mind. Whoever she marries will have something to him."

"I devoutly hope so!" said Mrs. Pomfret.

It was quite true that Mr. Arthur Rangely had asked Victoria to drop him at the Inn. But when they reached it he made another request.

"Do you mind if I go a bit farther, Miss Flint?" he suggested. "I'd rather like the walk back."

Victoria laughed.

"Do come," she said.

He admired the country, but he looked at Victoria, and asked a hundred exceedingly frank questions about Leith, about Mrs. Pomfret, whom he had met at his uncle's seat in Devonshire, and about Mr. Crewe and the railroads in politics. Many of these Victoria parried, and she came rapidly to the conclusion that Mr. Arthur Rangely was a more astute person than—to a casual observer he would seem.

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He showed no inclination to fix the limits of his walk, and made no protest as she drove under the stone archway at the entrance of Fairview. Victoria was amused and interested, and she decided that she liked Mr. Rangely.

"Will you come up for tea?" she asked. "I'll send you home."

He accepted with alacrity. They had reached the first turn when their attention was caught by the sight of a buggy ahead of them, and facing towards them. The horse, with the reins hanging loosely over the shafts, had strayed to the side of the driveway and was contentedly eating the shrubbery that lined it. Inside the vehicle, hunched up in the corner of the seat, was a man who presented an appearance of helplessness which struck them both with a sobering effect.

"Is the fellow drunk?" said Mr. Rangely.

Victoria's answer was a little cry which startled him, and drew his look to her. She had touched her horse with the whip, and her eyes had widened in real alarm.

"It's Hilary Vane!" she exclaimed. "I—I wonder what can have happened!"

She handed the reins to Mr. Rangely, and sprang out and flew to Hilary's side.

"Mr. Vane!" she cried. "What's the matter? Are you ill?"

She had never seen him look so. To her he had always been as one on whom pity would be wasted, as one who long ago had established his credit with the universe to his own satisfaction. But now, suddenly, intense pity welled up within her, and even in that moment she wondered if it could be because he was Austen's father. His hands were at his sides, his head was fallen forward a little, and his face was white. But his eyes frightened her most; instead of the old, semi-defiant expression which she remembered from childhood, they had in them a dumb suffering that went to her heart. He looked at her, tried to straighten up, and fell back again.

"N—nothing's the matter," he said, "nothing. A little spell. I'll be all right in a moment."

Victoria did not lose an instant, but climbed into the buggy at his side and gathered up the reins, and drew the fallen lap-robe over his knees.

"I'm going to take you back to Fairview," she said. "And we'll telephone for a doctor."

But she had underrated the amount of will left in him. He did not move, though indeed if he had seized the reins from her hands, he could have given her no greater effect of surprise. Life came back into the eyes at the summons, and dominance into the voice, although he breathed heavily.

“No, you’re not,” he said; “no, you’re not. I’m going to Ripton—do you understand? I’ll be all right in a minute, and I’ll take the lines.”

Victoria, when she got over her astonishment at this, reflected quickly. She glanced at him, and the light of his expression was already fading. There was some reason why he did not wish to go back to Fairview, and common sense told her that agitation was not good for him; besides, they would have to telephone to Ripton for a physician, and it was quicker to drive there. Quicker to drive in her own runabout, did she dare to try to move him into it. She made up her mind.

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"Please follow on behind with that trap," she called out to Rangely; "I'm going to Ripton."

He nodded understandingly, admiringly, and Victoria started Hilary's horse out of the bushes towards the entrance way. From time to time she let her eyes rest upon him anxiously.

"Are you comfortable?" she asked.

"Yes," he said, "yes. I'm all right. I'll be able to drive in a minute."

But the minutes passed, and he made no attempt to take the reins. Victoria had drawn the whalebone whip from its socket, and was urging on the horse as fast as humanity would permit; and the while she was aware that Hilary's look was fixed upon her—in fact, never left her. Once or twice, in spite of her anxiety to get him home, Victoria blushed faintly, as she wondered what he was thinking about.

And all the while she asked herself what it was that had brought him to this condition. Victoria knew sufficient of life and had visited hospitals enough to understand that mental causes were generally responsible for such breakdowns—Hilary had had a shock. She remembered how in her childhood he had been the object of her particular animosity; how she used to put out her tongue at him, and imitate his manner, and how he had never made the slightest attempt to conciliate her; most people of this sort are sensitive to the instincts of children; but Hilary had not been. She remembered—how long ago it seemed now!—the day she had given him, in deviltry, the clipping about Austen shooting Mr. Blodgett.

The Hilary Vane who sat beside her to-day was not the same man. It was unaccountable, but he was not. Nor could this changed estimate of him be attributed to her regard for Austen, for she recalled a day only a few months since—in June—when he had come up to Fairview and she was standing on the lawn, and she had looked at him without recognition; she had not, then, been able to bring herself to bow to him; to her childhood distaste had been added the deeper resentment of Austen's wrongs. Her early instincts about Hilary had been vindicated, for he had treated his son abominably and driven Austen from his mother's home. To misunderstand and maltreat Austen Vane, of all people Austen, whose consideration for his father had been what it had! Could it be that Hilary felt remorse? Could it be that he loved Austen in some peculiar manner all his own?

Victoria knew now—so strangely—that the man beside her was capable of love, and she had never felt that way about Hilary Vane. And her mind was confused, and her heart was troubled and wrung. Insight flashed upon her of the terrible loneliness of a life surrounded by outstretched, loving arms to which one could not fly; scenes from a famous classic she had read with a favourite teacher at school came to her, and she knew that she was the witness of a retribution, of a suffering beyond conception of a

soul prepared for suffering,—not physical suffering, but of that torture which is the meaning of hell.

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However, there was physical suffering. It came and went, and at such moments she saw the traces of it in the tightening of his lips, and longed with womanly intuition to alleviate it. She had not spoken —although she could have cried aloud; she knew not what to say. And then suddenly she reached out and touched his hand. Nor could she have accounted for the action.

“Are you in much pain?” she asked.

She felt him tremble.

“No,” he said; “it’s only a spell—I’ve had ’em before. I—I can drive in a few minutes.”

“And do you think,” she asked, “that I would allow you to go the rest of the way alone?”

“I guess I ought to thank you for comin’ with me,” he said.

Victoria looked at him and smiled. And it was an illuminating smile for her as well as for Hilary. Suddenly, by that strange power of sympathy which the unselfish possess, she understood the man, understood Austen’s patience with him and affection for him. Suddenly she had pierced the hard layers of the outer shell, and had heard the imprisoned spirit crying with a small persistent voice,—a spirit stifled for many years and starved—and yet it lived and struggled still.

Yes, and that spirit itself must have felt her own reaching out to it—who can, say? And how it must have striven again for utterance—

“It was good of you to come,” he said.

“It was only common humanity,” she answered, touching the horse.

“Common humanity,” he repeated. “You’d have done it for anybody along the road, would you?”

At this remark, so characteristic of Hilary, Victoria, hesitated. She understood it now. And yet she hesitated to give him an answer that was hypocritical.

“I have known you all my life, Mr. Vane, and you are a very old friend of my father’s.”

“Old,” he repeated, “yes, that’s it. I’m ready for the scrap-heap —better have let me lie, Victoria.”

Victoria started. A new surmise had occurred to her upon which she did not like to dwell.

“You have worked too hard, Mr. Vane—you need a rest. And I have been telling father that, too. You both need a rest.”

He shook his head.

“I’ll never get it,” he said. “Stopping work won’t give it to me.”

She pondered on these words as she guided the horse over a crossing. And all that Austen had said to her, all that she had been thinking of for a year past, helped her to grasp their meaning. But she wondered still more at the communion which, all at once, had been established between Hilary Vane and herself, and why he was saying these things to her. It was all so unreal and inexplicable.

“I can imagine that people who have worked hard all their lives must feel that way,” she answered, though her voice was not as steady as she could have wished. “You—you have so much to live for.”

Her colour rose. She was thinking of Austen—and she knew that Hilary Vane knew that she was thinking of Austen. Moreover, she had suddenly grasped the fact that the gentle but persistently strong influence of the son’s character had brought about the change in the father. Hilary Vane’s lips closed again, as in pain, and she divined the reason.

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Victoria knew the house in Hanover Street, with its classic porch, with its certain air of distinction and stability, and long before she had known it as the Austen residence she remembered wondering who lived in it. The house had individuality, and (looked at from the front) almost perfect proportions; consciously—it bespoke the gentility of its builders. Now she drew up before it and called to Mr. Rangely, who was abreast, to tie his horse and ring the bell. Hilary was already feeling with his foot for the step of the buggy.

“I’m all right,” he insisted; “I can manage now,” but Victoria seized his arm with a firm, detaining hand.

“Please wait,—Mr. Vane,” she pleaded.

But the feeling of shame at his helplessness was strong.

“It’s over now. I—I can walk. I’m much obliged to you, Victoria—much obliged.”

Fortunately Hilary’s horse showed no inclination to go any farther—even to the stable. And Victoria held on to his arm. He ceased to protest, and Mr. Rangely quickly tied the other horse and came to Victoria’s aid. Supported by the young Englishman, Hilary climbed the stone steps and reached the porch, declaring all the while that he needed no assistance, and could walk alone. Victoria rang the bell, and after an interval the door was opened by Euphrasia Cotton.

Euphrasia stood upright with her hand on the knob, and her eyes flashed over the group and rested fixedly on the daughter of Mr. Flint.

“Mr. Vane was not very well,” Victoria explained, “and we came home with him.”

“I’m all right,” said Hilary, once more, and to prove it he stepped—not very steadily—across the threshold into the hall, and sat down on a chair which had had its place at the foot of the stairs from time immemorial. Euphrasia stood still.

“I think,” said Victoria, “that Mr. Vane had better see a doctor. Have you a telephone?”

“No, we haven’t,” said Euphrasia.

Victoria turned to Mr. Rangely, who had been a deeply interested spectator to this scene.

“A little way down the street, on the other side, Dr. Tredway lives. You will see his sign.”

“And if he isn’t in, go to the hospital. It’s only a few doors farther on.”

"I'll wait," said Victoria, simply, when he had gone; "my father will wish to know about Mr. Vane."

"Hold on," said Hilary, "I haven't any use for a doctor—I won't see one. I know what the trouble is, and I'm all right."

Victoria became aware—for the first time that Hilary Vane's housekeeper had not moved; that Euphrasia Cotton was still staring at her in a most disconcerting manner, and was paying no attention whatever to Hilary.

"Come in and set down," she said; and seeing Victoria glance at Hilary's horse, she added, "Oh, he'll stand there till doomsday."

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Victoria, thinking that the situation would be less awkward, accepted the invitation, and Euphrasia shut the door. The hall, owing to the fact that the shutters of the windows by the stairs were always closed, was in semidarkness. Victoria longed to let in the light, to take this strange, dried-up housekeeper and shake her into some semblance of natural feeling. And this was Austen's home! It was to this house, made gloomy by these people, that he had returned every night! Infinitely depressed, she felt that she must take some action, or cry aloud.

"Mr. Vane," she said, laying a hand upon his shoulder, "I think you ought, at least, to lie down for a little while. Isn't there a sofa in—in the parlour?" she asked Euphrasia.

"You can't get him to do anything," Euphrasia replied, with decision; "he'll die some day for want of a little common sense. I shouldn't wonder if he was took on soon."

"Oh!" cried Victoria. She could think of no words to answer this remark.

"It wouldn't surprise me," Euphrasia continued. "He fell down the stairs here not long ago, and went right on about his business. He's never paid any attention to anybody, and I guess it's a mite late to expect him to begin now. Won't you set down?"

There was another chair against the low wainscoting, and Victoria drew it over beside Hilary and sat down in it. He did not seem to notice the action, and Euphrasia continued to stand. Standing seemed to be the natural posture of this remarkable woman, Victoria thought—a posture of vigilance, of defiance. A clock of one of the Austen grandfathers stood obscurely at the back of the hall, and the measured swing of its pendulum was all that broke the silence. This was Austen's home. It seemed impossible for her to realize that he could be the product of this environment—until a portrait on the opposite wall, above the stairs, came out of the gloom and caught her eye like the glow of light. At first, becoming aware of it with a start, she thought it a likeness of Austen himself. Then she saw that the hair was longer, and more wavy than his, and fell down a little over the velvet collar of a coat with a wide lapel and brass buttons, and that the original of this portrait had worn a stock. The face had not quite the strength of Austen's, she thought, but a wondrous sweetness and intellect shone from it, like an expression she had seen on his face. The chin rested on the hand, an intellectual hand,—and the portrait brought to her mind that of a young English statesman she had seen in the National Gallery in London.

"That's Channing Austen,—he was minister to Spain."

Victoria started. It was Euphrasia who was speaking, and unmistakable pride was in her voice.

Fortunately for Victoria, who would not in the least have known what to reply, steps were heard on the porch, and Euphrasia opened the door. Mr. Rangely had returned.

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"Here's the doctor, Miss Flint," he said, "and I'll wait for you outside."

Victoria rose as young Dr. Tredway came forward. They were old friends, and the doctor, it may be recalled, had been chiefly responsible for the preservation of the life of Mr. Zebulun Meader.

"I have sent for you, Doctor," she said, "against instructions and on my own responsibility. Mr. Vane is ill, although he refuses to admit it."

Dr. Tredway had a respect for Victoria and her opinions, and he knew Hilary. He opened the door a little wider, and looked critically at Mr. Vane.

"It's nothing but a spell," Hilary insisted. "I've had 'em before. I suppose it's natural that they should scare the women-folks some."

"What kind of a spell was it, Mr. Vane?" asked the doctor.

"It isn't worth talking about," said Hilary. "You might as well pick up that case of yours and go home again. I'm going down to the square in a little while."

"You see," Euphrasia put in, "he's made up his mind to kill himself."

"Perhaps," said the doctor, smiling a little, "Mr. Vane wouldn't object to Miss Flint telling me what happened."

Victoria glanced at the doctor and hesitated. Her sympathy for Hilary, her new understanding of him, urged her on—and yet never in her life had she been made to feel so distinctly an intruder. Here was the doctor, with his case; here was this extraordinary housekeeper, apparently ready to let Hilary walk to the square, if he wished, and to shut the door on their backs; and here was Hilary himself, who threatened at any moment to make his word good and depart from their midst. Only the fact that she was convinced that Hilary was in real danger made her relate, in a few brief words, what had occurred, and when she had finished Mr. Vane made no comment whatever.

Dr. Tredway turned to Hilary.

"I am going to take a mean advantage of you, Mr. Vane," he said, "and sit here awhile and talk to you. Would you object to waiting a little while, Miss Flint? I have something to say to you," he added significantly, "and this meeting will save me a trip to Fairview."

"Certainly I'll wait," she said.

"You can come along with me," said Euphrasia, "if you've a notion to."

Victoria was of two minds whether to accept this invitation. She had an intense desire to get outside, but this was counter-balanced by a sudden curiosity to see more of this strange woman who loved but one person in the world. Tom Gaylord had told Victoria that. She followed Euphrasia to the back of the hall.

“There’s the parlour,” said Euphrasia; “it’s never be’n used since Mrs. Vane died,—but there it is.”

“Oh,” said Victoria, with a glance into the shadowy depths of the room, “please don’t open it for me. Can’t we go,” she added, with an inspiration, “can’t we go into—the kitchen?” She knew it was Euphrasia’s place.

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"Well," said Euphrasia, "I shouldn't have thought you'd care much about kitchens." And she led the way onward; through the little passage, to the room where she had spent most of her days. It was flooded with level, yellow rays of light that seemed to be searching the corners in vain for dust. Victoria paused in the doorway.

"I'm afraid you do me an injustice," she said. "I like some kitchens."

"You don't look as if you knew much about 'em," was Euphrasia's answer. With Victoria once again in the light, Euphrasia scrutinized her with appalling frankness, taking in every detail of her costume and at length raising her eyes to the girl's face. Victoria coloured. On her visits about the country-side she had met women of Euphrasia's type before, and had long ago ceased to be dismayed by their manner. But her instinct detected in Euphrasia a hostility for which she could not account.

In that simple but exquisite gown which so subtly suited her, the creation of which had aroused the artist in a celebrated Parisian dressmaker, Victoria was, indeed, a strange visitant in that kitchen. She took a seat by the window, and an involuntary exclamation of pleasure escaped her as her eyes fell upon the little, old-fashioned flower garden beneath it. The act and the exclamation for the moment disarmed Euphrasia.

"They were Sarah Austen's—Mrs. Vane's," she explained, "just as she planted them the year she died. I've always kept 'em just so."

"Mrs. Vane must have loved flowers," said Victoria.

"Loved 'em! They were everything to her—and the wild flowers, too. She used to wander off and spend whole days in the country, and come back after sunset with her arms full."

"It was nature she loved," said Victoria, in a low voice.

"That was it—nature," said Euphrasia. "She loved all nature. There wasn't a living, creeping thing that wasn't her friend. I've seen birds eat out of her hand in that window where you're settin', and she'd say to me, 'Phrasie, keep still! They'd love you, too, if they only knew you, but they're afraid you'll scrub 'em if you get hold of them, the way you used to scrub me.'"

Victoria smiled—but it was a smile that had tears in it. Euphrasia Cotton was standing in the shaft of sunlight at the other window, staring at the little garden.

"Yes, she used to say funny things like that, to make you laugh when you were all ready to cry. There wasn't many folks understood her. She knew every path and hilltop within miles of here, and every brook and spring, and she used to talk about that mountain just as if it was alive."

Victoria caught her breath.

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"Yes," continued Euphrasia, "the mountain was alive for her. 'He's angry to-day, Phrasie. That's because, you lost your temper and scolded Hilary.' It's a queer thing, but there have been hundreds of times since when he needed scoldin' bad, and I've looked at the mountain and held my tongue. It was just as if I saw her with that half-whimsical, half-reproachful expression in her eyes, holding up her finger at me. And there were other mornings when she'd say, 'The mountain's lonesome today, he wants me.' And I vow, I'd look at the mountain and it would seem lonesome. That sounds like nonsense, don't it?" Euphrasia demanded, with a sudden sharpness.

"No," said Victoria, "it seems very real to me."

The simplicity, the very ring of truth, and above all the absolute lack of self-consciousness in the girl's answer sustained the spell.

"She'd go when the mountain called her, it didn't make any difference whether it was raining—rain never appeared to do her any hurt. Nothin' natural ever did her any hurt. When she was a little child flittin' about like a wild creature, and she'd come in drenched to the skin, it was all I could do to catch her and change her clothes. She'd laugh at me. 'We're meant to be wet once in a while, Phrasie,' she'd say; 'that's what the rain's for, to wet us. It washes some of the wickedness out of us.' It was the unnatural things that hurt her—the unkind words and makin' her act against her nature. 'Phrasie,' she said once, 'I can't pray in the meeting-house with my eyes shut—I can't, I can't. I seem to know what they're all wishing for when they pray,—for more riches, and more comfort, and more security, and more importance. And God is such a long way off. I can't feel Him, and the pew hurts my back.' She used to read me some, out of a book of poetry, and one verse I got by heart—I guess her prayers were like that."

"Do you—remember the verse?" asked Victoria.

Euphrasia went to a little shelf in the corner of the kitchen and produced a book, which, she opened and handed to Victoria.

"There's the verse!" she said; "read it aloud. I guess you're better at that than I am."

And Victoria read:—

"Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest."

Victoria let fall the volume on her lap.

“There’s another verse in that book she liked,” said Euphrasia, “but it always was sad to me.”

Victoria took the book, and read again:—

“Weary wind, who wanderest
Like the world’s rejected guest,
Hast thou still some secret nest
On the tree or billow?”

Euphrasia laid the volume tenderly on the shelf, and turned and faced Victoria.

“She was unhappy like that before she died,” she exclaimed, and added, with a fling of her head towards the front of the house, “he killed her.”

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"Oh, no!" cried Victoria, involuntarily rising to her feet. "Oh, no! I'm sure he didn't mean to. He didn't understand her!"

"He killed her," Euphrasia repeated. "Why didn't he understand her? She was just as simple as a child, and just as trusting, and just as loving. He made her unhappy, and now he's driven her son out of her house, and made him unhappy. He's all of her I have left, and I won't see him unhappy."

Victoria summoned her courage.

"Don't you think," she asked bravely, "that Mr. Austen Vane ought to be told that his father is—in this condition?"

"No," said Euphrasia, determinedly. "Hilary will have to send for him. This time it'll be Austen's victory."

"But hasn't he had—a victory?" Victoria persisted earnestly. "Isn't this—victory enough?"

"What do you mean?" Euphrasia cried sharply.

"I mean," she answered, in a low voice, "I mean that Mr. Vane's son is responsible for his condition to-day. Oh—not consciously so. But the cause of this trouble is mental—can't you see it? The cause of this trouble is remorse. Can't you see that it has eaten into his soul? Do you wish a greater victory than this, or a sadder one? Hilary Vane will not ask for his son—because he cannot. He has no more power to send that message than a man shipwrecked on an island. He can only give signals of distress—that some may heed. Would She have waited for such a victory as you demand? And does Austen Vane desire it? Don't you think that he would come to his father if he knew? And have you any right to keep the news from him? Have you any right to decide what their vengeance shall be?"

Euphrasia had stood mute as she listened to these words which she had so little expected, but her eyes flashed and her breath came quickly. Never had she been so spoken to! Never had any living soul come between her and her cherished object the breaking of the heart of Hilary Vane! Nor, indeed, had that object ever been so plainly set forth as Victoria had set it forth. And this woman who dared to do this had herself brought unhappiness to Austen. Euphrasia had almost forgotten that, such had been the strange harmony of their communion.

"Have you the right to tell Austen?" she demanded.

"Have I?" Victoria repeated. And then, as the full meaning of the question came to her; the colour flooded into her face, and she would have fled, if she could, but Euphrasia's words came in a torrent.



“You’ve made him unhappy, as well as Hilary. He loves you—but he wouldn’t speak of it to you. Oh, no, he didn’t tell me who it was, but I never rested till I found out. He never would have told me about it at all, or anybody else, but that I guessed it. I saw he was unhappy, and I calculated it wasn’t Hilary alone made him so. One night he came in here, and I knew all at once—somehow—there was a woman to blame, and I asked him, and he couldn’t lie to me. He said it wasn’t anybody’s fault but his own—he wouldn’t say any more than that, except that he hadn’t spoken to her. I always expected the time was coming when there would be—a woman. And I never thought the woman lived that he’d love who wouldn’t love him. I can’t see how any woman could help lovin’ him.

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“And then I found out it was that railroad. It came between Sarah Austen and her happiness, and now it’s come between Austen and his. Perhaps you don’t love him!” cried Euphrasia. “Perhaps you’re too rich and high and mighty. Perhaps you’re a-going to marry that fine young man who came with you in the buggy. Since I heard who you was, I haven’t had a happy hour. Let me tell you there’s no better blood in the land than the Austen blood. I won’t mention the Vanes. If you’ve led him on, if you’ve deceived him, I hope you may be unhappy as Sarah Austen was—”

“Don’t!” pleaded Victoria; “don’t! Please don’t!” and she seized Euphrasia by the arms, as though seeking by physical force to stop the intolerable flow of words. “Oh, you don’t know me; you can’t understand me if you say that. How can you be so cruel?”

In another moment she had gone, leaving Euphrasia standing in the middle of the floor, staring after her through the doorway.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FOCUS OF WRATH

Victoria, after leaving Euphrasia, made her way around the house towards Mr. Rangely, who was waiting in the runabout, her one desire for the moment being to escape. Before she had reached the sidewalk under the trees, Dr. Tredway had interrupted her.

“Miss Flint,” he called out, “I wanted to say a word to you before you went.”

“Yes,” she said, stopping and turning to him.

He paused a moment before speaking, as he looked into her face.

“I don’t wonder this has upset you a little,” he said; “a reaction always comes afterwards—even with the strongest of us.”

“I am all right,” she replied, unconsciously repeating Hilary’s words. “How is Mr. Vane?”

“You have done a splendid thing,” said the doctor, gravely. And he continued, after a moment: “It is Mr. Vane I wanted to speak to you about. He is an intimate friend, I believe, of your father’s, as well as Mr. Flint’s right-hand man in—in a business way in this State. Mr. Vane himself will not listen to reason. I have told him plainly that if he does not drop all business at once, the chances are ten to one that he will forfeit his life very shortly. I understand that there is a—a convention to be held at the capital the day after to-morrow, and that it is Mr. Vane’s firm intention to attend it. I take the liberty of suggesting that you lay these facts before your father, as Mr. Flint probably has more influence with Hilary Vane than any other man. However,” he added, seeing Victoria hesitate, “if there is any reason why you should not care to speak to Mr. Flint—”



“Oh, no,” said Victoria; “I’ll speak to him, certainly. I was going to ask you—have you thought of Mr. Austen Vane? He might be able to do something.”

“Of course,” said the doctor, after a moment, “it is an open secret that Austen and his father have—have, in short, never agreed. They are not now on speaking terms.”

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"Don't you think," asked Victoria, summoning her courage, "that Austen Vane ought to be told?"

"Yes," the doctor repeated decidedly, "I am sure of it. Everybody who knows Austen Vane as I do has the greatest admiration for him. You probably remember him in that Meader case,—he isn't a man one would be likely to forget,—and I know that this quarrel with his father isn't of Austen's seeking."

"Oughtn't he to be told—at once?" said Victoria.

"Yes," said the doctor; "time is valuable, and we can't predict what Hilary will do. At any rate, Austen ought to know—but the trouble is, he's at Jenney's farm. I met him on the way out there just before your friend the Englishman caught me. And unfortunately I have a case which I cannot neglect. But I can send word to him."

"I know where Jenney's farm is," said Victoria; "I'll drive home that way."

"Well," exclaimed Dr. Tredway, heartily, "that's good of you. Somebody who knows Hilary's situation ought to see him, and I can think of no better messenger than you."

And he helped her into the runabout.

Young Mr. Rangely being a gentleman, he refrained from asking Victoria questions on the drive out of Ripton, and expressed the greatest willingness to accompany her on this errand and to see her home afterwards. He had been deeply impressed, but he felt instinctively that after such a serious occurrence, this was not the time to continue to give hints of his admiration. He had heard in England that many American women whom he would be likely to meet socially were superficial and pleasure-loving; and Arthur Rangely came of a family which had long been cited as a vindication of a government by aristocracy,—a family which had never shirked responsibilities. It is not too much to say that he had pictured Victoria among his future tenantry; she had appealed to him first as a woman, but the incident of the afternoon had revealed her to him, as it were, under fire.

They spoke quietly of places they both had visited, of people whom they knew in common, until they came to the hills—the very threshold of Paradise on that September evening. Those hills never failed to move Victoria, and they were garnished this evening in no earthly colours, —rose-lighted on the billowy western pasture slopes and pearl in the deep clefts of the streams, and the lordly form of Sawanec shrouded in indigo against a flame of orange. And orange faded, by the subtlest of colour changes, to azure in which swam, so confidently, a silver evening star.

In silence they drew up before Mr. Jenney's ancestral trees, and through the deepening shadows beneath these the windows of the farm-house glowed with welcoming light. At



Victoria's bidding Mr. Rangely knocked to ask for Austen Vane, and Austen himself answered the summons. He held a book in his hand, and as Rangely spoke she saw Austen's look turn quickly to her, and met it through the gathering gloom between them. In an instant he was at her side, looking up questioningly into her face, and the telltale blood leaped into hers. What must he think of her for coming again? She could not speak of her errand too quickly.

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"Mr. Vane, I came to leave a message."

"Yes?" he said, and glanced at the broad-shouldered, well-groomed figure of Mr. Rangely, who was standing at a discreet distance.

"Your father has had an attack of some kind,—please don't be alarmed, he seems to be recovered now,—and I thought and Dr. Tredway thought you ought to know about it. The doctor could not leave Ripton, and I offered to come and tell you."

"An attack?" he repeated.

"Yes." Hilary and she related simply how she had found Hilary at Fairview, and how she had driven him home. But, during the whole of her recital, she could not rid herself of the apprehension that he was thinking her interference unwarranted, her coming an indelicate repetition of the other visit. As he stood there listening in the gathering dusk, she could not tell from his face what he thought. His expression, when serious, had a determined, combative, almost grim note in it, which came from a habit he had of closing his jaw tightly; and his eyes were like troubled skies through which there trembled an occasional flash of light.

Victoria had never felt his force so strongly as now, and never had he seemed more distant; at times—she had thought—she had had glimpses of his soul; to-night he was inscrutable, and never had she realized the power (which she had known he must possess) of making himself so. And to her? Her pride forbade her recalling at that moment the confidences which had passed between them and which now seemed to have been so impossible. He was serious because he was listening to serious news—she told herself. But it was more than this: he had shut himself up, he was impenetrable. Shame seized her; yes, and anger; and shame again at the remembrance of her talk with Euphrasia—and anger once more. Could he think that she would make advances to tempt his honour, and risk his good opinion and her own?

Confidence is like a lute-string, giving forth sweet sounds in its perfection; there are none so discordant as when it snaps.

Victoria scarcely heard Austen's acknowledgments of her kindness, so perfunctory did they seem, so unlike the man she had known; and her own protestations that she had done nothing to merit his thanks were to her quite as unreal. She introduced him to the Englishman.

"Mr. Rangely has been good enough to come with me," she said.

"I've never seen anybody act with more presence of mind than Miss Flint," Rangely declared, as he shook Austen's hand. "She did just the right thing, without wasting any time whatever."

“I’m sure of it,” said Austen, cordially enough. But to Victoria’s keener ear, other tones which she had heard at other times were lacking. Nor could she, clever as she was, see the palpable reason standing before her!

“I say,” said Rangely, as they drove away, “he strikes me as a remarkably sound chap, Miss Flint. There is something unusual about him, something clean cut.”

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"I've heard other people say so," Victoria replied. For the first time since she had known him, praise of Austen was painful to her. What was this curious attraction that roused the interest of all who came in contact with him? The doctor had it, Mr. Redbrook, Jabe Jenney,—even Hamilton Tooting, she remembered. And he attracted women as well as men—it must be so. Certainly her own interest in him—a man beyond the radius of her sphere—and their encounters had been strange enough! And must she go on all her life hearing praises of him? Of one thing she was sure—who was not?—that Austen Vane had a future. He was the type of man which is inevitably impelled into places of trust.

Manly men, as a rule, do not understand women. They humour them blindly, seek to comfort them—if they weep—with caresses, laugh with them if they have leisure, and respect their curious and unaccountable moods by keeping out of the way. Such a husband was Arthur Rangely destined to make; a man who had seen any number of women and understood none,—as wondrous mechanisms. He had merely acquired the faculty of appraisal, although this does not mean that he was incapable of falling in love.

Mr. Rangely could not account for the sudden access of gayety in Victoria's manner as they drove to Fairview through the darkness, nor did he try. He took what the gods sent him, and was thankful. When he reached Fairview he was asked to dinner, as he could not possibly get back to the Inn in time. Mr. Flint had gone to Sumner with the engineers, leaving orders to be met at the East Tunbridge station at ten; and Mrs. Flint, still convalescent, had dined in her sitting room. Victoria sat opposite her guest in the big dining room, and Mr. Rangely pronounced the occasion decidedly jolly. He had, he proclaimed, with the exception of Mr. Vane's deplorable accident, never spent a better day in his life.

Victoria wondered at her own spirits, which were feverish, as she listened to transatlantic gossip about girls she had known who had married Mr. Rangely's friends, and stories of Westminster and South Africa, and certain experiences of Mr. Rangely's at other places than Leith on the American continent, which he had grown sufficiently confidential to relate. At times, lifting her eyes to him as he sat smoking after dinner on the other side of the library fire, she almost doubted his existence. He had come into her life at one o'clock that day—it seemed an eternity since. And a subconscious voice, heard but not heeded, told her that in the awakening from this curious dream he would be associated in her memory with tragedy, just as a tune or a book or a game of cards reminds one of painful periods of one's existence. To-morrow the—episode would be a nightmare; to-night her one desire was to prolong it.

And poor Mr. Rangely little imagined the part he was playing—as little as he deserved it. Reluctant to leave, propriety impelled him to ask for a trap at ten, and it was half past before he finally made his exit from the room with a promise to pay his respects soon—very soon.

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Victoria stood before the fire listening to the sound of the wheels gradually growing fainter, and her mind refused to work. Hanover Street, Mr. Jenney's farm-house, were unrealities too. Ten minutes later—if she had marked the interval—came the sound of wheels again, this time growing louder. Then she heard a voice in the hall, her father's voice.

"Towers, who was that?"

"A young gentleman, sir, who drove home with Miss Victoria. I didn't get his name, sir."

"Has Miss Victoria retired?"

"She's in the library, sir. Here are some telegrams, Mr. Flint."

Victoria heard her father tearing open the telegrams and walking towards the library with slow steps as he read them. She did not stir from her place before the fire. She saw him enter and, with a characteristic movement which had become almost habitual of late, crush the telegrams in front of him with both hands.

"Well, Victoria?" he said.

"Well, father?"

It was characteristic of him, too, that he should momentarily drop the conversation, unravel the ball of telegrams, read one, crush them once more,—a process that seemed to give him relief. He glanced at his daughter—she had not moved. Whatever Mr. Flint's original character may have been in his long-forgotten youth on the wind-swept hill farm in Truro, his methods of attack lacked directness now; perhaps a long business and political experience were responsible for this trait.

"Your mother didn't come down to dinner, I suppose."

"No," said Victoria.

Simpson tells me the young bull got loose and cut himself badly. He says it's the fault of the Eben Fitch you got me to hire."

"I don't believe it was Eben's fault—Simpson doesn't like him," Victoria replied.

"Simpson tells me Fitch drinks."

"Let a man get a bad name," said Victoria, "and Simpson will take care that he doesn't lose it." The unexpected necessity of defending one of her proteges aroused her. "I've made it a point to see Eben every day for the last three months, and he hasn't touched a drop. He's one of the best workers we have on the place."

“I’ve got too much on my mind to put up with that kind of thing,” said Mr. Flint, “and I won’t be worried here on the place. I can get capable men to tend cattle, at least. I have to put up with political rascals who rob and deceive me as soon as my back is turned, I have to put up with inefficiency and senility, but I won’t have it at home.”

“Fitch will be transferred to the gardener if you think best,” she said.

It suddenly occurred to Victoria, in the light of a new discovery, that in the past her father’s irritability had not extended to her. And this discovery, she knew, ought to have some significance, but she felt unaccountably indifferent to it. Mr. Flint walked to a window at the far end of the room and flung apart the tightly closed curtains before it.

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"I never can get used to this new-fangled way of shutting everything up tight," he declared. "When I lived in Centre Street, I used to read with the curtains up every night, and nobody ever shot me." He stood looking out at the starlight for awhile, and turned and faced her again.

"I haven't seen much of you this summer, Victoria," he remarked.

"I'm sorry, father. You know I always like to walk with you every day you are here." He had aroused her sufficiently to have a distinct sense that this was not the time to refer to the warning she had given him that he was working too hard. But he was evidently bent on putting this construction on her answer.

"Several times I have asked for you, and you have been away," he said.

"If you had only let me know, I should have made it a point to be at home."

"How can I tell when these idiots will give me any rest?" he asked. He crushed the telegrams again, and came down the room and stopped in front of her. "Perhaps there has been a particular reason why you have not been at home as much as usual."

"A particular reason?" she repeated, in genuine surprise.

"Yes," he said; "I have been hearing things which, to put it mildly, have astonished me."

"Hearing things?"

"Yes," he exclaimed. "I may be busy, I may be harassed by tricksters and bunglers, but I am not too busy not to care something about my daughter's doings. I expect them to deceive me, Victoria, but I pinned my faith somewhere. I pinned it on you. On you, do you understand?"

She raised her head for the first time and looked at him, with her lips quivering. But she did not speak.

"Ever since you were a child you have been everything to me, all I had to fly to. I was always sure of one genuine, disinterested love—and that was yours. I was always sure of hearing the truth from your lips."

"Father!" she cried.

He seemed not to hear the agonized appeal in her voice. Although he spoke in his usual tones, Augustus Flint was, in fact, beside himself.

"And now," he said, "and now I learn that you have been holding clandestine meetings with a man who is my enemy, with a man who has done me more harm than any other

single individual, with a man whom I will not have in my house—do you understand? I can only say that before to-night, I gave him credit for having the decency not to enter it, not to sit down at my table.”

Victoria turned away from him, and seized the high oak shelf of the mantel with both hands. He saw her shoulders rising and falling as her breath came deeply, spasmodically—like sobbing. But she was not sobbing as she turned again and looked into his face. Fear was in her eye, and the high courage to look: fear and courage. She seemed to be looking at another man, at a man who was not her father. And Mr. Flint, despite his anger, vaguely interpreting her meaning, was taken aback. He had never seen anybody with such a look. And the unexpected quiet quality of her voice intensified his strange sensation.

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"A Mr. Rangely, an Englishman, who is staying at the Leith Inn, was here to dinner to-night. He has never been here before."

"Austen Vane wasn't here to-night?"

"Mr. Vane has never been in this house to my knowledge but once, and you knew more about that meeting than I do."

And still Victoria spoke quietly, inexplicably so to Mr. Flint—and to herself. It seemed to her that some other than she were answering with her voice, and that she alone felt. It was all a part of the nightmare, all unreal, and this was not her father; nevertheless, she suffered now, not from anger alone, nor sorrow, nor shame for him and for herself, nor disgust, nor a sense of injustice, nor cruelty—but all of these played upon a heart responsive to each with a different pain.

And Mr. Flint, halted for the moment by her look and manner, yet goaded on by a fiend of provocation which had for months been gathering strength, and which now mastered him completely, persisted. He knew not what he did or said.

"And you haven't seen him to-day, I suppose," he cried.

"Yes, I have seen him to-day."

"Ah, you have! I thought as much. Where did you meet him to-day?"

Victoria turned half away from him, raised a hand to the mantel-shelf again, and lifted a foot to the low brass fender as she looked down into the fire. The movement was not part of a desire to evade him, as he fancied in his anger, but rather one of profound indifference, of profound weariness—the sunless deeps of sorrow. And he thought her capable of deceiving him! He had been her constant companion from childhood, and knew only the visible semblance of her face, her form, her smile. Her sex was the sex of subterfuge.

"I went to the place where he is living, and asked for him," she said, "and he came out and spoke to me."

"You?" he repeated incredulously. There was surely no subterfuge in her tone, but an unreal, unbelievable note which his senses seized, and to which he clung. "You! My daughter!"

"Yes," she answered, "I, your daughter. I suppose you think I am shameless. It is true—I am."

Mr. Flint was utterly baffled. He was at sea. He had got beyond the range of his experience; defence, denial, tears, he could have understood and coped with. He

crushed the telegrams into a tighter ball, sought for a footing, and found a precarious one.

“And all this has been going on without my knowledge, when you knew my sentiments towards the man?”

“Yes,” she said. “I do not know what you include in that remark, but I have seen him many times as many times, perhaps, as you have heard about.”

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He wheeled, and walked over to a cabinet between two of the great windows and stood there examining a collection of fans which his wife had bought at a famous sale in Paris. Had he suddenly been asked the question, he could not have said whether they were fans or beetles. And it occurred to Victoria, as her eyes rested on his back, that she ought to be sorry for him—but wasn't, somehow. Perhaps she would be tomorrow. Mr. Flint looked at the fans, and an obscure glimmering of the truth came to him that instead of administering a severe rebuke to the daughter he believed he had known all his life, he was engaged in a contest with the soul of a woman he had never known. And the more she confessed, the more she apparently yielded, the more impotent he seemed, the tighter the demon gripped him. Obstacles, embarrassments, disappointments, he had met early in his life, and he had taken them as they came. There had followed a long period when his word had been law. And now, as age came on, and he was meeting with obstacles again, he had lost the magic gift of sweeping them aside; the growing certainty that he was becoming powerless haunted him night and day. Unbelievably strange, however, it was that the rays of his anger by some subconscious process had hovered from the first about the son of Hilary Vane, and were now, by the trend of event after event, firmly focussed there.

He left the cabinet abruptly and came back to Victoria.

She was standing in the same position.

"You have spared me something," he said. "He has apparently undermined me with my own daughter. He has evidently given you an opinion of me which is his. I think I can understand why you have not spoken of these —meetings."

"It is an inference that I expected," said Victoria. Then she lifted her head and looked at him, and again he could not read her expression, for a light burned in her eyes that made them impenetrable to him,—a light that seemed pitilessly to search out and reveal the dark places and the weak places within him which he himself had not known were there. Could there be another standard by which men and women were measured and judged?

Mr. Flint snapped his fingers, and turned and began to pace the room.

"It's all pretty clear," he said; "there's no use going into it any farther. You believe, with the rest of them, that I'm a criminal and deserve the penitentiary. I don't care a straw about the others," he cried, snapping his fingers again. "And I suppose, if I'd had any sense, I might have expected it from you, too, Victoria—though you are my daughter."

He was aware that her eyes followed him.

"How many times have you spoken with Austen Vane?" she asked.

“Once,” he exclaimed; “that was enough. Once.”

“And he gave you the impression,” she continued slowly, “that he was deceitful, and dishonourable, and a coward? a man who would say things behind your back that he dared not say to your face? who desired reward for himself at any price, and in any manner? a man who would enter your house and seek out your daughter and secretly assail your character?”

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Mr. Flint stopped in the middle of the floor.

“And you tell me he has not done these things?”

“Suppose I did tell you so,” said Victoria, “would you believe me? I have no reason to think that you would. I am your daughter, I have been your most intimate companion, and I had the right to think that you should have formed some estimate of my character. Suppose I told you that Austen Vane has avoided me, that he would not utter a word against you or in favour of himself? Suppose I told you that I, your daughter, thought there might be two sides to the political question that is agitating you, and wished in fairness to hear the other side, as I intended to tell you when you were less busy? Suppose I told you that Austen Vane was the soul of honour, that he saw your side and presented it as ably as you have presented it? that he had refrained in many matters which might have been of advantage to him—although I did not hear of them from him—on account of his father? Would you believe me?”

“And suppose I told you,” cried Mr. Flint—so firmly fastened on him was the long habit of years of talking another down, “suppose I told you that this was the most astute and the craftiest course he could take? I’ve always credited him with brains. Suppose I told you that he was intriguing now, as he has been all along, to obtain the nomination for the governorship? Would you believe me?”

“No,” answered Victoria, quietly.

Mr. Flint went to the lamp, unrolled the ball of telegrams, seized one and crossed the room quickly, and held it out to her. His hand shook a little.

“Read that!” he said.

She read it: “Estimate that more than half of delegates from this section pledged to Henderson will go to Austen Vane when signal is given in convention. Am told on credible authority same is true of other sections, including many of Hunt’s men and Crewe’s. This is the result of quiet but persistent political work I spoke about. *Billings*.”

She handed the telegram back to her father in silence. “Do you believe it now?” he demanded exultantly.

“Who is the man whose name is signed to that message?” she asked.

Mr. Flint eyed her narrowly.

“What difference does that make?” he demanded.

“None,” said Victoria. But a vision of Mr. Billings rose before her. He had been pointed out to her as the man who had opposed Austen in the Meader suit. “If the bishop of the

diocese signed it, I would not believe that Austen Vane had anything to do with the matter.”

“Ah, you defend him!” cried Mr. Flint. “I thought so—I thought so. I take off my hat to him, he is a cleverer man even than I. His own father, whom he has ruined, comes up here and defends him.”

“Does Hilary Vane defend him?” Victoria asked curiously.

“Yes,” said Mr. Flint, beside himself; “incredible as it may seem, he does. I have Austen Vane to thank for still another favour—he is responsible for Hilary’s condition to-day. He has broken him down—he has made him an imbecile. The convention is scarcely thirty-six hours off, and Hilary is about as fit to handle it as—as Eben Fitch. Hilary, who never failed me in his life!”

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Victoria did not speak for a moment, and then she reached out her hand quickly and laid it on his that still held the telegram. A lounge stood on one side of the fireplace, and she drew him gently to it, and he sat down at her side. His acquiescence to her was a second nature, and he was once more bewildered. His anger now seemed to have had no effect upon her whatever.

"I waited up to tell you about Hilary Vane, father," she said gently. "He has had a stroke, which I am afraid is serious."

"A stroke!" cried Mr. Flint, "Why didn't you tell me? How do you know?"

Victoria related how she had found Hilary coming away from Fairview, and what she had done, and the word Dr. Tredway had sent.

"Good God!" cried Mr. Flint, "he won't be able to go to the convention!" And he rose and pressed the electric button. "Towers," he said, when the butler appeared, "is Mr. Freeman still in my room? Tell him to telephone to Ripton at once and find out how Mr. Hilary Vane is. They'll have to send a messenger. That accounts for it," he went on, rather to himself than to Victoria, and he began to pace the room once more; "he looked like a sick man when he was here. And who have we got to put in his place? Not a soul!"

He paced awhile in silence. He appeared to have forgotten Victoria.

"Poor Hilary!" he said again, "poor Hilary! I'll go down there the first thing in the morning."

Another silence, and then Mr. Freeman, the secretary, entered.

"I telephoned to Dr. Tredway's, Mr. Flint. I thought that would be quickest. Mr. Vane has left home. They don't know where he's gone."

"Left home! It's impossible!" and he glanced at Victoria, who had risen to her feet. "There must be some mistake."

"No, sir. First I got the doctor, who said that Mr. Vane was gone—at the risk of his life. And then I talked to Mr. Austen Vane himself, who was there consulting with the doctor. It appears that Mr. Hilary Vane had left home by eight o'clock, when Mr. Austen Vane got there."

"Hilary's gone out of his head," exclaimed Mr. Flint. "This thing has unhinged him. Here, take these telegrams. No, wait a minute, I'll go out there. Call up Billings, and see if you can get Senator Whitredge."

He started out of the room, halted, and turned his head and hesitated.

“Father,” said Victoria, “I don’t think Hilary Vane is out of his mind.”

“You don’t?” he said quickly. “Why?”

By some unaccountable change in the atmosphere, of which Mr. Flint was unconscious, his normal relation to his daughter had been suddenly reestablished. He was giving ear, as usual, to her judgment.

“Did Hilary Vane tell you he would go to the convention?” she asked.

“Yes.” In spite of himself, he had given the word an apologetic inflection.

“Then he has gone already,” she said. “I think, if you will telephone a little later to the State capital, you will find that he is in his room at the Pelican Hotel.”

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“By thunder, Victoria!” he ejaculated, “you may be right. It would be like him.”

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ARENA AND THE DUST

Alas! that the great genius who described the battle of Waterloo is not alive to-day and on this side of the Atlantic, for a subject worthy of his pen is at hand,—nothing less than that convention of conventions at which the Honourable Humphrey Crewe of Leith is one of the candidates. One of the candidates, indeed! Will it not be known, as long as there are pensions, and a governor and a state-house and a seal and State sovereignty and a staff, as the Crewe Convention? How charge after charge was made during the long, hot day and into the night; how the delegates were carried out limp and speechless and starved and wet through, and carried in to vote again,—will all be told in time. But let us begin at the beginning, which is the day before.

But look! it is afternoon, and the candidates are arriving at the Pelican. The Honourable Adam B. Hunt is the first, and walks up the hill from the station escorted by such prominent figures as the Honourables Brush Bascom and Jacob Botcher, and surrounded by enthusiastic supporters who wear buttons with the image of their leader—goatee and all—and the singularly prophetic superscription, ‘To the Last Ditch!’ Only veterans and experts like Mr. Bascom and Mr. Botcher can recognize the last ditch when they see it.

Another stir in the street—occasioned by the appearance of the Honourable Giles Henderson,—of the blameless life. Utter a syllable against him if you can! These words should be inscribed on his buttons if he had any—but he has none. They seem to be, unuttered, on the tongues of the gentlemen who escort the Honourable Giles, United States Senator Greene and the Honourable Elisha Jane, who has obtained leave of absence from his consular post to attend the convention,—and incidentally to help prepare for it.

But who and what is this? The warlike blast of a siren horn is heard, the crowd in the lobby rushes to the doors, people up-stairs fly to the windows, and the Honourable Adam B. Hunt leans out and nearly falls out, but is rescued by Division Superintendent Manning of the Northeastern Railroads, who has stepped in from Number Seven to give a little private tug of a persuasive nature to the Honourable Adam’s coat-tails. A red Leviathan comes screaming down Main Street with a white trail of dust behind it, smothering the occupants of vehicles which have barely succeeded in getting out of the way, and makes a spectacular finish before the Pelican by sliding the last fifty feet on locked rear wheels.



A group in the street raises a cheer. It is the People's Champion! Dust coat, gauntlets, goggles, cannot hide him; and if they did, some one would recognize that voice, familiar now and endeared to many, and so suited to command:—"Get that baggage off, and don't waste any time! Jump out, Watling—that handle turns the other way. Well, Tooting, are the headquarters ready? What was the matter that I couldn't get you on the telephone?" (To the crowd.) "Don't push in and scratch the paint. He's going to back out in a minute, and somebody'll get hurt."

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Mr. Hamilton Tooting (Colonel Hamilton Tooting that is to be—it being an open secret that he is destined for the staff) is standing hatless on the sidewalk ready to receive the great man. The crowd in the rotunda makes a lane, and Mr. Crewe, glancing neither to the right nor left, walks upstairs; and scarce is he installed in the bridal suite, surrounded by his faithful workers for reform, than that amazing reception begins. Mr. Hamilton Tooting, looking the very soul of hospitality, stands by the doorway with an open box of cigars in his left hand, pressing them upon the visitors with his right. Reform, contrary to the preconceived opinion of many, is not made of icicles, nor answers with a stone a request for bread. As the hours run on, the visitors grow more and more numerous, and after supper the room is packed to suffocation, and a long line is waiting in the corridor, marshalled and kept in good humour by able lieutenants; while Mr. Crewe is dimly to be perceived through clouds of incense burning in his honour—and incidentally at his expense—with a welcoming smile and an appropriate word for each caller, whose waistcoat pockets, when they emerge, resemble cartridge-belts of cigars.

More cigars were hastily sent for, and more. There are to be but a thousand delegates to the convention, and at least two thousand men have already passed through the room—and those who don't smoke have friends. It is well that Mr. Crewe has stuck to his conservative habit of not squeezing hands too hard.

"Isn't that Mr. Putter, who keeps a livery-stable here?" inquired Mr. Crewe, about nine o'clock—our candidate having a piercing eye of his own. Mr. Putter's coat, being brushed back, has revealed six cigars.

"Why, yes—yes," says Mr. Watling.

"Is he a delegate?" Mr. Crewe demanded.

"Why, I guess he must be," says Mr. Watling.

But Mr. Putter is not a delegate.

"You've stood up and made a grand fight, Mr. Crewe," says another gentleman, a little later, with a bland, smooth shaven face and strong teeth to clinch Mr. Crewe's cigars. "I wish I was fixed so as I could vote for you."

Mr. Crewe looks at him narrowly.

"You look very much like a travelling man from New York, who tried to sell me farm machinery," he answers.

"Where are you from?"

“You ain’t exactly what they call a tyro, are you?” says the bland-faced man; “but I guess you’ve missed the mark this shot. Well, so long.”

“Hold on!” says Mr. Crewe, “Watling will talk to you.”

And, as the gentleman follows Mr. Watling through the press, a pamphlet drops from his pocket to the floor. It is marked ‘Catalogue of the Raines Farm Implement Company.’ Mr. Watling picks it up and hands it to the gentleman, who winks again.

“Tim,” he says, “where can we sit down? How much are you getting out of this? Brush and Jake Botcher are bidding high down-stairs, and the quotation on delegates has gone up ten points in ten minutes. It’s mighty good of you to remember old friends, Tim, even if they’re not delegates.”

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Meanwhile Mr. Crewe is graciously receiving others who are crowding to him.

"How are you, Mr. Giddings? How are the cows? I carry some stock that'll make you sit up—I believe I told you when I was down your way. Of course, mine cost a little money, but that's one of my hobbies. Come and see 'em some day. There's a good hotel in Ripton, and I'll have you met there and drive you back."

Thus, with a genial and kindly remark to each, he passes from one to the other, and when the members of the press come to him for his estimate of the outcome on the morrow, he treats them with the same courtly consideration.

"Estimate!" cries Mr. Crewe. "Where have your eyes been to-night, my friends? Have you seen the people coming into these headquarters? Have you seen 'em pouring into any other headquarters? All the State and federal office-holders in the country couldn't stop me now. Estimate! I'll be nominated on the first ballot."

They wrote it down.

"Thank you, Mr. Crewe," they said; "that's the kind of talk we like to hear."

"And don't forget," said Mr. Crewe, "to mention this reception in the accounts."

Mr. Tooting, who makes it a point from time to time to reconnoitre, saunters halfway down-stairs and surveys the crowded rotunda from the landing. Through the blue medium produced by the burning of many cigars (mostly Mr. Crewe's) he takes note of the burly form of Mr. Thomas Gaylord beside that of Mr. Redbrook and other rural figures; he takes note of a quiet corner with a ring of chairs surrounded by scouts and outposts, although it requires a trained eye such as Mr. Tooting's to recognize them as such—for they wear no uniforms. They are, in truth, minor captains of the feudal system, and their present duties consist (as Mr. Tooting sees clearly) in preventing the innocent and inquisitive from unprofitable speech with the Honourable Jacob Botcher, who sits in the inner angle conversing cordially with those who are singled out for this honour. Still other scouts conduct some of the gentlemen who have talked with Mr. Botcher up the stairs to a mysterious room on the second floor. Mr. Tooting discovers that the room is occupied by the Honourable Brush Bascom; Mr. Tooting learns with indignation that certain of these guests of Mr. Bascom's are delegates pledged to Mr. Crewe, whereupon he rushes back to the bridal suite to report to his chief. The cigars are giving out again, and the rush has slackened, and he detaches the People's Champion from the line and draws him to the inner room.

"Brush Bascom's conducting a bourse on the second floor and is running the price up right along," cried the honest and indignant Mr. Tooting. He's stringin' Adam Hunt all right. They say he's got Adam to cough up six thousand extra since five o'clock, but the

question is—ain't he stringin' us? He paid six hundred for a block of ten not quarter of an hour ago—and nine of 'em were our delegates."

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It must be remembered that these are Mr. Tooting's words, and Mr. Crewe evidently treated them as the product of that gentleman's vivid imagination. Translated, they meant that the Honourable Adam B. Hunt has no chance for the nomination, but that the crafty Messrs. Botcher and Bascom are inducing him to think that he has—by making a supreme effort. The supreme effort is represented by six thousand dollars.

"Are you going to lie down under that?" Mr. Tooting demanded, forgetting himself in his zeal for reform and Mr. Crewe. But Mr. Tooting, in some alarm, perceived the eye of his chief growing virtuous and glassy.

"I guess I know when I'm strung, as you call it, Mr. Tooting," he replied severely. "This cigar bill alone is enough to support a large family for several months."

And with this merited reproof he turned on his heel and went back to his admirers without, leaving Mr. Tooting aghast, but still resourceful. Ten minutes later that gentleman was engaged in a private conversation with his colleague, the Honourable Timothy Wading.

"He's up on his hind legs at last," said Mr. Tooting; "it looks as if he was catching on."

Mr. Wading evidently grasped these mysterious words, for he looked grave.

"He thinks he's got the nomination cinched, don't he?"

"That's the worst of it," cried Mr. Tooting.

"I'll see what I can do," said the Honourable Tim. "He's always talking about thorough, let him do it thorough." And Mr. Watling winked.

"Thorough," repeated Mr. Tooting, delightedly.

"That's it—Colonel," said Mr. Watling. "Have you ordered your uniform yet, Ham?"

Mr. Tooting plainly appreciated this joke, for he grinned.

"I guess you won't starve if you don't get that commissionership, Tim," he retorted.

"And I guess," returned Mr. Watling, "that you won't go naked if you don't have a uniform."

Victoria's surmise was true. At ten o'clock at night, two days before the convention, a tall figure had appeared in the empty rotunda of the Pelican, startling the clerk out of a doze. He rubbed his eyes and stared, recognized Hilary Vane, and yet failed to recognize him. It was an extraordinary occasion indeed which would cause Mr. McAvoy to lose his aplomb; to neglect to seize the pen and dip it, with a flourish, into the ink, and

extend its handle towards the important guest; to omit a few fitting words of welcome. It was Hilary who got the pen first, and wrote his name in silence, and by this time Mr. McAvoy had recovered his presence of mind sufficiently to wield the blotter.

“We didn’t expect you to-night, Mr. Vane,” he said, in a voice that sounded strange to him, “but we’ve kept Number Seven, as usual. Front!”

“The old man’s seen his day, I guess,” Mr. McAvoy remarked, as he studied the register with a lone reporter. “This Crewe must have got in on ’em hard, from what they tell me, and Adam Hunt has his dander up.”

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The next morning at ten o'clock, while the workmen were still tacking down the fireproof carpets in headquarters upstairs, and before even the advance guard of the armies had begun to arrive, the eye of the clerk was caught by a tall young man rapidly approaching the desk.

"Is Mr. Hilary Vane here?"

"He's in Number Seven," said Mr. McAvoy, who was cudgelling his brains. "Give me your card, and I'll send it up."

"I'll go up," said the caller, turning on his heel and suiting the action to the word, leaving Mr. McAvoy to make active but futile inquiries among the few travelling men and reporters seated about.

"Well, if you fellers don't know him, I give up," said the clerk, irritably, "but he looks as if he ought to be somebody. He knows his business, anyway."

In the meantime Mr. Vane's caller had reached the first floor; he hesitated just a moment before knocking at the door of Number Seven, and the Honourable Hilary's voice responded. The door opened.

Hilary was seated, as usual, beside the marble-topped table, which was covered with newspapers and memoranda. In the room were Mr. Ridout, the capital lawyer, and Mr. Manning, the division superintendent. There was an instant of surprised silence on the part of the three, but the Honourable Hilary was the only one who remained expressionless.

"If you don't mind, gentlemen," said the visitor, "I should like to talk to my father for a few minutes."

"Why, certainly, Austen," Mr. Ridout replied, with an attempt at heartiness. Further words seemed to fail him, and he left the room somewhat awkwardly, followed by Mr. Manning; but the Honourable Hilary appeared to take no notice of this proceeding.

"Judge," said Austen, when the door had closed behind them, "I won't keep you long. I didn't come down here to plead with you to abandon what you believe to be your duty, because I know that would be useless. I have had a talk with Dr. Tredway," he added gently, "and I realize that you are risking your life. If I could take you back to Ripton I would, but I know that I cannot. I see your point of view, and if I were in your place I should do the same thing. I only wanted to tell you this—" Austen's voice caught a little, "if—anything should happen, I shall be at Mrs. Peasley's on Maple Street, opposite the Duncan house." He laid his hand for an instant, in the old familiar way, on Hilary's shoulder, and looked down into the older man's face. It may have been that Hilary's lips trembled a little. "I—I'll see you later, Judge, when it's all over. Good luck to you."

He turned slowly, went to the door and opened it, gave one glance at the motionless figure in the chair, and went out. He did not hear the voice that called his name, for the door had shut.

Mr. Ridout and Mr. Manning were talking together in low tones at the head of the stairs. It was the lawyer who accosted Austen.

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"The old gentleman don't seem to be quite himself, Austen. Don't seem well. You ought to hold him in he can't work as hard as he used to."

"I think you'll find, Mr. Ridout," answered Austen, deliberately, "that he'll perform what's required of him with his usual efficiency."

Mr. Ridout followed Austen's figure with his eyes until he was hidden by a turn of the stairs. Then he whistled.

"I can't make that fellow out," he exclaimed. "Never could. All I know is that if Hilary Vane pulls us through this mess, in the shape he's in, it'll be a miracle."

"His mind seems sound enough to-day—but he's lost his grip, I tell you. I don't wonder Flint's beside himself. Here's Adam Hunt with both feet in the trough, and no more chance of the nomination than I have, and Bascom and Botcher teasing him on, and he's got enough votes with Crewe to lock up that convention for a dark horse. And who's the dark horse?"

Mr. Manning, who was a silent man, pointed with his thumb in the direction Austen had taken.

"Hilary Vane's own son," said Mr. Ridout, voicing the gesture; "they tell me that Tom Gaylord's done some pretty slick work. Now I leave it to you, Manning, if that isn't a mess!"

At this moment the conversation was interrupted by the appearance on the stairway of the impressive form of United States Senator Whitredge, followed by a hall boy carrying the senatorial gripsack. The senator's face wore a look of concern which could not possibly be misinterpreted.

"How's Hilary?" were his first words.

Mr. Ridout and Mr. Manning glanced at each other.

"He's in Number Seven; you'd better take a look at him, Senator."

The senator drew breath, directed that his grip be put in the room where he was to repose that night, produced an amber cigar-holder from a case, and a cigar from his waistcoat pocket.

"I thought I'd better come down early," he said, "things aren't going just as they should, and that's the truth. In fact," he added, significantly tapping his pocket, "I've got a letter from Mr. Flint to Hilary which I may have to use. You understand me."

"I guessed as much," said Mr. Ridout.

“Ahem! I saw young Vane going out of the hotel just now,” the senator remarked. “I am told, on pretty good authority, that under certain circumstances, which I must confess seem not unlikely at present, he may be a candidate for the nomination. The fact that he is in town tends to make the circumstance more probable.”

“He’s just been in to see Hilary,” said Mr. Ridout.

“You don’t tell me!” said the senator, pausing as he lighted his cigar; “I was under the impression that they were not on speaking terms.”

“They’ve evidently got together now, that—” said Mr. Ridout. “I wonder how old Hilary would feel about it. We couldn’t do much with Austen Vane if he was governor—that’s a sure thing.”

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The senator pondered a moment.

"It's been badly managed," he muttered; "there's no doubt of that. Hunt must be got out of the way. When Bascom and Botcher come, tell them I want to see them in my room, not in Number Seven."

And with this impressive command, received with nods of understanding, Senator Whitredge advanced slowly towards Number Seven, knocked, and entered. Be it known that Mr. Flint, with characteristic caution, had not confided even to the senator that the Honourable Hilary had had a stroke.

"Ah, Vane," he said, in his most affable tones, "how are you?"

The Honourable Hilary, who was looking over some papers, shot at him a glance from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Came in here to find out—didn't you, Whitredge?" he replied.

"What?" said the senator, taken aback; and for once at a loss for words.

The Honourable Hilary rose and stood straighter than usual, and looked the senator in the eye.

"What's your diagnosis?" he asked. "Superannuated—unfit for duty —unable to cope with the situation ready to be superseded? Is that about it?"

To say that Senator Whitredge was startled and uncomfortable would be to put his case mildly. He had never before seen Mr. Vane in this mood.

"Ha-ha!" he laughed; "the years are coming over us a little, aren't they? But I guess it isn't quite time for the youngsters to step in yet."

"No, Whitredge," said Mr. Vane, slowly, without taking his eye from the senator's, "and it won't be until this convention is over. Do you understand?"

"That's the first good news I've heard this morning," said the senator, with the uneasy feeling that, in some miraculous way, the Honourable Hilary had read the superseding orders from highest authority through his pocket.

"You may take it as good news or bad news, as you please, but it's a fact. And now I want *'you'* to tell Ridout that I wish to see him again, and to bring in Doby, who is to be chairman of the convention."

"Certainly," assented the senator, with alacrity, as he started for the door. Then he turned. "I'm glad to see you're all right, Vane," he added; "I'd heard that you were a little

under the weather—a bilious attack on account of the heat—that’s all I meant.” He did not wait for an answer, nor would he have got one. And he found Mr. Ridout in the hall.

“Well?” said the lawyer, expectantly, and looking with some curiosity at the senator’s face.

“Well,” said Mr. Whitredge, with marked impatience, “he wants to see you right away.”

All day long Hilary Vane held conference in Number Seven, and at six o’clock sent a request that the Honourable Adam visit him. The Honourable Adam would not come; and the fact leaked out—through the Honourable Adam.

“He’s mad clean through,” reported the Honourable Elisha Jane, to whose tact and diplomacy the mission had been confided. “He said he would teach Flint a lesson. He’d show him he couldn’t throw away a man as useful and efficient as he’d been, like a sucked orange.”

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"Humph! A sucked orange. That's what he said, is it? A sucked orange," Hilary repeated.

"That's what he said," declared Mr. Jane, and remembered afterwards how Hilary had been struck by the simile.

At ten o'clock at night, at the very height of the tumult, Senator Whitredge had received an interrogatory telegram from Fairview, and had called a private conference (in which Hilary was not included) in a back room on the second floor (where the conflicting bands of Mr. Crewe and Mr. Hunt could not be heard), which Mr. Manning and Mr. Jane and State Senator Billings and Mr. Ridout attended. Query: the Honourable Hilary had quarrelled with Mr. Flint, that was an open secret; did not Mr. Vane think himself justified, from his own point of view, in taking a singular revenge in not over-exerting himself to pull the Honourable Adam out, thereby leaving the field open for his son, Austen Vane, with whom he was apparently reconciled? Not that Mr. Flint had hinted of such a thing! He had, in the telegram, merely urged the senator himself to see Mr. Hunt, and to make one more attempt to restrain the loyalty to that candidate of Messrs. Bascom and Botcher.

The senator made the attempt, and failed signally.

It was half-past midnight by the shining face of the clock on the tower of the state-house, and hope flamed high in the bosom of the Honourable Adam B. Hunt a tribute to the bellows-like skill of Messrs. Bascom and Botcher. The bands in the street had blown themselves out, the delegates were at last seeking rest, the hall boys in the corridors were turning down the lights, and the Honourable Adam, in a complacent and even jubilant frame of mind, had put on his carpet slippers and taken off his coat, when there came a knock at his door. He was not a little amazed and embarrassed, upon opening it, to see the Honourable Hilary. But these feelings gave place almost immediately to a sense of triumph; gone were the days when he had to report to Number Seven. Number Seven, in the person of Hilary (who was Number Seven), had been forced to come to him!

"Well, upon my soul!" he exclaimed heartily. "Come in, Hilary."

He turned up the jets of the chandelier, and gazed at his friend, and was silent.

"Have a seat, Hilary," he said, pushing up an armchair.

Mr. Vane sat down. Mr. Hunt took a seat opposite, and waited for his visitor to speak. He himself seemed to find no words.

"Adam," said Mr. Vane, at length, "we've known each other for a good many years."

"That's so, Hilary. That's so," Mr. Hunt eagerly assented. What was coming?

“And whatever harm I’ve done in my life,” Hilary continued, “I’ve always tried to keep my word. I told you, when we met up there by the mill this summer, that if Mr. Flint had consulted me about your candidacy, before seeing you in New York, I shouldn’t have advised it—this time.”

The Honourable Adam’s face stiffened.

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"That's what you said. But—"

"And I meant it," Mr. Vane interrupted. "I was never pledged to your candidacy, as a citizen. I've been thinking over my situation some, this summer, and I'll tell you in so many plain words what it is. I guess you know—I guess everybody knows who's thought about it. I deceived myself for a long time by believing that I earned my living as the attorney for the Northeastern Railroads. I've drawn up some pretty good papers for them, and I've won some pretty difficult suits. I'm not proud of 'em all, but let that go. Do you know what I am?"

The Honourable Adam was capable only of a startled ejaculation. Was Hilary Vane in his right senses?

"I'm merely their paid political tool," Mr. Vane continued, in the same tone. "I've sold them my brain, and my right of opinion as a citizen. I wanted to make this clear to you first of all. Not that you didn't know it, but I wished you to know that I know it. When Mr. Flint said that you were to be the Republican nominee, my business was to work to get you elected, which I did. And when it became apparent that you couldn't be nominated —"

"Hold on!" cried the Honourable Adam.

"Please wait until I have finished. When it became apparent that you couldn't be nominated, Mr. Flint sent me to try to get you to withdraw, and he decreed that the new candidate should pay your expenses up to date. I failed in that mission."

"I don't blame you, Hilary," exclaimed Mr. Hunt. "I told you so at the time. But I guess I'll soon be in a position where I can make Flint walk the tracks—his own tracks."

"Adam," said Mr. Vane, "it is because I deserve as much of the blame as Mr. Flint that I am here."

Again Mr. Hunt was speechless. The Honourable Hilary Vane in an apologetic mood! A surmise flashed into the brain of the Honourable Adam, and sparkled there. The Honourable Giles Henderson was prepared to withdraw, and Hilary had come, by authority, to see if he would pay the Honourable Giles' campaign expenses. Well, he could snap his fingers at that.

"Flint has treated me like a dog," he declared.

"Mr. Flint never pretended," answered Mr. Vane, coldly, "that the nomination and election of a governor was anything but a business transaction. His regard for you is probably unchanged, but the interests he has at stake are too large to admit of sentiment as a factor."

“Exactly,” exclaimed Mr. Hunt. “And I hear he hasn’t treated you just right, Hilary. I understand—”

Hilary’s eyes flashed for the first time.

“Never mind that, Adam,” he said quietly; “I’ve been treated as I deserve. I have nothing whatever to complain of from Mr. Flint. I will tell you why I came here to-night. I haven’t felt right about you since that interview, and the situation to-night is practically what it was then. You can’t be nominated.”

“Can’t be nominated!” gasped Mr. Hunt. And he reached to the table for his figures. “I’ll have four hundred on the first ballot, and I’ve got two hundred and fifty more pledged to me as second choice. If you’ve come up here at this time of night to try to deceive me on that, you might as well go back and wire Flint it’s no use. Why, I can name the delegates, if you’ll listen.”

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Mr. Vane shook his head sadly. And, confident as he was, the movement sent a cold chill down the Honourable Adam's spine, for faith in Mr. Vane's judgment had become almost a second nature. He had to force himself to remember that this was not the old Hilary.

"You won't have three hundred, Adam, at any time," answered Mr. Vane. "Once you used to believe what I said, and if you won't now, you won't. But I can't go away without telling you what I came for."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Hunt, wondering.

"It's this," replied Hilary, with more force than he had yet shown. "You can't get that nomination. If you'll let me know what your campaign expenses have been up to date, —all of 'em, you understand, to-night too,—I'll give you a check for them within the next two weeks."

"Who makes this offer?" demanded Mr. Hunt, with more curiosity than alarm; "Mr. Flint?"

"No," said Hilary; "Mr. Flint does not use the road's funds for such purposes."

"Henderson?"

"No," said Hilary; "I can't see what difference it makes to you."

The Honourable Adam had an eminently human side, and he laid his hand on Mr. Vane's knee.

"I think I've got a notion as to where that money would come from, Hilary," he said. "I'm much obliged to you, my friend. I wouldn't take it even if I thought you'd sized up the situation right. But—I don't agree with you this time. I know I've got the nomination. And I want to say once more, that I think you're a square man, and I don't hold anything against you."

Mr. Vane rose.

"I'm sorry, Adam," he said; "my offer holds good after to-morrow."

"After to-morrow!"

"Yes," said the Honourable Hilary. "I don't feel right about this thing. Er—good night, Adam."

"Hold on!" cried Mr. Hunt, as a new phase of the matter struck him. "Why, if I got out—"

"What then?" said Mr. Vane, turning around.



“Oh, I won’t get out,” said Mr. Hunt, “but if I did,—why, there wouldn’t, according to your way of thinking, be any chance for a dark horse.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Mr. Vane.

“Now don’t get mad, Hilary. I guess, and you know, that Flint hasn’t treated you decently this summer after all you’ve done for him, and I admire the way you’re standing by him. I wouldn’t do it. I just wanted to say,” Mr. Hunt added slowly, “that I respect you all the more for trying to get me out. If—always according to your notion of the convention—if I don’t get out, and haven’t any chance, they tell me on pretty good authority Austen Vane will get the nomination.”

Hilary Vane walked to the door, opened it and went out, and slammed it behind him.

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It is morning,—a hot morning, as so many recall,—and the partisans of the three leaders are early astir, and at seven-thirty Mr. Tooting discovers something going on briskly which he terms “dealing in futures.” My vote is yours as long as you are in the race, but after that I have something negotiable. The Honourable Adam Hunt strolls into the rotunda after an early breakfast, with a toothpick in his mouth, and is pointed out by the sophisticated to new arrivals as the man who spent seven thousand dollars over night, much of which is said to have stuck in the pockets of two feudal chiefs who could be named. Is it possible that there is a split in the feudal system at last? that the two feudal chiefs (who could be named) are rebels against highest authority? A smile from the sophisticated one. This duke and baron have merely stopped to pluck a bird; it matters not whether or not the bird is an erstwhile friend—he has been outlawed by highest authority, and is fair game. The bird (with the toothpick in his mouth) creates a smile from other chiefs of the system in good standing who are not too busy to look at him. They have ceased all attempts to buttonhole him, for he is unapproachable.

The other bird, the rebel of Leith, who has never been in the feudal system at all, they have stopped laughing at. It is he who has brought the Empire to its most precarious state.

And now, while strangers from near and far throng into town, drawn by the sensational struggle which is to culminate in battle to-day, Mr. Crewe is marshalling his forces. All the delegates who can be collected, and who wear the button with the likeness and superscription of Humphrey Crewe, are drawn up beside the monument in the park, where the Ripton Band is stationed; and presently they are seen by cheering crowds marching to martial music towards the convention hall, where they collect in a body, with signs and streamers in praise of the People’s Champion well to the front and centre. This is generally regarded as a piece of consummate general ship on the part of their leader. They are applauded from the galleries,—already packed,—especially from one conspicuous end where sit that company of ladies (now so famed) whose efforts have so materially aided the cause of the People’s Champion. Gay streamers vie with gayer gowns, and morning papers on the morrow will have something to say about the fashionable element and the special car which brought them from Leith.

“My, but it is hot!”

The hall is filled now, with the thousand delegates, or their representatives who are fortunate enough to possess their credentials. Something of this matter later. General Doby, chairman of the convention, an impressive but mournful figure, could not call a roll if he wanted to. Not that he will want to! Impossible to tell, by the convenient laws of the State, whether the duly elected delegates of Hull or Mercer or Truro are here or not, since their credentials

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may be bought or sold or conferred. Some political giants, who have not negotiated their credentials, are recognized as they walk down the aisle: the statesmanlike figure of Senator Whitredge (a cheer); that of Senator Green (not so statesmanlike, but a cheer); Congressman Fairplay (cheers); and—Hilary Vane! His a figure that does not inspire cheers,—least of all to-day,—the man upon whose shoulders rests the political future of the Northeastern. The conservative Mr. Tredways and other Lincoln radicals of long ago who rely on his strength and judgment are not the sort to cheer. And yet—and yet Hilary inspires some feeling when, with stooping gait, he traverses the hall, and there is a hush in many quarters as delegates and spectators watch his progress to the little room off the platform: the general's room, as the initiated know.

Ah, but few know what a hateful place it is to Hilary Vane to-day, this keyboard at which he has sat so complacently in years gone by, the envied of conventions. He sits down wearily at the basswood table, and scarcely hears the familiar sounds without, which indicate that the convention of conventions has begun. Extraordinary phenomenon at such a time, scenes of long ago and little cherished then, are stealing into his mind.

The Reverend Mr. Crane (so often chaplain of the Legislature, and known to the irreverent as the chaplain of the Northeastern) is praying now for guidance in the counsels of this great gathering of the people's representatives. God will hear Mr. Botcher better if he closes his eyes; which he does. Now the platform is being read by State Senator Billings; closed eyes would best suit this proceeding, too. As a parallel to that platform, one can think only of the Ten Commandments. The Republican Party (chosen children of Israel) must be kept free from the domination of corporations. (Cheers and banner waving for a full minute.) Some better method of choosing delegates which will more truly reflect the will of the people. (Plank of the Honourable Jacob Botcher, whose conscience is awakening.) Never mind the rest. It is a triumph for Mr. Crewe, and is all printed in that orthodox (reform) newspaper, the State Tribune, with urgent editorials that it must be carried out to the letter.

And what now? Delegates, credential holders, audience, and the Reverend Mr. Crane draw long breaths of heated carbon dioxide. Postmaster Burrows of Edmundton, in rounded periods, is putting in nomination his distinguished neighbour and fellow-citizen, the Honourable Adam B. Hunt, who can subscribe and say amen to every plank in that platform. He believes it, he has proclaimed it in public, and he embodies it. Mr. Burrows indulges in slight but effective sarcasm of sham reformers and so-called business men who perform the arduous task of cutting coupons and live in rarefied regions where they can only be seen by the common people when the light is turned on. (Cheers from two partisan bodies and groans and hisses from another. General Doby, with a pained face, pounding with the gavel. This isn't a circumstance to what's coming, General.)

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After General Doby has succeeded in abating the noise in honour-of the Honourable Adam, there is a hush of expectancy. Humphrey Crewe, who has made all this trouble and enthusiasm, is to be nominated next, and the Honourable Timothy Wailing of Newcastle arises to make that celebrated oration which the cynical have called the “thousand-dollar speech.” And even if they had named it well (which is not for a moment to be admitted!), it is cheap for the price. How Mr. Crewe’s ears must tingle as he paces his headquarters in the Pelican! Almost would it be sacrilege to set down cold, on paper, the words that come, burning, out of the Honourable Timothy’s loyal heart. Here, gentlemen, is a man at last, not a mere puppet who signs his name when a citizen of New York pulls the string; one who is prepared to make any sacrifice,—to spend his life, if need be, in their service. (A barely audible voice, before the cheering commences, “I guess that’s so.”) Humphrey Crewe needs no defence—the Honourable Timothy avers—at his hands, or any one’s. Not merely an idealist, but a practical man who has studied the needs of the State; unselfish to the core; longing, like Washington, the Father of his Country, to remain in a beautiful country home, where he dispenses hospitality with a flowing hand to poor and rich alike, yet harking to the call of duty. Leaving, like the noble Roman of old, his plough in the furrow—(Same voice as before, “I wish he’d left his automobil’ thar!” Hisses and laughter.) The Honourable Timothy, undaunted, snatches his hand from the breast of his Prince Albert and flings it, with a superb gesture, towards the Pelican. “Gentlemen, I have the honour to nominate to this convention that peerless leader for the right, the Honourable Humphrey Crewe of Leith—our next governor.”

General Andrew Jackson himself, had he been alive and on this historic ground and chairman of that convention, could scarce have quelled the tumult aroused by this name and this speech—much less General Doby. Although a man of presence, measurable by scales with weights enough, our general has no more ponderosity now than a leaf in a mountain storm at Hale—and no more control over the hurricane. Behold him now, pounding with his gavel on something which should give forth a sound, but doesn’t. Who is he (to change the speech’s figure—not the general’s), who is he to drive a wild eight-horse team, who is fit only to conduct Mr. Flint’s oxen in years gone by?

It is a memorable scene, sketched to life for the metropolitan press. The man on the chair, his face lighted by a fanatic enthusiasm, is the Honourable Hamilton Tooting, coatless and collarless, leading the cheers that shake the building, that must have struck terror to the soul of Augustus P. Flint himself—fifty miles away. But the endurance of the human throat is limited.

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Why, in the name of political strategy, has United States Senator Greene been chosen to nominate the Honourable Giles Henderson of Kingston? Some say that it is the will of highest authority, others that the senator is a close friend of the Honourable Giles—buys his coal from him, wholesale. Both surmises are true. The senator's figure is not impressive, his voice less so, and he reads from manuscript, to the accompaniment of continual cries of "Louder!" A hook for Leviathan! "A great deal of dribble," said the senator, for little rocks sometimes strike fire, "has been heard about the 'will of the people.'"

The Honourable Giles Henderson is beholden to no man and to no corporation, and will go into office prepared to do justice impartially to all."

"Bu—copia verborum—let us to the main business!"

To an hundred newspapers, to Mr. Flint at Fairview, and other important personages ticks out the momentous news that the balloting has begun. No use trying to hold your breath until the first ballot is announced; it takes time to obtain the votes of one thousand men—especially when neither General Doby nor any one else knows who they are! The only way is to march up on the stage by counties and file past the ballot-box. Putnam, with their glitter-eyed duke, Mr. Bascom, at their head—presumably solid for Adam B. Hunt; Baron Burrows, who farms out the post-office at Edmundton, leads Edmunds County; Earl Elisha Jane, consul at some hot place where he spends the inclement months drops the first ticket for Haines County, ostensibly solid for home-made virtue and the Honourable Giles.

An hour and a quarter of suspense and torture passes, while collars wilt and coats come off, and fans in the gallery wave incessantly, and excited conversation buzzes in every quarter. And now, see! there is whispering on the stage among the big-bugs. Mr. Chairman Doby rises with a paper in his hand, and the buzzing dies down to silence.

The Honourable Giles Henderson of Kingston has . . . 398
The Honourable Humphrey Crewe of Leith has . . . 353
The Honourable Adam B. Hunt of Edmundton has. . . 249
And a majority being required, there is no choice!

Are the supporters of the People's Champion crest-fallen, think you? Mr. Tooting is not leading them for the moment, but is pressing through the crowd outside the hall and flying up the street to the Pelican and the bridal suite, where he is first with the news. Note for an unabridged biography: the great man is discovered sitting quietly by the window, poring over a book on the modern science of road-building, some notes from which he is making for his first message. And instead of the reek of tobacco smoke, the room is filled with the scent of the floral tributes brought down by the Ladies' Auxiliary from Leith. In Mr. Crewe's right-hand pocket, neatly typewritten, is his speech of

acceptance. He is never caught unprepared. Unkind, now, to remind him of that prediction made last night about the first ballot to the newspapers—and useless.

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"I told you last night they were buyin' 'em right under our noses," cried Mr. Tooting, in a paroxysm of indignation, "and you wouldn't believe me. They got over one hundred and sixty away from us."

"It strikes me, Mr. Tooting," said Mr. Crewe, "that it was your business to prevent that."

There will no doubt be a discussion, when the biographer reaches this juncture, concerning the congruity of reform delegates who can be bought. It is too knotty a point of ethics to be dwelt upon here.

"Prevent it!" echoed Mr. Tooting, and in the strong light of the righteousness of that eye reproaches failed him. "But there's a whole lot of 'em can be seen, right now, while the ballots are being taken. It won't be decided on the next ballot."

"Mr. Tooting," said Mr. Crewe, indubitably proving that he had the qualities of a leader—if such proof were necessary, "go back to the convention. I have no doubt of the outcome, but that doesn't mean you are to relax your efforts. Do you understand?"

"I guess I do," replied Mr. Tooting, and was gone. "He still has his flag up," he whispered into the Honourable Timothy Watling's ear, when he reached the hall. "He'll stand a little more yet."

Mr. Tooting, at times, speaks a language unknown to us—and the second ballot is going on. And during its progress the two principal lieutenants of the People's Champion were observed going about the hall apparently exchanging the time of day with various holders of credentials. Mr. Jane, too, is going about the hall, and Postmaster Burrows, and Postmaster Bill Fleeting of Brampton, and the Honourable Nat Billings, and Messrs. Bascom and Botcher, and Mr. Manning, division superintendent, and the Honourable Orrin Young, railroad commissioner and candidate for reappointment—all are embracing the opportunity to greet humble friends or to make new acquaintances. Another hour and a quarter, with the temperature steadily rising and the carbon dioxide increasing—and the second ballot is announced.

The Honourable Giles Henderson of Kingston has . . 440

The Honourable Humphrey Crewe of Leith has . . . 336

The Honourable Adam B. Hunt of Edmundton has . . . 255

And there are three votes besides improperly made out!

What the newspapers call indescribable excitement ensues. The three votes improperly made out are said to be trip passes accidentally dropped into the box by the supporters of the Honourable Elisha Jane. And add up the sum total of the votes! Thirty-one votes more than there are credentials in the hall! Mystery of mysteries how can it be? The ballot, announces General Doby, after endless rapping, is a blank. Cheers,

recriminations, exultation, disgust of decent citizens, attempts by twenty men to get the eye of the president (which is too watery to see any of them), and rushes for the platform to suggest remedies or ask what is going to be done about

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such palpable fraud. What can be done? Call the roll! How in blazes can you call the roll when you don't know who's here? Messrs. Jane, Botcher, Bascom, and Fleming are not disturbed, and improve their time. Watling and Tooting rush to the bridal suite, and rush back again to demand justice. General Doby mingles his tears with theirs, and somebody calls him a jellyfish. He does not resent it. Friction makes the air hotter and hotter—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would scarce enter into this furnace,—and General Doby has a large damp spot on his back as he pounds and pounds and pounds until we are off again on the third ballot. No dinner, and three-thirty P.M.! Two delegates have fainted, but the essential parts of them—the credentials—are left behind.

Four-forty, whispering again, and the gavel drops.

The Honourable Giles Henderson of Kingston has . . 412
The Honourable Humphrey Crewe of Leith has . . . 325
The Honourable Adam B. Hunt of Edmundton has. . . 250
And there is no choice on the third ballot!

Thirteen delegates are actually missing this time. Scour the town! And now even the newspaper adjectives describing the scene have given out. A persistent and terrifying rumour goes the rounds, where's Tom Gaylord? Somebody said he was in the hall a moment ago, on a Ripton credential. If so, he's gone out again—gone out to consult the dark horse, who is in town, somewhere. Another ominous sign: Mr. Redbrook, Mr. Widgeon of Hull, and the other rural delegates who have been voting for the People's Champion, and who have not been observed in friendly conversation with anybody at all, now have their heads together. Mr. Billings goes sauntering by, but cannot hear what they are saying. Something must be done, and right away, and the knowing metropolitan reporters are winking at each other and declaring darkly that a sensation is about to turn up.

Where is Hilary Vane? Doesn't he realize the danger? Or—traitorous thought!—doesn't he care? To see his son nominated would be a singular revenge for the indignities which are said to have been heaped upon him. Does Hilary Vane, the strong man of the State, merely sit at the keyboard, powerless, while the tempest itself shakes from the organ a new and terrible music? Nearly, six hours he has sat at the basswood table, while senators, congressmen, feudal chiefs, and even Chairman Doby himself flit in and out, whisper in his ear, set papers before him, and figures and problems, and telegrams from highest authority. He merely nods his head, says a word now and then, or holds his peace. Does he know what he's about? If they had not heard things concerning his health,—and other things,—they would still feel safe. He seems the only calm man to be found in the hall—but is the calm aberration?

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A conference in the corner of the platform, while the fourth ballot is progressing, is held between Senators Whitredge and Greene, Mr. Ridout and Mr. Manning. So far the Honourable Hilary has apparently done nothing but let the storm take its course; a wing-footed messenger has returned who has seen Mr. Thomas Gaylord walking rapidly up Maple Street, and Austen Vane (most astute and reprehensible of politicians) is said to be at the Widow Peasley's, quietly awaiting the call. The name of Austen Vane—another messenger says—is running like wildfire through the hall, from row to row. Mr. Crewe has no chance—so rumour goes. A reformer (to pervert the saying of a celebrated contemporary humorist) must fight Marquis of Queensberry to win; and the People's Champion, it is averred, has not. Shrewd country delegates who had listened to the Champion's speeches and had come to the capital prepared to vote for purity, had been observing the movements since yesterday, of Mr. Tooting and Mr. Wading with no inconsiderable interest. Now was the psychological moment for Austen Vane, but who was to beard Hilary?

No champion was found, and the Empire, the fate of which was in the hands of a madman, was cracking. Let an individual of character and known anti-railroad convictions (such as the gentleman said to be at the Widow Peasley's) be presented to the convention, and they would nominate him. Were Messrs. Bascom and Botcher going to act the part of Samsons? Were they working for revenge and a new regime? Mr. Whitredge started for the Pelican, not at his ordinary senatorial gait, to get Mr. Flint on the telephone.

The result of the fourth ballot was announced, and bedlam broke loose.

The Honourable Giles Henderson of Kingston has . . 419 The Honourable Humphrey Crewe of Leith has . . . 337 The Honourable Adam B. Hunt of Edmundton has . . . 256

Total, one thousand and eleven out of a thousand! Two delegates abstained from voting, and proclaimed the fact, but were heard only a few feet away. Other delegates, whose flesh and blood could stand the atmosphere no longer, were known to have left the hall! Aha! the secret is out, if anybody could hear it. At the end of every ballot several individuals emerge and mix with the crowd in the street. Astute men sometimes make mistakes, and the following conversation occurs between one of the individuals in question and Mr. Crewe's chauffeur.

Individual: "Do you want to come in and see the convention and vote?"

Chauffeur: "I am Frenchman."

Individual: "That doesn't cut any ice. I'll make out the ballot, and all you'll have to do is to drop it in the box."

Chauffeur: "All right; I vote for Meester Crewe."

Sudden disappearance of the individual.

Nor is this all. The Duke of Putnam, for example, knows how many credentials there are in his county—say, seventy-six. He counts the men present and voting, and his result is sixty-one. Fifteen are absent, getting food or—something else. Fifteen vote over again. But, as the human brain is prone to error, and there are men in the street, the Duke miscalculates; the Earl of Haines miscalculates, too. Result—eleven over a thousand votes, and some nine hundred men in the hall!

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How are you going to stop it? Mr. Watling climbs up on the platform and shakes his fist in General Doby's face, and General Doby tearfully appeals for an honest ballot—to the winds.

In the meantime the Honourable Elisha Jane, spurred on by desperation and thoughts of a 'dolce far niente' gone forever; has sought and cornered Mr. Bascom.

"For God's sake, Brush," cries the Honourable Elisha, "hasn't this thing gone far enough? A little of it is all right—the boys understand that; but have you thought what it means to you and me if these blanked reformers get in,—if a feller like Austen Vane is nominated?"

That cold, hard glitter which we have seen was in Mr. Bascom's eyes.

"You fellers have got the colic," was the remark of the arch-rebel. "Do you think old Hilary doesn't know what he's about?"

"It looks that way to me," said Mr. Jane.

"It looks that way to Doby too, I guess," said Mr. Bascom, with a glance of contempt at the general; "he's lost about fifteen pounds to-day. Did Hilary send you down here?" he demanded.

"No," Mr. Jane confessed.

"Then go back and chase yourself around the platform some more," was Mr. Bascom's unfeeling advice, "and don't have a fit here. All the brains in this hall are in Hilary's room. When he's ready to talk business with me in behalf of the Honourable Giles Henderson, I guess he'll do so."

But fear had entered the heart of the Honourable Elisha, and there was a sickly feeling in the region of his stomach which even the strong medicine administered by the Honourable Brush failed to alleviate. He perceived Senator Whitredge, returned from the Pelican. But the advice—if any—the president of the Northeastern has given the senator is not forthcoming in practice. Mr. Flint, any more than Ulysses himself, cannot recall the tempests when his own followers have slit the bags—and in sight of Ithaca! Another conference at the back of the stage, out of which emerges State Senator Nat Billings and gets the ear of General Doby.

"Let 'em yell," says Mr. Billings—as though the general, by raising one adipose hand, could quell the storm. Eyes are straining, scouts are watching at the back of the hall and in the street, for the first glimpse of the dreaded figure of Mr. Thomas Gaylord. "Let 'em yell," counsels Mr. Billings, "and if they do nominate anybody nobody'll hear 'em. And send word to Putnam County to come along on their fifth ballot."

It is Mr. Billings himself who sends word to Putnam County, in the name of the convention's chairman. Before the messenger can reach Putnam County another arrives on the stage, with wide pupils, "Tom Gaylord is coming!" This momentous news, Marconi-like, penetrates the storm, and is already on the floor. Mr. Widgeon and Mr. Redbrook are pushing their way towards the door. The conference, emboldened by terror, marches in a body into the little room, and surrounds the calmly insane Lieutenant-general of the forces; it would be ill-natured to say that visions of lost railroad commissionerships, lost consulships, lost postmasterships, —yes, of lost senatorships, were in these loyal heads at this crucial time.

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It was all very well (so said the first spokesman) to pluck a few feathers from a bird so bountifully endowed as the Honourable Adam, but were not two gentlemen who should be nameless carrying the joke a little too far? Mr. Vane unquestionably realized what he was doing, but—was it not almost time to call in the two gentlemen and—and come to some understanding?

“Gentlemen,” said the Honourable Hilary, apparently unmoved, “I have not seen Mr. Bascom or Mr. Botcher since the sixteenth day of August, and I do not intend to.”

Some clearing of throats followed this ominous declaration,—and a painful silence. The thing must be said and who would say it? Senator Whitredge was the hero.

Mr. Thomas Gaylord has just entered the convention hall, and is said to be about to nominate—a dark horse. The moment was favourable, the convention demoralized, and at least one hundred delegates had left the hall. (How about the last ballot, Senator, which showed 1011?)

The Honourable Hilary rose abruptly, closed the door to shut out the noise, and turned and looked Mr. Whitredge in the eye.

“Who is the dark horse?” he demanded.

The members of the conference coughed again, looked at each other, and there was a silence. For some inexplicable reason, nobody cared to mention the name of Austen Vane.

The Honourable Hilary pointed at the basswood table.

“Senator,” he said, “I understand you have been telephoning Mr. Flint. Have you got orders to sit down there?”

“My dear sir,” said the Senator, “you misunderstand me.”

“Have you got orders to sit down there?” Mr. Vane repeated.

“No,” answered the Senator, “Mr. Flint’s confidence in you—”

The Honourable Hilary sat down again, and at that instant the door was suddenly flung open by Postmaster Bill Fleeting of Brampton, his genial face aflame with excitement and streaming with perspiration. Forgotten, in this moment, is senatorial courtesy and respect for the powers of the feudal system.

“Say, boys,” he cried, “Putnam County’s voting, and there’s be’n no nomination and ain’t likely to be. Jim Scudder, the station-master at Wye, is here on credentials, and he says for sure the thing’s fizzled out, and Tom Gaylord’s left the hall!”

Again a silence, save for the high hum let in through the open doorway. The members of the conference stared at the Honourable Hilary, who seemed to have forgotten their presence; for he had moved his chair to the window, and was gazing out over the roofs at the fast-fading red in the western sky.

An hour later, when the room was in darkness save for the bar of light that streamed in from the platform chandelier, Senator Whitredge entered.

“Hilary!” he said.

There was no answer. Mr. Whitredge felt in his pocket for a match, struck it, and lighted the single jet over the basswood table. Mr. Vane still sat by the window. The senator turned and closed the door, and read from a paper in his hand; so used was he to formality that he read it formally, yet with a feeling of intense relief, of deference, of apology.

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"Fifth ballot:—The Honourable Giles Henderson of Kingston has . . . 587; The Honourable Adam B. Hunt of Edmundton has . . . 230; The Honourable Humphrey Crewe of Leith has . . . 154.

And Giles Henderson is nominated—Hilary?"

"Yes," said Mr. Vane.

"I don't think any of us were—quite ourselves to-day. It wasn't that we didn't believe in you—but we didn't have all the threads in our hands, and—for reasons which I think I can understand—you didn't take us into your confidence. I want to—"

The words died on the senator's lips. So absorbed had he been in his momentous news, and solicitous over the result of his explanation, that his eye looked outward for the first time, and even then accidentally.

"Hilary!" he cried; "for God's sake, what's the matter? Are you sick?"

"Yes, Whitredge," said Mr. Vane, slowly, "sick at heart."

It was but natural that these extraordinary and incomprehensible words should have puzzled and frightened the senator more than ever.

"Your heart!" he repeated.

"Yes, my heart," said Hilary.

The senator reached for the ice-water on the table.

"Here," he cried, pouring out a glass, "it's only the heat—it's been a hard day—drink this."

But Hilary did not raise his arm. The door opened others coming to congratulate Hilary Vane on the greatest victory he had ever won. Offices were secure once more, the feudal system intact, and rebels justly punished; others coming to make their peace with the commander whom, senseless as they were, they had dared to doubt.

They crowded past each other on the threshold, and stood grouped beyond the basswood table, staring—staring—men suddenly come upon a tragedy instead of a feast, the senator still holding the glass of water in a hand that trembled and spilled it. And it was the senator, after all, who first recovered his presence of mind. He set down the water, pushed his way through the group into the hall, where the tumult and the shouting die. Mr. Giles Henderson, escorted, is timidly making his way towards the platform to read his speech of acceptance of a willing bondage, when a voice rings out:—"If there is a physician in the house, will he please come forward?"

And then a hush,—and then the buzz of comment. Back to the little room once more, where they are gathered speechless about Hilary Vane. And the doctor comes young Dr. Tredway of Ripton, who is before all others.

“I expected this to happen, gentlemen,” he said, “and I have been here all day, at the request of Mr. Vane’s son, for this purpose.”

“Austen!”

It was Hilary who spoke.

“I have sent for him,” said the doctor. “And now, gentlemen, if you will kindly—”

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They withdrew and the doctor shut the door. Outside, the Honourable Giles is telling them how seriously he regards the responsibility of the honour thrust upon him by a great party. But nobody hears him in the wild rumours that fly from mouth to mouth as the hall empties. Rushing in against the tide outpouring, tall, stern, vigorous, is a young man whom many recognize, whose name is on many lips as they make way for him, who might have saved them if he would. The door of the little room opens, and he stands before his father, looking down at him. And the stern expression is gone from his face.

"Austen!" said Mr. Vane.

"Yes, Judge."

"Take me away from here. Take me home—now—to-night."

Austen glanced at Dr. Tredway.

"It is best," said the doctor; "we will take him home—to-night."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE VOICE OF AN ERA

They took him home, in the stateroom of the sleeper attached to the night express from the south, although Mr. Flint, by telephone, had put a special train at his disposal. The long service of Hilary Vane was over; he had won his last fight for the man he had chosen to call his master; and those who had fought behind him, whose places, whose very luminary existences, had depended on his skill, knew that the end had come; nay, were already speculating, manoeuvring, and taking sides. Who would be the new Captain-general? Who would be strong enough to suppress the straining ambitions of the many that the Empire might continue to flourish in its integrity and gather tribute? It is the world-old cry around the palace walls: Long live the new ruler—if you can find him among the curdling factions.

They carried Hilary home that September night, when Sawanec was like a gray ghost-mountain facing the waning moon, back to the home of those strange, Renaissance Austens which he had reclaimed for a grim puritanism, and laid him in the carved and canopied bedstead Channing Austen had brought from Spain. Euphrasia had met them at the door, but a trained nurse from the Ripton hospital was likewise in waiting; and a New York specialist had been summoned to prolong, if possible, the life of one from whom all desire for life had passed.

Before sunrise a wind came from the northern spruces; the dawn was cloudless, fiery red, and the air had an autumn sharpness. At ten o'clock Dr. Harmon arrived, was met

at the station by Austen, and spent half an hour with Dr. Tredway. At noon the examination was complete. Thanks to generations of self-denial by the Vanes of Camden Street, Mr. Hilary Vane might live indefinitely, might even recover, partially; but at present he was condemned to remain, with his memories, in the great canopied bed.

The Honourable Hilary had had another caller that morning besides Dr. Harmon,—no less a personage than the president of the Northeastern Railroads himself, who had driven down from Fairview immediately after breakfast. Austen having gone to the station, Dr. Tredway had received Mr. Flint in the darkened hall, and had promised to telephone to Fairview the verdict of the specialist. At present Dr. Tredway did not think it wise to inform Hilary of Mr. Flint's visit—not, at least, until after the examination.

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Mr. Vane exhibited the same silent stoicism on receiving the verdict of Dr. Harmon as he had shown from the first. With the clew to Hilary's life which Dr. Tredway had given him, the New York physician understood the case; one common enough in his practice in a great city where the fittest survive—sometimes only to succumb to unexpected and irreparable blows in the evening of life.

On his return from seeing Dr. Harmon off Austen was met on the porch by Dr. Tredway.

"Your father has something on his mind," said the doctor, "and perhaps it is just as well that he should be relieved. He is asking for you, and I merely wished to advise you to make the conversation as short as possible."

Austen climbed the stairs in obedience to this summons, and stood before his father at the bedside. Hilary lay, back among the pillows, and the brightness of that autumn noonday only served to accentuate the pallor of his face, the ravages of age which had come with such incredible swiftness, and the outline of a once vigorous frame. The eyes alone shone with a strange new light, and Austen found it unexpectedly difficult to speak. He sat down on the bed and laid his hand on the helpless one that rested on the coverlet.

"Austen," said Mr. Vane, "I want you to go to Fairview."

His son's hand tightened over his own.

"Yes, Judge."

"I want you to go now."

"Yes, Judge."

"You know the combination of my safe at the office. It's never been changed since—since you were there. Open it. You will find two tin boxes, containing papers labelled Augustus P. Flint. I want you to take them to Fairview and put them into the hands of Mr. Flint himself. I—I cannot trust any one else. I promised to take them myself, but—Flint will understand."

"I'll go right away," said Austen, rising, and trying to speak cheerfully. "Mr. Flint was here early this morning—inquiring for you."

Hilary Vane's lips trembled, and another expression came into his eyes.

"Rode down to look at the scrap-heap,—did he?"

Austen strove to conceal his surprise at his father's words and change of manner.

“Tredway saw him,” he said. “I’m pretty sure Mr. Flint doesn’t feel that way, Judge. He has taken your illness very much to heart, I know, and he left some fruit and flowers for you.”

“I guess his daughter sent those,” said Hilary.

“His daughter?” Austen repeated.

“If I didn’t think so,” Mr. Vane continued, “I’d send ’em back. I never knew what she was until she picked me up and drove me down here. I’ve always done Victoria an injustice.”

Austen walked to the door, and turned slowly.

“I’ll go at once, Judge,” he said.

In the kitchen he was confronted by Euphrasia.

“When is that woman going away?” she demanded. “I’ve took care of Hilary Vane nigh on to forty years, and I guess I know as much about nursing, and more about Hilary, than that young thing with her cap and apron. I told Dr. Tredway so. She even came down here to let me know what to cook for him, and I sent her about her business.”

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Austen smiled. It was the first sign, since his return the night before, Euphrasia had given that an affection for Hilary Vane lurked beneath the nature.

"She won't stay long, Phrasie," he answered, and added mischievously, "for a very good reason."

"And what's that?" asked Euphrasia.

"Because you won't allow her to. I have a notion that she'll pack up and leave in about three days, and that all the doctors in Ripton couldn't keep her here."

"Get along with you," said Euphrasia, who could not for the life of her help looking a little pleased.

"I'm going off for a few hours," he said more seriously. "Dr. Tredway tells me they do not look for any developments—for the worse."

"Where are you going?" asked Euphrasia, sharply.

"To Fairview," he said.

Euphrasia moved the kettle to another part of the stove.

"You'll see her?" she said.

"Who?" Austen asked. But his voice must have betrayed him a little, for Euphrasia turned and seized him by the elbows and looked up into his face.

"Victoria," she said.

He felt himself tremble at the name,—at the strangeness of its sound on Euphrasia's lips.

"I do not expect to see Miss Flint," he answered, controlling himself as well as he was able. "I have an errand for the Judge with Mr. Flint himself."

Euphrasia had guessed his secret! But how?

"Hadn't you better see her?" said Euphrasia, in a curious monotone.

"But I have no errand with her," he objected, mystified yet excited by Euphrasia's manner.

"She fetched Hilary home," said Euphrasia.

"Yes."



She couldn't have be'n kinder if she was his own daughter."

"I know—" he began, but Euphrasia interrupted.

"She sent that Englishman for the doctor, and waited to take the news to her father, and she came out in this kitchen and talked to me."

Austen started. Euphrasia was not looking at him now, and suddenly she dropped his arms and went to the window overlooking the garden.

"She wouldn't go in the parlour, but come right out here in her fine clothes. I told her I didn't think she belonged in a kitchen—but I guess I did her an injustice," said Euphrasia, slowly.

"I think you did," he said, and wondered.

"She looked at that garden," Euphrasia went on, "and cried out. I didn't callate she was like that. And the first thing I knew I was talking about your mother, and I'd forgot who I was talking to. She wahn't like a stranger—it was just as if I'd known her always. I haven't understood it yet. And after a while I told her about that verse, and she wanted to see it—the verse about the skylark, you know—"

"Yes," said Austen.

"Well, the way she read it made me cry, it brought back Sarah Austen so. Somehow, I can't account for it, she puts me in mind of your mother."

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Austen did not speak.

“In more ways than one,” said Euphrasia. “I didn’t look to find her so natural—and so gentle. And there she has a way of scolding you, just as Sarah Austen had, that you’d never suspect.”

“Did she scold you—Phrasie?” asked Austen. And the irresistible humour that is so near to sorrow made him smile again.

“Indeed she did! And it surprised me some—coming right out of a summer sky. I told her what I thought about Hilary, and how he’d driven you out of your own mother’s house. She said you’d ought to be sent for, and I said you oughtn’t to set foot in this house until Hilary sent for you. She said I’d no right to take such a revenge—that you’d come right away if you knew Hilary’d had a stroke, and that Hilary’d never send for you—because he couldn’t. She said he was like a man on a desert island.”

“She was right,” answered Austen.

“I don’t know about that,” said Euphrasia; “she hadn’t put up with Hilary for forty years, as I had, and seen what he’d done to your mother and you. But that’s what she said. And she went for you herself, when she found the doctor couldn’t go. Austen, ain’t you going to see her?”

Austen shook his head gently, and smiled at her.

“I’m afraid it’s no use, Phrasie,” he said. “Just because she has been—kind we mustn’t be deceived. It’s her nature to be kind.”

Euphrasia crossed the room swiftly, and seized his arm again.

“She loves you, Austen,” she cried; “she loves you. Do you think that I’d love her, that I’d plead for her, if she didn’t?”

Austen’s breath came deeply. He disengaged himself, and went to the window.

“No,” he said, “you don’t know. You can’t—know. I have only seen her—a few times. She lives a different life—and with other people. She will marry a man who can give her more.”

“Do you think I could be deceived?” exclaimed Euphrasia, almost fiercely. “It’s as true as the sun shining on that mountain. You believe she loves the Englishman, but I tell you she loves you—you.”

He turned towards her.

“How do you know?” he asked, as though he were merely curious.

“Because I’m a woman, and she’s a woman,” said Euphrasia. “Oh, she didn’t confess it. If she had, I shouldn’t think so much of her. But she told me as plain as though she had spoken it in words, before she left this room.”

Austen shook his head again.

“Phrasie,” he said, “I’m afraid you’ve been building castles in Spain.” And he went out, and across to the stable to harness Pepper.

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Austen did not believe Euphrasia. On that eventful evening when Victoria had called at Jabe Jenney's, the world's aspect had suddenly changed for him; old values had faded,—values which, after all, had been but tints and glows,—and sterner but truer colours took their places. He saw Victoria's life in a new perspective,—one in which his was but a small place in the background of her numerous beneficences; which was, after all, the perspective in which he had first viewed it. But, by degrees, the hope that she loved him had grown and grown until it had become unconsciously the supreme element of his existence,—the hope that stole sweetly into his mind with the morning light, and stayed him through the day, and blended into the dreams of darkness.

By inheritance, by tradition, by habits of thought, Austen Vane was an American,—an American as differentiated from the citizen of any other nation upon the earth. The French have an expressive phrase in speaking of a person as belonging to this or that world, meaning the circle by which the life of an individual is bounded; the true American recognizes these circles—but with complacency, and with a sure knowledge of his destiny eventually to find himself within the one for which he is best fitted by his talents and his tastes. The mere fact that Victoria had been brought up amongst people with whom he had nothing in common would not have deterred Austen Vane from pressing his suit; considerations of honour had stood in the way, and hope had begun to whisper that these might, in the end, be surmounted. Once they had disappeared, and she loved him, that were excuse and reason enough.

And suddenly the sight of Victoria with a probable suitor—who at once had become magnified into an accepted suitor—had dispelled hope. Euphrasia! Euphrasia had been deceived as he had, by a loving kindness and a charity that were natural. But what so natural (to one who had lived the life of Austen Vane) as that she should marry amongst those whose ways of life were her ways? In the brief time in which he had seen her and this other man, Austen's quickened perceptions had detected tacit understanding, community of interest, a habit of thought and manner,—in short, a common language, unknown to him, between the two. And, more than these, the Victoria of the blissful excursions he had known was changed as she had spoken to him—constrained, distant, apart; although still dispensing kindness, going out of her way to bring Hilary home, and to tell him of Hilary's accident. Rumour, which cannot be confined in casks or bottles, had since informed Austen Vane that Mr. Rangely had spent the day with Victoria, and had remained at Fairview far into the evening; rumour went farther (thanks to Mrs. Pomfret) and declared the engagement already an accomplished fact. And to Austen, in the twilight in front of Jabe Jenney's, the affair might well have assumed the proportions of an intimacy of long standing rather than that of the chance acquaintance of an hour. Friends in common, modes of life in common, and incidents in common are apt to sweep away preliminaries.

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Such were Austen's thoughts as he drove to Fairview that September afternoon when the leaves were turning their white backs to the northwest breeze. The sun was still high, and the distant hills and mountains were as yet scarce stained with blue, and stood out in startling clearness against the sky. Would he see her? That were a pain he scarce dared contemplate.

He reached the arched entrance, was on the drive. Here was the path again by which she had come down the hillside; here was the very stone on which she had stood—awaiting him. Why? Why had she done that? Well-remembered figure amidst the yellow leaves dancing in the sunlight! Here he had stopped, perforce, and here he had looked up into his face and smiled and spoken!

At length he gained the plateau across which the driveway ran, between round young maples, straight to Fairview House, and he remembered the stares from the tea-tables, and how she had come out to his rescue. Now the lawn was deserted, save for a gardener among the shrubs. He rang the stable-bell, and as he waited for an answer to his summons, the sense of his remoteness from these surroundings of hers deepened, and with a touch of inevitable humour he recalled the low-ceiled bedroom at Mr. Jenney's and the kitchen in Hanover Street; the annual cost of the care of that lawn and driveway might well have maintained one of these households.

He told the stable-boy to wait. It is to be remarked as curious that the name of the owner of the house on Austen's lips brought the first thought of him to Austen's mind. He was going to see and speak with Mr. Flint, a man who had been his enemy ever since the day he had come here and laid down his pass on the president's desk; the man who—so he believed until three days ago—had stood between him and happiness. Well, it did not matter now.

Austen followed the silent-moving servant through the hall. Those were the stairs which knew her feet, these the rooms—so subtly flower-scented—she lived in; then came the narrow passage to the sterner apartment of the master himself. Mr. Flint was alone, and seated upright behind the massive oak desk, from which bulwark the president of the Northeastern was wont to meet his opponents and his enemies; and few visitors came into his presence, here or elsewhere, who were not to be got the better of, if possible. A life-long habit had accustomed Mr. Flint to treat all men as adversaries until they were proved otherwise. His square, close-cropped head, his large features, his alert eyes, were those of a fighter.

He did not rise, but nodded. Suddenly Austen was enveloped in a flame of wrath that rose without warning and blinded him, and it was with a supreme effort to control himself that he stopped in the doorway. He was frightened, for he had felt this before, and he knew it for the anger that demands physical violence.

"Come in, Mr. Vane," said the president.

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Austen advanced to the desk, and laid the boxes before Mr. Flint.

“Mr. Vane told me to say that he would have brought these himself, had it been possible. Here is the list, and I shall be much obliged if you will verify it before I go back.”

“Sit down.” said Mr. Flint.

Austen sat down, with the corner of the desk between them, while Mr. Flint opened the boxes and began checking off the papers on the list.

“How is your father this afternoon?” he asked, without looking up.

“As well as can be expected,” said Austen.

“Of course nobody knew his condition but himself,” Mr. Flint continued; “but it was a great shock to me—when he resigned as my counsel three days ago.”

Austen laid his forearm on the desk, and his hand closed.

“He resigned three days ago?” he exclaimed.

Mr. Flint was surprised, but concealed it.

“I can understand, under the circumstances, how he has overlooked telling you. His resignation takes effect to-day.”

Austen was silent a moment, while he strove to apply this fact to his father’s actions.

“He waited until after the convention.”

“Exactly,” said Mr. Flint, catching the implied accusation in Austen’s tone; “and needless to say, if I had been able to prevent his going, in view of what happened on Monday night, I should have done so. As you know, after his—accident, he went to the capital without informing any one.”

“As a matter of honour,” said Austen.

Mr. Flint looked up from the papers, and regarded him narrowly, for the tone in which this was spoken did not escape the president of the Northeastern. He saw, in fact, that at the outset he had put a weapon into Austen’s hands. Hilary’s resignation was a vindication of Austen’s attitude, an acknowledgment that the business and political practices of his life had been wrong.

What Austen really felt, when he had grasped the significance of that fact, was relief—gratitude. A wave of renewed affection for his father swept over him, of affection and pity and admiration, and for the instant he forgot Mr. Flint.

“As a matter of honour,” Mr. Flint repeated. “Knowing he was ill, Mr. Vane insisted upon going to that convention, even at the risk of his life. It is a fitting close to a splendid career, and one that will not soon be forgotten.”

Austen merely looked at Mr. Flint, who may have found the glance a trifle disconcerting, for he turned to the papers again.

“I repeat,” he went on presently, “that this illness of Mr. Vane’s is not only a great loss to the Northeastern system, but a great blow to me personally. I have been associated with him closely for more than a quarter of a century, and I have never seen a lawyer of greater integrity, clear-headedness, and sanity of view. He saw things as they were, and he did as much to build up the business interests and the prosperity of this State as any man I know of. He was true to his word, and true to his friends.”

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Still Austen did not reply. He continued to look at Mr. Flint, and Mr. Flint continued to check the papers only more slowly. He had nearly finished the first box.

“A wave of political insanity, to put it mildly, seems to be sweeping over this country,” said the president of the Northeastern. “Men who would paralyze and destroy the initiative of private enterprise, men who themselves are ambitious, and either incapable or unsuccessful, have sprung up; writers who have no conscience, whose one idea is to make money out of a passing craze against honest capital, have aided them. Disappointed and dangerous politicians who merely desire office and power have lifted their voices in the hue and cry to fool the honest voter. I am glad to say I believe that the worst of this madness and rascality is over; that the common sense of the people of this country is too great to be swept away by the methods of these self-seekers; that the ordinary man is beginning to see that his bread and butter depends on the brain of the officers who are trying honestly to conduct great enterprises for the benefit of the average citizen.

“We did not expect to escape in this State,” Mr. Flint went on, raising his head and meeting Austen’s look; “the disease was too prevalent and too catching for the weak-minded. We had our self-seekers who attempted to bring ruin upon an institution which has done more for our population than any other. I do not hesitate to speak of the Northeastern Railroads as an institution, and as an institution which has been as conscientiously and conservatively conducted as any in the country, and with as scrupulous a regard for the welfare of all. Hilary Vane, as you doubtless know, was largely responsible for this. My attention, as president of all the roads, has been divided. Hilary Vane guarded the interests in this State, and no man could have guarded them better. He well deserves the thanks of future generations for the uncompromising fight he made against such men and such methods. It has broken him down at a time of life when he has earned repose, but he has the satisfaction of knowing that he has won the battle for conservative American principles, and that he has nominated a governor worthy of the traditions of the State.”

And Mr. Flint started checking off the papers again. Had the occasion been less serious, Austen could have smiled at Mr. Flint’s ruse—so characteristic of the tactics of the president of the Northeastern—of putting him into a position where criticism of the Northeastern and its practices would be criticism of his own father. As it was, he only set his jaw more firmly, an expression indicative of contempt for such tactics. He had not come there to be lectured out of the “Book of Arguments” on the divine right of railroads to govern, but to see that certain papers were delivered in safety.

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Had his purpose been deliberately to enter into a contest with Mr. Flint, Austen could not have planned the early part of it any better than by pursuing this policy of silence. To a man of Mr. Flint's temperament and training, it was impossible to have such an opponent within reach without attempting to hector him into an acknowledgment of the weakness of his position. Further than this, Austen had touched him too often on the quick merely to be considered in the light of a young man who held opposite and unfortunate views—although it was Mr. Flint's endeavour to put him in this light. The list of injuries was too fresh in Mr. Flint's mind—even that last conversation with Victoria, in which she had made it plain that her sympathies were with Austen.

But with an opponent who would not be led into ambush, who had the strength to hold his fire under provocation, it was no easy matter to maintain a height of conscious, matter-of-fact rectitude and implied reproof. Austen's silence, Austen's attitude, declared louder than words the contempt for such manoeuvres of a man who knows he is in the right—and knows that his adversary knows it. It was this silence and this attitude which proclaimed itself that angered Mr. Flint, yet made him warily conceal his anger and change his attack.

"It is some years since we met, Mr. Vane," he remarked presently.

Austen's face relaxed into something of a smile.

"Four, I think," he answered.

"You hadn't long been back from that Western experience. Well, your father has one decided consolation; you have fulfilled his hope that you would settle down here and practise in the State. And I hear that you are fast forging to the front. You are counsel for the Gaylord Company, I believe."

"The result of an unfortunate accident," said Austen; "Mr. Hammer died."

"And on the occasion when you did me the honour to call on me," said Mr. Flint, "if I remember rightly, you expressed some rather radical views—for the son of Hilary Vane."

"For the son of Hilary Vane," Austen agreed, with a smile.

Mr. Flint ignored the implication in the repetition.

"Thinking as much as I do of Mr. Vane, I confess that your views at that time rather disturbed me. It is a matter of relief to learn that you have refused to lend yourself to the schemes of men like our neighbour, Mr. Humphrey Crewe, of Leith."

"Honesty compels me to admit," answered Austen, "that I did not refrain on Mr. Crewe's account."

“Although,” said Mr. Flint, drumming on the table, “there was some talk that you were to be brought forward as a dark horse in the convention, and as a candidate unfriendly to the interests of the Northeastern Railroads, I am glad you did not consent to be put in any such position. I perceive that a young man of your ability and—popularity, a Vane of Camden Street, must inevitably become a force in this State. And as a force, you must

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retain the conservatism of the Vanes—the traditional conservatism of the State. The Northeastern Railroads will continue to be a very large factor in the life of the people after you and I are gone, Mr. Vane. You will have to live, as it were, with that corporation, and help to preserve it. We shall have to work together, perhaps, to that end—who can say? I repeat, I am glad that your good sense led you to refrain from coming as a candidate before that Convention. There is time enough in the future, and you could not have been nominated.”

“On the contrary,” answered Austen, quietly, “I could have been nominated.”

Mr. Flint smiled knowingly—but with an effort. What a relief it would have been to him to charge horse and foot, to forget that he was a railroad president dealing with a potential power.

“Do you honestly believe that?” he asked.

“I am not accustomed to dissemble my beliefs,” said Austen, gravely. “The fact that my father had faith enough in me to count with certainty on my refusal to go before the convention enabled him to win the nomination for the candidate of your railroads.”

Mr. Flint continued to smile, but into his eyes had crept a gleam of anger.

“It is easy to say such things—after the convention,” he remarked.

“And it would have been impossible to say their before,” Austen responded instantly, with a light in his own eyes. “My nomination was the only disturbing factor in the situation for you and the politicians who had your interests in hand, and it was as inevitable as night and day that the forces of the candidates who represented the two wings of the machine of the Northeastern Railroads should have united against Mr. Crewe. I want to say to you frankly that if my father had not been the counsel for your corporation, and responsible for its political success, or if he could have resigned with honour before the convention, I should not have refused to let my name go in. After all,” he added, in a lower tone, and with a slight gesture characteristic of him when a subject was distasteful, “it doesn’t matter who is elected governor this autumn.”

“What?” cried Mr. Flint, surprised out of his attitude as much by Austen’s manner as by Austen’s words.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Austen, “whether the Northeastern Railroads have succeeded this time in nominating and electing a governor to whom they can dictate, and who will reappoint railroad commissioners and other State officials in their interests. The practices by which you have controlled this State, Mr. Flint, and elected governors and councillors and State and national senators are doomed. However necessary these

practices may have been from your point of view, they violated every principle of free government, and were they to continue, the nation to which we belong would inevitably decay and become the scorn of the world. Those practices depended for their success on one condition,—which

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in itself is the most serious of ills in a republic,—the ignorance and disregard of the voter. You have but to read the signs of the times to see clearly that the day of such conditions is past, to see that the citizens of this State and this country are thinking for themselves, as they should; are alive to the dangers and determined to avert it. You may succeed in electing one more governor and one more senate, or two, before the people are able to destroy the machinery you have built up and repeal the laws you have made to sustain it. I repeat, it doesn't matter in the long run. The era of political domination by a corporation, and mainly for the benefit of a corporation, is over."

Mr. Flint had been drumming on the desk, his face growing a darker red as Austen proceeded: Never, since he had become president of the Northeastern Railroads, had any man said such things to his face. And the fact that Austen Vane had seemingly not spoken in wrath, although forcefully enough to compel him to listen, had increased Mr. Flint's anger. Austen apparently cared very little for him or his opinions in comparison with his own estimate of right and wrong.

"It seems," said Mr. Flint, "that you have grown more radical since your last visit."

"If it be radical to refuse to accept a pass from a railroad to bind my liberty of action as an attorney and a citizen, then I am radical," replied Austen. "If it be radical to maintain that the elected representatives of the people should not receive passes, or be beholden to any man or any corporation, I acknowledge the term. If it be radical to declare that these representatives should be elected without interference, and while in office should do exact justice to the body of citizens on the one hand and the corporations on the other, I declare myself a radical. But my radicalism goes back behind the establishment of railroads, Mr. Flint, back to the foundation of this government, to the idea from which it sprang."

Mr. Flint smiled again.

"We have changed materially since then," he said. "I am afraid such a utopian state of affairs, beautiful as it is, will not work in the twentieth century. It is a commercial age, and the interests which are the bulwark of the country's strength must be protected."

"Yes," said Austen, "we have changed materially. The mistake you make, and men like you, is the stress which you lay on that word material. Are there no such things as moral interests, Mr. Flint? And are they not quite as important in government, if not more important, than material interests? Surely, we cannot have commercial and political stability without cominertial and political honour! if, as a nation, we lose sight of the ideals which have carried us so far, which have so greatly modified the conditions of other peoples than ourselves, we shall perish as a force in the world. And if this government proves a failure, how long do you think the material interests of which you

are so solicitous will endure? Or do you care whether they endure beyond your lifetime? Perhaps not. But it is a matter of importance, not only to the nation, but to the world, whether or not the moral idea of the United States of America is perpetuated, I assure you.”

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"I begin to fear, Mr. Vane," said the president of the Northeastern, "that you have missed your vocation. Suppose I were to grant you, for the sake of argument, that the Northeastern Railroads, being the largest taxpayers in this State, have taken an interest in seeing that conservative men fill responsible offices. Suppose such to be the case, and we abruptly cease—to take such an interest. What then? Are we not at the mercy of any and all unscrupulous men who build up a power of their own, and start again the blackmail of the old days?"

"You have put the case mildly," said Austen, and ingeniously. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Flint, you know as well as I do that for years you have governed this State absolutely, for the purpose of keeping down your taxes, avoiding unnecessary improvements for safety and comfort, and paying high dividends—"

"Perhaps you realize that in depicting these criminal operations so graphically," cried Mr. Flint, interrupting, "you are involving the reputation of one of the best citizens the State ever had—your own father."

Austen Vane leaned forward across the desk, and even Mr. Flint (if the truth were known) recoiled a little before the anger he had aroused. It shot forth from Austen's eyes, proclaimed itself in the squareness of the face, and vibrated in every word he spoke.

"Mr. Flint," he said, "I refrain from comment upon your methods of argument. There were many years in which my father believed the practices which he followed in behalf of your railroad to be necessary—and hence justified. And I have given you the credit of holding the same belief. Public opinion would not, perhaps, at that time have protected your property from political blackmail. I merely wished you to know, Mr. Flint, that there is no use in attempting to deceive me in regard to the true colour of those practices. It is perhaps useless for me to add that in my opinion you understand as well as I do the real reason for Mr. Vane's resignation and illness. Once he became convinced that the practices were wrong, he could no longer continue them without violating his conscience. He kept his word to you—at the risk of his life, and, as his son, I take a greater pride in him to-day than I ever have before."

Austen got to his feet. He was formidable even to Mr. Flint, who had met many formidable, and angry men in his time—although not of this type. Perhaps—who can say?—he was the in the mind of the president unconscious embodiment of the Northeastern of the new forces which had arisen against him,—forces which he knew in his secret soul he could not combat, because they were the irresistible forces of things not material. All his life he had met and successfully conquered forces of another kind, and put down with a strong hand merely physical encroachments.

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Mr. Flint's nature was not an introspective one, and if he had tried, he could not have accounted for his feelings. He was angry—that was certain. But he measured the six feet and more of Austen Vane with his eye, and in spite of himself experienced the compelled admiration of one fighting man for another. A thought, which had made itself vaguely felt at intervals in the past half hour, shot suddenly and poignantly through Mr. Flint's mind what if this young man, who dared in spite of every interest to oppose him, should in the apparently inevitable trend of things, become...?

Mr. Flint rose and went to the window, where he stood silent for a space, looking out, played upon by unwonted conflicting thoughts and emotions. At length, with a characteristic snap of the fingers, he turned abruptly. Austen Vane was still standing beside the desk. His face was still square, determined, but Mr. Flint noted curiously that the anger was gone from his eyes, and that another—although equally human—expression had taken its place,—a more disturbing expression, to Mr. Flint.

"It appears, Mr. Vane," he said, gathering up the papers and placing them in the boxes, "it appears that we are able to agree upon one point, at least—Hilary Vane."

"Mr. Flint," said Austen, "I did not come up here with any thought of arguing with you, of intruding any ideas—I may hold, but you have yourself asked me one question which I feel bound to answer to the best of my ability before I go. You have asked me what, in my opinion, would happen if you ceased—as you express it—to take an interest in the political, affairs of this State.

"I believe, as firmly as I stand here, that the public opinion which exists to-day would protect your property, and I base that belief on the good sense of the average American voter. The public would protect you not only in its own interests, but from an inherent sense of fair play. On the other hand, if you persist in a course of political manipulation which is not only obsolete but wrong, you will magnify the just charges against you, and the just wrath; you will put ammunition into the hands of the agitators you rightly condemn. The stockholders of your corporation, perhaps, are bound to suffer some from the fact that you have taken its life-blood to pay dividends, and the public will demand that it be built up into a normal and healthy condition. On the other hand, it could not have gone on as it was. But the corporation will suffer much more if a delayed justice is turned into vengeance.

"You ask me what I could do. I should recognize, frankly, the new conditions, and declare as frankly what the old ones were, and why such methods of defence as you adopted were necessary and justified. I should announce, openly, that from this day onward the Northeastern Railroads depended for fair play on an enlightened public—and I think your trust would be well founded, and your course vindicated.

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I should declare, from this day onward, that the issue of political passes, newspaper passes, and all other subterfuges would be stopped, and that all political hirelings would be dismissed. I should appeal to the people of this State to raise up political leaders who would say to the corporations, 'We will protect you from injustice if you will come before the elected representatives of the people, openly, and say what you want and why you want it.' By such a course you would have, in a day, the affection of the people instead of their distrust. They would rally to your defence. And, more than that, you would have done a service for American government the value of which cannot well be estimated."

Mr. Flint rang the bell on his desk, and his secretary appeared.

"Put these in my private safe, Mr. Freeman," he said.

Mr. Freeman took the boxes, glanced curiously at Austen, and went out. It was the same secretary, Austen recalled, who had congratulated him four years before. Then Mr. Flint laid his hand deliberately on the desk, and smiled slightly as he turned to Austen.

"If you had run a railroad as long as I have, Mr. Vane," he said, "I do you the credit of thinking that you would have intelligence enough to grasp other factors which your present opportunities for observation have not permitted you to perceive. Nevertheless, I am much obliged to you for your opinion, and I value the—frankness in which it was given. And I shall hope to hear good news of your father. Remember me to him, and tell him how deeply I feel his affliction. I shall call again in a day or two."

Austen took up his hat.

"Good day, Mr. Flint," he said; "I will tell him."

By the time he had reached the door, Mr. Flint had gone back to the window once more, and appeared to have forgotten his presence.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE VALE OF THE BLUE

Austen himself could not well have defined his mental state as he made his way through the big rooms towards the door, but he was aware of one main desire—to escape from Fairview. With the odours of the flowers in the tall silver vases on the piano—her piano!—the spirit of desire which had so long possessed him, waking and sleeping, returned,—returned to torture him now with greater skill amidst these her possessions; her

volume of Chopin on the rack, bound in red leather and stamped with her initials, which compelled his glance as he passed, and brought vivid to his memory the night he had stood in the snow and heard her playing. So, he told himself, it must always be, for him to stand in the snow listening.

He reached the hall, with a vast relief perceived that it was empty, and opened the door and went out. Strange that he should note, first of all, as he parsed a moment at the top of the steps, that the very day had changed. The wind had fallen; the sun, well on his course towards the rim of western hills, poured the golden light of autumn over field and forest, while Sawanec was already in the blue shadow; the expectant stillness of autumn reigned, and all unconsciously Austen's blood was quickened though a quickening of pain.

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The surprise of the instant over, he noticed that his horse was gone, —had evidently been taken to the stables. And rather than ring the bell and wait in the mood in which he found himself, he took the path through the shrubbery from which he had seen the groom emerge.

It turned beyond the corner of the house, descended a flight of stone steps, and turned again.

They stood gazing each at the other for a space of time not to be computed before either spoke, and the sense of unreality which comes with a sudden fulfilment of intense desire—or dread—was upon Austen. Could this indeed be her figure, and this her face on which he watched the colour rise (so he remembered afterwards) like the slow flood of day? Were there so many Victorias, that a new one—and a strange one—should confront him at every meeting? And, even while he looked, this Victoria, too,—one who had been near him and departed,—was surveying him now from an unapproachable height of self-possession and calm. She held out her hand, and he took it, scarce knowing—that it was hers.

“How do you do, Mr. Vane?” she said; “I did not expect to meet you here.”

“I was searching for the stable, to get my horse,” he answered lamely.

“And your father?” she asked quickly; “I hope he is not—worse.”

It was thus she supplied him, quite naturally, with an excuse for being at Fairview. And yet her solicitude for Hilary was wholly unaffected.

“Dr. Harmon, who came from New York, has been more encouraging than I had dared to hope,” said Austen. “And, by the way, Mr. Vane believes that you had a share in the fruit and flowers which Mr. Flint so kindly brought. If—he had known that I were to see you, I am sure he would have wished me to thank you.”

Victoria turned, and tore a leaf from the spiraea.

“I will show you where the stables are,” she said; “the path divides a little farther on—and you might find yourself in the kitchen.”

Austen smiled, and as she went on slowly, he followed her, the path not being wide enough for them to walk abreast, his eyes caressing the stray hairs that clustered about her neck and caught the light. It seemed so real, and yet so unrealizable, that he should be here with her.

“I am afraid,” he said, “that I did not express my gratitude as I should have done the evening you were good enough to come up to Jabe Jenney’s.”

He saw her colour rise again, but she did not pause.

“Please don’t say anything about it, Mr. Vane. Of course I understand how you felt,” she cried.

“Neither my father nor myself will forget that service,” said Austen.

“It was nothing,” answered Victoria, in a low voice. “Or, rather, it was something I shall always be glad that I did not miss. I have seen Mr. Vane all my life, but I never=never really knew him until that day. I have come to the conclusion,” she added, in a lighter tone, “that the young are not always the best judges of the old. There,” she added, “is the path that goes to the kitchen, which you probably would have taken.”

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He laughed. Past and future were blotted out, and he lived only in the present. He could think of nothing but that she was here beside him. Afterwards, cataclysms might come and welcome.

"Isn't there another place," he asked, "where I might lose my way?"

She turned and gave him one of the swift, searching looks he recalled so well: a look the meaning of which he could not declare, save that she seemed vainly striving to fathom something in him—as though he were not fathomable! He thought she smiled a little as she took the left-hand path.

"You will remember me to your father?" she said. "I hope he is not suffering."

"He is not suffering," Austen replied. "Perhaps—if it were not too much to ask—perhaps you might come to see him, sometime? I can think of nothing that would give him greater pleasure."

"I will come—sometime," she answered. "I am going away to-morrow, but—"

"Away?" he repeated, in dismay. Now that he was beside her, all unconsciously the dominating male spirit which was so strong in him, and which moves not woman alone, but the world, was asserting itself. For the moment he was the only man, and she the only woman, in the universe.

"I am going on a promised visit to a friend of mine."

"For how long?" he demanded.

"I don't know, said Victoria, calmly; probably until she gets tired of me. And there," she added, "are the stables, where no doubt you will find your faithful Pepper."

They had come out upon an elevation above the hard service drive, and across it, below them, was the coach house with its clock-tower and weather-vane, and its two wings, enclosing a paved court where a whistling stable-boy was washing a carriage. Austen regarded this scene an instant, and glanced back at her profile. It was expressionless.

"Might I not linger—a few minutes?" he asked.

Her lips parted slightly in a smile, and she turned her head. How wonderfully, he thought, it was poised upon her shoulders.

"I haven't been very hospitable, have I?" she said. But then, you seemed in such a hurry to go, didn't you? You were walking so fast when I met you that you quite frightened me."

“Was I?” asked Austen, in surprise.

She laughed.

“You looked as if you were ready to charge somebody. But this isn’t a very nice place—to linger, and if you really will stay awhile,” said Victoria, “we might walk over to the dairy, where that model protege of yours, Eben Fitch, whom you once threatened with corporal chastisement if he fell from grace, is engaged. I know he will be glad to see you.”

Austen laughed as he caught up with her. She was already halfway across the road.

“Do you always beat people if they do wrong?” she asked.

“It was Eben who requested it, if I remember rightly,” he said. “Fortunately, the trial has not yet arrived. Your methods,” he added, “seem to be more successful with Eben.”

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They went down the grassy slope with its groups of half-grown trees; through an orchard shot with slanting, yellow sunlight,—the golden fruit, harvested by the morning winds, littering the ground; and then by a gate into a dimpled, emerald pasture slope where the Guernseys were feeding along a water run. They spoke of trivial things that found no place in Austen's memory, and at times, upon one pretext or another, he fell behind a little that he might feast his eyes upon her.

Eben was not at the dairy, and Austen betraying no undue curiosity as to his whereabouts, they walked on up the slopes, and still upward towards the crest of the range of hills that marked the course of the Blue. He did not allow his mind to dwell upon this new footing they were on, but clung to it. Before, in those delicious moments with her, seemingly pilfered from the angry gods, the sense of intimacy had been deep; deep, because robbing the gods together, they had shared the feeling of guilt, had known that retribution would come. And now the gods had locked their treasure-chest, although themselves powerless to redeem from him the memory of what he had gained. Nor could they, apparently, deprive him of the vision of her in the fields and woods beside him, though transformed by their magic into a new Victoria, keeping him lightly and easily at a distance.

Scattering the sheep that flecked the velvet turf of the uplands, they stood at length on the granite crown of the crest itself. Far below them wound the Blue into its vale of sapphire shadows, with its hillsides of the mystic fabric of the backgrounds of the masters of the Renaissance. For a while they stood in silence under the spell of the scene's enchantment, and then Victoria seated herself on the rock, and he dropped to a place at her side.

"I thought you would like the view," she said; "but perhaps you have been here, perhaps I am taking you to one of your own possessions."

He had flung his hat upon the rock, and she glanced at his serious, sunburned face. His eyes were still fixed, contemplatively, on the Yale of the Blue, but he turned to her with a smile.

"It has become yours by right of conquest," he answered.

She did not reply to that. The immobility of her face, save for the one look she had flashed upon him, surprised and puzzled him more and more —the world—old, indefinable, eternal feminine quality of the Spring.

"So you refused to be governor? she said presently,—surprising him again.

"It scarcely came to that," he replied.

"What did it come to?" she demanded.

He hesitated.

“I had to go down to the capital, on my father’s account, but I did not go to the convention. I stayed,” he said slowly, “at the little cottage across from the Duncan house where—you were last winter.” He paused, but she gave no sign. “Tom Gaylord came up there late in the afternoon, and wanted me to be a candidate.”

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"And you refused?"

"Yes."

"But you could have been nominated!"

"Yes," he admitted; "it is probable. The conditions were chaotic."

"Are you sure you have done right?" she asked. "It has always seemed to me from what I know and have heard of you that you were made for positions of trust. You would have been a better governor than the man they have nominated."

His expression became set.

"I am sure I have done right," he answered deliberately. "It doesn't make any difference who is governor this time."

"Doesn't make any difference!" she exclaimed.

"No," he said. "Things have changed—the people have changed. The old method of politics, which was wrong, although it had some justification in conditions, has gone out. A new and more desirable state of affairs has come. I am at liberty to say this much to you now," he added, fixing his glance upon her, "because my father has resigned as counsel for the Northeastern, and I have just had a talk with—Mr. Flint."

"You have seen my father?" she asked, in a low voice, and her face was averted.

"Yes," he answered.

"You—did not agree," she said quickly.

His blood beat higher at the question and the manner of her asking it, but he felt that he must answer it honestly, unequivocally, whatever the cost.

"No, we did not agree. It is only fair to tell you that we differed —vitality. On the other hand, it is just that you should know that we did not part in anger, but, I think, with a mutual respect."

She drew breath.

"I knew," she said, "I knew if he could but talk to you he would understand that you were sincere—and you have proved it. I am glad—I am glad that you saw him." The quality of the sunlight changed, the very hills leaped, and the river sparkled. Could she care? Why did she wish her father to know that he was sincere.

“You are glad that I saw him!” he repeated.

But she met his glance steadily.

“My father has so little faith in human nature,” she answered. “He has a faculty of doubting the honesty of his opponents—I suppose because so many of them have been dishonest. And—I believe in my friends,” she added, smiling. “Isn’t it natural that I should wish to have my judgment vindicated?”

He got to his feet and walked slowly to the far edge of the rock, where he stood for a while, seemingly gazing off across the spaces to Sawanec. It was like him, thus to question the immutable. Victoria sat motionless, but her eyes followed irresistibly the lines of power in the tall figure against the sky—the breadth of shoulder and slimness of hip and length of limb typical of the men who had conquered and held this land for their descendants. Suddenly, with a characteristic movement of determination; he swung about and came towards her, and at the same instant she rose.

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"Don't you think we should be going back?" she said.

Rut he seemed not to hear her.

"May I ask you something?" he said.

"That depends," she answered.

"Are you going to marry Mr. Rangely?"

"No," she said, and turned away. "Why did you think that?"

He quivered.

"Victoria!"

She looked up at him, swiftly, half revealed, her eyes like stars surprised by the flush of dawn in her cheeks. Hope quickened at the vision of hope, the seats of judgment themselves were filled with radiance, and rumour, cowered and fled like the spirit of night. He could only gaze, enraptured.

"Yes?" she answered.

His voice was firm but low, yet vibrant with sincerity, with the vast store of feeling, of compelling magnetism that was in the man and moved in spite of themselves those who knew him. His words Victoria remembered afterwards—all of them; but it was to the call of the voice she responded. His was the fibre which grows stronger in times of crisis. Sure of himself, proud of the love which he declared, he spoke as a man who has earned that for which he prays,—simply and with dignity.

"I love you," he said; "I have known it since I have known you, but you must see why I could not tell you so. It was very hard, for there were times when I led myself to believe that you might come to love me. There were times when I should have gone away if I hadn't made a promise to stay in Ripton. I ask you to marry me, because I—know that I shall love you as long as I live. I can give you this, at least, and I can promise to protect and cherish you. I cannot give you that to which you have been accustomed all your life, that which you have here at Fairview, but I shouldn't say this to you if I believed that you cared for them above —other things."

"Oh, Austen!" she cried, "I do not—I—do not! They would be hateful to me—without you. I would rather live with you—at Jabe Jenney's," and her voice caught in an exquisite note between laughter and tears. "I love you, do you understand, you! Oh, how could you ever have doubted it? How could you? What you believe, I believe. And, Austen, I have been so unhappy for three days."

He never knew whether, as the most precious of graces ever conferred upon man, with a womanly gesture she had raised her arms and laid her hands upon his shoulders before he drew her to him and kissed her face, that vied in colour with the coming glow in the western sky. Above the prying eyes of men, above the world itself, he held her, striving to realize some little of the vast joy of this possession, and failing. And at last she drew away from him, gently, that she might look searchingly into his face again, and shook her head slowly.

“And you were going away,” she said, “without a word I thought—you didn’t care. How could I have known that you were just—stupid?”

His eyes lighted with humour and tenderness.

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"How long have you cared, Victoria?" he asked.

She became thoughtful.

"Always, I think," she answered; "only I didn't know it. I think I loved you even before I saw you."

"Before you saw me!"

"I think it began," said Victoria, "when I learned that you had shot Mr. Blodgett—only I hope you will never do such a thing again. And you will please try to remember," she added, after a moment, "that I am neither Eben Fitch nor your friend, Tom Gaylord."

Sunset found them seated on the rock, with the waters of the river turned to wine at the miracle in the sky their miracle. At times their eyes wandered to the mountain, which seemed to regard them from a discreet distance—with a kindly and protecting majesty.

"And you promised," said Victoria, "to take me up there. When will you do it?"

"I thought you were going away," he replied.

"Unforeseen circumstances," she answered, "have compelled me to change my plans."

"Then we will go tomorrow," he said.

"To the Delectable Land," said Victoria, dreamily; "your land, where we shall be—benevolent despots. Austen?"

"Yes?" He had not ceased to thrill at the sound of his name upon her lips.

"Do you think," she asked, glancing at him, "do you think you have money enough to go abroad—just for a little while?"

He laughed joyously.

"I don't know," he said, "but I shall make it a point to examine my bank-account to-night. I haven't done so—for some time."

"We will go to Venice, and drift about in a gondola on one of those gray days when the haze comes in from the Adriatic and touches the city with the magic of the past. Sometimes I like the gray days best—when I am happy. And then," she added, regarding him critically, "although you are very near perfection, there are some things you ought to see and learn to make your education complete. I will take you to all the queer places I love. When you are ambassador to France, you know, it would be humiliating to have to have an interpreter, wouldn't it?"



“What’s the use of both of us knowing the language?” he demanded.

“I’m afraid we shall be—too happy,” she sighed, presently.

“Too happy!” he repeated.

“I sometimes wonder,” she said, “whether happiness and achievement go together. And yet—I feel sure that you will achieve.”

“To please you, Victoria,” he answered, “I think I should almost be willing to try.”

CHAPTER XXX

P.S.

By request of one who has read thus far, and is still curious.

Yes, and another who, in spite of himself, has fallen in love with Victoria and would like to linger a while longer, even though it were with the paltry excuse of discussing that world-old question of hers—Can sublime happiness and achievement go together? Novels on the problem of sex nowadays often begin with marriages, but rarely discuss the happy ones; and many a woman is forced to sit wistfully at home while her companion soars.

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"Yet may I look with heart unshook
On blow brought home or missed—
Yet may I hear with equal ear
The clarions down the List;
Yet set my lance above mischance
And ride the barriere—
Oh, hit or miss, how little 'tis,
My Lady is not there!"

A verse, in this connection, which may be a perversion of Mr. Kipling's meaning, but not so far from it, after all. And yet, would the eagle attempt the great flights if contentment were on the plain? Find the mainspring of achievement, and you hold in your hand the secret of the world's mechanism. Some aver that it is woman.

Do the gods ever confer the rarest of gifts upon him to whom they have given pinions? Do they mate him, ever, with another who soars as high as he, who circles higher that he may circle higher still? Who can answer? Must those who soar be condemned to eternal loneliness, and was it a longing they did not comprehend which bade them stretch their wings toward the sun? Who can say?

Alas, we cannot write of the future of Austen and Victoria Vane! We can only surmise, and hope, and pray,—yes, and believe. Romance walks with parted lips and head raised to the sky; and let us follow her, because thereby our eyes are raised with hers. We must believe, or perish.

Postscripts are not fashionable. The satiated theatre goer leaves before the end of the play, and has worked out the problem for himself long before the end of the last act. Sentiment is not supposed to exist in the orchestra seats. But above (in many senses) is the gallery, from whence an excited voice cries out when the sleeper returns to life, "It's Rip Van Winkle!" The gallery, where are the human passions which make this world our world; the gallery, played upon by anger, vengeance, derision, triumph, hate, and love; the gallery, which lingers and applauds long after the fifth curtain, and then goes reluctantly home—to dream. And he who scorns the gallery is no artist, for there lives the soul of art. We raise our eyes to it, and to it we dedicate this our play;—and for it we lift the curtain once more after those in the orchestra have departed.

It is obviously impossible, in a few words, to depict the excitement in Ripton, in Leith, in the State at large, when it became known that the daughter of Mr. Flint was to marry Austen Vane,—a fitting if unexpected climax to a drama. How would Mr. Flint take it? Mr. Flint, it may be said, took it philosophically; and when Austen went up to see him upon this matter, he shook hands with his future son-in-law,—and they agreed to disagree. And beyond this it is safe to say that Mr. Flint was relieved; for in his secret soul he had for many years entertained a dread that Victoria might marry a foreigner. He had this consolation at any rate.



His wife denied herself for a day to her most intimate friends,—for it was she who had entertained visions of a title; and it was characteristic of the Rose of Sharon that she knew nothing of the Vanes beyond the name. The discovery that the Austens were the oldest family in the State was in the nature of a balm; and henceforth, in speaking of Austen, she never failed to mention the fact that his great-grandfather was Minister to Spain in the '30's,—a period when her own was engaged in a far different calling.

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And Hilary Vane received the news with a grim satisfaction, Dr. Tredway believing that it had done more for him than any medicine or specialists. And when, one warm October day, Victoria herself came and sat beside the canopied bed, her conquest was complete: he surrendered to her as he had never before surrendered to man or woman or child, and the desire to live surged back into his heart,—the desire to live for Austen and Victoria. It became her custom to drive to Ripton in the autumn mornings and to sit by the hour reading to Hilary in the mellow sunlight in the lee of the house, near Sarah Austen's little garden. Yes, Victoria believed she had developed in him a taste for reading; although he would have listened to Emerson from her lips.

And sometimes, when she paused after one of his long silences to glance at him, she would see his eyes fixed, with a strange rapt look, on the garden or the dim lavender form of Sawanec through the haze, and knew that he was thinking of a priceless thing which he had once possessed, and missed. Then Victoria would close the volume, and fall to dreaming, too.

What was happiness? Was it contentment? If it were, it might endure, —contentment being passive. But could active, aggressive, exultant joy exist for a lifetime, jealous of its least prerogative, perpetually watchful for its least abatement, singing unending anthems on its conquest of the world? The very intensity of her feelings at such times sobered Victoria—alarmed her. Was not perfection at war with the world's scheme, and did not achievement spring from a void?

But when Austen appeared, with Pepper, to drive her home to Fairview, his presence never failed to revive the fierce faith that it was his destiny to make the world better, and hers to help him. Wondrous afternoons they spent together in that stillest and most mysterious of seasons in the hill country—autumn! Autumn and happiness! Happiness as shameless as the flaunting scarlet maples on the slopes, defiant of the dying year of the future, shadowy and unreal as the hills before them in the haze. Once, after a long silence, she started from a reverie with the sudden consciousness of his look intent upon her, and turned with parted lips and eyes which smiled at him out of troubled depths.

"Dreaming, Victoria?" he said.

"Yes," she answered simply, and was silent once more. He loved these silences of hers,—hinting, as they did, of unexplored chambers in an inexhaustible treasure-house which by some strange stroke of destiny was his. And yet he felt at times the vague sadness of them, like the sadness of the autumn, and longed to dispel it.

"It is so wonderful," she went on presently, in a low voice, "it is so wonderful I sometimes think that it must be like—like this; that it cannot last. I have been wondering whether we shall be as happy when the world discovers that you are great."

He shook his head at her slowly, in mild reproof.

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"Isn't that borrowing trouble, Victoria?" he said. "I think you need have no fear of finding the world as discerning as yourself."

She searched his face.

"Will you ever change?" she asked.

"Yes," he said. "No man can stand such flattery as that without deteriorating, I warn you. I shall become consequential, and pompous, and altogether insupportable, and then you will leave me and never realize that it has been all your fault."

Victoria laughed. But there was a little tremor in her voice, and her eyes still rested on his face.

"But I am serious, Austen," she said. "I sometimes feel that, in the future, we shall not always have many such days as these. It's selfish, but I can't help it. There are so many things you will have to do without me. Don't you ever think of that?"

His eyes grew grave, and he reached out and took her hand in his.

"I think, rather, of the trials life may bring, Victoria," he answered, "of the hours when judgment halts, when the way is not clear. Do you remember the last night you came to Jabe Jenney's? I stood in the road long after you had gone, and a desolation such as I had never known came over me. I went in at last, and opened a book to some verses I had been reading, which I shall never forget. Shall I tell you what they were?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"They contain my answer to your question," he said.

"What became of all the hopes,
Words and song and lute as well?
Say, this struck you 'When life gropes
Feebly for the path where fell
Light last on the evening slopes,

"One friend in that path shall be,
To secure my step from wrong;
One to count night day for me,
Patient through the watches long,
Serving most with none to see."

"Victoria, can you guess who that friend is?"

She pressed his hand and smiled at him, but her eyes were wet.

“I have thought of it in that way, too, dear. But—but I did not know that you had. I do not think that many men have that point of view, Austen.”

“Many men,” he answered, “have not the same reason to be thankful as I.”

There is a time, when the first sharp winds which fill the air with flying leaves have come and gone, when the stillness has come again, and the sunlight is tinged with a yellower gold, and the pastures are still a vivid green, and the mountain stained with a deeper blue than any gem, called Indian summer. And it was in this season that Victoria and Austen were married, in a little church at Tunbridge, near Fairview, by the bishop of the diocese, who was one of Victoria’s dearest friends. Mr. Thomas Gaylord (for whose benefit there were many rehearsals) was best man, Miss Beatrice Chillingham maid of honour; and it was unanimously declared by Victoria’s bridesmaids, who came up from New York, that they had fallen in love with the groom.

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How describe the wedding breakfast and festivities at Fairview House, on a November day when young ladies could walk about the lawns in the filmiest of gowns! how recount the guests and leave out no friends—for none were left out! Mr. Jabe Jenney and Mrs. Jenney, who wept as she embraced both bride and groom; and Euphrasia, in a new steel-coloured silk and a state of absolute subjection and incredulous happiness. Would that there were time to chronicle that most amazing of conquests of Victoria over Euphrasia! And Mrs. Pomfret, who, remarkable as it may seem, not only recognized Austen without her lorgnette, but quite overwhelmed him with an unexpected cordiality, and declared her intention of giving them a dinner in New York.

“My dear,” she said, after kissing Victoria twice, “he is most distinguished-looking—I had no idea—and a person who grows upon one. And I am told he is descended from Channing Austen, of whom I have often heard my grandfather speak. Victoria, I always had the greatest confidence in your judgment.”

Although Victoria had a memory (what woman worth her salt has not?), she was far too happy to remind Mrs. Pomfret of certain former occasions, and merely smiled in a manner which that lady declared to be enigmatic. She maintained that she had never understood Victoria, and it was characteristic of Mrs. Pomfret that her respect increased in direct proportion to her lack of understanding.

Mr. Thomas Gaylord, in a waistcoat which was the admiration of all who beheld it, proposed the health of the bride; and proved indubitably that the best of oratory has its origin in the heart and not in the mind,—for Tom had never been regarded by his friends as a Demosthenes. He was interrupted from time to time by shouts of laughter; certain episodes in the early career of Mr. Austen Vane (in which, if Tom was to be believed, he was an unwilling participant) were particularly appreciated. And shortly after that, amidst a shower of miscellaneous articles and rice, Mr. and Mrs. Vane took their departure.

They drove through the yellow sunlight to Ripton, with lingering looks at the hills which brought back memories of boys and sorrows, and in Hanover Street bade good-by to Hilary Vane. A new and strange contentment shone in his face as he took Victoria’s hands in his, and they sat with him until Euphrasia came. It was not until they were well on their way to New York that they opened the letter he had given them, and discovered that it contained something which would have enabled them to remain in Europe the rest of their lives had they so chosen.

We must leave them amongst the sunny ruins of Italy and Greece and southern France, on a marvellous journey that was personally conducted by Victoria.

Mr. Crewe was unable to go to the wedding, having to attend a directors’ meeting of some importance in the West. He is still in politics, and still hopeful; and he was married, not long afterwards, to Miss Alice Pomfret.