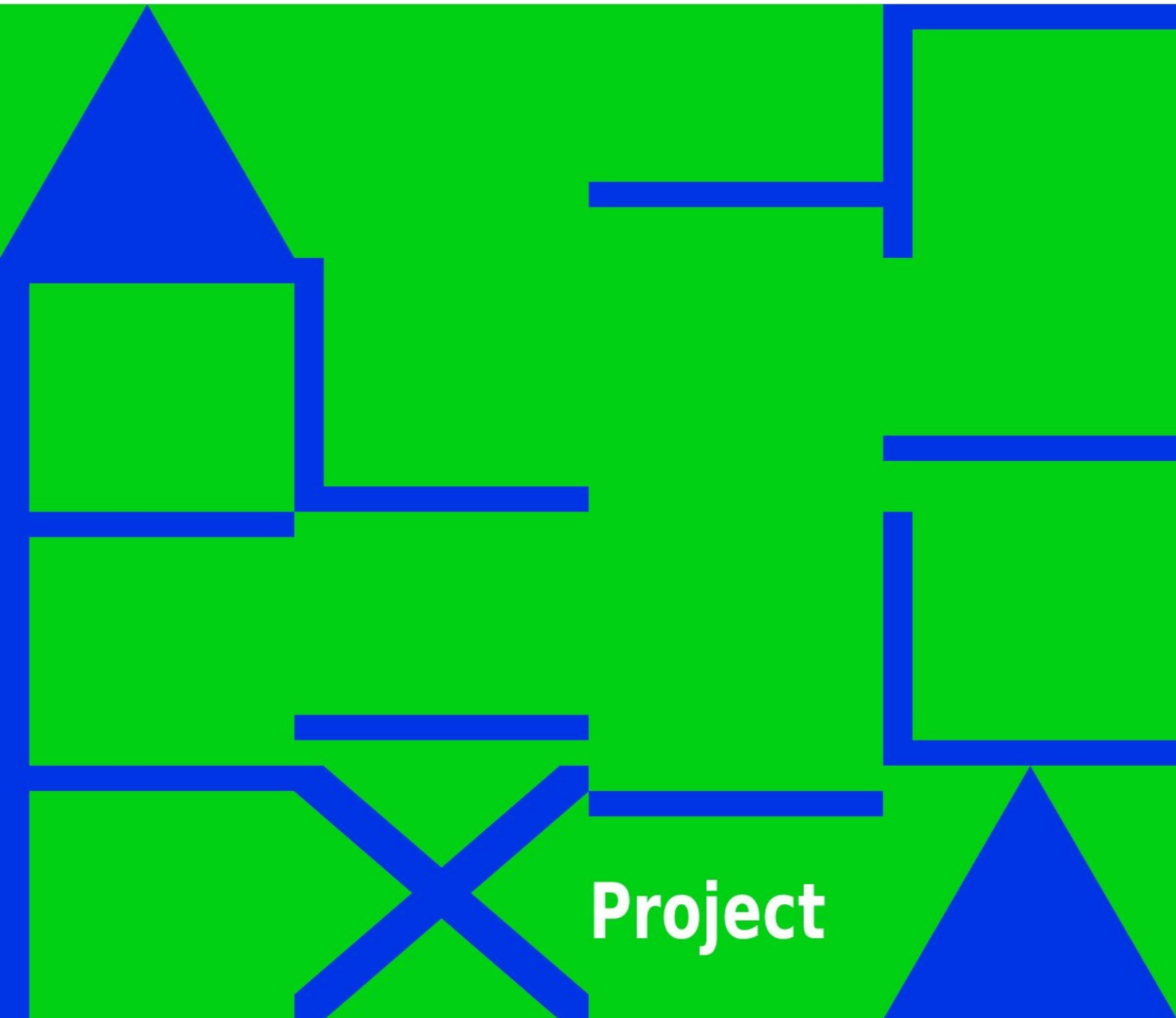
A Fool for Love

Francis Lynde



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A FOOL FOR LOVE

By Francis Lynde

Author of “The Grafters,” “The Master of Appleby,” etc.

Contents

I. IN WHICH WE TAKE PASSAGE ON THE LIMITED

It was a December morning,—the Missouri December of mild temperatures and saturated skies,—and the Chicago and Alton's fast train, dripping from the rush through the wet night, had steamed briskly to its terminal track in the Union Station at Kansas City.

Two men, one smoking a short pipe and the other snapping the ash from a scented cigarette, stood aloof from the hurrying throngs on the platform, looking on with the measured interest of those who are in a melee but not of it.

“More delay,” said the cigarettist, glancing at his watch. “We are over an hour late now. Do we get any of it back on the run to Denver?”

The pipe-smoker shook his head.

“Hardly, I should say. The Limited is a pretty heavy train to pick up lost time. But it won't make any particular difference. The western connections all wait for the Limited, and we shall reach the seat of war to-morrow night, according to the Boston itinerary.”

Mr. Morton P. Adams flung away the unburned half of his cigarette and masked a yawn behind his hand.

“It's no end of a bore, Winton, and that is the plain, unlacquered fact,” he protested. “I think the governor owes me something. I worried through the Tech because he insisted that I should have a profession; and now I am going in for field work with you in a howling winter wilderness because he insists on a practical demonstration. I shall ossify out there in those mountains. It's written in the book.”

“Humph! it's too bad about you,” said the other ironically. He was a fit figure of a man, clean-cut and vigorous, from the steadfast outlook of the gray eyes and the firm, smooth-shaven jaw to the square fingertips of the strong hands, and his smile was of good-natured contempt. “As you say, it is an outrage on filial complaisance. All the same, with the right-of-way fight in prospect, Quartz Creek Canyon may not prove to be such a valley of dry bones as—Look out, there!”

The shifting-engine had cut a car from the rear of the lately-arrived Alton, and was sending it down the outbound track to a coupling with the Transcontinental

Limited. Adams stepped back and let it miss him by a hand's-breadth, and as the car was passing, Winton read the name on the paneling.

“The Rosemary: somebody's twenty-ton private outfit. That cooks our last chance of making up any lost time between this and tomorrow—”

He broke off abruptly. On the square rear observation platform of the private car were three ladies. One of them was small and blue-eyed, with wavy little puffs of snowy hair peeping out under her dainty widow's cap. Another was small and blue-eyed, with wavy masses of flaxen hair caught up from a face which might have served as a model for the most exquisite bisque figure that ever came out of France. But Winton saw only the third.

She was taller than either of her companions—tall and straight and lithe; a charming embodiment of health and strength and beauty: clear-skinned, brown-eyed—a very goddess fresh from the bath, in Winton's instant summing up of her, and her crown of red-gold hair helped out the simile.

Now, thus far in his thirty-year pilgrimage John Winton, man and boy, had lived the intense life of a working hermit, so far as the social gods and goddesses were concerned. Yet he had a pang—of disappointment or pointless jealousy, or something akin to both—when Adams lifted his hat to this particular goddess, was rewarded by a little cry of recognition, and stepped up to the platform to be presented to the elder and younger Bisques.

So, as we say, Winton turned and walked away as one left out, feeling one moment as though he had been defrauded of a natural right, and deriding himself the next, as a sensible man should. After a bit he was able to laugh at the “sudden attack,” as he phrased it, but later, when he and Adams were settled for the day-long run in the Denver sleeper, and the Limited was clanking out over the switches, he brought the talk around with a carefully assumed air of lack-interest to the party in the private car.

“She is a friend of yours, then?” he said, when Adams had taken the baited hook open-eyed.

The Technologian modified the assumption.

“Not quite in your sense of the word, I fancy. I met her a number of times at the houses of mutual friends in Boston. She was studying at the Conservatory.”

“But she isn't a Bostonian,” said Winton confidently.

“Miss Virginia?—hardly. She is a Carteret of the Carterets; Virginia-born-bred-and-named. Stunning girl, isn't she?”

“No,” said Winton shortly, resenting the slang for no reason that he could have

set forth in words.

Adams lighted another of the scented villainies, and his clean-shaven face wrinkled itself in a slow smile.

“Which means that she has winged you at sight, I suppose, as she does most men.” Then he added calmly, “It's no go.”

“What is 'no go'?”

Adams laughed unfeelingly, and puffed away at his cigarette.

“You remind me of the fable about the head-hiding ostrich. Didn't I see you staring at her as if you were about to have a fit? But it is just as I tell you: it's no go. She isn't the marrying kind. If you knew her, she'd be nice to you till she got a good chance to flay you alive—”

“Break it off!” growled Winton.

“Presently. As I was saying, she would miss the chance of marrying the best man in the world for the sake of taking a rise out of him. Moreover, she comes of old Cavalier stock with an English earldom at the back of it, and she is inordinately proud of the fact; while you—er—you've given me to understand that you are a man of the people, haven't you?”

Winton nodded absently. It was one of his minor fads to ignore his lineage, which ran decently back to a Colonial governor on his father's side, and to assert that he did not know his grandfather's middle name—which was accounted for by the very simple fact that the elder Winton had no middle name.

“Well, that settles it definitely,” was the Bostonian's comment. “Miss Carteret is of the *sang azur*. The man who marries her will have to know his grandfather's middle name—and a good bit more besides.”

Winton's laugh was mockingly good-natured.

“You have missed your calling by something more than a hair's-breadth, Morty. You should have been a novelist. Give you a spike and a cross-tie and you'd infer a whole railroad. But you pique my curiosity. Where are these American royalties of yours going in the Rosemary?”

“To California. The car belongs to Mr. Somerville Darrah, who is vice-president and manager in fact of the Colorado and Grand River road: the 'Rajah,' they call him. He is a relative of the Carterets, and the party is on its way to spend the winter on the Pacific coast.”

“And the little lady in the widow's cap: is she Miss Carteret's mother?”

“Miss Bessie Carteret's mother and Miss Virginia's aunt. She is the chaperon of the party.”

Winton was silent while the Limited was roaring through a village on the Kansas side of the river. When he spoke again it was not of the Carterets; it was of the Carterets' kinsman and host.

“I have heard somewhat of the Rajah,” he said half-musingly. “In fact, I know him, by sight. He is what the magazinists are fond of calling an 'industry colonel,' a born leader who has fought his way to the front. If the Quartz Creek row is anything more than a stiff bluff on the part of the C. G. R. it will be quite as well for us if Mr. Somerville Darrah is safely at the other side of the continent—and well out of ordinary reach of the wires.”

Adams came to attention with a half-hearted attempt to galvanize an interest in the business affair.

“Tell me more about this mysterious jangle we are heading for,” he rejoined. “Have I enlisted for a soldier when I thought I was only going into peaceful exile as assistant engineer of construction on the Utah Short Line?”

“That remains to be seen.” Winton took a leaf from his pocket memorandum and drew a rough outline map. “Here is Denver, and here is Carbonate,” he explained. “At present the Utah is running into Carbonate this way over the rails of the C. G. R. on a joint track agreement which either line may terminate by giving six months' notice of its intention to the other. Got that?”

“To have and to hold,” said Adams. “Go on.”

“Well, on the first day of September the C. G. R. people gave the Utah management notice to quit.”

“They are bloated monopolists,” said Adams sententiously. “Still I don't see why there should be any scrapping over the line in Quartz Creek Canyon.”

“No? You are not up in monopolistic methods. In six months from September first the Utah people will be shut out of Carbonate business, which is all that keeps that part of their line alive. If they want a share of that traffic after March first, they will have to have a road of their own to carry it over.”

“Precisely,” said Adams, stifling a yawn. “They are building one, aren't they?”

“Trying to,” Winton amended. “But, unfortunately, the only practicable route through the mountains is up Quartz Creek Canyon, and the canyon is already occupied by a branch line of the Colorado and Grand River.”

“Still I don't see why there should be any scrap.”

“Don't you? If the Rajah's road can keep the new line out of Carbonate till the six months have expired, it will have a monopoly of all the carrying trade of the camp. By consequence it can force every shipper in the district to make iron-clad

contracts, so that when the Utah line is finally completed it won't be able to secure any freight for a year, at least.”

“Oho! that's the game, is it? I begin to savvy the burro: that's the proper phrase, isn't it? And what are our chances?”

“We have about one in a hundred, as near as I could make out from Mr. Callowell's statement of the case. The C. G. R. people are moving heaven and earth to obstruct us in the canyon. If they can delay the work a little longer, the weather will do the rest. With the first heavy snow in the mountains, which usually comes long before this, the Utah will have to put up its tools and wait till next summer.”

Adams lighted another cigarette.

“Pardon me if I seem inquisitive,” he said, “but for the life of me I can't understand what these obstructionists can do. Of course, they can't use force.”

Winton's smile was grim. “Can't they? Wait till you get on the ground. But the first move was peaceable enough. They got an injunction from the courts restraining the new line from encroaching on their right of way.”

“Which was a thing that nobody wanted to do,” said Adams, between inhalations.

“Which was a thing the Utah *had* to do,” corrected Winton. “The canyon is a narrow gorge—a mere slit in parts of it. That is where they have us.”

“Oh, well,” returned Adams, “I suppose we took an appeal and asked to have the injunction set aside?”

“We did, promptly; and that is the present status of the fight. The appeal decision has not yet been handed down; and in the meantime we go on building railroad, incurring all the penalties for contempt of court with every shovelful of earth moved. Do you still think you will be in danger of ossifying?”

Adams let the question rest while he asked one of his own.

“How do you come to be mixed up in it, Jack? A week ago some one told me you were going to South America to build a railroad in the Andes. What switched you?”

Winton shook his head. “Fate, I guess; that and a wire from President Callowell of the Utah offering me this. Chief of Construction Evarts, in charge of the work in Quartz Creek Canyon, said what you said a few minutes ago—that he had not hired out for a soldier. He resigned, and I'm taking his berth.”

Adams rose and buttoned his coat.

“By all of which it seems that we two are in for a good bit more than the

ossifying exile," he remarked. And then: "I am going back into the Rosemary to pay my respects to Miss Virginia Carteret. Won't you come along?"

"No," said Winton, more shortly than the invitation warranted; and the other went his way alone.

II. IN WHICH AN ENGINE IS SWITCHED

“'Scuse me, sah; private cyah, sah.”

It was the porter's challenge in the vestibule of the Rosemary. Adams found a card.

“Take that to Miss Carteret—Miss Virginia Carteret,” he directed, and waited till the man came back with his welcome.

The extension table in the open rear third of the private car was closed to its smallest dimensions, and the movable furnishings were disposed about the compartment to make it a comfortable lounging room.

Mrs. Carteret was propped among the cushions of a divan with a book. Her daughter occupied the undivided half of a tete-a-tete chair with a blond athlete in a clerical coat and a reversed collar. Miss Virginia was sitting alone at a window, but she rose and came to greet the visitor.

“How good of you to take pity on us!” she said, giving him her hand. Then she put him at one with the others: “Aunt Martha you have met; also Cousin Bessie. Let me present you to Mr. Calvert: Cousin Billy, this is Mr. Adams, who is responsible in a way for many of my Boston-learned gaucheries.”

Aunt Martha closed the book on her finger. “My dear Virginia!” she protested in mild deprecation; and Adams laughed and shook hands with the Reverend William Calvert and made Virginia's peace all in the same breath.

“Don't apologize for Miss Virginia, Mrs. Carteret. We were very good friends in Boston, chiefly, I think, because I never objected when she wanted to—er—to take a rise out of me.” Then to Virginia: “I hope I don't intrude?”

“Not in the least. Didn't I just say you were good to come? Uncle Somerville tells us we are passing through the famous Golden Belt,—whatever that may be,—and recommends an easy-chair and a window. But I haven't seen anything but stubble-fields—dismally wet stubble-fields at that. Won't you sit down and help me watch them go by?”

Adams placed a chair for her and found one for himself.

“'Uncle Somerville'—am I to have the pleasure of meeting Mr. Somerville Darrah?”

Miss Virginia's laugh was non-committal.

“*Quien sabe*?” she queried, airing her one Westernism before she was fairly in the longitude of it. “Uncle Somerville is a law unto himself. He had a lot of telegrams and things at Kansas City, and he is locked in his den with Mr. Jastrow, dictating answers by the dozen, I suppose.”

“Oh, these industry colonels!” said Adams. “Don't their toilings make you ache in sheer sympathy sometimes?”

“No, indeed,” was the prompt rejoinder; “I envy them. It must be fine to have large things to do, and to be able to do them.”

“Degenerate scion of a noble race!” jested Adams. “What ancient Carteret of them all would have compromised with the necessities by becoming a captain of industry?”

“It wasn't their *metier*, or the *metier* of their times,” said Miss Virginia with conviction. “They were sword-soldiers merely because that was the only way a strong man could conquer in those days. Now it is different, and a strong man fights quite as nobly in another field—and deserves quite as much honor.”

“Think so? I don't agree with you—as to the fighting, I mean. I like to take things easy. A good club, a choice of decent theaters, the society of a few charming young women like—”

She broke him with a mocking laugh.

“You were born a good many centuries too late, Mr. Adams; you would have fitted so beautifully, into decadent Rome.”

“No—thanks. Twentieth-century America, with the commercial frenzy taken out of it, is good enough for me. I was telling Winton a little while ago—”

“Your friend of the Kansas City station platform?” she interrupted. “Mightn't you introduce us a little less informally?”

“Beg pardon, I'm sure—yours and Jack's: Mr. John Winton, of New York and the world at large, familiarly known to his intimates—and they are precious few—as 'Jack W.' As I was about to say—”

But she seemed to find a malicious satisfaction in breaking in upon him.

“'Mr. John Winton': it's a pretty name as names go, but it isn't as strong as he is. He is an 'industry colonel,' isn't he? He looks it.”

The Bostonian avenged himself at Winton's expense for the unwelcome interruption.

“So much for your woman's intuition,” he laughed. “Speaking of idlers, there is your man to the dotting of the 'i'; a dilettante raised to the *nth* power.”

Miss Carteret's short upper lip curled in undisguised scorn.

“I like men who do things,” she asserted with pointed emphasis; whereupon the talk drifted eastward to Boston, and Winton was ignored until Virginia, having exhausted the reminiscent vein, said, “You are going on through to Denver?”

“To Denver and beyond,” was the reply. “Winton has a notion of hibernating in the mountains—fancy it; in the dead of winter!—and he has persuaded me to go along. He sketches a little, you know.”

“Oh, so he is an artist?” said Virginia, with interest newly aroused.

“No,” said Adams gloomily, “he isn't an artist—isn't much of anything, I'm sorry to say. Worse than all, he doesn't know his grandfather's middle name. Told me so himself.”

“That is inexcusable—in a dilettante,” said Miss Virginia mockingly. “Don't you think so?”

“It is inexcusable in anyone,” said the Technologian, rising to take his leave. Then, as a parting word: “Does the Rosemary set its own table? or do you dine in the dining-car?”

“In the dining-car, if we have one. Uncle Somerville lets us dodge the Rosemary's cook whenever we can,” was the answer; and with this bit of information Adams went his way to the Denver sleeper.

Finding Winton in his section, poring over a blue-print map and making notes thereon after the manner of a man hard at work, Adams turned back to the smoking-compartment.

Now for Mr. Morton P. Adams the salt of life was a joke, harmless or otherwise, as the tree might fall. So, during the long afternoon which he wore out in solitude, there grew up in him a keen desire to see what would befall if these two whom he had so grotesquely misrepresented each to the other should come together in the pathway of acquaintanceship.

But how to bring them together was a problem which refused to be solved until chance pointed the way. Since the Limited had lost another hour during the day there was a rush for the dining-car as soon as the announcement of its taking-on had gone through the train. Adams and Winton were of this rush, and so were the members of Mr. Somerville Darrah's party. In the seating the party was separated, as room at the crowded tables could be found; and Miss Virginia's fate gave her the unoccupied seat at one of the duet tables, opposite a young man with steadfast gray eyes and a firm jaw.

Winton was equal to the emergency, or thought he was. Adams was still within call and he beckoned him, meaning to propose an exchange of seats. But the Bostonian misunderstood wilfully.

“Most happy, I'm sure,” he said, coming instantly to the rescue. “Miss Carteret, my friend signals his dilemma. May I present him?”

Virginia smiled and gave the required permission in a word. But for Winton self-possession fled shrieking.

“Ah—er—I hope you know Mr. Adams well enough to make allowances for his—for his—” He broke down helplessly and she had to come to his assistance.

“For his imagination?” she suggested. “I do, indeed; we are quite old friends.”

Here was “well enough,” but Winton was a man and could not let it alone.

“I should be very sorry to have you think for a moment that I would—er—so far forget myself,” he went on fatuously. “What I had in mind was an exchange of seats with him. I thought it would be pleasanter for you; that is, I mean, pleasanter for—” He stopped short, seeing nothing but a more hopeless involvement ahead; also because he saw signals of distress or of mirth flying in the brown eyes.

“Oh, please!” she protested in mock humility. “Do leave my vanity just the tiniest little cranny to creep out of, Mr. Winton. I'll promise to be good and not bore you too desperately.”

At this, as you would imagine, the pit of utter self-abasement yawned for Winton, and he plunged headlong, holding the bill of fare wrong side up when the waiter asked for his dinner order, and otherwise demeaning himself like a man taken at a hopeless disadvantage. She took pity on him.

“But let's ignore Mr. Adams,” she went on sweetly. “I am much more interested in this,” touching the bill of fare. “Will you order for me, please? I like —”

When she had finished the list of her likings, Winton was able to smile at his lapse into the primitive, and gave the dinner order for two with a fair degree of coherence. After that they got on better. Winton knew Boston, and, next to the weather, Boston was the safest and most fruitful of the commonplaces. Nevertheless, it was not immortal; and Winton was just beginning to cast about for some other safe riding road for the shallop of small talk when Miss Carteret sent it adrift with malice aforethought.

It was somewhere between the entrees and the fruit, and the point of departure was Boston art.

“Speaking of art, Mr. Winton, will you tell me how you came to think of sketching in the mountains of Colorado at this time of year? I should think the cold would be positively prohibitive of anything like that.”

Winton stared—open-mouthed, it is to be feared.

“I—I beg your pardon,” he stammered, with the inflection which takes its pitch from blank bewilderment.

Miss Virginia was happy. Dilettante he might be, and an unhumbled man of the world as well; but, to use the Reverend Billy's phrase, she could make him “sit up.”

“I beg yours, I'm sure,” she said demurely. “I didn't know it was a craft secret.”

Winton looked across the aisle to the table where the Technologian was sitting opposite a square-shouldered, ruddy-faced gentleman with fiery eyes and fierce white mustaches, and shook a figurative fist.

“I'd like to know what Adams has been telling you,” he said. “Sketching in the mountains in midwinter! that would be decidedly original, to say the least of it. And I think I have never done an original thing in all my life.”

For a single instant the brown eyes looked their pity for him; generic pity it was, of the kind that mounting souls bestow upon the stagnant. But the subconscious lover in Winton made it personal to him, and it was the lover who spoke when he went on.

“That is a damaging admission, is it not? I am sorry to have to make it—to have to confirm your poor opinion of me.”

“Did I say anything like that?” she protested.

“Not in words; but your eyes said it, and I know you have been thinking it all along. Don't ask me how I know it: I couldn't explain it if I should try. But you have been pitying me, in a way—you know you have.”

The brown eyes were downcast. Frank and free-hearted after her kind as she was, Virginia Carteret was finding it a new and singular experience to have a man tell her baldly at their first meeting that he had read her inmost thought of him. Yet she would not flinch or go back.

“There is so much to be done in the world, and so few to do the work,” she pleaded in extenuation.

“And Adams has told you that I am not one of the few? It is true enough to hurt.”

She looked him fairly in the eyes. “What is lacking, Mr. Winton—the spur?”

“Possibly,” he rejoined. “There is no one near enough to care, or to say 'Well done!'”

“How can you tell?” she questioned musingly. “It is not always permitted to us to hear the plaudits or the hisses—happily, I think. Yet there are always those standing by who are ready to cry '*Io triumphe*!' and mean it, when one approves himself a good soldier.”

The coffee had been served, and Winton sat thoughtfully stirring the lump of sugar in his cup. Miss Carteret was not having a monopoly of the new experiences. For instance, it had never before happened to John Winton to have a woman, young, charming, and altogether lovable, read him a lesson out of the book of the overcomers.

He smiled inwardly and wondered what she would say if she could know to what battlefield the drumming wheels of the Limited were speeding him. Would she be loyal to her mentorship and tell him he must win, at whatever the cost to Mr. Somerville Darrah and his business associates? Or would she, womanlike, be her uncle's partizan and write one John Winton down in her blackest book for daring to oppose the Rajah?

He assured himself it would make no jot of difference if he knew. He had a thing to do, and he was purposed to do it strenuously, inflexibly. Yet in the inmost chamber of his heart, where the barbarian ego stands unabashed and isolate and recklessly contemptuous of the moralities minor and major, he saw the birth of an influence which inevitably must henceforth be desperately reckoned with.

Given a name, this new-born life-factor was love; love barely awakened, and as yet no more than a masterful desire to stand well in the eyes of one woman. None the less, he saw the possibilities: that a time might come when this woman would have the power to intervene; would make him hold his hand in the business affair at the very moment, mayhap, when he should strike the hardest.

It was a rather unnerving thought, and when he considered it he was glad that their ways, coinciding for the moment, would presently go apart, leaving him free to do battle as an honest soldier in any cause must.

The Rosemary party was rising, and Winton rose, too, folding the seat for Miss Virginia and carefully reaching her wrap from the rack.

“I am so glad to have met you,” she said, giving him the tips of her fingers and going back to the conventionalities as if they had never been ignored.

But the sincerity in Winton's reply transcended the conventional form of it.

“Indeed, the pleasure has been wholly mine, I assure you. I hope the future will be kind to me and let me see more of you.”

“Who knows?” she rejoined, smiling at him level-eyed. “The world has been steadily growing smaller since Shakespeare called it 'narrow.'”

He caught quickly at the straw of hope. “Then we need not say good-by?”

“No; let it be *auf Wiedersehen*,” she said; and he stood aside to allow her to join her party.

Two hours later, when Adams was reading in his section and Winton was smoking his short pipe in the men's compartment and thinking things unspeakable with Virginia Carteret for a nucleus, there was a series of sharp whistle-shrieks, a sudden grinding of the brakes, and a jarring stop of the Limited—a stop not down on the time-card.

Winton was among the first to reach the head of the long train. The halt was in a little depression of the bleak plain, and the train-men were in conference over a badly-derailed engine when Winton came up. A vast herd of cattle was lumbering away into the darkness, and a mangled carcass under the wheels of the locomotive sufficiently explained the accident.

“Well, there's only the one thing to do,” was the engineer's verdict. “That's for somebody to mog back to Arroyo to wire for the wreck-wagon.”

“Yes, by gum! and that means all night,” growled the conductor.

There was a stir in the gathering throng of half-alarmed and all-curious passengers, and a red-faced, white-mustached gentleman, whose soft southern accent was utterly at variance with his manner, hurled a question bolt-like at the conductor.

“All night, you say, seh? Then we miss ouh Denver connections?”

“You can bet to win on that,” was the curt reply.

“Damn!” said the ruddy-faced gentleman; and then in a lower tone: “I beg your pahdon, my deah Virginia; I was totally unaware of your presence.”

Winton threw off his overcoat.

“If you will take a bit of help from an outsider, I think we needn't wait for the wrecking-car,” he said to the dubious trainmen. “It's bad, but not so bad as it looks. What do you say?”

Now, as everyone knows, it is not in the nature of operative railway men to brook interference even of the helpful sort. But they are as quick as other folk to recognize the man in essence, as well as to know the clan slogan when they hear it. Winton did not wait for objections, but took over the command as one in

authority.

“Think we can't do it? I'll show you. Up on the tank, one of you, and heave down the jacks and frogs. We'll have her on the steel again before you can say your prayers.”

At the hearty command, churlish reluctance vanished and everybody lent a willing hand. In two minutes the crew of the Limited knew it was working under a master. The frogs were adjusted under the derailed wheels, the jack-screws were braced to lift and push with the nicest accuracy, and all was ready for the attempt to back the engine in trial. But now the engineer shook his bead.

“I ain't the artist to move her gently enough with all that string o' dinkeys behind her,” he said unhopefully.

“No?” said Winton. “Come up into the cab with and I'll show you how.” And he climbed to the driver's footboard with the doubting engineer at his heels.

The reversing-lever went over with a clash; the air whistled into the brakes; and Winton began to ease the throttle open. The steam sang into the cylinders, the huge machine trembling like a living thing under the hand of a master.

Slowly and by almost imperceptible degrees the life of the pent-up boiler power crept into the pistons and out through the connecting rods to the wheels. With the first thrill of the gripping tires Winton leaned from the window to watch the derailed trucks climb by half-inches up the inclined planes of the frogs.

At the critical instant, when the entire weight of the forward half of the engine was poising for the drop upon the rails, he gave the precise added impulse. The big ten-wheeler coughed hoarsely and spat fire; the driving-wheels made a quick half-turn backward; and a cheer from the onlookers marked the little triumph of mind over matter.

Winton found Miss Carteret holding his overcoat when he swung down from the cab, and he fancied her enthusiasm was tempered with something remotely like embarrassment. But she suffered him to walk back to the private car beside her; and in this sudden retreat from the scene of action he missed hearing the comments of his fellow craftsmen.

“You bet, he's no 'prentice,” said the fireman.

“Not much!” quoth the engineer. “He's an all-round artist, that's about what he is. Shouldn't wonder if he was the travelin' engineer for some road back in God's country.”

“Travelin' nothing!” said the conductor. “More likely he's a train-master, 'r

p'raps a bigger boss than that. Call in the flag, Jim, and we'll be getting a move."

Oddly enough, the comment on Winton did not pause with the encomiums of the train crew. When the Limited was once more rushing on its way through the night, and Virginia and her cousin were safe in the privacy of their state-room, Miss Carteret added her word.

"Do you know, Bessie, I think it was Mr. Adams who scored this afternoon?" she said.

"How so?" inquired *la petite* Bisque, who was too sleepy to be over-curious.

"I think he 'took a rise' out of me, as he puts it. Mr. Winton is precisely all the kinds of man Mr. Adams said he wasn't."

III. IN WHICH AN ITINERARY IS CHANGED

It was late breakfast time when the Transcontinental Limited swept around the great curve in the eastern fringe of Denver, paused for a registering moment at “yard limits,” and went clattering in over the switches to come to rest at the end of its long westward run on the in-track at the Union Depot.

Having wired ahead to have his mail meet him at the yard limits registering station, Winton was ready to make a dash for the telegraph office the moment the train stopped.

“That is our wagon, over there on the narrow-gage,” he said to Adams, pointing out the waiting mountain train. “Have the porter transfer our dunnage, and I'll be with you as soon as I can send a wire or two.”

On the way across the broad platform he saw the yard crew cutting out the Rosemary, and had a glimpse of Miss Virginia clinging to the hand-rail and enjoying enthusiastically, he fancied, her first view of the mighty hills to the westward.

The temptation to let the telegraphing wait while he went to say good morning to her was strong, but he resisted it and hastened the more for the hesitant thought. Nevertheless, when he reached the telegraph office he found Mr. Somerville Darrah and his secretary there ahead of him, and he observed that the explosive gentleman who presided over the destinies of the Colorado and Grand River appeared to be in a more than usually volcanic frame of mind.

Now Winton, though new to the business of building railroads for the Utah Short Line, was not new to Denver or Colorado. Hence when the Rajah, followed by his secretarial shadow, had left the office, Winton spoke to the operator as to a friend.

“What is the matter with Mr. Darrah, Tom? He seems to be uncommonly vindictive this morning.”

The man of dots and dashes nodded.

“He's always crankier this time than he was the other. He's a holy terror, the Rajah is. I wouldn't work on his road for a farm down East—not if my job took me within cussing distance of him. Bet a hen worth fifty dollars he is up in Mr. Colbert's office right now, raising particular sand because his special engine wasn't standing here ready to snatch his private car on the fly, so's to go on

without losing headway.”

Winton frowned thoughtfully, and he let his writing hand pause while he said, “So he travels special from Denver, does he?”

“On his own road?—well, I should smile. Nothing is too good for the Rajah; or too quick, when he happens to be in a hurry. I wonder he didn't have the T. C. pull him special from Kansas City.”

Winton handed in his batch of telegrams and went his way reflective.

What was Mr. Somerville Darrah's particular rush? As set forth by Adams, the plans of the party in the Rosemary contemplated nothing more hasty than a leisurely trip to the Pacific coast—a pleasure jaunt with a winter sojourn in California to lengthen it. Why, then, this sudden change from Limited regular trains to unlimited specials? Was there fresh news from the seat of war in Quartz Creek Canyon? Winton thought not. In that case he would have had his budget as well; and so far as his own advices went, matters were still as they had been. A letter from the Utah attorneys in Carbonate assured him that the injunction appeal was not yet decided, and another from Chief of Construction Evarts concerned itself mainly with the major's desire to know when he was to be relieved.

But if Winton could have been an eavesdropper behind the door of Superintendent Colbert's office on the second floor of the Union Depot, his doubts would have been resolved instantly.

The telegraph operator's guess went straight to the mark. Mr. Darrah was “raising particular sand” because his wire order for a special engine had not been obeyed to the saving of the ultimate second of time. But between his objurgations on that score, he was rasping out questions designed to exhaust the chief clerk's store of information concerning the status of affairs at the seat of war.

“Will you inform me, seh, why I wasn't wired that this beggahly appeal was going against us?” he demanded wrathfully. “What's that you say, seh? Don't tell me you couldn't know what the decision of the cou't was going to be before it was handed down: that's what you-all are heah for—to find out these things! And what is all this about Majah Eva'ts resigning, and the Utah's sending East for a professional right-of-way fighteh to take his place? Who is this new man? Don't know? Dammit, seh! it's your business to know! *Now when do you faveh me with my engine*?”

Thus the Rajah; and the chief clerk, himself known from end to end of the Colorado and Grand River as a queller of men, could only point out of the

window to where the Rosemary stood engined and equipped for the race, and say meekly: “I'm awfully sorry you've been delayed, Mr. Darrah; very sorry, indeed. But your car is ready now. Shall I go along to be on hand if you need me?”

“No, seh!” stormed the irate master; and the chief clerk's face became instantly expressive of the keenest relief. “You stay right heah and see that the wires to Qua'tz Creek are kept open—wide open, seh. And when you get an ordeh from me—for an engine, a regiment of the National Gyua'd, or a train-load of white elephants—you fill it. Do you understand, seh?”

Meantime, while this scene was getting itself enacted in the superintendent's office, a mild fire of consternation was alight in the gathering room of the Rosemary. As we have guessed, Winton's packet of mail was not the only one which was delivered by special arrangement that morning to the incoming Limited at the yard registering station. There had been another, addressed to Mr. Somerville Darrah; and when he had opened it there had been a volcanic explosion and a hurried dash for the telegraph office, as recorded.

Sifted out by the Reverend Billy, and explained by him to Mrs. Carteret and Bessie, the firing spark of the explosion appeared to be some news of an untoward character from a place vaguely designated as “the front.”

“It seems that there is some sort of a right-of-way scrimmage going on up in the mountains between our road and the Utah Short Line,” said the young man. “It was carried into the courts, and now it turns out that the decision has gone against us.”

“How perfectly horrid!” said Miss Bessie. “Now I suppose we shall have to stay here indefinitely while Uncle Somerville does things.” And placid Mrs. Carteret added plaintively: “It's too bad! I think they might let him have one little vacation in peace.”

“Who talks of peace?” queried Virginia, driven in from her post of vantage on the observation platform by the smoke from the switching-engine. “Didn't I see Uncle Somerville charging across to the telegraph office with war written out large in every line of him?”

“I am afraid you did,” affirmed the Reverend Billy; and thereupon the explanation was rehearsed for Virginia's benefit.

The brown eyes flashed militant sympathy.

“Oh, I wish Uncle Somerville would go to 'the front,' wherever that is, and take us along!” she cried. “It would be ever so much better than California.”

The Reverend William laughed; and Aunt Martha put in her word of

expostulation, as in duty bound.

“Why, my dear Virginia—the idea! You don't know in the least what you are talking about. I have been reading in the papers about these right-of-way troubles, and they are perfectly terrible. One report said they were arming the laboring men, and another said the militia might have to be called out.”

“Well, what of it?” said Virginia, with all the hardihood of youth and unknowledge. “It's something like a burning building: one doesn't want to be hard-hearted and rejoice over other people's misfortunes; but then, if it has to burn, one would like to be there to see.”

Miss Bessie put a stray lock of the flaxen hair up under its proper comb.

“I'm sure I prefer California and the orange-groves and peace,” she asserted. “Don't you, Cousin Billy?”

What Mr. Calvert would have replied is no matter for this history, since at this precise moment the Rajah came in, “coruscating,” as Virginia put it, from his late encounter with the superintendent's chief clerk.

“Give them the word to go, Jastrow, and let's get out of heah,” he commanded. And when the secretary had vanished the Rajah made his explanations to all and sundry. “I've been obliged in a manneh to change ouh itinerary. Anotheh company is trying to fault us up in Qua'tz Creek Canyon, and I am in a meashuh compelled to be on the ground. We shall be delayed only a few days, I hope; at the worst only until the first snow-storm comes; and, in the meantime, Califo'nia won't run away.”

Virginia clapped her hands.

“Then we are really to go to 'the front' and see a right-of-way fight? Oh, won't that be perfectly intoxicating!”

The Rajah glared at her as if she had said something incendiary. The picturesque aspect of the struggle had evidently not appealed to him. But he smiled grimly when he said: “Now there spoke the blood of the fighting Carterets: hope you won't change your mind, my deah.” And with that he dived into his working den, pushing the lately-returned secretary in ahead of him.

Virginia linked arms with Bessie, the flaxen-haired, when the wheels began to turn.

“We are off,” she said. “Let's go out on the platform and see the last of Denver.”

It was while they were clinging to the hand-rail, and looking back upon the jumble of railway activities out of which they had just emerged that the

Rosemary, gaining headway, overtook another moving train running smoothly on a track parallel to that upon which the private car was speeding. It was the narrow-gage mountain connection of the Utah line, and Winton and Adams were on the rear platform of the last car. So it chanced that the four of them were presently waving their adieus across the wind-blown interspace. In the midst of it, or rather at the moment when the Rosemary, gathering speed as the lighter of the two trains, forged ahead, the Rajah came out to light his cigar.

He took in the little tableau of the rear platforms at a glance, and when the slower train was left behind asked a question of Virginia.

“Ah—wasn't one of those two the young gentleman who called on you yestehday afternoon, my deah?”

Virginia admitted it.

“Could you faveh me with his name?”

“He is Mr. Morton P. Adams, of Boston.”

“Ah-h! and his friend—the young gentleman who laid his hand to ouh plow and put the engine on the track last night?”

“He is Mr. Winton—a—an artist, I believe; at least, that is what I gathered from what Mr. Adams said of him.”

Mr. Somerville Darrah laughed, a slow little laugh, deep in his chest.

“Bless youh innocent soul—he a picchuh—painteh? Not in a thousand yeahs, my deah Virginia. He is a railroad man, and a right good one at that. Faveh me with the name again; Winteh, did you say?”

“No; Winton—Mr. John Winton.”

“D-d-devil!” gritted the Rajah, smiting the hand-rail with his clenched fist. “Hah! I beg your pahdon, my deahs—a meah slip of the tongue.” And then, to the full as savagely: “By Heaven, I hope that train will fly the track and ditch him before eveh he comes within ordering distance of the work in Qua'tz Creek Canyon!”

“Why, Uncle Somerville—how vindictive!” cried Virginia. “Who is he, and what has he done?”

“He is Misteh John Winton, as you informed me just now; one of the brainiest constructing engineers in this entiah country, and the hardest man in this or any otheh country to down in a right-of-way fight—that's who he is. And it's not what he's done, my deah Virginia, it's what he is going to do. If I can't get him killed up out of ouh way,”—but here Mr. Darrah saw the growing terror in two pairs of eyes, and realizing that he was committing himself before an

unsympathetic audience, beat a hasty retreat to his stronghold at the other end of the Rosemary.

“Well!” said the flaxen-haired Bessie, catching her breath. But Virginia laughed.

“I'm glad I'm not Mr. Winton,” she said.

IV. THE CRYSTALLINE ALTITUDES

Morning in the highest highlands of the Rockies, a morning clear, cold, and tense, with a bell-like quality in the frosty air to make the cracking of a snow-laden spruce-bough resound like a pistol-shot. For Denver and the dwellers on the eastern plain the sun is an hour high; but the hamlet mining-camp of Argentine, with its dovecote railway station and two-pronged siding, still lies in the steel-blue depths of the canyon shadow.

Massive mountains, dark green to the timber line and dazzling white above it, shut in the narrow valley to right and left. A mimic torrent, ice-bound in the quieter pools, drums and gurgles on its descent midway between two railway embankments, the one to which the station and side-tracks belong, old and well-settled, the other new and as yet unballasted. Just opposite the pygmy station a lateral gorge intersects the main canyon, making a deep gash in the opposing mountain bulwark, around which the new line has to find its way by a looping detour.

In a scanty widening of the main canyon a few hundred yards below the station a graders' camp of rude slab shelters is turning out its horde of wild-looking Italians; and on a crooked spur track fronting the shanties blue wood-smoke is curling lazily upward from the kitchen car of a construction train.

All night long the Rosemary, drawn by the sturdiest of mountain-climbing locomotives, had stormed onward and upward from the valley of the Grand, through black defiles and around the shrugged shoulders of the mighty peaks to find a resting-place in the white-robed dawn on the siding at Argentine. The lightest of sleepers, Virginia had awakened when the special was passing through Carbonate; and, drawing the berth curtain, she had lain for an hour watching the solemn procession of cliffs and peaks wheeling in stately and orderly array against the inky background of sky. Now, in the steel-blue dawn, she was—or thought she was—the first member of the party to dress and steal out upon the railed platform to look abroad upon the wondrous scene in the canyon.

But her reverie, trance-like in its wordless enthusiasm, was presently broken by a voice behind her—the voice, namely, of Mr. Arthur Jastrow.

“What a howling wilderness, to be sure, isn't it?” said the secretary, twirling his eyeglasses by the cord and looking, as he felt, interminably bored.

“No, indeed; anything but that,” she retorted warmly. “It is grander than anything I ever imagined. I wish there were a piano in the car. It makes me fairly ache to set it in some form of expression, and music is the only form I know.”

“I'm glad if it doesn't bore you,” he rejoined, willing to agree with her for the sake of prolonging the interview. “But to me it is nothing more than a dreary wilderness, as I say; a barren, rock-ribbed gulch affording an indifferent right of way for two railroads.”

“For one,” she corrected, in a quick upflash of loyalty for her kin.

The secretary shifted his gaze from the mountains to the maiden and smiled. She was exceedingly good to look upon—high-bred, queenly, and just now the fine fire of enthusiasm quickened her pulses and sent the rare flush to neck and cheek.

Jastrow the cold-eyed, the business automaton, set to go off with a click at Mr. Somerville Darrah's touch, had ambitions not automatic. Some day he meant to put the world of business under foot as a conqueror, standing triumphant on the apex of that pyramid of success which the Mr. Somerville Darrahs were so painstakingly uprearing. When that day should come, there would need to be an establishment, a menage, a queen for the kingdom of success. Summing her up for the hundredth time since the beginning of the westward flight, he thought Miss Carteret would fill the requirements passing well.

But this was a divagation, and he pulled himself back to the askings of the moment, agreeing with her again without reference to his private convictions.

“For one, I should have said,” he amended. “We mean to have it that way, though an unprejudiced onlooker might be foolish enough to say that there is a pretty good present prospect of two.”

But Miss Carteret was in a contradictory mood. Moreover, she was a woman, and the way to a woman's confidence does not lie through the neutral country of easy compliance.

“If you won't take the other side, I will,” she said. “There will be two.”

Jastrow acquiesced a second time.

“I shouldn't wonder. Our competitor's road seems to be only a question of time—a very short time, judging from the number of men turning out in the track gang down yonder.”

Virginia leaned over the railing to look past the car and the dovecote station shading her eyes to shut out the snow-blink from the sun-fired peaks.

“Why, they are soldiers!” she exclaimed. “At least, some of them have guns

on their shoulders. And see—they are forming in line!”

The secretary adjusted his eye-glasses.

“By Jove! you are right; they have armed the track force. The new chief of construction doesn't mean to take any chances of being shaken loose by main strength. Here they come.”

The end of track of the new line was diagonally across the creek from the Rosemary's berth and a short pistol-shot farther down stream. But to advance it to a point opposite the private car, and to gain the altitude of the high embankment directly across from the station, the new line turned short out of the main canyon at the mouth of the intersecting gorge, describing a long, U-shaped curve around the head of the lateral ravine and doubling back upon itself to reenter the canyon proper at the higher elevation.

The curve which was the beginning of this U-shaped loop was the morning's scene of action, and the Utah track-layers, two hundred strong, moved to the front in orderly array, with armed guards as flankers for the handcar load of rails which the men were pushing up the grade.

Jastrow darted into the car, and a moment later his place on the observation platform was taken by a wrathful industry colonel fresh from his dressing-room—so fresh, indeed, that he was coatless, hatless, and collarless, and with the dripping bath-sponge clutched like a missile to hurl at the impudent invaders on the opposite side of the canyon.

“Hah! wouldn't wait until a man could get into his clothes!” he rasped, apostrophizing the Utah's new chief of construction. “Jastrow! Faveh me instantly, seh! Hustle up to the camp there and turn out the constable, town-marshal, or whatever he is. Tell him I have a writ for him to serve. Run, seh!”

The secretary appeared and disappeared like a marionette when the string has been jerked by a vigorous hand, and Virginia smiled—this without prejudice to a very acute appreciation of the grave possibilities which were preparing themselves. But having her share of the militant quality which made her uncle what he was, she stood her ground.

“Aren't you afraid you will take cold, Uncle Somerville?” she asked archly; and the Rajah came suddenly to a sense of his incompleteness and went in to finish his ablutions against the opening of the battle actual.

At first Virginia thought she would follow him. When Mercury Jastrow should return with the officer of the law there would be trouble of some sort, and the woman in her shrank from the witnessing of it. But at the same instant the blood of the fighting Carterets asserted itself and she resolved to stay.

“I wonder what uncle hopes to be able to do?” she mused. “Will a little town constable with a bit of signed paper from some lawyer or judge be mighty enough to stop all that furious activity over there? It's more than incredible.”

From that she fell to watching the activity and the orderly purpose of it. A length of steel, with men clustering like bees upon it, would slide from its place on the hand-car to fall with a frosty clang on the cross-ties. Instantly the hammermen would pounce upon it. One would fall upon hands and knees to “sight” it into place; two others would slide the squeaking track-gage along its inner edge; a quartet, working like the component parts of a faultless mechanism, would tap the fixing spikes into the wood; and then at a signal a dozen of the heavy pointed hammers swung aloft and a rhythmic volley of resounding blows clamped the rail into permanence on its wooden bed.

Ahead of the steel-layers were the Italians placing the cross-ties in position to receive the track, and here the foreman's badge of office and scepter was a pick-handle. Above all the clamor and the shoutings Virginia could hear the bull-bellow of this foreman roaring out his commands—in terms happily not understandable to her; and once she drew back with a little cry of womanly shrinking when the pick-handle thwacked upon the shoulders of one who lagged.

It was this bit of brutality which enabled her to single out Winton in the throng of workers. He heard the blow, and the oath that went with it, and she saw him run forward to wrench the bludgeon from the bully's hands and fling it afar. What words emphasized the act she could not hear, but the little deed of swift justice thrilled her curiously, and her heart warmed to him as it had when he had thrown off his coat to fall to work on the derailed engine of the Limited.

“That was fine!” she said to herself. “Most men in his place wouldn't care, so long as the work was done, and done quickly. I wonder if—oh, you startled me!”

It was Mr. Somerville Darrah again, clothed upon and in his right mind; otherwise the mind of a master of men who will brook neither defeat at the hands of an antagonist nor disobedience on the part of his following. He was scowling fiercely across at the Utah activities when she spoke, but at her exclamation the frown softened into a smile for his favorite niece.

“Startled you, eh? Pahdon me, my deah Virginia. But as I am about to startle some one else, perhaps you would better go in to your aunt.”

She put a hand on his arm. “Please let me stay out here, Uncle Somerville,” she said. “I'll be good and not get in the way.”

He shook his head, in deprecation rather than in refusal.

“An officer will be here right soon now to make an arrest. There may be a

fight, or at least trouble of a sort you wouldn't care to see, my deah.”

“Is it—is it Mr. Winton?” she asked.

He nodded.

“What has he been doing—besides being 'The Enemy'?”

The Rajah's smile was ferocious.

“Just now he is trespassing, and directing others to trespass, upon private property. Do you see that dump up there on the mountain?—the hole that looks like a mouth with a long gray beard hanging below it? That is a mine, and its claim runs down across the track where Misteh Winton is just now spiking his rails.”

“But, I don't understand,” she began; then she stopped short and clung to the strong arm. A man in a wide-flapped hat and cowboy *chaparejos*, with a revolver on either hip, was crossing the stream on the ice-bridge to scramble up the embankment of the new line.

“The officer?” she asked in an awed whisper.

The Rajah made a sign of assent. Then, identifying Winton in the throng of workers, he forgot Virginia's presence. “Confound him!” he fumed. “I'd give a thousand dollars if he'd faveh me by showing fight so we could lock him up on a criminal count!”

“Why, Uncle Somerville!” she cried.

But there was no time for reproaches. The leather-breeched person parading as the Argentine town-marshal had climbed the embankment, and, singling out his man, was reading his warrant.

Contrary to Mr. Darrah's expressed hope, Winton submitted quietly. With a word to his men—a word that stopped the strenuous labor-battle as suddenly as it had begun—he turned to pick his way down the rough hillside at the heels of the marshal.

For some reason that she could never have set out in words Virginia was distinctly disappointed. It was no part of her desire to see the conflict blaze up in violence, but it nettled her to see Winton give up so easily. Some such thought as this had possession of her while the marshal and his prisoner were picking their way across the ice, and she was hoping that Winton would give her a chance to requite him, if only with a look.

But it was Town-Marshal Peter Biggin, affectionately known to his constituents as “Bigginjin Pete,” who gave her the coveted opportunity. Instead of disappearing decently with his captive, the marshal made the mistake of his

life by marching Winton up the track to the private car, thrusting him forward, and saying: “Here's yer meat, Guv'nor. What-all 'ud ye like fer me to do with hit now I've got it?”

Now it is safe to assume that the Rajah had no intention of appearing thus openly as the instigator of Winton's arrest. Hence, if a fierce scowl and a wordless oath could maim, it is to be feared that the overzealous Mr. Biggin would have been physically disqualified on the spot. As it was, Mr. Darrah's ebullient wrath could find no adequate speech forms, and in the eloquent little pause Winton had time to smile up at Miss Carteret and to wish her the pleasantest of good-mornings.

But the Rajah's handicap was not permanent.

“Confound you, seh!” he exploded. “I'm not a justice of the peace! If you've made an arrest, you must have had a warrant for it, and you ought to know what to do with your prisoneh.”

“I'm dashed if I do,” objected the simple-hearted Mr. Biggin. “I allowed you wanted him.”

Winton laughed openly.

“Simplify it for him, Mr. Darrah. We all know that it was your move to stop the work, and you have stopped it—for the moment. What is the charge, and where is it answerable?”

The Rajah dropped the mask and spoke to the point.

“The cha'ge, seh, is trespass, and it is answerable in Judge Whitcomb's cou't in Carbonate. The plaintiff in this particular case is John Doe, the supposable owneh of that mining claim up yondeh. In the next it will probably be Richa'd Roe. You are fighting a losing battle, seh.”

Winton's smile showed his teeth.

“That remains to be seen,” he countered coolly.

The Rajah waved a shapely hand toward the opposite embankment, where the tracklayers were idling in silent groups waiting for some one in authority to tell them what to do.

“We can do that every day, Misteh Winton. And each separate individual arrest will cost your company twelve hours, or such a matteh—the time required for you to go to Carbonate to give bond for your appearance.”

During this colloquy Virginia had held her ground stubbornly, this though she felt intuitively that it would be the greatest possible relief to all three of these men if she would go away.

But now a curious struggle as of a divided allegiance was holding her. Of course, she wanted Mr. Somerville Darrah to win. Since he was its advocate, his cause must be righteous and just. But against this dutiful convincement there was a rebellious hope that Winton would not allow himself to be beaten; or, rather, it was a feeling that she would never forgive him if he should.

So it was that she stood with face averted lest he should see her eyes and read the rebellious hope in them. And in spite of the precaution he both saw and read, and made answer to the Rajah's ultimatum accordingly.

“Do your worst, Mr. Darrah. We have some twenty miles of steel to lay to take us into the Carbonate yards. That steel shall go down in spite of anything you can do to prevent it.”

Virginia waited breathless for her uncle's reply to this cool defiance. Quite contrary to all precedent, it was mildly expostulatory.

“It grieves me, seh, to find you so determined to cou't failure,” he began; and when the whistle of the upcoming Carbonate train gave him leave to go on: “Constable, you will find transpo'tation for yourself and one in the hands of the station agent. Misteh Winton, that is your train. I wish you good-morning and a pleasant journey. Come, Virginia, we shall be late to ouh breakfast.”

Winton walked back to the station at the heels of his captor, cudgeling his brain to devise some means of getting word to Adams. Happily the Technologian, who had been unloading steel at the construction camp, had been told of the arrest, and when Winton reached the station he found his assistant waiting for him.

But now the train was at hand and time had grown suddenly precious. Winton turned short upon the marshal.

“This is not a criminal matter, Mr. Biggin: will you give me a moment with my friend?”

The ex-cowboy grinned. “Bet your life I will. I ain't lovin' that old b'iler-buster in the private car none too hard.” And he went in to get the passes.

“What's up?” queried Adams, forgetting his drawl for once in a way.

“An arrest—trumped-up charge of trespass on that mining claim up yonder. But I've got to go to Carbonate to answer the charge and give bonds, just the same.”

“Any instructions?”

“Yes. When the train is out of sight and hearing, you get back over there and drive that track-laying for every foot there is in it.”

Adams nodded. “I'll do it, and get myself locked up, I suppose.”

“No, you won't; that's the beauty of it. The majesty of the law—all there is of it in Argentine—goes with me to Carbonate in the person of the town-marshal.”

“Oh, good—succulently good! Well, so long. I'll look for you back on the evening train?”

“Sure,” was the confident reply, “if the Rajah doesn't order it to be abandoned on my poor account.”

Ten minutes later, when the train had gone storming on its way to Carbonate and the Rosemary party was at breakfast, the clank of steel and the chanteys of the hammermen on the other side of the canyon began again with renewed vigor. The Rajah threw up his head like a war-horse scenting the battle from afar and laid his commands upon the long-suffering secretary.

“Faveh me, Jastrow. Get out there and see what they are doing, seh.”

The secretary was back in the shortest possible interval, and his report was concise and business-like.

“Work under full headway again, in charge of a fellow who wears a billy-cock hat and smokes cigarettes.”

“Mr. Morton P. Adams,” said Virginia, recognizing the description. “Will you have him arrested too, Uncle Somerville?”

But the Rajah rose hastily without replying and went to his office state-room, followed, shadow-like, by the obsequious Jastrow.

It was some little time after breakfast, and Virginia and the Reverend Billy were doing a constitutional on the plank platform at the station, when the secretary came down from the car on his way to the telegraph office.

It was Virginia who stopped him. “What do we do next, Mr. Jastrow?” she said; “call in the United States Army?”

For reply he handed her a telegram, damp from the copying press. It was addressed to the superintendent of the C. G. R. at Carbonate, and she read it without scruple.

“Have the Sheriff of Ute County swear in a dozen deputies and come with them by special train to Argentine. Revive all possible titles to abandoned mining claims on line of the Utah Extension, and have Sheriff Deckert bring blank warrants to cover any emergency.

“DARRAH V.-P.”

“That's one of them,” said the secretary. “I daren't show you the other.”

“Oh, please!” she said, holding out her hand, while the Reverend Billy considerately turned his back.

Jastrow weighed the chances of detection. It was little enough he could do to lay her under obligations to him, and he was willing to do that little as he could. “I guess I can trust you,” he said, and gave her the second square of press-damp paper.

Like the first, it was addressed to the superintendent at Carbonate. But this time the brown eyes flashed and her breath came quickly as she read the vice-president's cold-blooded after-thought:

“Town-Marshal Biggin will arrive in Carbonate on Number 201 this A.M. with a prisoner. Have our attorneys see to it that the man is promptly jailed in default of bond. If he is set at liberty, as he is likely to be, I shall trust you to arrange for his rearrest and detention at all hazards.

“D.”

V. THE LANDSLIDE

Virginia took the first step in the perilous path of the strategist when she handed the incendiary telegram back to Jastrow.

“Poor Mr. Winton!” she said, with the real sympathy in the words made most obviously perfunctory by the tone. “What a world of possibilities there is masquerading behind that little word 'arrange.' Tell me more about it, Mr. Jastrow. How will they 'arrange' it?”

“Winton's rearrest? Nothing easier in a tough mining-camp like Carbonate, I should say.”

“Yes, but how?”

“I can't prophesy how Grafton will go about it, but I know what I should do.”

Virginia's smile was irresistible, but there was a look in the deepest depth of the brown eyes that was sifting Mr. Arthur Jastrow to the innermost sand-heap of his desert nature.

“How would you do it, Mr. Napoleon Jastrow?” she asked, giving him the exact fillip on the side of gratified vanity.

“Oh, I'd fix him. He is in a frame of mind right now; and by the time the lawyers are through drilling him in the trespass affair, he'll be just spoiling for a row with somebody.”

“Do you think so? Oh, how delicious! And then what?”

“Then I'd hire some plug-ugly to stumble up against him and pick a quarrel with him. He'd do the rest—and land in the lock-up.”

Those who knew her best said it was a warning to be heeded in Miss Virginia Carteret when her eyes were downcast and her voice sank to its softest cadence.

“Why, certainly; how simple!” she said, taking her cousin's arm again; and the secretary went in to set the wires at work in Winton's affair.

Now Miss Carteret was a woman in every fiber of her, but among her gifts she might have counted some that were, to say the least, super-feminine. One of these was a measure of discretion which would have been fairly creditable in a past master of diplomacy. So, while the sympathetic part of her was crying out for a chance to talk Winton's threatened danger over with some one, she lent herself outwardly to the Reverend Billy's mood—which was one of scenic

enthusiasm; this without prejudice to a growing determination to intervene in behalf of fair play for Winton if she could find a way.

But the way obstinately refused to discover itself. The simple thing to do would be to appeal to her uncle's sense of justice. It was not like him to fight with ignoble weapons, she thought, and a tactful word in season might make him recall the order to the superintendent. But she could not make the appeal without betraying Jastrow. She knew well enough that the secretary had no right to show her the telegrams; knew also that Mr. Somerville Darrah's first word would be a demand to know how she had learned the company's business secrets. Regarding Jastrow as little as a high-bred young woman to whom sentiment is as the breath of life can regard a man who is quite devoid of it, she was still far enough from the thought of effacing him.

To this expedient there was an unhopeful alternative: namely, the sending, by the Reverend Billy, or, in the last resort, by herself, of a warning message to Winton. But there were obstacles seemingly insuperable. She had not the faintest notion of how such a warning should be addressed; and again, the operator at Argentine was a Colorado and Grand River employee, doubtless loyal to his salt, in which case the warning message would never get beyond his waste-basket.

“Getting too chilly for you out here? Want to go in?” asked the Reverend Billy, when the scenic enthusiasm began to outwear itself.

“No; but I am tired of the sentry-go part of it—ten steps and a turn,” she confessed. “Can't we walk on the track a little way?”

Calvert saw no reason why they might not, and accordingly helped her over to the snow-encrusted path between the rails.

“We can trot down and have a look at their construction camp, if you like,” he suggested, and thitherward they went.

There was not much to see, after all, as the Reverend Billy remarked when they had reached a coign of vantage below the curve. A string of use-worn bunk cars; a “dinkey” caboose serving as the home on wheels of the chief of construction and his assistant; a crooked siding with a gang of dark-skinned laborers at work unloading a car of steel. These in the immediate foreground; and a little way apart, perched high enough on the steep slope of the mountain side to be out of the camp turmoil, a small structure, half plank and half canvas —to wit, the end-of-track telegraph office.

It was Virginia who first marked the boxed-up tent standing on the slope.

“What do you suppose that little house-tent is for?” she asked.

“I don't know,” said Calvert. Then he saw the wires and ventured a guess which hit the mark.

“I didn't suppose they would have a telegraph office,” she commented, with hope rising again.

“Oh, yes; they'd have to have a wire—one of their own. Under the circumstances they could hardly use ours.”

“No,” she rejoined absently. She was scanning the group of steel-handlers in the hope that a young man in a billy-cock hat and with a cigarette between his lips would shortly reveal himself. She found him after a time and turned quickly to her cousin.

“There is Mr. Adams down by the engine. Do you think he would come over and speak to us if he knew we were here?”

The Reverend Billy's smile was of honest admiration.

“How could you doubt it? Wait here a minute and I'll call him for you.”

He was gone before she could reply—across the ice-bridge spanning one of the pools, and up the rough, frozen embankment of the new line. There were armed guards here, too, as well as at the front, and one of them halted him at the picket line. But Adams saw and recognized him, and presently the two were crossing to where Virginia stood waiting for them.

“Eheu! what a little world we live in, Miss Virginia! Who would have thought of meeting you here?” said Adams, taking her hand at the precise elevation prescribed by good form—Boston good form.

“The shock is mutual,” she laughed. “I must say that you and Mr. Winton have chosen a highly unconventional environment for your sketching-field.”

“I'm down,” he admitted cheerfully; “please don't trample on me. But really, it wasn't all fib. Jack does do things with a pencil—other things besides maps and working profiles, I mean. Won't you come over and let me do the honors of the studio?”—with a grandiloquent arm-sweep meant to include the construction camp in general and the “dinkey” caboose-car in particular.

It was the invitation she would have angled for, but she was too wise to assent too readily.

“Oh, no; I think we mustn't. I'm afraid Mr. Winton might not like it.”

“Not like it? If you'll come he'll never forgive himself for not being here to 'shoot up' the camp for you in person. He is away, you know; gone to Carbonate for the day.”

“Ought we to go, Cousin Billy?” she asked, shifting, not the decision, but the

responsibility for it, to broader shoulders.

“Why not, if you care to?” said the athlete, to whom right-of-way fights were mere matters of business in no wise conflicting with the social ameliorations.

Virginia hesitated. There was a thing to be said to Mr. Adams, and that without delay; but how could she say it with her cousin standing by to make an impossible trio out of any attempted duet confidential? A willingness to see that Winton had fair play need not carry with it an open desertion to the enemy. She must not forget to be loyal to her salt; and, besides, Mr. Somerville Darrah's righteous indignation was a possibility not lightly to be ignored.

But, the upshot of the hesitant pause was a decision to brave the consequences —all of them; so she took Calvert's arm for the slippery crossing of the ice-bridge.

Once on his own domain, Adams did the honors of the camp as thoroughly and conscientiously as if the hour held no care heavier than the entertainment of Miss Virginia Carteret. He explained the system under which the material was kept moving forward to the ever-advancing front; let her watch the rhythmic swing and slide of the rails from the car to the benches; took her up into the cab of the big “octopod” locomotive; gave her a chance to peep into the camp kitchen car; and concluded by handing her up the steps of the “dinkey.”

“Oh, how comfortable!” she exclaimed, when he had shown her all the space-saving contrivances of the field office. “And this is where you and Mr. Winton work?”

“It is where we eat and sleep,” corrected Adams. “And speaking of eating: it is hopelessly the wrong end of the day,—or it would be in Boston,—but our Chinaman won't know the difference. Let me have him make you a dish of tea,”—and the order was given before she could protest.

“While we are waiting for Ah Foo I'll show you some of Jack's sketches,” he went on, finding a portfolio and opening it upon the drawing-board.

“Are you quite sure Mr. Winton won't mind?” she asked.

“Mind? He'd give a month's pay to be here to show them himself. He is peacock vain of his one small accomplishment, Winton is—bores me to death with it sometimes.”

“Really?” was the mocking rejoinder, and they began to look at the sketches.

They were heads, most of them, impressionistic studies in pencil or pastel, with now and then a pen-and-ink bearing evidence of more painstaking after-work. They were made on bits of map paper, the backs of old letters, and not a

few on leaves torn from an engineer's note-book.

“They don't count for much in an artistic way,” said Adams, with the brutal frankness of a friendly critic, “but they will serve to show you that I wasn't all kinds of an embroiderer when I was telling you about Winton's proclivities the other day.”

“I shouldn't apologize for that, if I were you,” she retorted. “It is well past apology, don't you think?” And then: “What is this one?”

They had come to the last of the sketches, which was a rude map. It was penciled on the leaf of a memorandum, and Adams recognized it as the outline Winton had made and used in explaining the right-of-way entanglement.

“It is a map,” he said; “one that Jack drew day before yesterday when he was trying to make me understand the situation up here. I wonder why he kept it? Is there anything on the other side?”

She turned the leaf, and they both went speechless for the moment. The reverse of the scrap of cross-ruled paper held a very fair likeness of a face which Virginia's mirror had oftenest portrayed: a sketch setting forth in a few vigorous strokes of the pencil the impressionist's ideal of the “goddess fresh from the bath.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Adams, when he could find the word for his surprise. Then he tried to turn it off lightly. “There is a good bit more of the artist in Jack than I have been giving him credit for. Don't you know, he must have got the notion for that between two half-seconds—when you recognized me on the platform at Kansas City. It's wonderful!”

“So very wonderful that I think I shall keep it,” she rejoined, not without a touch of austerity. Then she added: “Mr. Winton will probably never miss it. If he does, you will have to explain the best way you can.” And Adams could only say “By Jove!” again, and busy himself with pouring the tea which Ah Foo had brought in.

In the nature of things the tea-drinking in the stuffy “dinkey” drawing-room was not prolonged. Time was flying. Virginia's errand of mercy was not yet accomplished, and Aunt Martha in her character of anxious chaperon was not to be forgotten. Also, Miss Carteret had a feeling that under his well-bred exterior Mr. Morton P. Adams was chafing like any barbarian industry captain at this unwarrantable intrusion and interruption.

So presently they all forthfared into the sun-bright, snow-blinding, out-of-door world, and Virginia gathered up her courage and took her dilemma by the horns.

“I believe I have seen everything now except that tent-place up there,” she asserted, groping purposefully for her opening.

Adams called up another smile of acquiescence. “That is our telegraph office. Would you care to see it?” He was of those who shirk all or shirk nothing.

“I don't know why I should care to, but I do,” she replied, with charming and childlike wilfulness; so the three of them trudged up the slippery path to the operator's den on the slope.

Not to evade his hospitable duty in any part, Adams explained the use and need of a “front” wire, and Miss Carteret was properly interested.

“How convenient!” she commented. “And you can come up here and talk to anybody you like—just as if it were a telephone?”

“To anyone in the company's service,” amended Adams. “It is not a commercial wire.”

“Then let us send a message to Mr. Winton,” she suggested, playing the part of the capricious *ingenue* to the very upcast of a pair of mischievous eyes. “I'll write it and you may sign it.”

Adams stretched his complaisance the necessary additional inch and gave her a pencil and a pad of blanks. She wrote rapidly:

“Miss Carteret has been here admiring your drawings. She took one of them away with her, and I couldn't stop her without being rude. You shouldn't have done it without asking her permission. She says—”

“Oh, dear! I am making it awfully long. Does it cost so much a word?”

“No,” said Adams, not without an effort. He was beginning to be distinctly disappointed in Miss Virginia, and was inwardly wondering what piece of girlish frivolity he was expected to sign and send to his chief. Meanwhile she went on writing:

“—I am to tell you not to get into any fresh trouble—not to let anyone else get you into trouble; by which I infer she means that some attempt will be made to keep you from returning on the evening train.”

“There, can you send all that?” she asked sweetly, giving the pad to her host.

Adams read the first part of the letter length telegram with inward groanings, but the generous purpose of it struck him like a whip-blow when he came to the thinly-veiled warning. Also it shamed him for his unworthy judgment of Virginia.

“I thank you very heartily, Miss Carteret,” he said humbly. “It shall be sent word for word.” Then, for the Reverend William's benefit: “Winton deserves all sorts of a snubbing for taking liberties with your portrait. I'll see he gets more

when he comes back."

Here the matter rested; and, having done what she conceived to be her charitable duty, Virginia was as anxious to get away as heart—the heart of a slightly bored Reverend Billy, for instance—could wish.

So they bade Adams good-by and picked their way down the frozen embankment and across the ice-bridge; down and across and back to the Rosemary, where they found a perturbed chaperon in a flutter of solicitude arising upon their mysterious disappearance and long absence.

"It may be just as well not to tell any of them where we have been," said Virginia in an aside to her cousin. And so the incident of tea-drinking in the enemy's camp was safely put away like a little personal note in its envelop with the flap gummed down.

VI. THE RAJAH GIVES AN ORDER

While Adams was dispensing commissary tea in iron-stone china cups to his two guests in the “dinkey” field office, his chief, taking the Rosemary's night run in reverse in the company of Town-Marshal Biggin, was turning the Rajah's coup into a small Utah profit.

Having come upon the ground late the night before, and from the opposite direction, he had seen nothing of the extension grade west of Argentine. Hence the enforced journey to Carbonate only anticipated an inspection trip which he had intended to make as soon as he had seated Adams firmly in the track-laying saddle.

Not to miss his opportunity, at the first curve beyond Argentine he passed his cigar-case to Biggin and asked permission to ride on the rear platform of the day-coach for inspection purposes.

“Say, pardner, what do you take me fer, anyhow?” was the reproachful rejoinder.

“For a gentleman in disguise,” said Winton promptly.

“Sim'larly, I do you; savvy? You tell me you ain't goin' to stampede, and you ride anywhere you blame please. See? This here C. G. R. outfit ain't got no surcingle on me.”

Winton smiled.

“I haven't any notion of stampeding. As it happens, I'm only a day ahead of time. I should have made this run to-morrow of my own accord to have a look at the extension grade. You will find me on the rear platform when you want me.”

“Good enough,” was the reply; and Winton went to his post of observation.

Greatly to his satisfaction, he found that the trip over the C. G. R. answered every purpose of a preliminary inspection of the Utah grade beyond Argentine. For seventeen of the twenty miles the two lines were scarcely more than a stone's throw apart, and when Biggin joined him at the junction above Carbonate he had his note-book well filled with the necessary data.

“Make it, all right?” inquired the friendly bailiff.

“Yes, thanks. Have another cigar?”

“Don't care if I do. Say, that old fire-eater back yonder in the private car has

got a mighty pretty gal, ain't he?”

“The young lady is his niece,” said Winton, wishing that Mr. Biggin would find other food for comment.

“I don't care; she's pretty as a Jersey two-year-old.”

“It's a fine day,” observed Winton; and then, to background Miss Carteret effectually as a topic: “How do the people of Argentine feel about the opposition to our line?”

“They're red-hot; you can put your money on that. The C. G. R.'s a sure-enough tail-twister where there ain't no competition. Your road'll get every pound of ore in the camp if it ever gets through.”

Winton made a mental note of this up-cast of public opinion, and set it over against the friendly attitude of the official Mr. Biggin. It was very evident that the town-marshal was serving the Rajah's purpose only because he had to.

“I suppose you stand with your townsmen on that, don't you?” he ventured.

“Now you're shouting: that's me.”

“Then if that is the case, we won't take this little holiday of ours any harder than we can help. When the court business is settled—it won't take very long—you are to consider yourself my guest. We stop at the Buckingham.”

“Oh, we do, do we? Say, pardner, that's white—mighty white. If I'd 'a' been an inch or so more'n half awake this morning when that old b'iler-buster's hired man routed me out, I'd 'a' told him to go to blazes with his warrant. Nex' time I will.”

Winton shook his head. “There isn't going to be any 'next time,' Peter, my son,” he prophesied. “When Mr. Darrah gets fairly down to business he'll throw bigger chunks than the Argentine town-marshal at us.”

By this time the train was slowing into Carbonate, and a few minutes after the stop at the crowded platform they were making their way up the single bustling street of the town to the court-house.

“Ever see so many tin-horns and bunco people bunched in all your round-ups?” said Biggin, as they elbowed through the uneasy shifting groups in front of the hotel.

“Not often,” Winton admitted. “But it's the luck of the big camps: they are the dumping-grounds of the world while the high pressure is on.”

The ex-range-rider turned on the courthouse steps to look the sidewalk loungers over with narrowing eyes.

“There's Sheeny Mike and Big Otto and half a dozen others right there in front

o' the Buckingham that couldn't stay to breathe twice in Argentine. And this town's got a po-lice!”—the comment with lip-curling scorn.

“It also has a county court which is probably waiting for us,” said Winton; whereupon they went in to appease the offended majesty of the law.

As Winton had predicted, his answer to the court summons was a mere formality. On parting with his chief at the Argentine station platform, Adams' first care had been to wire news of the arrest to the Utah headquarters. Hence Winton found the company's attorney waiting for him in Judge Whitcomb's courtroom, and his release on an appearance bond was only a matter of moments.

The legal affair dismissed, there ensued a weary interval of time-killing. There was no train back to Argentine until nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, and the hours dragged heavily for the two, who had nothing to do but wait. Biggin endured his part of it manfully till the midday dinner had been discussed; then he drifted off with one of Winton's cigars between his teeth, saying that he should “take poison” and shoot up the town if he could not find some more peaceful means of keeping his blood in circulation.

It was a little after three o'clock, and Winton was sitting at the writing-table in the lobby of the hotel elaborating his hasty notebook data of the morning's inspection, when a boy came in with a telegram. The young engineer was not so deeply engrossed in his work as to be deaf to the colloquy.

“Mr. John Winton? Yes, he is here somewhere,” said the clerk in answer to the boy's question; and after an identifying glance: “There he is—over at the writing-table.”

Winton turned in his chair and saw the boy coming toward him; also he saw the ruffian pointed out by Biggin from the court-house steps and labeled “Sheeny Mike” lounging up to the clerk's desk for a whispered exchange of words with the bediamonded gentleman behind it.

What followed was cataclysmic in its way. The lounger took three staggering lurches toward Winton, brushed the messenger boy aside, and burst out in a storm of maudlin invective.

“Sign yerself 'Winton' now, do yet ye lowdown, turkey-trodden—”

“One minute,” said Winton curtly, taking the telegram from the boy and signing for it.

“I'll give ye more'n ye can carry away in less'n half that time—see?” was the minatory retort; and the threat was made good by an awkward buffet which

would have knocked the engineer out of his chair if he had remained in it.

Now Winton's eyes were gray and steadfast, but his hair was of that shade of brown which takes the tint of dull copper in certain lights, and he had a temper which went with the red in his hair rather than with the gray in his eyes. Wherefore his attempt to placate his assailant was something less than diplomatic.

“You drunken scoundrel!” he snapped. “If you don't go about your business and let me alone, I'll turn you over to the police with a broken bone or two!”

The bully's answer was a blow delivered straight from the shoulder—too straight to harmonize with the fiction of drunkenness. Winton saw the sober purpose in it and went battle-mad, as a hasty man will. Being a skilful boxer,—which his antagonist was not,—he did what he had to do neatly and with commendable despatch. Down, up; down, up; down a third time, and then the bystanders interfered.

“Hold on!”

“That'll do!”

“Don't you see he's drunk?”

“Enough's as good as a feast—let him go.”

Winton's blood was up, but he desisted, breathing threatenings. Whereat Biggin shouldered his way into the circle.

“Pay your bill and let's hike out o' this, *pronto*!” he said in a low tone. “You ain't got no time to fool with a Carbonate justice shop.”

But Winton was not to be brought to his senses so easily.

“Run away from that swine? Not if I know it. Let him take it into court if he wants to. I'll be there, too.”

The beaten one was up now and apparently looking for an officer.

“I'm takin' ye all to witness,” he rasped. “I was on'y askin' him to cash up what he lost to me las' night, and he jumps me. But I'll stick him if there's any law in this camp.”

Now all this time Winton had been holding the unopened telegram crumpled in his fist, but when Biggin pushed him out of the circle and thrust him up to the clerk's desk, he bethought him to read the message. It was Virginia's warning, signed by Adams, and a single glance at the closing sentence was enough to cool him suddenly.

“Pay the bill, Biggin, and join me in the billiard-room, quick!” he whispered,

pressing money into the town-marshal's hand and losing himself in the crowd. And when Biggin had obeyed his instructions: “Now for a back way out of this, if there is one. We'll have to take to the hills till train time.”

They found a way through the bar and out into a side street leading abruptly up to the spruce-clad hills behind the town. Biggin held his peace until they were safe from immediate danger of pursuit. Then his curiosity got the better of him.

“Didn't take you more'n a week to change your mind about pullin' it off with that tinhorn scrapper in the courts, did it?”

“No,” said Winton.

“'Tain't none o' my business, but I'd like to know what stampeded you.”

“A telegram,”—shortly. “It was a put-up job to have me locked up on a criminal charge, and so hold me out another day.”

Biggin grinned. “The old b'iler-buster again. Say, he's a holy terror, ain't he?”

“He doesn't mean to let me build my railroad if he can help it.”

The ex-cowboy found his sack of chip tobacco and dexterously rolled a cigarette in a bit of brown wrapping-paper.

“If that's the game, Mr. Sheeny Mike, or his backers, will be most likely to play it to a finish, don't you guess?”

“How?”

“By havin' a po-liceman layin' for you at the train.”

“I hadn't thought of that.”

“Well, I can think you out of it, I reckon. The branch train is a 'commodation, and it'll stop most anywhere if you throw up your hand at it. We can take out through the woods and across the hills, and mog up the track a piece. How'll that do?”

“It will do for me, but there is no need of your tramping when you can just as well ride.”

But now that side of Mr. Peter Biggin which endears him and his kind to every man who has ever shared his lonely round-ups, or broken bread with him in his comfortless shack, came uppermost.

“What do you take me fer?” was the way it vocalized itself; but there was more than a formal oath of loyal allegiance in the curt question.

“For a man and a brother,” said Winton heartily; and they set out together to waylay the outgoing train at some point beyond the danger limit.

It was accomplished without further mishap, and the short winter day was

darkening to twilight when the train came in sight and the engineer slowed to their signal. They climbed aboard, and when they had found a seat in the smoker the chief of construction spoke to the ex-cowboy as to a friend.

“I hope Adams has knocked out a good day's work for us,” he said.

“Your pardner with the store hat and the stinkin' cigaroots?—he's all right,” said Biggin; and it so chanced that at the precise moment of the saying the subject of it was standing with the foreman of track-layers at a gap in the new line just beyond and above the Rosemary's siding at Argentine, his day's work ended, and his men loaded on the flats for the run down to camp over the lately-laid rails of the lateral loop.

“Not such a bad day, considering the newness of us and the bridge at the head of the gulch,” he said, half to himself. And then more pointedly to the foreman: “Bridge-builders to the front at the first crack of dawn, Mike. Why wasn't this break filled in the grading?”

“Sure, sorr, 'tis a dhrain it is,” said the Irishman; “from the placer up beyant,” he added, pointing to a washed-out excoriation on the steep upper slope of the mountain. “Major Evarts did be tellin' us we'd have the lawyers afther us hot-fut again if we didn't be lavin' ut open the full width.”

“Mmph!” said Adams, looking the ground over with a critical eye. “It's a bad bit. It wouldn't take much to bring that whole slide down on us if it wasn't frozen solid. Who owns the placer?”

“Two fellies over in Carbonate. The company did be thryin' to buy the claim, but the sharps wouldn't sell—bein' put up to hold ut by thim C. G. R. divils. It's more throuble we'll be havin' here, I'm thinking.”

While they lingered a shrill whistle, echoing like an eldrich laugh among the cliffs of the upper gorge, announced the coming of a train from the direction of Carbonate. Adams looked at his watch.

“I'd like to know what that is,” he mused. “It's an hour too soon for the accommodation. By Jove!”

The exclamation directed itself at a one-car train which came thundering down the canyon to pull in on the siding beyond the Rosemary. The car was a passenger coach, well-lighted, and from his post on the embankment Adams could see armed men filling the windows. Michael Branagan saw them, too, and the fighting Celt in him rose to the occasion.

“'Tis Donnybrook Fair we've come to this time, Misther Adams. Shall I call up the b'ys wid their guns?”

“Not yet. Let's wait and see what happens.”

What happened was a peaceful sortie. Two men, each with a kit of some kind borne in a sack, dropped from the car, crossed the creek, and struggled up the hill through the unbridged gap. Adams waited until they were fairly on the right of way, then he called down to them.

“Halt, there! you two. This is corporation property.”

“Not much it ain't!” retorted one of the trespassers gruffly. “It's the drain-way from our placer up yonder.”

“What are you going to do up there at this time of night?”

“None o' your blame business!” was the explosive counter-shot.

“Perhaps it isn't,” said Adams mildly. “Just the same, I'm thirsting to know. Call it vulgar curiosity if you like.”

“All right, you can know, and be cussed to you. We're goin' to work our claim. Got anything to say against it?”

“Oh! no,” rejoined Adams; and when the twain had disappeared in the upper darkness he went down the grade with Branagan and took his place on the man-loaded flats for the run to the construction camp, thinking more of the lately-arrived car with its complement of armed men than of the two miners who had calmly announced their intention of working a placer claim on a high mountain, without water, and in the dead of winter! By which it will be seen that Mr. Morton P. Adams, C. E. M. I. T. Boston, had something yet to learn in the matter of practical field work.

By the time Ah Foo had served him his solitary supper in the dinkey he had quite forgotten the incident of the mysterious placer miners. Worse than this, it had never occurred to him to connect their movements with the Rajah's plan of campaign. On the other hand, he was thinking altogether of the carload of armed men, and trying to devise some means of finding out how they were to be employed in furthering the Rajah's designs.

The means suggested themselves after supper, and he went alone over to Argentine to spend a half-hour in the bar of the dance-hall listening to the gossip of the place. When he had learned what he wanted to know, he forthfared to meet Winton at the incoming train.

“We are in for it now,” he said, when they had crossed the creek to the dinkey and the Chinaman was bringing Winton's belated supper. “The Rajah has imported a carload of armed mercenaries, and he is going to clean us all out to-morrow: arrest everybody from the gang foremen up.”

Winton's eyebrows lifted. “So? that is a pretty large contract. Has he men enough to do it?”

“Not so many men. But they are sworn-in deputies, with the sheriff of Ute County in command—a posse, in fact. So he has the law on his side.”

“Which is more than he had when he set a thug on me this afternoon at Carbonate,” said Winton sourly; and he told Adams about the misunderstanding in the lobby of the Buckingham. His friend whistled under his breath. “By Jove! that's pretty rough. Do you suppose the Rajah dictated any such Lucretia Borgia thing as that?”

Winton took time to think about it and admitted a doubt, as he had not before. Believing Mr. Somerville Darrah fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils in his official capacity of vice-president of a fighting corporation, he was none the less disposed to find excuses for Miss Virginia Carteret's uncle.

“I did think so at first, but I guess it was only the misguided zeal of some understrapper. Of course, word has gone out all along the C. G. R. line that we are to be delayed by every possible expedient.”

But Adams shook his head.

“Mr. Darrah dictated that move in his own proper person.”

“How do you know that?”

“You had a message from me this afternoon?”

“I did.”

“What did you think of it?”

“I thought you might have left out the first part of it; also that you might have made the latter half a good bit more explicit.”

A slow smile spread itself over Adams' impassive face.

“Every man has his limitations,” he said. “I did the best I could. But the Rajah knew very well what he was about—otherwise there would have been no telegram.”

Winton sent the Chinaman out for another cup of tea before he said, “Did Miss Carteret come here alone?”

“Oh, no; Calvert came with her.”

“What brought them here?”

Adams spread his hands.

“What makes any woman do precisely the most unexpected thing?”

Winton was silent for a moment. Finally he said: “I hope you did what you

could to make it pleasant for her."

"I did. And I didn't hear her complain."

"That was low-down in you, Morty."

Adams chuckled reminiscently. "Had to do it to make my day-before-yesterday lie hold water. And she was immensely taken with the scrawls, especially with one of them."

Winton flushed under the bronze.

"I suppose I don't need to ask which one."

Adams' grin was a measure of his complacence.

"Well, hardly."

"She took it away with her?"

"Took it, or tore it up, I forget which."

"Tell me, Morty, was she very angry?"

The other took the last hint of laughter out of his eyes before he said solemnly: "You'll never know how thankful I was that you were twenty miles away."

Winton's cup was full, and he turned the talk abruptly to the industrial doings and accomplishments of the day. Adams made a verbal report which led him by successive steps up to the twilight hour when he had stood with Branagan on the brink of the placer drain, but, strangely enough, there was no stirring of memory to recall the incident of the upward-climbing miners.

When Winton rose he said something about mounting a night guard on the engine, which was kept under steam at all hours; and shortly afterward he left the dinkey ostensibly to do it, declining Adams' offer of company. But once out-of-doors he climbed straight to the operator's tent on the snow-covered slope. Carter had turned in, but he sat up in his bunk at the noise of the intrusion.

"That you, Mr. Winton? Want to send something?" he asked.

"No, go to sleep. I'll write a wire and leave it for you to send in the morning."

He sat down at the packing-case instrument table and wrote out a brief report of the day's progress in track-laying for the general manager's record. But when Carter's regular breathing told him he was alone he pushed the pad aside, took down the sending-hook, and searched until he had found the original copy of the message which had reached him at the moment of cataclysms in the lobby of the Buckingham.

"Um," he said, and his heart grew warm within him. "It's just about as I

expected: Morty didn't have anything whatever to do with it—except to sign and send it as she commanded him to." And the penciled sheet was folded carefully and filed in permanence in the inner breast pocket of his brown duck shooting-coat.

The moon was rising behind the eastern mountain when he extinguished the candle and went out. Below lay the chaotic construction camp buried in silence and in darkness save for the lighted windows of the dinkey. He was not quite ready to go back to Adams, and after making a round of the camp and bidding the engine watchman keep a sharp lookout against a possible night surprise, he set out to walk over the newly-laid track of the day.

Another half-hour had elapsed, and a waning moon was clearing the topmost crags of Pacific Peak when he came out on the high embankment opposite the Rosemary, having traversed the entire length of the lateral loop and inspected the trestle at the gulch head by the light of a blazing spruce-branch.

The station with its two one-car trains, and the shacks of the little mining-camp beyond, lay shimmering ghost-like in the new-born light of the moon. The engine of the sheriff's car was humming softly with a note like the distant swarming of bees, and from the dancehall in Argentine the snort of a trombone and the tinkling clang of a cracked piano floated out upon the frosty night air.

Winton turned to go back. The windows of the Rosemary were all dark, and there was nothing to stay for. So he thought, at all events; but if he had not been musing abstractedly upon things widely separated from his present surroundings, he might have remarked two tiny stars of lantern-light high on the placer ground above the embankment; or, failing the sight, he might have heard the dull, measured *slumph* of a churn-drill burrowing deep in the frozen earth of the slope.

As it was, a pair of brown eyes blinded him, and the tones of a voice sweeter than the songs of Oberon's sea-maid filled his ears. Wherefore he neither saw nor heard; and taking the short cut across the mouth of the lateral gulch back to camp, he boarded the dinkey and went to bed without disturbing Adams.

The morning of the day to come broke clear and still, with the stars paling one by one at the pointing finger of the dawn, and the frost-rime lying thick and white like a snowfall of erect and glittering needles on iron and steel and wood.

Obedient to orders, the bridge-builders were getting out their hand-car at the construction camp, the wheels shrilling merrily on the frosted rails, and the men stamping and swinging their arms to start the sluggish night-blood. Suddenly, like the opening gun of a battle, the dull rumble of a mighty explosion trembled

upon the still air, followed instantly by a sound as of a passing avalanche.

Winton was out and running up the track before the camp was fairly aroused. What he saw when he gained the hither side of the lateral gulch was a sight to make a strong man weep. A huge landslide, starting from the frozen placer ground high up on the western promontory, had swept every vestige of track and embankment into the deep bed of the creek at a point precisely opposite Mr. Somerville Darrah's private car.

VII. THE MAJESTY OF THE LAW

Virginia was up and dressed when the sullen shock of the explosion set the windows jarring in the Rosemary.

She hurried out upon the observation platform and so came to look upon the ruin wrought by the landslide while the dust-like smoke of the dynamite still hung in the air.

“Rather unlucky for our friends the enemy,” said a colorless voice behind her; and she had an uncomfortable feeling that Jastrow had been lying in wait for her.

She turned upon him quickly.

“Was it an accident, Mr. Jastrow?”

“How could it be anything else?” he inquired mildly.

“I don't know. But there was an explosion: I heard it.”

“It is horribly unfair,” she went on. “I understand the sheriff is here. Couldn't he have prevented this?”

The secretary's rejoinder was a platitude: “Everything is fair in love or war.”

“But this is neither,” she retorted.

“Think not?” he said coolly. “Wait, and you'll see. And a word in your ear, Miss Carteret: you are one of us, you know, and you mustn't be disloyal. I know what you did yesterday after you read those telegrams.”

Virginia's face became suddenly wooden. Until that moment it had not occurred to her that Jastrow's motive in showing her the two telegrams might have been carefully calculated.

“I have never given you the right to speak to me that way, Mr. Jastrow,” she said, with the faintest possible emphasis on the courtesy prefix; and with that she turned from him to focus her field-glass on the construction camp below.

At the Utah stronghold all was activity of the fiercest. Winton had raced back with his news of the catastrophe, and the camp was alive with men clustering like bees and swarming upon the flat-cars of the material-train to be taken to the front.

While she looked, studiously ignoring the man behind her, Virginia saw the big octopod engine clamoring up the grade. In a twinkling the men were off and at work.

Virginia's color rose and the brown eyes filled swiftly. One part of her ideal was courage of the sort that rises the higher for reverses. But at the instant she remembered the secretary, and, lest he should spy upon her emotion, she turned and took refuge in the car.

In the Rosemary the waiter was laying the plates for breakfast, and Bessie and the Reverend William were at the window, watching the stirring industry battle now in full swing on the opposite slope. Virginia joined them.

“Isn't it a shame!” she said. “Of course, I want our side to win; but it seems such a pity that we can't fight fairly.”

Calvert said, “Isn't what a shame?” thereby eliciting a crisp explanation from Virginia in which she set well-founded suspicion in the light of fact.

The Reverend Billy shook his head.

“Such things may be within the law—of business; but they will surely breed bad blood—”

The interruption was the Rajah in his proper person, bustling out fiercely to a conference with his Myrmidons. By tacit consent the three at the window fell silent.

There was a hasty mustering of armed men under the windows of the Rosemary, and they heard Sheriff Deckert's low-voiced instructions to his posse.

“Take it slow and easy, boys, and don't get rattled. Now, then; guns to the front! Steady!”

The Reverend Billy rose.

“What are you going to do?” said Virginia.

“I'm going to give Winton a tip if it's the last thing I ever do.”

She shook her head and pointed eastward to the mouth of the lateral gulch. Under cover of a clump of evergreen-scrub a man in a wideflapped hat and leather breeches was climbing swiftly to the level of the new line, cautiously waving a handkerchief as a peace token. “That is the man who arrested Mr. Winton yesterday. This time he is going to fight on the other side. He'll carry the warning.”

“Think so?” said Calvert.

“I am sure of it. Open the window, please. I want to see better.”

As yet there was no sign of preparation on the embankment. For the moment the rifles of the track force were laid aside, and every man was plying pick or shovel.

Winton was in the thick of the pick-and-shovel melee, urging it on, when Biggin ran up.

“Hi!” he shouted. “Fixin' to take another play-day in Carbonate? Lookee down yonder!”

Winton looked and became alive to the possibilities in the turning of a leaf.

“Guns!” he yelled; and at the word of command the tools were flung aside, and the track force, over two hundred strong, became an army.

“Mulcahey, take half the men and go up the grade till you can rake those fellows without hitting the car. Branagan, you take the other half and go down till you can cross-fire with Mulcahey. Aim low, both of you; and the man who fires before he gets the word from me will break his neck at a rope's end. Fall in!”

“By Jove!” said Adams. “Are you going to resist? That spells felony, doesn't it?”

Winton pointed to the waiting octopod.

“I'm going to order the Two-fifteen down out of the way: you may go with her if you like.”

“I guess not!” quoth the assistant, calmly lighting a fresh cigarette. And then to the water-boy, who was acting quartermaster: “Give me a rifle and a cartridge-belt, Chunky, and I'll stay here with the boss.”

“And where do I come in?” said Biggin to Winton reproachfully.

“You'll stay out, if your head's level. You've done enough already to send you to Canyon City.”

“I ain't a-forgettin' nothing,” said Peter cheerfully, casting himself flat behind a heap of earth on the dump-edge.

While the sheriff's posse was picking its way gingerly over the loose rock and earth dam formed by the landslide, the window went up in the Rosemary and Winton saw Virginia. Without meaning to, she gave him his battle-word.

“We are a dozen Winchesters to your one, Mr. Deckert, and we shall resist force with force. Order your men back or there will be trouble.”

Winton stood out on the edge of the cutting, a solitary figure where a few minutes before the earth had been flying from a hundred shovels.

The sheriff's reply was an order, but not for retreat.

“He's one of the men we want; cover him!” he commanded.

Unless the public occasion appeals strongly to the sympathies or the passions,

a picked-up sheriff's posse is not likely to have very good metal in it. Peter Biggin laughed.

“Don't be no ways nervous,” he said in an aside to Winton. “Them professional veniry chumps couldn't hit the side o' Pacific Peak.”

Winton held his ground, while the sheriff tried to drive his men up a bare slope commanded by two hundred rifles to right and left. The attempt was a humiliating failure. Being something less than soldiers trained to do or die, the deputies hung back to a man.

Virginia could not forbear a smile. The sheriff burst into caustic profanity. Whereupon Mr. Peter Biggin rose up and sent a bullet to plow a little furrow in the ice within an inch of Deckert's heels.

“Ex-cuse *me*, Bart,” he drawled, “but no cuss words don't go.”

The sheriff ignored Peter Biggin as a person who could be argued with at leisure and turned to Winton.

“Come down!” he bellowed.

Winton laughed.

“Let me return the invitation. Come up, and you may read your warrants to us all day.”

Deckert withdrew his men, and at Winton's signal the track-layers came in and the earth began to fly again.

Virginia sighed her relief, and Bessie plucked up courage to go to the window, which she had deserted in the moment of impending battle.

“Breakfast is served,” announced the waiter as calmly as if the morning meal were the only matter of consequence in a world of happenings.

They gathered about the table, a silent trio made presently a quartet by the advent of Mrs. Carteret, who had neither seen nor heard anything of the warlike episode with which the day had begun.

Mr. Darrah was late, so late that when he came in, Virginia was the only one of the four who remained at table. She stayed to pour his coffee and to bespeak peace.

“Uncle Somerville, can't we win without calling in these horrid men with their guns?”

A mere shadow of a grim smile came and went in the Rajah's eyes.

“An unprejudiced outsideh might say that the 'horrid men with their guns' were on top of that embankment, my deah—ten to ouh one,” he remarked.

“But I should think we might win in some other way,” Virginia persisted undauntedly.

Mr. Darrah pushed his plate aside and cleared his throat.

“For business reasons which you—ah—wouldn't undehstand, we can't let the Utah finish this railroad of theirs into Carbonate this winteh.”

“So much I have inferred. But Mr. Winton seems to be very determined.”

“Mmph! I wish Mr. Callowell had favehed us with some one else—any one else. That young fellow is a bawn fighteh, my deah.”

Virginia had a bright idea, and she advanced it without examining too closely into its ethical part.

“Mr. Winton is working for wages, isn't he?” she asked.

“Of cou'se; big money, at that. His sawt come high.”

“Well, why can't you hire him away from the other people? Mr. Callowell might not be so fortunate next time.”

The Rajah sat back in his chair and regarded her thoughtfully.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Nothing my deah—nothing at all. I was just wondering how a woman's—ah—sense of propo'tion was put togetheh. But your plan has merit. Do I understand that you will faveh me with your help?”

“Why, ye-es, certainly, if I can,” she assented, not without dubiety. “That is, I'll be nice to Mr. Winton.”

“That is precisely what I mean, my deah. We'll begin by having him heah to dinneh this evening, him and the otheh young man—what's his name?—Adams.”

And the upshot of the matter was a dainty note which found its way by the hands of the private-car porter to Winton, laboring manfully at his task of repairing the landslide damages.

“Mr. Somerville Darrah's compliments to Mr. John Winton and Mr. Morton P. Adams, and he will be pleased if they will dine with the party in the car Rosemary at seven o'clock.

“Informal.

“Wednesday, December the Ninth.”

VIII. THE GREEKS BRINGING GIFTS

Adams said “By Jove!” in his most cynical drawl when Winton gave him the dinner-bidding to read: then he laughed.

Winton recovered the dainty note, folding it carefully and putting it in his pocket. The handwriting was the same as that of the telegram abstracted from Operator Carter's sending-book.

“I don't see anything to laugh at,” he objected.

“No? First the Rajah sends the sheriff's posse packing without striking a blow, and now he invites us to dinner.”

“You make me exceedingly tired at odd moments, Morty. Why can't you give Mr. Darrah the credit of being what he really is at bottom—a right-hearted Virginia gentleman of the old school?”

“You don't mean that you are going to accept!” said Adams, aghast.

“Certainly; and so are you.”

There was no more to be said, and Adams held his peace while Winton scribbled a line of acceptance on a leaf of his note-book and sent it across to the Rosemary by the hand of the water-boy.

Their reception at the steps of the Rosemary was a generous proof of the aptness of that aphorism which sums up the status *post bellum* in the terse phrase, “After war, peace.” Mr. Darrah met them; was evidently waiting for them.

“Come in, gentlemen; come in and be at home,”—this with a hand for each. “Virginia allowed you wouldn't faveh us, but I assured her she didn't rightly know men of the world: told her that a picayune business affair in which we are all acting as corporation proxies needn't spell out anything like a blood feud between gentlemen.”

For another man the informal table gathering might have been easily prohibitive of confidences *a deux*, even with a Virginia Carteret to help, but Winton was far above the trammelings of time and place. He had eyes and ears only for the sweet-faced, low-voiced young woman beside him, and some of his replies to the others were irrelevant enough to send a smile around the board.

“How very absent-minded Mr. Winton seems to be this evening!” murmured Bessie from her niche between Adams and the Reverend Billy at the farther end

of the table. “He isn't quite at his best, is he, Mr. Adams?”

“No, indeed,” said Adams, matching her undertone, “very far from it. He has been a bit off all day: touch of mountain fever, I'm afraid.”

“But he doesn't look at all ill,” objected Miss Bessie. “I should say he is a perfect picture of rude health.”

The coffee was served, and Mrs. Carteret was rising. Whereupon Miss Virginia handed her cup to Adams, and so had him for her companion in the tete-a-tete chair, leaving Winton to shift for himself.

The shifting process carried him over to the Rajah and the Reverend Billy, to a small table in a corner of the compartment, and the enjoyment of a mild cigar.

Later, when Calvert had been eliminated by Miss Bessie, Winton looked to see the true inwardness of the dinner-bidding made manifest by his host.

But Mr. Darrah chatted on, affably noncommittal, and after a time Winton began to upbraid himself for suspecting the ulterior motive. And when he finally rose to excuse himself on a letter-writing plea, his leave-taking was that of the genial host reluctant to part company with his guest.

“I've enjoyed your conve'sation, seh; enjoyed it right much. May I hope you will faveh us often while we are neighbors?”

Winton rose, made the proper acknowledgments, and would have crossed the compartment to make his adieus to Mrs. Carteret. But at that moment Virginia came between.

“You are not going yet, are you, Mr. Winton? Don't hurry. If you are dying to smoke a pipe, as Mr. Adams says you are, we can go out on the platform. It isn't too cold, is it?”

“It is clear and frosty, a beautiful night,” he hastened to say. “May I help you with your coat?”

So presently Winton had his heart's desire, which was to be alone with Virginia.

She nerved herself for the plunge,—her uncle's plunge.

“Your part in the building of this other railroad is purely a business affair, is it not?”

“My personal interest? Quite so; a mere matter of dollars and cents, you may say.”

“If you should have another offer, from some other company—”

“That is not your argument; it is Mr. Darrah's. You know well enough what is

involved: honor, integrity, good faith, everything a man values, or should value. I can't believe you would ask such a sacrifice of me—of any man.

“Indeed, I do not ask it, Mr. Winton. But it is only fair that you should have your warning. My uncle will leave no stone unturned to defeat you.”

He was still looking into her eyes, and so had courage to say what came uppermost.

“I don't care: I shall fight him as hard as I can, but I shall always be his debtor for this evening. Do you understand?”

In a flash her mood changed and she laughed lightly.

“Who would think it of you, Mr. Winton. Of all men I should have said you were the last to care so much for the social diversions. Shall we go in?”

IX. THE BLOCK SIGNAL.

If Mr. John Winton, C. E., stood in need of a moral tonic, as Adams had so delicately intimated to Miss Bessie Carteret, it was administered in quantity sufficient before he slept on the night of dinner-givings.

For a clear-eyed theorist, free from all heart-trammelings and able to grasp the unsentimental fact, the enemy's new plan of campaign wrote itself quite legibly. With his pick and choice among the time-killing expedients the Rajah could scarcely have found one more to his purpose than the private car Rosemary, including in its passenger list a Miss Virginia Carteret.

All of which Adams, substituting friendly frankness for the disciplinary traditions of the service, set forth in good Bostonian English for the benefit and behoof of his chief, and was answered according to his deserts with scoffings and deridings.

“I wasn't born yesterday, Morty, and I'm not so desperately asinine as you seem to think,” was the besotted one's summing-up. “I know the Rajah doesn't split hairs in a business fight, but he is hardly unscrupulous enough to use Miss Carteret as a cat's-paw.”

But Adams would not be scoffed aside so easily.

“You're off in your estimate of Mr. Darrah, Jack, 'way off. I know the tradition: that a Southern gentleman is all chivalry when it comes to a matter touching his womankind, and I don't controvert it as a general proposition. But the Rajah has been a fighting Western railroad magnate so long that his accent is about the only Southern asset he has retained. If I'm any good at guessing, he will stick at nothing to gain his end.”

Winton admitted the impeachment without prejudice to his own point of view.

“Perhaps you are right. But forewarned is forearmed. And Miss Virginia is not going to lend herself to any such nefarious scheme.”

“Not consciously, perhaps; but you don't know her yet. If she saw a good chance to take the conceit out of you, she'd improve it—without thinking overmuch of the possible consequences to the Utah company.”

“Pshaw!” said Winton. “That is another of your literary inferences. I've met her only twice, yet I venture to say I know her better than you do. If she cared anything for me—which she doesn't—”

“Oh, go to sleep!” said Adams, who was not minded to argue further with a man besotted; and so the matter went by default for the time.

But in the days that followed, days in which the sun rose and set in cloudless winter splendor and the heavy snows still held aloof, Adams' prediction wrought itself out into sober fact. After the single appeal to force, Mr. Darrah seemed to give up the fight. None the less, the departure of the Rosemary was delayed, and its hospitable door was always open to the Utah chief of construction and his assistant.

It was very deftly done, and even Adams, the clear-eyed, could not help admiring the Rajah's skilful finesse. Of formal dinner-givings there might easily have been an end, since the construction camp had nothing to offer in return. But the formalities were studiously ignored, and the two young men were put upon a footing of intimacy and encouraged to come and go as they pleased.

Winton took his welcome broadly, as what lover would not? and within a week was spending most of his evenings in the Rosemary—this at a time when every waking moment of the day and night was deeply mortgaged to the chance of success. For now that the Rajah had withdrawn his opposition, Nature and the perversity of inanimate things had taken a hand, and for a fortnight the work of track-laying paused fairly within sight of the station at Argentine.

First it was a carload of steel accidentally derailed and dumped into Quartz Creek at precisely the worst possible point in the lower canyon, a jagged, rock-ribbed, cliff-bound gorge where each separate piece of metal had to be hoisted out singly by a derrick erected for the purpose—a process which effectually blocked the track for three entire days. Next it was another landslide (unhelped by dynamite, this) just above the station, a crawling cataract of loose, sliding shale which, painstakingly dug out and dammed with plank bulkhead during the day, would pour down and bury bulkhead, buttresses, and the very right of way in the night.

In his right mind—the mind of an ambitious young captain of industry who sees defeat with dishonor staring him in the face—Winton would have fought all the more desperately for these hindrances. But, unfortunately, he was no longer an industry captain with an eye single to success. He was become that anomaly despised of the working world—a man in love.

“It's no use shutting our eyes to the fact, Jack,” said Adams one evening, when his chief was making ready for his regular descent upon the Rosemary. “We shall have to put night shifts at work on that shale-slide if we hope ever to get past it with the rails.”

“Hang the shale!” was the impatient rejoinder. “I'm no galley slave.”

Adams' slow smile came and went in cynical ripplings.

“It is pretty difficult to say precisely what you are just now. But I can prophesy what you are going to be if you don't wake up and come alive.”

Having no reply to this, Adams went back to the matter of night shifts.

“If you will authorize it, I'll put a night gang on and boss it myself. What do you say?”

“I say you are no end of a good fellow, Morty. And that's the plain fact. I'll do as much for you some time.”

“I'll be smashed if you will—you'll never get the chance. When I let a pretty girl make a fool of me—”

But the door of the dinkey slammed behind the outgoing one, and the prophet of evil was left to organize his night assault on the shale-slide, and to command it as best he could.

So, as we say, the days, days of stubborn toil with the enthusiasm taken out, slipped away unfruitful. Of the entire Utah force Adams alone held himself up to the mark, and being only second in command, he was unable to keep the bad example of the chief from working like a leaven of inertness among the men. Branagan voiced the situation in rich brogue one evening when Adams had exhausted his limited vocabulary of abuse on the force for its apathy. “'Tis no use, ava, Misther Adams. If you was the boss himself 'twould be you as would put the comether on thim too quick. But it's 'like masther, like mon.' The b'ys all know that Misther Winton don't care a damn; and they'll not be hurtin' thimselves wid the wurrk.”

And the Rajah? Between his times of smoking high-priced cigars with Winton in the lounging-room of the Rosemary, he was swearing Jubilates in the privacy of his working-den state-room, having tri-daily weather reports wired to him by way of Carbonate and Argentine station, and busying himself in the intervals with sending and receiving sundry mysterious telegrams in cipher.

Thus Mr. Somerville Darrah, all going well for him until one fateful morning when he made the mistake of congratulating his ally. Then—but we picture the scene: Mr. Darrah late to his breakfast, being just in from an early-morning reconnaissance of the enemy's advancings; Virginia sitting opposite to pour his coffee. All the others vanished to some limbo of their own.

The Rajah rubbed his hands delightedly.

“We are coming on famously, famously, my deah Virginia. Two weeks gone,

heavy snows predicted for the mountain region, and nothing, practically nothing at all, accomplished on the otheh side of the canyon. When you marry, my deah, you shall have a block of C. G. R. preferred stock to keep you in pin-money."

"I?" she queried. "But, Uncle Somerville, I don't understand—"

The Rajah laughed.

"That was a very pretty blush, my deah. Bless your innocent soul, if I were young Misteh Winton, I'm not sure but I should consideh the game well lost."

She was gazing at him wide-eyed now, and the blush had left a pallor behind it.

"You mean that I—that I—"

"I mean that you are a helpeh worth having, Miss Carteret. Anotheh time Misteh Winton won't pay cou't to a cha'ming young girl and try to build a railroad at one and the same moment, I fancy. Hah!"

The startled eyes veiled themselves swiftly, and Virginia's voice sank to its softest cadence.

"Have I been an accomplice," she began, "in this—this despicable thing, Uncle Somerville?"

Mr. Darrah began a little to see his mistake.

"Ah—an accomplice? Oh, no, my deah Virginia, not quite that. The word smacks too much of the po-lice cou'ts. Let us say that Misteh Winton has found your company mo' attractive than that of his laborehs, and commend his good taste in the matteh."

So much he said by way of damping down the fire he had so rashly lighted. Then Jastrow came in with one of the interminable cipher telegrams and Virginia was left alone.

For a time she sat at the deserted breakfast-table, dry-eyed, hot-hearted, thinking such thoughts as would come crowding thickly upon the heels of such a revelation. Winton would fail: a man with honor, good repute, his entire career at stake, as he himself had admitted, would go down to miserable oblivion and defeat, lacking some friendly hand to smite him alive to a sense of his danger. And, in her uncle's estimation, at least, she, Virginia Carteret, would figure as the Delilah triumphant.

She rose, tingling to her finger-tips with the shame of it, went to her state-room, and found her writing materials. In such a crisis her methods could be as direct as a man's. Winton was coming again that evening. He must be stopped and sent about his business.

So she wrote him a note, telling him he must not come—a note man-like in its conciseness, and yet most womanly in its failure to give even the remotest hint of the new and binding reason why he must not come. And just before luncheon an obliging Cousin Billy was prevailed upon to undertake its delivery.

When he had found Winton at the shale-slide, and had given him Miss Carteret's mandate, the Reverend Billy did not return directly to the Rosemary. On the contrary, he extended his tramp westward, stumbling on aimlessly up the canyon over the unsurfaced embankment of the new line.

Truth to tell, Virginia's messenger was not unwilling to spend a little time alone with the immensities. To put it baldly, he was beginning to be desperately cloyed with the sweets of a day-long Miss Bessie, ennuyé on the one hand and despondent on the other.

Why could not the Cousin Bessies see, without being told in so many words, that the heart of a man may have been given in times long past to another woman?—to a Cousin Virginia, let us say. And why must the Cousin Virginias, passing by the lifelong devotion of a kinsman lover, throw themselves—if one must put it thus brutally—fairly at the head of an acquaintance of a day?

So questioning the immensities, the Reverend Billy came out after some little time in a small upland valley where the two lines, old and new, ran parallel at the same level, with low embankments less than a hundred yards apart.

Midway of the valley the hundred-yard interspace was bridged by a hastily-constructed spur track starting from a switch on the Colorado and Grand River main line, and crossing the Utah right of way at a broad angle. On this spur, at its point of intersection with the new line, stood a heavy locomotive, steam up, and manned in every inch of its standing-room by armed guards.

The situation explained itself, even to a Reverend Billy. The Rajah had not been idle during the interval of dinner-givings and social divagations. He had acquired the right of way across the Utah's line for his blockading spur; had taken advantage of Winton's inalertness to construct the track; and was now prepared to hold the crossing with a live engine and such a show of force as might be needful.

Calvert turned back from the entrance of the valley, and was minded, in a spirit of fairness, to pass the word concerning the new obstruction on to the man who was most vitally concerned. But alas! even a Reverend Billy may not always arise superior to his hamperings as a man and a lover. Here was defeat possible—nay, say rather defeat probable—for a rival, with the probability increasing with each hour of delay. Calvert fought it out by length and by

breadth a dozen times before he came in sight of the track force toiling at the shale-slide. Should he tell Winton, and so, indirectly, help to frustrate Mr. Darrah's well-laid plan? Or should he hold his peace and thus, indirectly again, help to defeat the Utah company?

He put it that way in decent self-respect. Also he assured himself that the personal equation as between two lovers of one and the same woman was entirely eliminated. But who can tell which motive it was that prompted him to turn aside before he came to the army of toilers at the slide: to turn and cross the stream and make as wide a detour as the nature of the ground would permit, passing well beyond call from the other side of the canyon?

The detour took him past the slide in silent safety, but it did not take him immediately back to the Rosemary. Instead of keeping on down the canyon on the C. G. R. side, he turned up the gulch at the back of Argentine and spent the better half of the afternoon tramping beneath the solemn spruces on the mountain. What the hours of solitude brought him in the way of decision let him declare as he sets his face finally toward the station and the private car.

“I can't do it: I can't turn traitor to the kinsman whose bread I eat. And that is what it would come to in plain English. Beyond that I have no right to go: it is not for me to pass upon the justice of this petty war between rival corporations.”

Ah, William Calvert! is there no word then of that other and far subtler temptation? When you have reached your goal, if reach it you may, will there be no remorseful looking back to this mile-stone where a word from you might have taken the fly from your pot of precious ointment?

The short winter day was darkening to its close when he returned to the Rosemary. By dint of judicious manoeuvering, with a too-fond Bessie for an unconscious confederate, he managed to keep Virginia from questioning him; this up to a certain moment of climaxes in the evening.

But Virginia read momentous things in his face and eyes, and when the time was fully ripe she cornered him. It was the old story over again, of a woman's determination to know pitted against a truthful man's blundering efforts to conceal; and before he knew what he was about Calvert had betrayed the Rajah's secret—which was also the secret of the cipher telegrams.

Miss Carteret said little—said nothing, indeed, that an anxious kinsman lover could lay hold of. But when the secret was hers she donned coat and headgear and went out on the square-railed platform, whither the Reverend Billy dared not follow her.

But another member of the Rosemary group had more courage—-or fewer

scruples. When Miss Carteret let herself out of the rear door, Jastrow disappeared in the opposite direction, passing through the forward vestibule and dropping cat-like from the step to inch his way silently over the treacherous snow-crust to a convenient spying place at the other end of the car.

Unfortunately for the spying purpose, the shades were drawn behind the two great windows and the glass door, but the starlight sufficed to show the watcher a shadowy Miss Virginia standing motionless on the side which gave her an outlook down the canyon, leaning out, it might be, to anticipate the upcoming of some one from the construction camp below.

The secretary, shivering in the knife-like wind slipping down from the bald peaks, had not long to wait. By the time his eyes were fitted to the darkness he heard a man coming up the track, the snow crunching frostily under his steady stride. Jastrow ducked under the platform and gained a viewpoint on the other side of the car. The crunching footfalls had ceased, and a man was swinging himself up to the forward step of the Rosemary. At the instant a voice just above the spy's head called softly, “Mr. Winton!” and the new-comer dropped back into the snow and came tramping to the rear.

It was an awkward moment for Jastrow; but he made shift to dodge again, and so to be out of the way when the engineer drew himself up and climbed the hand-rail to stand beside his summoner.

The secretary saw him take her hand and heard her exclamation, half indignant, wholly reproachful:

“You had my note: I told you not to come!”

“So you did, and yet you were expecting me,” he asserted. He was still holding her hand, and she could not—or did not—withdraw it.

“Was I, indeed!” There was a touch of the old-time raillery in the words, but it was gone when she added: “Oh, why will you keep on coming and coming when you know so well what it means to you and your work?”

“I think you know the answer to that better than anyone,” he rejoined, his voice matching hers for earnestness. “It is because I love you; because I could not stay away if I should try. Forgive me, dear; I did not mean to speak so soon. But you said in your note that you would be leaving Argentine immediately—that I should not see you again: so I had to come. Won't you give me a word, Virginia?—a waiting word, if it must be that?”

Jastrow held his breath, hope dying within him and sullen ferocity crouching for the spring if her answer should urge it on. But when she spoke the secretary's anger cooled and he breathed again.

“No: a thousand times, no!” she burst out passionately; and Winton staggered as if the suddenly-freed hand had dealt him a blow.

X. SPIKED SWITCHES

For a little time after Virginia's passionate rejection of him Winton stood abashed and confounded. Weighed in the balance of the after-thought, his sudden and unpremeditated declaration could plead little excuse in encouragement. And yet she had been exceedingly kind to him.

“I have no right to expect a better answer,” he said finally, when he could trust himself to speak. “But I am like other men: I should like to know why.”

“You can ask that?” she retorted. “You say you have no right: what have you done to expect a better answer?”

He shrugged. “Nothing, I suppose. But you knew that before.”

“I only know what you have shown me during the past three weeks, and it has proved that you are what Mr. Adams said you were—though he was only jesting.”

“And that is?”

“A *faineant*, a dilettante; a man with all the God-given ability to do as he will and to succeed, and yet who will not take the trouble to persevere.”

Winton smiled, a grim little smile.

“You are not quite like any other woman I have ever known—not like any other in the world, I believe. Your sisters, most of them, would take it as the sincerest homage that a man should neglect his work for his love. Do you care so much for success, then?”

“For the thing itself—nothing, less than nothing. But—but one may care a little for the man who wins or loses.”

He tried to take her hand again, tried and failed.

“Virginia!—is that my word of hope?”

“No. Will you never see the commonplace effrontery of it, Mr. Winton? Day after day you have come here, idling away the precious hours that meant everything to you, and now you come once again to offer me a share in what you have lost. Is that your idea of chivalry, of true manhood?”

Again the grim smile came and went.

“An unprejudiced onlooker might say that you have made me very welcome.”

“Mr. Winton! Is that generous?”

“No; perhaps it is hardly just. Because I counted the cost and have paid the price open-eyed. You may remember that I told you that first evening I should come as often as I dared. I knew then, what I have known all along: that it was a part of your uncle's plan to delay my work.”

“His and mine, you mean; only you are too kind—or not quite brave enough—to say so.”

“Yours? Never! If I could believe you capable of such a thing—”

“You may believe it,” she broke in. “It was I who suggested it.”

He drew a deep breath, and she heard his teeth come together with a click. It was enough to try the faith of the loyalest lover: it tried his sorely. Yet he scarcely needed her low-voiced, “Don't you despise me as I deserve, now?” to make him love her all the more.

“Indeed, I don't. Resentment and love can hardly find room in the same heart at the same time, and I have said that I love you,” he rejoined quickly.

She went silent at that, and when she spoke again the listening Jastrow tuned his ear afresh to lose no word.

“As I have confessed, I suggested it: it was just after I had seen your men and the sheriff's ready to fly at one another's throats. I was miserably afraid, and I asked Uncle Somerville if he could not make terms with you in some other way. I didn't mean—”

He made haste to help her.

“Please don't try to defend your motive to me; it is wholly unnecessary. It is more than enough for me to know that you were anxious about my safety.”

But she would not let him have the crumb of comfort undisputed.

“There were other lives involved besides yours. I didn't say I was specially afraid for you, did I?”

“No, but you meant it. And I thought afterward that I should have given you a hint in some way, though the way didn't offer at the time. There was no danger of bloodshed. I knew—we all knew—that Deckert wouldn't go to extremities with the small force he had.”

“Then it was only a—a—”

“A bluff,” he said, supplying the word. “If I had believed there was the slightest possibility of a fight, I should have made my men take to the woods rather than let you witness it.”

“You shouldn't have let me waste my sympathy,” she protested reproachfully.

“I'm sorry; truly, I am. And you have been wasting it in another direction as well. To-night will see the shale-slide conquered definitely, I hope, and three more days of good weather will send us into the Carbonate yards.”

She broke in upon him with a little cry of impatient despair.

“That shows how unwary you have been! Tell me: is there not a little valley just above here—an open place where your railroad and Uncle Somerville's run side by side?”

“Yes, it is a mile this side of the canyon head. What about it?”

“How long is it since you have been up there?” she queried.

Winton stopped to think. “I don't know—a week, possibly.”

“Yet if you had not been coming here every evening, you or Mr. Adams would have found time to go—to watch every possible chance of interference, wouldn't you?”

“Perhaps. That was one of the risks I took, a part of the price-paying I spoke of. If anything had happened, I should still be unrepentant.”

“Something *has* happened. While you have been taking things for granted, Uncle Somerville has been at work day and night. He has built a track right across yours in that little valley, and he keeps a train of cars or something, filled with armed men, standing there all the time!”

Winton gave a low whistle. Then he laughed mirthlessly.

“You are quite sure of this?” he asked. “There is no possibility of your being mistaken?”

“None at all,” she replied. “And I can only defend myself by saying that I didn't know about it until a few minutes ago. What is to be done? But stop; you needn't tell me. I am not worthy of your confidence.”

“You are; you have just proved it. But there isn't anything to be done. The next thing in order is the exit of one John Winton in disgrace. That spur track and engine means a crossing fight which can be prolonged indefinitely, with due vigilance on the part of Mr. Darrah's mercenaries. I'm smashed, Miss Carteret, thoroughly and permanently. Ah, well, it's only one more fool for love. Hadn't we better go in? You'll take cold standing out here.”

She drew herself up and put her hands behind her.

“Is that the way you take it, Mr. Winton?”

The acrid laugh came again.

“Would you have me tear a passion to tatters? My ancestors were not French.”

Trying as the moment was, she could not miss her opportunity.

“How can you tell when you don't know your grandfather's middle name?” she said, half crying.

His laugh at this was less acrid. “Adams again? My grandfather had no middle name. But I mustn't keep you out here in the cold talking genealogies.”

His hand was on the door to open it for her. Like a flash she came between, and her fingers closed over his on the door-knob.

“Wait,” she said. “Have I done all this—humbled myself into the very dust—to no purpose?”

“Not if you will give me the one priceless word I am thirsting for.”

“Oh, how shameless you are!” she cried. “Will nothing serve to arouse the better part of you?”

“There is no better part of any man than his love for a woman. You have aroused that.”

“*Then prove it by going and building your railroad*, Mr. Winton. When you have done that—”

He caught at the word as a drowning man catches at a straw.

“When I have won the fight—Virginia, let me see your eyes—when I have won, I may come back to you?”

“I didn't say anything of the kind! But I will say what I said to Mr. Adams. I like men who *do* things. Good night.” And before he could reply she had made him open the door for her, and he was left alone on the square-railed platform.

In the gathering-room of the private car Virginia found an atmosphere surcharged with electrical possibilities, felt it and inhaled it, though there was nothing visible to indicate it. The Rajah was buried in the depths of his particular easy-chair, puffing his cigar; Bessie had the Reverend Billy in the tete-a-tete contrivance; and Mrs. Carteret was reading under the Pintsch drop-light at the table.

It was the chaperon who applied the firing spark to the electrical possibilities.

“Didn't I hear you talking to some one out on the platform, Virginia?” she asked.

“Yes, it was Mr. Winton. He came to make his excuses.”

Mr. Somerville Darrah awoke out of his tobacco reverie with a start.

“Hah!” he said fiercely. Then, in his most courteous phrase: “Did I undehstand you to say that Misteh Winton would not faveh us to-night, my deah Virginia?”

“He could not. He has come upon—upon some other difficulty, I believe,” she stammered, steering a perilous course among the rocks of equivocation.

“Mmph!” said the Rajah, rising. “Ah—where is Jastrow?”

The obsequious one appeared, imp-like, at the mention of his name, and received a curt order.

“Go and find Engineer McGrath and his fireman. Tell him I want the engine instantly. Move, seh!”

Virginia retreated to her state-room. In a few minutes she heard her uncle go out; and shortly afterward the Rosemary's engine shook itself free of the car and rumbled away westward. At that, Virginia went back to the others and found a book. But if waiting inactive were difficult, reading was blankly impossible.

“Goodness!” she exclaimed impatiently at last. “How hot you people keep it in here! Cousin Billy, won't you take a turn with me on the station platform? I can't breathe!”

Calvert acquiesced eagerly, scenting an opportunity. But when they were out under the frosty stars he had the good sense to walk her up and down in the healing silence and darkness for five full minutes before he ventured to say what was in his mind.

When he spoke it was earnestly and to the purpose, not without eloquence. He loved her; had always loved her, he thought. Could she not, with time and the will to try, learn to love him?—not as a cousin?

She turned quickly and put both hands on his shoulders.

“Oh, Cousin Billy—*don't*!” she faltered brokenly; and he, seeing at once that he had played the housebreaker where he would fain have been the welcome guest, took his punishment manfully, drawing her arm in his and walking her yet other turns up and down the long platform until his patience and the silence had wrought their perfect work.

“Does it hurt much?” she asked softly, after a long time.

“You would have to change places with me to know just how much it hurts,” he answered. “And yet you haven't left me quite desolate, Virginia. I still have something left—all I've ever had, I fancy.”

“And that is—”

“My love for you, you know. It isn't at all contingent upon your yes or no; or upon possession—it never has been, I think. It has never asked much except the right to be.”

She was silent for a moment. Then she said: “Cousin Billy, I do believe that

you are the best man that ever lived. And I am ashamed—ashamed!”

“What for?”

“If I have spoiled you, ever so little, for some truer, worthier woman.”

“You haven't,” he responded; “you mustn't take that view of it. I am decently in love with my work—a work that not a few wise men have agreed could best be done alone. I don't think there will be any other woman. You see, there is only one Virginia. Shall we go in now?”

She nodded, but when they reached the Rosemary the returning engine was rattling down upon the open siding. Virginia drew back.

“I don't want to meet Uncle Somerville just now,” she confessed. “Can't we climb up to the observation platform at the other end of the car?”

He said yes, and made the affirmative good by lifting her in his arms over the high railing. Once safely on the car, she bade him leave her.

“Slip in quietly and they won't notice,” she said. “I'll come presently.”

Calvert obeyed, and Virginia stood alone in the darkness. Down in the Utah construction camp lights were darting to and fro; and before long she heard the hoarse puffs of the big octopod, betokening activities.

She was shivering a little in the chill wind sliding down from the snow-peaks, yet she would not go in until she had made sure. In a little time her patience was rewarded. The huge engine came storming up the grade on the new line, pushing its three flat-cars, which were black with clinging men. On the car nearest the locomotive, where the dazzling beam of the headlight pricked him out for her, stood Winton, braced against the lurchings of the train over the uneven track.

“God speed you, my—love!” she murmured softly; and when the gloom of the upper canyon cleft had engulfed man and men and storming engine she turned to go in.

She was groping for the door-knob in the darkness made thicker by the glare of the passing headlight when a voice, disembodied for the moment, said: “Wait a minute, Miss Carteret; I'd like to have a word with you.”

She drew back quickly.

“Is it you, Mr. Jastrow? Let me go in, please.”

“In one moment. I have something to say to you—something you ought to hear.”

“Can't it be said on the other side of the door? I am cold—very cold, Mr. Jastrow.”

It was his saving hint, but he would not take it.

“No, it must be said to you alone. We have at least one thing in common, Miss Carteret—you and I: that is a proper appreciation of the successful realities. I—”

She stopped him with a quick little gesture of impatience.

“Will you be good enough to stand aside and let me go in?”

The keen breath of the snow-caps was summer-warm in comparison with the chilling iciness of her manner; but the secretary went on unmoved:

“Success is the only thing worth while in this world. Winton will fail, but I shan't. And when I do succeed, I shall marry a woman who can wear the purple most becomingly.”

“I hope you may, I'm sure,” she answered wearily. “Yet you will excuse me if I say that I don't understand how it concerns me, or why you should keep me out here in the cold to tell me about it.”

“Don't you? It concerns you very nearly. You are the woman, Miss Carteret.”

“Indeed? And if I decline the honor?”

The contingency was one for which the suitor seemed not entirely prepared. Yet he evinced a willingness to meet the hypothesis in a spirit of perfect candor.

“You wouldn't do that, definitely, I fancy. It would be tantamount to driving me to extremities.”

“If you will tell me how I can do it 'definitely,' I shall be most happy to drive you to extremities, or anywhere else out of my way,” she said frigidly.

“Oh, I think not,” he rejoined. “You wouldn't want me to go and tell Mr. Darrah how you have betrayed him to Mr. Winton. I had the singular good fortune to overhear you conversation—yours and Mr. Winton's, you know; and if Mr. Darrah knew, he would cut you out of his will with very little compunction, don't you think? And, really, you mustn't throw yourself away on that sentimental Tommy of an engineer, Miss Virginia. He'll never be able to give you the position you're fitted for.”

Since French was a dead language to Mr. Arthur Jastrow, he never knew what it was that Miss Carteret named him. But she left him in no doubt as to her immediate purpose.

“If that be the case, we would better go and find my uncle at once,” she said in her softest tone; and before he could object she had led the way to the Rajah's working-den state-room.

Mr. Darrah was deep in one of the cipher telegrams when they entered, and he

looked up to glare fiercely at one and then the other of the intruders. Virginia gave her persecutor no time to lodge his accusation.

“Uncle Somerville, Mr. Winton was here an hour ago, as you know, and I told him what you had done—what I had helped you do. Also, I sent him about his business; which is to win his railroad fight if he can. Mr. Jastrow overheard the conversation, purposely, and as he threatens to turn informer, I am saving him the trouble. Perhaps I ought to add that he offered to hold his peace if I would promise to marry him.”

What the unlucky Jastrow might have said in his own behalf is not to be here set down in peaceful black and white. With the final word of Virginia's explanation the fierce old master of men was up and clutching for the secretary's throat, and the working complement of the Rosemary suffered instant loss.

“You'll spy upon a membeh of my family, will you, seh!” he stormed. “Out with you, bag and baggage, befo' I lose my tempeh and forget what is due to this young lady you have insulted, seh, with your infamous proposals! Faveh me instantly, while you have a leg to run with! Go!”

Jastrow disappeared; and when the door closed behind him Virginia faced her irate clan-chief bravely.

“He was a spy, and he would have been a traitor. But I am little better. What will you do to me?”

The Rajah's wrath evaporated quickly, and a shrewd smile, not unkindly, wrinkled the ruddy old face.

“So it was a case of the trappeh trapped, was it, my deah? I'm sorry—right sorry. I might have known how it would be; a youngeh man would have known. But you have done no unpahdonable mischief: Misteh Winton would have found out for himself in a few hours, and we are ready for him now.”

“Oh, dear! Then he will be beaten?”

“Unquestionably. Faveh me by going to bed, my deah. Your roses will suffeh sadly for all this excitement, I feah. Good night.”

XI. THE RIGHT OF WAY

It seemed to Virginia that she had but just fallen asleep when she was rudely awakened by the jar and grind of the Rosemary's wheels on snow-covered rails. Drawing the curtain, she found that a new day was come, gray and misty white in the gusty swirl of a mountain snow-squall.

Without disturbing the sleeping Bessie, she dressed quickly and slipped out to see what the early-morning change of base portended. The common room was empty when she entered it, but before she could cross to the door the Reverend Billy came in, stamping the snow from his feet.

“What is it?” she asked eagerly. “Are we off for California?”

“No, it's some more of the war. Winton has outgeneraled us. During the night he pushed his track up to the disputed crossing, 'rushed' the guarded engine, and ditched it.”

Virginia felt that she ought to be decorously sorry for relationship's sake, but the effort ended in a little paean of joy.

“But Uncle Somerville—what will he do?”

“He is with McGrath on the engine, getting himself—and us—to the front in a hurry, as you perceive.”

“Isn't it too late to stop Mr. Winton now?”

“I don't know. From what I could overhear I gathered that the ditched engine is still in the way; that they are trying to roll it over into the creek. Bless me! McGrath is getting terribly reckless!”—this as a spiteful lurch of the car flung them both across the compartment.

“Say Uncle Somerville,” she amended. “Don't charge it to Mr. McGrath. Can't we go out on the platform?”

“It's as much as your life is worth,” he asserted, but he opened the door for her.

The car was backing swiftly up the grade with the engine behind serving as a “pusher.” At first the fiercely-driven snow-whirl made Virginia gasp. Then the

speed slackened and she could breathe and see.

The shrilling wheels were tracking around a curve into a scanty widening of the canyon. To the left, on the rails of the new line, the big octopod was heaving and grunting in the midst of an army of workmen swarming thick upon the overturned guard engine.

“Goodness! it's like a battle!” she shuddered. As she spoke the Rosemary stopped with a jerk and McGrath's fireman darted past to set the spur-track switch.

The points were snow-clogged, and the fireman wrestled with the lever, saying words. The delay was measurable in heart-beats, but it sufficed. The big octopod coughed thrice like a mighty giant in a consumption; the clustering workmen scattered like chaff to a ringing shout of “Stand clear!” and the obstructing mass of iron and steel rolled, wallowing and hissing, into the stream.

“Rails to the front! Hammermen!” yelled Winton; and the scattered force rallied instantly.

But now the wrestling fireman had thrown the switch, and at the Rajah's command the Rosemary shot out on the spur to be thrust with locked brakes fairly into the breach left defenseless by the ditched engine. With a mob-roar of wrath the infuriated track-layers made a rush for the new obstruction. But Winton was before them.

“Hold on!” he shouted, bearing them back with outflung arms. “Hold on, men, for God's sake! There are women in that car!”

The wrathful wave broke and eddied murmurous while a square-shouldered old man with fierce eyes and huge white mustaches, and with an extinct cigar between his teeth, clambered down from the Rosemary's engine to say:

“Hah! a ratheh close connection, eh, Misteh Winton? Faveh me with a match, if you please, seh. May I assume that you won't tumble my private car into the ditch?”

Winton was white-hot, but he found a light for the Rajah's cigar, easing his mind only as he might with Virginia looking on.

“I shall be more considerate of the safety of the ladies than you seem to be, Mr. Darrah,” he retorted. “You are taking long chances in this game, sir.”

The Rajah's laugh rumbled deep in his chest. “Not so vehy much longer than you have been taking during the past fo'tnight, my deah seh. But neveh mind; all's fair in love or war, and we appeah to be having a little of both now up heah in Qua'tz Creek, hah?”

Winton flushed angrily. It was no light thing to be mocked before his men, to say nothing of Miss Carteret standing within arm's reach on the railed platform of the Rosemary.

“Perhaps I shall give you back that word before we are through, Mr. Darrah,” he snapped. Then to the eddying mob-wave: “Tools up, boys. We camp here for breakfast. Branagan, send the Two-fifteen down for the cook's outfit.”

The Rajah dropped his cigar butt in the snow and trod upon it.

“Possibly you will faveh us with your company to breakfast in the Rosemary, Misteh Winton—you and Misteh Adams. No? Then I bid you a vehy good morning, gentlemen, and hope to see you lateh.” And he swung up to the steps of the private car.

Half an hour afterward, the snow still whirling dismally, Winton and Adams were cowering over a handful of hissing embers, drinking their commissary coffee and munching the camp cook's poor excuse for a breakfast.

“Jig's up pretty definitely, don't you think?” said Adams, with a glance around at the idle track force huddling for shelter under the lee of the flats and the octopod.

Winton shook his head and groaned. “I'm a ruined man, Morty.”

Adams found his cigarette case.

“I guess that's so,” he said quite heartlessly. Then: “Hello! what is our friend the enemy up to now?”

McGrath's fireman was uncoupling the engine from the Rosemary, and Mr. Somerville Darrah, complacently lighting his after breakfast cigar, came across to the hissing ember fire.

“A word with you, gentlemen, if you will faveh me,” he began. “I am about to run down to Argentine on my engine, and I propose leaving the ladies in your cha'ge, Misteh Winton. Will you give me your word of honeh, seh, that they will not be annoyed in my absence?”

Winton sprang up, losing his temper again.

“It's—well, it's blessed lucky that you know your man, Mr. Darrah!” he exploded. “Go on about your business—which is to bring another army of deputy-sheriffs down on us, I take it. You know well enough that no man of mine will lay a hand on your car so long as the ladies are in it.”

The Rajah thanked him, dismissed the matter with a Chesterfieldian wave of his hand, climbed to his place in the cab, and the engine shrilled away around the curve and disappeared in the snow-wreaths.

Adams rose and stretched himself.

“By Jove! when it comes to cheek, pure and unadulterated, commend me to a Virginia gentleman who has acquired the proper modicum of Western bluff,” he laughed. Then, with a cavernous yawn dating back to the sleepless night: “Since there is nothing immediately pressing, I believe I'll go and call on the ladies. Won't you come along for a while?”

“No!” said Winton savagely; and the assistant lounged off by himself.

Some little time afterward Winton, glooming over his handful of spitting embers, saw Adams and Virginia come out to stand together on the observation platform of the Rosemary. They talked long and earnestly, and when Winton was beginning to add the dull pang of unreasoning jealousy to his other hurtings, Adams beckoned him. He went, not unwillingly, or altogether willingly.

“I should think you might come and say 'Good morning' to me, Mr. Winton. I'm not Uncle Somerville,” said Miss Carteret.

Winton said “Good morning,” not too graciously, and Adams mocked him.

“Besides being a bear with a sore head, Miss Carteret thinks you're not much of a hustler, Jack,” he said coolly. “She knows the situation; knows that you were stupid enough to promise not to lay hands on the car when we could have pushed it out of the way without annoying anybody. None the less, she thinks that you might find a way to go on building your railroad without breaking your word to Mr. Darrah.”

Winton put his sore-heartedness far enough behind him to smile and say: “Perhaps Miss Virginia will be good enough to tell me how.”

“I don't know how,” she rejoined quickly. “And you'd only laugh at me if I should tell you what I thought of.”

“You might try it and see,” he ventured. “I'm desperate enough to take suggestions from anyone.”

“Tell me something first: is your railroad obliged to run straight along in the middle of this nice little ridge you've been making for it?”

“Why—no; temporarily, it can run anywhere. But the problem is to get the track laid beyond this crossing before your uncle gets back with a trainload of armed guards.”

“Any kind of track would do, wouldn't it?—just to secure the crossing?”

“Certainly; anything that would hold the weight of the octopod. We shall have to rebuild most of the line, anyway, as soon as the frost comes out of the ground in the spring.”

The brown eyes became far-seeing.

“I was thinking,” she said musingly. “There is no time to make another nice little ridge. But you have piles and piles of logs over there,”—she meant the cross-ties,—“couldn't you build a sort of cobhouse ridge with those between your track and Uncle's, and cross behind the car? Don't laugh, please.”

But Winton was far enough from laughing at her. Why so simple an expedient had not suggested itself instantly he did not stop to inquire. It was enough that the Heaven-born idea had been given.

“Down out of that, Morty!” he cried. “It's one chance in a thousand. Pass the word to the men; I'll be with you in a second.” And when Adams was rousing the track force with the bawling shout of “*Ev-erybody*!” Winton looked up into the brown eyes.

“My debt to you was already very great: I owe you more now,” he said.

But she gave him his quittance in a whiplike retort.

“And you will stand here talking about it when every moment is precious? Go!” she commanded; and he went.

So now we are to conceive the maddest activity leaping into being in full view of the watchers at the windows of the private car. Winton's chilled and sodden army, welcoming any battle-cry of action, flew to the work with a will. In a twinkling the corded piles of cross-ties had melted to reappear in cobhouse balks bridging an angle from the Utah embankment to that of the spur track in the rear of the blockading Rosemary. In briefest time the hammermen were spiking the rails on the rough-and-ready trestle, and the Italians were bringing up the crossing-frogs.

But the Rajah, astute colonel of industry, had not left himself defenseless. On the contrary, he had provided for this precise contingency by leaving McGrath's fireman in mechanical command on the Rosemary. If Winton should attempt to build around the private car, the fireman was to wait till the critical moment: then he was to lessen the pressure on the automatic air-brakes and let the car drop back down the grade just far enough to block the new crossing.

So it came about that this mechanical lieutenant waited, laughing in his sleeve, until he saw the Italians coming with the crossing-frogs. Then, judging the time to be fully ripe, he ducked under the Rosemary to “bleed” the air-brake.

Winton heard the hiss of the escaping air above all the industry clamor; heard, and saw the car start backward. Then he had a flitting glimpse of a man in grimy overclothes scrambling terror-frenzied from beneath the Rosemary. The thing

done had been overdone. The fireman had “bled” the air-brake too freely, and the liberated car, gathering momentum with every wheel-turn, surged around the circling spur track and shot out masterless on the steeper gradient of the main line.

Now, for the occupants of a runaway car on a Rocky Mountain canyon line there is death and naught else. Winton saw, in a phantasmagoric flash of second sight, the meteor flight of the heavy car; saw the Reverend Billy's ineffectual efforts to apply the hand-brakes, if by good hap he should even guess that there were any hand-brakes; saw the car, bounding and lurching, keeping to the rails, mayhap, for some few miles below Argentine, where it would crash headlong into the upward climbing Carbonate train, and all would end.

In unreasoning misery, he did the only thing that offered: ran blindly down his own embankment, hoping nothing but that he might have one last glimpse of Virginia clinging to the hand-rail before she should be lost to him for ever.

But as he ran a thought white-hot from the furnace of despair fell into his brain to set it ablaze with purpose. Beyond the litter of activities the octopod was standing, empty of its crew. Bounding up into the cab, he released the brake and sent the great engine flying down the track of the new line.

In the measuring of the first mile the despair-born thought took shape and form. If he could outpace the runaway on the parallel line, stop the octopod and dash across to the C. G. R. track ahead of the Rosemary, there was one chance in a million that he might fling himself upon the car in mid flight and alight with life enough left to help Calvert with the hand-brakes.

Now, in the most unhopeful struggle it is often the thing least hoped for that comes to pass. At Argentine, Winton's speed was a mile a minute over a track rougher than a corduroy wagon-road; yet the octopod held the rail and was neck and neck with the runaway. Whisking past the station, Winton had a glimpse of a white-mustached old man standing bareheaded on the platform and gazing horror-stricken at the tableau; then man and station and lurching car were left behind, and the fierce strife to gain the needed mile of lead went on.

Three miles more of the surging, racking, nerve-killing race and Winton had his hand's-breadth of lead and had picked his place for the million-chanced wrestle with death. It was at the C. G. R. station of Tierra Blanca, just below a series of sharp curves which he hoped might check a little the arrow-like flight of the runaway.

Twenty seconds later the telegraph operator at the lonely little way station of Tierra Blanca saw a heroic bit of man-play. The upward-bound Carbonate train

was whistling in the gorge below when out of the snow-wreaths shrouding the new line a big engine shot down to stop with fire grinding from the wheels, and a man dropped from the high cab to dash across to the station platform.

At the same instant a runaway passenger car thundered out of the canyon above. The man crouched, flung himself at it in passing, missed the forward hand-rail, caught the rear, was snatched from his feet and trailed through the air like the thong of a whip-lash, yet made good his hold and clambered on.

This was all the operator saw, but when he had snapped his key and run out he heard the shrill squeal of the brakes on the car and knew that the man had not risked his life for nothing.

And on board the Rosemary? Winton, spent to the last breath, was lying prone on the railed platform, where he had fallen when the last twist had been given to the shrieking brakes.

“Run, Calvert! Run ahead and—stop—the—up-train!” he gasped; then the light went out of the gray eyes and Virginia wept unaffectedly and fell to dabbling his forehead with handfuls of snow.

“Help me get him in to the divan, Cousin Billy,” said Virginia, when all was over and the Rosemary was safely coupled in ahead of the upcoming train to be slowly pushed back to Argentine.

But Winton opened his eyes and struggled to his feet unaided.

“Not yet,” he said. “I've left my automobile on the other side of the creek; and besides, I have a railroad to build. My respects to Mr. Darrah, and you may tell him I'm not beaten yet.” And he swung over the railing and dropped off to mount the octopod and to race it back to the front.

Three days afterward, to a screaming of smelter whistles and other noisy demonstrations of mining-camp joy, the Utah Short Line laid the final rail of its new Extension in the Carbonate yards.

The driving of the silver spike accomplished, Winton and Adams slipped out of the congratulatory throng and made their way across the C. G. R. tracks to a private car standing along the siding. Its railed platform, commanding a view of the civic celebration, had its quota of onlookers—a fierce-eyed old man with huge mustaches, an athletic young clergyman, two Bisques, and a goddess.

“Climb up, Misteh Winton, and you, Misteh Adams; climb up and join us,” said the fierce-eyed one heartily. “Virginia, heah, thinks we ought to call one anotheh out, but I tell her—”

What the Rajah had told his niece is of small account to us. But what Winton whispered in her ear when he had taken his place beside her is more to the purpose of this history.

“I have built my railroad, as you told me to, and now I have come for my—”

“Hush!” she said softly. “Can't you wait?”

“No.”

“Shameless one!” she murmured.

But when the Rajah proposed an adjournment to the gathering-room of the car, and to luncheon therein, he surprised them standing hand-in-hand and laughed.

“Hah, you little rebel!” he said. “Do you think you dese've that block of stock I promised you when you should marry? Anseh me, my deah.”

She blushed and shook her head, but the brown eyes were dancing.

The Rajah opened the car door with his courtliest bow.

“Nevertheless, you shall have it, my deah Virginia, if only to remind an old man of the time when he was simple enough to make a business confederate of a cha'ming young woman. Straight on, Misteh Adams; afteh you, Misteh Winton.”

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